

Retaining Students of Color Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Higher Education

Danielle Thompson-Ochoa Gallaudet University

Retaining students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing remains a concern for educators. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing require access to resources; however, integrated support in the college environment remains a concept for further discussion. Retention of these students may be less influenced by the student's ability to perform academically and more influenced by the level of support provided. The support needs of students who are hard of hearing are defined according to educational needs, resources, social interaction, emotional intelligence, and the ability to cope with independence and isolation from familiar communities. In this context, the academic success of students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing relates directly to colleges' abilities to promote supportive systems particularly during the transition to college life.

Keywords: *retaining, retention, academic vigor, social interaction, isolation, deaf, hard of hearing.*

This article examines the retention of students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing in higher education. First, the study explores the social identity expressed by the 11 percent of higher education students who define themselves as disabled (Aquino, 2016). Evans and colleagues (2017) commented that the term disabled connotes students who attach a stigma to their identity. This article investigates how this stigma can be erased specifically for students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing. Aquino (2016) and Evans and others (2017) concurred that central to the research on the retention of students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing are demographics and inclusion, which create conflict for many individuals within the education system.

Efforts toward diversity and inclusion are catalysts for conflict because trending words, such as inclusion, diversity, and equality of access, highlight the disparity between those students who persevere and those who struggle. The retention of any student with a disability is met with challenges, and defined gaps within systems have been established by a dominant social construct (Evans et al., 2017). This article focuses on the retention of students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing within the higher learning model; one begins by defining retention as an on-going concern for higher educators.

Past policies to address the under-representation of specific demographics have focused on the establishment of disability models to better define the qualifying factors that categorize a student as disabled (Leake & Stodden, 2014). These policies have created systems where despite attempts to remove the barriers and allow access to this segment of the population, stigma is attached to categorization and has made success more difficult for these students. Leake and Stodden (2014) believed that success in retaining the student with disabilities requires allowing them to define their environment and a level of normality that is conducive to their success. Moxley, Najor-Durack, and Dumbrigue (2013) found that retention strategies---to devise the student-centered experience as well as specific tools and messages concerning retention rates---remain a concern worldwide and are tantamount to defining the higher learning mission. Moxley and associates (2013) revealed that retention is a socioeconomic and cultural issue because access to higher learning has broadened with the advent of online university and e-learning enhancements. The traditional track or learning environment is not the only option for students.

The availability and ease of use of the e-learning environment may present flexibility and narrow the gap for students of color who are disabled, deaf, or hard of hearing. E-learning is a strategic tool for the higher learning professional working with specific demographics such as students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing. What remains of interest is how online or e-learning environments

prevail among minority students considering their convenience and flexibility and whether demographics continue to play a role in the learning experience. In traditional offline learning environments, the student may feel marginalized when disability or other demographic information is divulged.

Online learning emphasizes students' strengths and weaknesses in terms of performance and participation, and the merits of an individual's intellect are not overshadowed by a disability policy. Previous policies unintentionally created stigma around disability and a barrier to education for under-represented groups. These policies instilled a social expectation of normative behaviors toward retention whereby people with disabilities who succeed are considered exceptions (Evans et al., 2017). Much like affirmative action created conflict at a social level, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), fails to see the unique qualities of every student regardless of ability.

A holistic view of a student can fully define the higher learning experience (Moxley et al., 2013). Leake and Stodden (2014) believed that existing disability modeling and policies do not fully reflect the identity of a student. What is seen on the exterior is only part of the equation, and there are hidden variables that define success for any student. Strategies for retaining higher education students must be student-centered and based on valid needs, but educators must first understand how the student's identity reflects success to provide effective mentorship.

This article examines the definition of retention and the broad implications for the higher learning educator working with this population segment. What are the specific needs of this segment? How can tools and strategies be provided without promoting stigma and social connotations or implying an advantage because of policy rather than success based on merit alone? It is important to identify gaps and barriers that exist for students who are deaf or hard of hearing within the overarching theme of retention in the higher learning institution. The understanding of students' needs creates privacy implications pertaining to stigma and the normal out-of-college experience.

Matthews (2009) wrote, "many institutions have grappled with how information about individual students' particular learning needs can be effectively shared in a way which respects both students' right to privacy and their right to access education equally" (p. 232). Many higher learning institutions fail to address diversity in terms of inclusion and strategies to maintain a desire to learn. Perhaps the desire to learn should be central to a holistic approach where higher education leaders can develop connections and tools to build a knowledgeable society where differences are unimportant. The academic experience should be unaffected by disability and other demographic constructs, such as age, gender, race, or family status. The desire to learn should be a core value expressing universal concern for student retention because they are the greatest asset to the organization. In contrast, Harper (2012) described the social context we live in as Americans, where race, differences, and diversity remain a strong element of our collective cultural experience and the memory of oppression represented by civil rights laws written within a White-centric context. Much of the post color-blind society in which we are supposed to live has undertones of the wrongness promoted by laws written by a dominant culture or race. One cannot ignore the fallacy that exists in this country that everyone is created equal, even if we all accept the ideology. Within academia, the environment should be independent of factors defining an individual's identity with demographic formats. However, because the laws and systems are still written within the remnants of that dominant culture, the shift to embracing inclusionary methods remains stalled.

DEFINING RETENTION IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

Gabriel (2008) found that the concern for retention within the higher education environment is largely universal. Promoting retention begins with an understanding of the level of vigor required to transition from the expectations set by high school to those of university or college academics. Retention seems poorly defined on a consistent level for student coordination. If specific markers are added that define needs within the environment and the level of retention strategies needed to support the student, the gap widens for under-represented populations.

Acclimatizing to mainstream university for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is full of challenges (Kersting, 1997). Those students who are also of color may face further challenges based

upon subset complexities found within beliefs and values of that culture based on their definition of academic vigor. If the message of achievement and success is not initiated at home, where do these students obtain the message? The answer is the institution, its instructors, and the student's previous learning environment (Luckner & Hanks, 2003). Luckner and Hanks (2003) revealed an unfortunate disparity within the deaf education community. Due to a shortage of teachers nationwide, changing reform policies toward students defined as disabled, and proactive testing for special education learning environments, the deaf educator is overburdened. Students with deafness transitioning to college may not receive adequate tools to meet the expectations of academic vigor, regardless of whether the university caters to the non-deaf or deaf. In fact, there are only three institutions of higher learning in the United States that cater to the deaf, Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., National Technical Institute of the Deaf (NTID) in Rochester, New York, and CSUN (California State University, Northridge) Center on Deafness in Northridge. Gallaudet University is the only university that has direct communication in American Sign Language (ASL). By this it is meant, all professors and instructors are mandated to use ASL in the classroom where an ASL interpreter is rarely seen.

Kersting (1997) remarked that a transition from the deaf world into the mainstream may represent a form of culture shock that also increases isolation, shyness, a lack of social interaction, and demotivation for attendance. Furthermore, students with deaf and hard of hearing conditions need tools to participate and collaborate at a level that other students maintain effortlessly. The concern for the student who is deaf is a lack of social awareness in the new environment compared to a familiar environment, which creates further barriers to success. Kersting (1997) highlighted the impact of peer integration and interaction and their significant role in how students view their place in the college environment. O'Keefe (2013) recommended that educational institutions of higher learning for the deaf or hard of hearing must consider how well-being is defined by the student to specifically design retention strategies.

Gabriel (2008) found the problem may be more familial than previously thought because the message of performance must come from the point of origin. Many students enter institutions with the expectation that they will make others proud. For the student of color who is deaf or hard of hearing, they may be the first in their families to attend college (Kersting, 1997). The pressure is considerable, and there is further anxiety associated with fitting in and adjusting. Simply understanding that they are breaking barriers can create anxiety and pressure.

Defining the retention of specific student demographic segments requires well-defined intent on the part of the university and its educators. The awareness of an increased need for at-risk groups must establish a standard for solving the retention problem. One model to apply to retain students who are deaf or hard of hearing is a universal design for learning (Tobin, 2014). The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) model enables

all individuals' equal opportunities to learn and provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone—not a single, one-size-fits-all solution, but rather offers flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs. (Tobin, 2014, p. 15)

Using the UDL model, the element of academic standards for vigor can be addressed in a way that also defines the student's perception of the environment, or students can adapt learning experiences and styles so that a learning experience is one of knowledge exchange and collaboration. Leppo (2015) found that adaptability coincides with communication skills and clarity in student perception of the academic environment. If the environment serves to isolate or intimidate, the retention strategy fails to capture the true goal of knowledge sharing (Leppo, 2015). Table 1 illustrates the retention rates at Gallaudet University in terms of graduation. Ultimately, the success of retention strategies is reflected in graduation rates. To define success differently suggests that the university does not consider graduation as a success for any student regardless of whether they are disabled.

Table 1

Graduation Rates at Gallaudet University

Race/ Ethnicity	Fall 2015 Enrollment	Graduated	Academically Dismissed	Withdrew	Returned Fall 2016
International/ Non-resident alien	79	18	1	4	56
American Indian/ Alaska Native	6	1	1	0	4
Asian	30	8	0	4	18
Black/African- American	126	18	1	16	91
Hispanic of any race	120	26	1	14	79
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1	0		0	1
Multiracial	113	28	2	8	75
White	481	116	5	47	313
Race and ethnicity unknown	33	1	1	5	26
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Fall 2015 Enrollment</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Academically Dismissed</i>	<i>Withdrew</i>	<i>Returned Fall 2016</i>
Male	474	92	9	47	326
Female	515	124	3	51	337
<i>Hearing Status</i>	<i>Fall 2015 Enrollment</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Academically Dismissed</i>	<i>Withdrew</i>	<i>Returned Fall 2016</i>
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	892	187	10	86	609
Hearing	97	29	2	12	54
Hearing Undergraduate (HUGS)	66	15	2	9	40
Non-HUGS	31	14	0	3	14
<i>Class</i>	<i>Fall 2015 Enrollment</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Academically Dismissed</i>	<i>Withdrew</i>	<i>Returned Fall 2016</i>
Freshmen	293	0	8	55	230
Sophomores	180	0	2	11	167
Juniors	220	24	2	16	178

Table 1 continued

Seniors	284	187	0	14	83
Second Degree	12	5	0	2	5
<i>Academic Load</i>	<i>Fall 2015 Enrollment</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Academically Dismissed</i>	<i>Withdrew</i>	<i>Returned Fall 2016</i>
Full-time	959	194	12	92	661
Part-time	30	22	0	6	2
Total for Academic Category	989	216	12	98	663

Kilpatrick and associates (2017) revealed that the essence of retaining a student labeled as “disabled” is the application of the concept of equality to the academic setting, which is difficult to accomplish with traditional educational formats. The sentiment reflects that the higher education learning process has existed for hundreds of years, and the framework does not require fixing. Kilpatrick and others (2017) believed that this explains why retaining students who do not fit the dominant demographic profile are unsuccessful, and inclusion remains an important subject to address as they support the image of a progressive institution.

The future is now focused on embedding retention design mechanisms within the university objectives of first-year students (Shah et al., 2014). Retention correlates heavily with student wellness and belonging at a socially interactive level (O’Keefe, 2013). Retention, while an issue for the organization because of sales, continuous quality improvements, reputation, and building competitive advantage over other institutions, requires honing strategies for educators to bridge the isolation gap for students. The student must feel a sense of participation and affiliation early to refrain from disassociation. The college should focus retention efforts on how the school’s merits motivate students to experience reward for and affiliation with continued attendance.

Shah and colleagues (2014) found that students who have been previously under-represented and underserved fall into minority categories that extend beyond race, gender, age, and socioeconomic variables. Students who leave the university lack the support system to maintain continued vigor. The environment must maintain high levels of success that start with the family and previous learning experiences. To extend strategies of participation based on how these previous impressions withstand the pressures of vigor also reflect high levels of group support at the mentoring level.

Retaining any student, particularly those students falling under a disabled category, requires them to overcome barriers to higher education and narrow the academic gaps. Herbert and colleagues (2014) noted that socioeconomic conditions such as adequate resources for living conditions while pursuing education matter. Simple resources including financial aid, scholarships, and work-study programs all impact the student’s ability to perform. Living away from home, changes to familiar resources, and the stress of pursuing education impact the success of the average student without labels (Herbert et al., 2014). What becomes of greater concern over time is the ineffectiveness of resource delivery to deaf or hard of hearing students (Herbert et al., 2014). Garberoglio and others (2014) noted that the lack of resources and effective communication about such tools diminishes the confidence of the student who is deaf or hard of hearing and influences how they see themselves as value-added members of the academic community.

The factors affecting the retention of these students, and others like them, are a strong sense of well-being and belief in themselves. The success rate for retention doubles when students who are deaf or hard of hearing have a supportive, integrated network of resources and people in place to manage conflict and the adversity of maintaining academic vigor (Garberoglio et al., 2014). While some literature implies that a failure to retain students is a result of students’ choices, it is the sense

of self, confidence, and the lack of mental illness, such as depression, that provide the tools and capacity to pursue a university degree.

BARRIERS AND GAPS IMPACTING THE RETENTION OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS OF COLOR

Cuculick and Kelly (2003) noted an overarching theme whereby barriers widen the gaps and impact the retention of deaf and hard of hearing students of color. This theme coincides with high levels of anxiety related to performance expectations and the completion of higher learning programs. Deaf and hard of hearing students have high standards of excellence and may not have an accurate depiction of what defines success within mainstream academic vigor. Cuculick and Kelly (2003) contended that students who are deaf or hard of hearing set themselves up for failure. A breakdown of demographic profiling suggests that students of color who are also deaf or hard of hearing experience extreme pressure to succeed by their family but also in the social context of previous educational experiences (Kersting, 1997). Both Leake and Stodden (2014) and Matthews (2009) discuss self-identity and its role in success where a lack of understanding of new surroundings determine the capacity for academic success.

Leake and Stodden (2014) found that students become pigeon-holed; colleges and universities rely on profiling to determine services and resources for the student body and encourage students to divulge their demographics. It is unclear whether this is done for funding purposes or simply to open the system to inclusive strategies that allow for further diversity. Michalski, Cunningham, and Henry (2017) suggested that barriers to resources exist for the student who is “disabled”, and the hard of hearing specifically, because of qualification standards.

Standards of achievement and future demonstration of the ability to perform may not reflect the desired image of the school as a promoter of students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing as members of the entering class. It defeats the purpose of inclusion and diversity if the school does not support admittance of such student profiles; yet, schools want to maintain an image of diversity. Gaps widen for degree completion for students of color (within disability labeling) simply because of the barriers to entry. Museus (2014) wrote,

while 62% of white students who begin college at a four-year institution complete a bachelor's degree within six years of matriculation, that figure is only 39, 40, and 50% for American Indian and Alaskan Native, Black, and Latino students, respectively. (p.189)

Lang (2002) surmised that of the deaf or hard of hearing students who enter a four-year degree program in the United States, only one in four will graduate.

Barriers to graduation and success within the academic environment are socio-culturally based. The deaf or hard of hearing student lacks a strong sense of belonging and does not form strong social interactions with students outside their deaf sub-culture (Kersting, 1997). Tactics are required to identify lapses of retention support using proactive forms of communication and intervention to leverage the resources within the university. An additional challenge is how to engage students for success early by redesigning the learning environment to provide a more personal and hands-on experience. Retaining students even without specific demographic factors attached requires allowing them a sense of affiliation with the school. A sense of pride can nurture strong motivation for success and drive toward meeting the standards of vigor.

Albertini, Kelly, and Matchett (2011) saw a direct connection between the rate of retaining deaf or hard of hearing students with institutional and personal factors that define an individual's view of success and the motivating factors required to reach goals. Albertini and colleagues (2011) found that while most deaf or hard of hearing students entering a hearing four-year institutional degree program are focused and motivated to achieve a degree, many fail to understand the social component of the college experience. Albertini and others (2011) considered that all college students entering the same degree program are simply unprepared for the demands of academic vigor. The student has not been adequately prepared by the high school academic experience. Surprisingly, these students compose

the best success rates of high school graduates. Thus, the assumption is that retaining students in colleges is dependent on the high school framework that teaches the student about time management, study habits, and motivational factors.

Persistence toward vigor and maintaining this level of focus requires that barriers be defined by the socio-cultural and economic variables the student has been exposed to prior to college entry. Further personal barriers exist for students of color who are deaf or hard of hearing because previous experiences shape subsequent experiences. While there may be pressure from family and social expectations, students may also fail to fit into the new social experience of college simply because of a lack of connection with students like themselves.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE RETENTION SPECIFIC TO DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS

For strategies to engage the student who is deaf or hard of hearing and retain them until graduation, Evans and colleagues (2017) suggested student advocacy groups that educate those within the college culture and the outside community on what it means to be deaf or hard of hearing. Such activities can quickly bring college students together because they are often willing to participate in social discourse. Social issues are subjects for discussion in schools, and awareness, protests, and individuality activities are common. Engaging the students in advocacy may ease the transition process to college course loads. This strategy also encourages a sense of identity that the student may have lost when they left their previous educational environment and community.

Garberoglio and others (2014) found that powerful belief systems within the deaf and hard of hearing culture resonate into the mainstream culture and encourage the creation of identity. The student may have felt multifaceted in the previous community; however, in their new environment, they may feel conspicuous. Preventing this dynamic would require matching cultures, which is impossible when the college is selected. If belief systems are similar, there is less cultural conflict. The values attached to seeking education at a specific college, for example, an excellent biology program or a history of family member attendance at a school, are values with strong cultural influence.

Literature suggests that student profiling is not the only issue creating poor retention rates. Gabriel (2008) revealed the need for preventative programs during freshman transition to assist students in adapting to shifts in academic vigor. Many students are under-prepared by their high schools. The student who is deaf or hard of hearing may be at a disadvantage compared to mainstream students. Many colleges offer pre-freshman programs to prepare students for the college setting and provide an academic focus including summer courses and programs that partner students with upper classmen as mentors. Such programs provide a support system for participating students.

Another key factor noted by Gabriel (2008) is professor awareness and capturing the student's learning styles early as a basis for dialogue on academic expectations. Many colleges design courses in the first two years to affiliate peers as every student must participate. These embedded requirements of the school in terms of reputation vigor will form strong bonds because the student is motivated by inclusion.

Harper (2012) and Lang (2002) supported strategies that allow the student to consider the reasons for their college selection and how the strategies create strong bonds within their value systems. By supporting student value systems, a sense of culture and self can boost students' performance, which elevates their ability to be retained, that is, with further scholarship and merit awards. Harper (2012) noted that the differences become advantages within the diversity of the college student body. Diversity can bring people together to isolate them. Strategies must be built upon the core goal of retaining all students but also focus on those who feel marginalized because these are the students who provide the school with the greatest outside leverage.

MENTORING AND LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR DEAF EDUCATORS

Many colleges devise programs and resources for students who are deaf or hard of hearing based on the concept of inclusion and creating space for those who may have been overlooked in previous

strategies (Matthews, 2009). Active participation, themes of diversity, and extending transparent tools to the college culture provide a deeper understanding of culture and engaging in a culture's values and beliefs allows for stronger application of strategies (Museus, 2014). These strategies are clearer to the student when diversity is included, and the value system matches. Trouble for mentors begins when there are barriers to understanding commonalities. Models are useful for mentoring and building the right environment for leadership.

Museus (2014) called this a culturally engaging campus environment or CECE. In this model, strategies are used to focus on inclusion and the values of many to form the whole. Typically, many liberal arts colleges employ this model as they seek to form a multidisciplinary environment and culture that sustains an active level of participation for learning. Stodden (2015) noted that to support inclusion and strategies for diverse campuses, perceptions and first impressions of people must be abandoned. The college community must have an open mind. When engaging the student who is having trouble fitting in and performing to the required standards, isolation often further exacerbates the problems. Stodden (2015) found that, unfortunately, the cognitive process under sociocultural influence identifies with what is perceived as least threatening. How a differently abled student of color may perceive the world will also influence how leaders approach the situation. Labels and the partitioning of individuals is an unfortunate reality. Leading, then, implies ignoring students' differences when such differences are celebrated.

To reach the deaf or hard of hearing student, the leader must create trust and move beyond the students' differences and find ways to form bonds. Teachers must shift perceptions and gain knowledge of the deaf community if they are not professionally versed (Luckner & Hanks, 2003). Much of the conflict in these situations is a result of miscommunication or misperceptions due to a lack of knowledge. Leaders/teachers who work with deaf and hard of hearing students must be subjective and treat the student as an individual who is more than deaf and more than defined by the difference. Luckner and Hanks (2003) consider most leadership problems are assumptions based on previous experiences, which is an inappropriate place to begin an assessment.

Gasman, Abiola, and Travers (2015) used diversity as a tool for leaders to initiate a dialogue concerning what defines the college experience. From this perspective, the leader can promote trust, form a bond, and encourage an open conversation where knowledge is shared. Leadership from a diverse level of understanding will increase participation and include the student because common stories or themes are shared. Leaders must engage regularly and define the situation continuously for any improvement to occur.

CONCLUSION

Increasing the level of interaction among students who deaf and hard of hearing and the provision of campus resources will increase the level of student participation. Overall, this will promote a greater sense of affiliation during the college experience. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing face challenges with their sense of identity, and the notion of change may play a significant role during this time of transition as students learn about themselves in relation to their past and present communities (Shah et al., 2014). Professors and other members of the academic community must be proactive in extending the right conditions to create an atmosphere in which students can flourish in fulfilling their intellectual capacity and curiosity.

Diversity offices, where issues concerning the differently abled are managed, must increase awareness in campus activities, resources, and programs that cater to these specific populations and encourage deaf and hard of hearing students to venture beyond their comfort zone so that they do not feel isolated. Part of the college experience is that students learn who they are and what they want to for a career. However, one problem remains for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and that is the isolation that they experience transitioning from the deaf community to the hearing community. There are many cultural differences. In the past, colleges and universities have not catered to these specific needs unless they had a reputation as a deaf university or a university having a large deaf program. Even Gallaudet University, the nation's most well-known academic environment for

students who are deaf or hard of hearing, has difficulty retaining students because successful retention implies graduation with a degree.

Leppo (2015) believed these statistics reflect the tactics and leadership involved in efforts to retain deaf or hard of hearing students but also students of color as their needs are not fully addressed by the typical, generic college experience. While certain accommodations are pursued, efforts never fully reach the intended audience, and the value of these tactics are not fully felt or realized by the population that can most benefit from the resources and programs.

It is possible that the general intent of programs and resources are not fully accepted by students who are deaf or hard of hearing because these come with a sense of “being different” and cannot shake the isolation that this creates for them. With additional exclusionary factors contributing to a sense of separation from the mainstream, students who are deaf and hard of hearing often lack affiliation, which impacts their ability to experience a deep level of satisfaction with the college experience. The level of commitment to remain and the level of motivation are correlated. However, even with the presence of active programs and resources, commitment remains a concern. The barrier of being deaf or hard of hearing along with being a person of color creates many challenges for participation in campus activities. For some students, the lack of role models and leaders also defeats the purpose of active programs and accessible resources because they do not see others participating; therefore, why should they participate in programs (Shah et al., 2014)? If the student can identify with common traits among those participating, they will be more likely to become involved.

Devising future strategies for the deaf or hard of hearing student of color, and other students who fall under different demographic stigmas, is a challenge because of the current state of social representation in the United States. Even with inclusion and diversity at the forefront of college campus culture, some gaps must be narrowed for students with differences to feel less marginalized. The future design of programs and resources must consider how these students perceives the value of using provisions to better their academic advantage and how this translates to them staying until graduation. The issue is complex because, overall, retention is also down for the mainstream population of students on many campuses (Moxley et al., 2013; O’Keeffe, 2013) which means there are logical reasons for retention rates to be down. The cost of higher education compounded with a shift in academic vigor, family pressure to succeed, and feelings of isolation are hallmarks of self-discovery and identifying career paths. Motivation can be lost at many stages, particularly if the student does not feel a sense of pride in attending school and only feels pressure to keep up.

Leadership in mentoring and building aspects of the community with common threads outside of “differences” are key to engaging the student and keeping them as active participants in the college culture. Football, the college newspaper, theater, a specific class, or a popular professor can all be factors in maintaining student focus. It is important that universities leverage all possible tools to interact with the student, and this dynamic begins with university/college leaders and unique programs that define reasons to remain at the college until graduation.

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AUTHOR

DANIELLE THOMPSON-OCHOA is an Associate Professor in the Department of Counseling at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC.

All comments and queries regarding this article should be addressed to Danielle.thompson-ochoa@gallaudet.edu