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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Building South African women's leadership: A cohort model for the PhD in student affairs

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Abstract

Despite the presence of a historically male-dominated culture in leadership, gender-mediated obstacles and challenges, black women in South Africa have the passion to develop professionally and move to higher levels as educational leaders. The current study assessed female students' perceptions regarding a joint pilot doctoral programme between the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and California State University, Fullerton's (CSUF) Higher Education programme, and their experiences while in the programme. Five participants described programme expectations, challenges, strengths, weaknesses and programme completion. Moreover, the research focused on the participants' future hopes, aspirations and their observations regarding any changes in their professional and academic growth. Students expressed that coming to CSUF after their experiences at UWC enabled them to learn from faculty members with expertise in student affairs, which has further developed their knowledge concerning student development strategies, philosophy and history. Recommendations for the programme centred on increased cohort meetings, expanded programme resources such as research, student support outside the classroom settings, and the improvement of programme funding in order to provide more financial support to students. The importance of professional development and formalised training programmes, expanding research dynamics, and teaching components with international collaborations are promising practices to address the challenges and obstacles that black women face in preparing to become leaders in South African higher education.

Keywords

South Africa, student affairs, doctoral programme, professional development, females in higher education.

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Introduction

Despite the attempt to increase PhD production in South Africa pre- and post-apartheid, rates of PhD production remain flat. In 2008, it was projected that South Africa would require 6 000 new doctoral graduates by 2010, indicating that the country will need to increase PhD output for new researchers (Seleti, 2009). In 2003, South Africa produced fewer than 25 PhDs per year per million of the population, compared to the UK with over 150, USA having over 125, and Australia with over 200 (Seleti, 2009). In order for South Africa to increase its economy of knowledge as a country, more researchers are needed, and existing inequalities between race and gender need to be addressed. The University of the Western Cape (UWC) has been the largest producer of black graduates in South Africa through taking into account disparities from colonialism and apartheid. MacGregor (2013) quoted a South African professor who stated that "there have been four main imperatives in policies and strategies on PhD training in South Africa over the past 15 years: quantity, quality, efficiency, and transformation and equity" (p. 2). However, less than 10% of South African students decide to pursue honors after obtaining a basic degree. Furthermore, only 19% of students in South Africa proceed to doctoral studies after obtaining masters degrees (Seleti, 2009). This showcases the importance of establishing doctoral programmes to help South Africa obtain a higher rate of PhD production.

In comparison to other countries such as the US, the UK and Australia, there is a limited representation of women in positions of academic leadership in African countries such as South Africa (White, *et al.*, 2012; Seleti, 2009) and Kenya (Odhiambo, 2011). This demonstrates that typical career pathways to higher positions within academic leadership are modelled for men rather than women in South Africa. Similarly, it is commonly stereotyped that women are not as effective as leaders, and their place is not in a leadership position (Lumby & Azaola, 2011). Leadership in South Africa is not viewed as being inclusive for all genders, ethnicities and races. Attitudes in South Africa reflect the idea that men are better leaders than women. Black women typically experience a combination of discrimination, aggression or harassment in regards to their gender when attempting to obtain leadership positions in education (Lumby & Azaola, 2011).

There was a need and interest from South African higher education faculty and practitioners at colleges, universities and further education training institutes to produce more PhDs because the South African PhD production rate was not as high as that of other countries (Seleti, 2009). As a result, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) and UWC collaborated to address the need for South Africa to produce more doctoral degrees with a pilot, cohort-based, doctoral programme in student affairs. The female participants in the pilot PhD programme aimed to become the next generation of female educational leaders in South Africa, persevering through the challenges. This study describes perceptions of five black women and their experiences in this pilot PhD programme.

Literature review

While this research focuses on a model of success to increase PhDs in higher education leadership, the literature review is limited in scope relative to higher education pre- and

post-apartheid. Instead, the focus is on information concerning cohort-based PhD programmes, gender, and issues of inequality in higher education. South Africa's higher education system in place during apartheid promoted racial and ethnic exclusivity alongside oppression within its policies where non-white individuals had severely limited access to higher education (Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). Black women were expected to be responsible for the well-being of their families, as opposed to obtaining educations (Phendla, 2008). Females were viewed as caregivers during apartheid, and they had limited education and employment opportunities. Women who were bilingual, married, religious, and teachers had better chances of obtaining positions within the educational hierarchy, but women still did not have the power and privilege that men could obtain (Phendla, 2008).

After apartheid, funding for higher education and financial aid for students became a large problem. South Africa's government funding for higher education has declined since 2000 (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010). Despite diminished financial aid availability, enrolment in higher education institutions increased between 2000 and 2004 (Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). Even though the cost of higher education has steadily risen, the country has not created more student grants to help mitigate rising costs. Due to increasing costs for higher education, institutions implemented tuition increases to compensate for the lack of public funding (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010). Escalating costs and diminished funding have led to increased obstacles for students intent on attending public universities. Certain institutions have implemented caps on university enrolment to compensate for limited government funding (Wangenge-Ouma, 2012).

As part of the post-apartheid constitution, democracy was introduced, and school governing bodies (SGBs) were established to provide leadership training for both males and females holding leadership positions in schools (Diko, 2007; Wangenge-Ouma, 2010). Despite the creation of these SGBs, women still faced gender biases, lack of training, and fear of promoting policies that supported gender equality. Women were still excluded in practice, as females at institutions did not feel comfortable voicing their ideas. Some women did transcend social norms to give their input, though they were not generally supported (Diko, 2007). Career paths to management positions are still typically modelled for men rather than women (White, Bagilhole & Riordan, 2012). Leaders are frequently described as typically black males who were politically active against apartheid, whereas leaders in other countries are known to retain research and leadership experience, such as in Australia (White, *et al.*, 2012).

Motivation through spirituality has driven female success within educational leadership post-apartheid. Women in South African educational leadership during apartheid showed moral and spiritual commitments to leadership and frequently cited a higher power as their motivation for becoming educational leaders (Modigame *et al.*, 2010). Spirituality helped drive female leaders to become leaders within their respective educational settings through ethical and moral commitments to social emancipation (Modigame *et al.*, 2010). A push for equality can fuel support for educational leadership empowerment to foster South African women's success.

This push for equality is seen in leadership styles, which are generally viewed as being markedly male or female and black or white in South Africa (Chisholm, 2001). Generally, male leadership styles are regarded highly and are positively related to performance, whereas femininity is associated with a lack of assertiveness and lower performance in leadership positions (Chisholm, 2001). These stereotypes help to shape gendered leadership styles. Thus, South Africa developed a culture of masculinity within educational leadership where there are low levels of sensitivity to the needs to black educational leaders (Chisholm, 2011). The post-apartheid era affirmed women educational leaders; however, it is hard for females to transcend stigmas of masculinity to advance in leadership positions. While those in educational management positions in South Africa are generally aware of discrepancies relating to gender matters, they are unsure of how to address them. In response to these discrepancies, a pilot, cohort-based, doctoral programme with more curricular support was created to support black students in educational leadership inclusive of black women.

Cohort-based doctoral programmes can help to foster change in South African higher education. Cohorts are viewed as groups of students who begin, move through, and finish a programme of study at the same time (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992). Cohort models differ from traditional programmes in that students can get to know one another more intimately, learn from one another, take the same courses, and graduate together. Students who participated in cohort-based PhD programmes reported higher levels of support, peer relationships, cooperative learning and cohesiveness (Lei, Forelick, Short, Smallwood & Wright-Porter, 2011).

Similarly, a change in pedagogy results in changing the nature of a PhD programme. Faculty members are typically coordinators and mentors who focus on the intellectual and social development of students through offering a course of study, in order for students to thrive and complete their programme (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011; Burnett, 1999). By structuring a PhD programme with cohorts, gender gaps and issues of inclusivity within the programme would be addressed. Students infrequently meet with faculty, and self-motivation is needed to complete coursework and dissertations. However, faculty members should be accessible for cohort meetings either in person or online to establish the flexibility of the collaborative cohort (Burnett, 1999). Moreover, faculty members need to ensure that the cohort meets and communicates effectively to help students finish their dissertations by helping each other gain communicative skills to improve their quality of work. A cohort model also allows students to discuss their dissertations, research ideas and resources (Burnett, 1999). This model has been applied for PhDs in educational leadership, and can similarly expand to student affairs. Students who participated in collaborative cohort models reported feeling more satisfied with their PhD programmes (Burnett, 1999).

Ideally, faculty members shape students' knowledge by challenging students to achieve and contribute (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011). Establishing curricula that are inclusive and diverse, alongside pedagogy in which students are engaged, can be transformative agents to further students' engagement within their scholarly and professional roles (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011). Through examining learnt content and pedagogy employed to help create

scholars, developers of PhD programmes can help to train future leaders more effectively (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011).

Moreover, cohort models increase the number of students who complete their degrees in PhD programmes (Nimer, 2009). These strategies could bring more diversity into PhD programmes as current models for PhD programmes do not address inequalities of gender, race and ethnicity. Currently, in non-cohort programmes, graduate students do not report high levels of support from their classmates and faculty (Nimer, 2009). However, cohort models allow members to gain a sense of inclusion and family through building social capital and relationships among those involved, as well as engaging in social learning through interactions with others.

In response to these successes of other cohortibased doctoral programmes, a pilot, cohort-based, doctoral programme in student affairs with curricular instruction was created that attracted and enrolled five South African black women. While this programme initially enrolled eight students, only five of the eight maintained enrolment beyond the first session. Through programmes of this nature, the number of black women leaders obtaining PhDs in South Africa can be increased, closing the achievement gap in educational leadership between men and women. The model of expertise, with regard to bringing in an international professor, having a mixed PhD model with seminar-based independent study, cohorts and meetings, and travelling to an international university, was predicted to be beneficial to students. Their stories of the doctoral experience in a structured setting are investigated.

Methodology

The following study is a qualitative case study of five women PhD students at UWC who were participants in the pilot doctoral programme in student affairs. In February 2012, a representative travelled to the UWC to gather qualitative data in the form of one-on-one interviews. Interview questions were related to the students' expectations, experiences, challenges, weaknesses, aspirations, finishing, fears, changes, future and benefits while pursuing the PhD in the unique programme format. Themes were found surrounding the students' expectations of the programme, the programme model, fears, aspirations and recommendations.

Programme description

As part of the 2009–2010 University Mission and Goals Initiative at CSUF, a proposal was created for developing a graduate degree programme in collaboration with the UWC Faculty of Education. The need for formal preparation programmes for practising student affairs administrators and educational leaders was identified. A representative from CSUF met with representatives from UWC to discuss an action plan for the implementation of programme efforts, which included traditional doctoral studies and professional development modules for practitioners pursuing the PhD.

The PhD programme aimed to run from 2011 through 2014 as a pilot. A visiting faculty member from CSUF visited UWC three times a year to conduct seminar classes for

the students. Video conferences were held for the remainder of the year to help connect the two universities and their students. The following outcomes were expected: a development of a seminar-supported PhD programme at the UWC; graduate students from a pilot cohort registering beginning in the 2011–2012 school year; and conducting research focusing on student affairs and collaborative efforts within higher education.

Lastly, students from the CSUF and UWC joint PhD programme in student affairs were invited to participate in a short-term doctoral training programme from June 15 to July 15, 2013 which focused on research in higher education, teaching and learning. The training provided an overview of content areas in research data management and analysis, assessment and evaluation. Additionally, attention was given to identifying findings from data based on the students' dissertation studies.

Participants

The doctoral students came from a variety of backgrounds. While the programme was not designed specifically for women, all five students were black South African women between the ages of 32 and 60. Most of the women were mothers and wives with families (n = 4), while some were also grandmothers (n = 2) with extended families. All of the women (n = 5) held bachelor, masters and honours degrees.

Student A was a wife and mother with twenty years of experience as a student affairs professional working in predominantly black institutions. She worked for the largest institution in the Western Cape as the executive director and dean of student affairs overseeing the health and wellness cluster. Her educational background consisted of an MA in educational psychology with honours in education and a post graduate diploma. In addition, her research focused on transformation, leadership and student affairs, especially looking at women of colour post-apartheid.

Student B was also a wife and mother of three who had been working in higher education for twelve years. She was a programme manager doing operational management for six projects. Her educational background consisted of a BA degree with majors in English, communications and linguistics. She also completed her honours in English and two masters degrees. Her first masters degree was in literacy studies, followed by a second in adult learning.

Student C was an adult student, mother and wife. Previously she had worked as an executive dean of students at one of the universities, but she also served as a senior manager for a private foundation that provides scholarships to students in higher education in South Africa. She received a masters in educational counselling. Her research focused on academic attainment of sponsored students in higher education.

Student D was a single mother who held a strategic position in higher education within library services. She had held this position at three institutions for 17 years, of which 6 had been spent at her current university. She obtained a BA in education and a masters degree in library and information science. Her research topic considered issues of quality management as a prerequisite in higher education, a global phenomenon and investigation into quality measurement indicators for South African higher education libraries.

Student E was the youngest woman of the cohort. She was a linguist by profession and completed a BA in linguistics and masters and postgraduate diploma in translation. This PhD would be her fourth degree. Her research topic examined the experience of students through peer pressure living in residential halls.

Instruments

The goal of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of the students' perceptions of the quality of the programme as well as their challenges and recommendations for improvement. Additionally, the interviews revealed the students' experiences, feelings and perceptions of the leadership of the programme (see Appendix A for interview questions).

Analysis

Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder. The audio recordings were then transcribed for further analysis. ATLAS.ti was used to code for convergent and divergent emerging themes.

Findings

Expectations: Self, faculty, others

Prior to the programme, students discussed their expectations of themselves, the faculty, and the other students in the cohort. Regarding personal expectations, students expected to keep up with the demands of the programme and complete the readings. For some students, the balance of school, work and family was difficult to uphold. One student explained, "It's just a matter of balance of how to keep doing your day job very well and to keep being true to yourself about delivering your best in terms of what's expected of one academically."

Academic expectations were met at multiple levels. In terms of learning, students expected to understand the roots of student affairs. Additionally, students expected to gain knowledge of leadership as well as guidance throughout the process. With regard to academic guidance, the expectation had been met according to several students. One student discussed her expectation of being taken through the process and research dynamics:

> "I needed to get guidance – I needed to get a dissertation going on where I could understand – you know obviously at this level I've done a bit of research on methodology and research and so on but I needed to get that resuscitated."

When asked about the aforementioned expectations, one student stated:

> "As the cohort, we are meant to be applying ourselves in a very rigorous way in relation to our research regime but also in a very rigorous way in relation to one another … and in the same set, we should be there to assist."

In terms of other students, participants indicated that they expected their cohort members to guide and support one another and build collegiality. Additionally, each student spoke

highly of CSUF's visiting faculty, staff, and graduate students. All participants spoke highly of CSUF faculty's intellectual contributions to the programme.

In terms of the overall programme, students expressed excitement. One student indicated that she had previous experience in a structured programme that was well supported, "that got funded by funding from Netherlands Embassy to assist South Africa in producing 250 PhDs on an annual basis". Another student exclaimed that it was a good idea to pilot a programme of this calibre because South Africa did not have a similar programme. Students discussed their expectations about funding. One particular student had an issue with funding that served as a barrier in registering for classes. She stated, "Last year I didn't register and then I was emailing all the various people who are involved in this programme but I couldn't get anywhere".

When asked if their expectations had been met, students' responses varied positively. Regarding personal and academic expectations, students indicated that some were met. In terms of peer support, plans were made among students to meet as a group to discuss readings and theories. Several students created dyads, met with one another, and held one another accountable for completing their work.

Programme benefits

When asked to describe their experiences with the programme, connections, access to resources, and increased knowledge were emerging themes. One student indicated that reconnecting with what was happening in the area, meeting up with other students with similar interests, and getting back into academics were beneficial. The greatest benefit articulated by all students was having access to professors and students at CSUF.

Access to resources was another benefit. One student described the biggest strength of the programme as the literature to which she was exposed. Many students positively commented on the benefits of Skype and talking to students in the United States who had written extensively about education and leadership. Additionally, visiting students and professionals from CSUF provided resources. The incentive to travel to California was another benefit articulated by the students. One student explained that studying abroad exposed them to an array of knowledge and resources, which enhanced their career development.

As with any advanced degree, the students identified an increase in knowledge and skill as a primary benefit of the programme. One student stated:

> "It gave us a clearer picture of higher education, the education system on its own, how it was formulated … And the philosophical opinions of the colleagues and how does it fit to our current practices."

Another student attested to the benefits of increasing her formal knowledge as it pertained to student development theory, while having an increased ability and confidence to write conference papers and run more workshops.

Programme challenges

For most of these students, there was a large gap in time between their masters degrees and their entrance into the doctoral programme. Aside from the initial challenge of acclimating oneself to academics, other challenges with the programme fell under two categories: logistics and funding. One logistical challenge in particular was the formalisation of faculty supervisors. Prior to supervisor assignment, students expressed that a disconnect between supervisors was a debilitating concern. Similarly, the lack of logistical structure in programme coordination was another issue. Students indicated that often there was too much time between session meetings. Funding posed another programme weakness. Several students expressed issues with the lack of financial support the doctoral students received. One student explained:

> "Maybe we didn't ask questions … I know for sure that other institutions, they actually run after students, doctoral students, and provide funding, but it's not the case, so maybe we should have asked questions."

Programme model: Strengths

The traditional PhD programme model in South Africa follows that of an independent study model. Students essentially teach themselves with no formal coursework and produce a dissertation with the assistance of a supervisor. For this particular programme, a mixed model approach of facilitated sessions and independent study was implemented. One student commented on the strength of the programme model: "There's just so much one can do with the contact. Online has its benefits but even then I don't think it replaces the face-to-face component". The fact that it was a structured, face-to-face, taught doctorate was described as invaluable.

An opportunity for advancement and professional development was indicated as another strength of the programme model. The students in South Africa expressed the joy of connecting with classmates in the United States. One student described having an American friend with access to resources such as CSUF's library database, "For us it's an issue of subscribing to journal articles in our library and I would ask him … I'm grateful for that." Furthermore, an additional strength of the programme model was the guidance and support provided. Students frequently expressed the importance of emotional support the cohort provides.

Programme model: Weaknesses

Students described the lack of in-person contact as a weakness of the programme model. Stemming from the lack of contact, students identified concerns about time management. The postgraduate director scheduled sessions on Saturdays, in addition to meeting sessions that were scheduled to occur. The students often felt as though they were made to attend both sets of graduate sessions, which became repetitive. It became a balancing act between institutional and programme expectations. However, one student indicated that after the CSUF professor visited and left, the cohort did not always meet. She explained:

> "We always meet when she's around. And there's a workshop that is running every Saturday. But I believe the coordinator of the programme is supposed to make sure that maybe we meet via Skype with him maybe on monthly basis or quarterly basis."

Programme completion

When asked if they felt they would finish the programme, all five doctoral students positively expressed they would. Students were prescribed the end date of 2014 and when asked how long it would take for degree completion, one student explained:

> "At the beginning I wasn't so sure that it would be within the prescribed time, but I think I've made the mental adjustment and some logistical alternations … now I can actually say that yes, I'm going to finish within the prescribed time."

Students were also asked what they feared most regarding the programme. Students' reported fears centred around delayed graduation, not completing schoolwork, and not graduating. Despite their fears, all five students strongly felt as though they would complete their PhDs in 2014.

Discussion

Each of the five participants was asked to explain what motivated her to become involved with the doctoral programme. Students discussed the lack of formalised training programmes for student affairs professionals in South Africa as a large reason for their involvement. Similar sentiments were articulated regarding their expectations of the programme and its components. In terms of the academic aspect, several students expected to delve into the development of student affairs in terms of history, purpose and theories. Students expected to engage in rigorous coursework, acquire knowledge of research dynamics, and benefit from a taught component with an international affiliation with CSUF. Students also expected to receive guidance and support from faculty and cohort members to build collegial relationships and welcome peer support during their doctoral process.

Initially, some of the students' expectations fell short, revolving around limited funding and meetings. Several students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of financial support the programme offered as hindrances to their matriculation within the programme. Despite weekly research seminars offered by the college, these students expected to engage in more meetings with peers and faculty as part of the PhD programme to discuss their work and readings. Plans to meet as a collective were made; thus, several students created dyads, collaborated with each other, and held each other accountable for completing their work within their cohort..

The primary benefits of the programme included the collaborative nature of, and access to, resources from CSUF, increased competency, and formalised training of student affairs professionals. As previously discussed, the joint nature of the programme integrated a coursework component as well as the traditional full dissertation approach. Students individually met with selected supervisors and engaged in several taught sessions throughout

the year, which provided the opportunity for exposure to literature, engagement, dialogue and critical thinking. The nature of the programme uniquely contributes to South African higher education through pedagogy and epistemology due to the mixed nature of the programme, which is uncommon in South Africa. The joint efforts between two universities on two different continents provided academic, social and financial resources for students to complete their dissertations and go on to obtain higher positions within student affairs.

Additionally, the UWC collaboration with CSUF opened access to resources including other doctoral students in the United States, CSUF literature and visiting scholars. All five students spoke highly of the benefits associated with a scholar from CSUF visiting in terms of providing insight and knowledge. Lastly, the overarching benefit of the programme was the attempt to formalise the support for the professionalisation of student affairs in South Africa. Thus, piloting the programme was an institutional and professional benefit for students and higher education in South Africa.

One of the main issues that students experienced was the disconnection between staff and administration. The lack of protocol negatively affected student progress. Several students described instances where they had to speak to multiple people before getting proper assistance. Logistical programme issues not addressed through the traditional structures of the university and college contributed to students' negative perceptions of the experience.

The mixed programme model of a traditional full dissertation approach with the integration of a coursework component exhibited both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of this approach included the structure and advanced development, which offered opportunities for collaboration and networking. Implementing a cohort structure gave students a group of peers among whom to work. Each woman came from a different background with different academic experiences, which created opportunities for these women to gather, discuss experiences and interpret literature, and their research provided learning opportunities that a traditional full dissertation process would not.

Additionally, UWC students connected with CSUF students and staff via Skype and email. The cross-continental connection created a sense of community among the students at UWC. Students expressed the relief at seeing other students tired and sleepy during their doctoral process. Furthermore, one student discussed the benefit of contacting CSUF students to request literature that was inaccessible in South Africa. The taught component facilitated by a CSUF professor was noted as the greatest benefit of the programme model. The professor's presence created an academic space of learning where students engaged in thoughtful dialogue and critical analysis of reading assignments. Similarly, this also provided students with opportunities to ask questions for clarification. In terms of advanced development, students expressed that CSUF professors brought an intellectual expertise that was invaluable to their learning experience. Professors exposed students to concepts and materials surrounding student development, strategies, philosophy and history of leadership in higher education.

The structure of the programme was also seen, however, as an area of concern for students. The students articulated the lack of in-person contact as a weakness of the programme model. Aside from the in-person sessions with the visiting faculty member from CSUF, the students explained their expectations of more scheduled meetings with

the cohort and faculty throughout the year. Plans were made to meet – however with the difficulty of finding the right day and time on all the women's schedules, some women had trouble attending the meetings.

Similarly, the lack of a clear, structured teaching model was also expressed as a disadvantage. The coursework approach did not provide students with the full complement of coursework. Students remedied this by meeting in dyads to discuss and synthesise coursework.

Looking towards the future, all five students simultaneously agreed that the cohort would complete their dissertations and graduate. There were discussions about the time frame in which the work would get completed, as well as fears of delay, but all the women expected to finish their PhDs. Once completed, the women hoped to utilise their degrees in professional settings at various levels such as teaching, writing, supervising, mentoring, and leading.

Limitations

The nature of this qualitative study is limited by the fact that it is one case study, and the findings are not generalisable. Similarly, the outcomes and implications directly referred to the specific UWC PhD programme with a group of unique participants, and no validation has been conducted to verify if the successes of the pilot PhD programme are similar to others in South Africa. Because the sample only included five black women, it would be difficult to generalise findings to other cohort-based PhD programmes with international components. Furthermore, this study is also limited in that it does not address the complexities of apartheid and post-apartheid impact on leadership in higher education and black women to the fullest extent. Researchers provided an outsider's perspective with regard to data collection and analyses without having the added benefits of sustained engagement over time. Nevertheless, the rich responses of the participants aided in presenting a well-rounded perspective of the collaborative CSUF and UWC PhD programme in South Africa and its outcomes.

Recommendations

As the joint doctoral programme continued to develop, student recommendations were considered. Students needed to complete their proposals and write their dissertations. Programme coordinators' communication issues among faculty and between the two collaborative partners were evident and require ongoing intentional follow-up and feedback across the partnership. Steps toward institutionalising the programme at UWC need to be taken, as resources allow, to create a formalised programme of study. These recommendations centre on programme logistics, such as more meetings, and student access to extensive libraries and databases of literature to improve programme quality, effectiveness and outcomes.

The programme, like many in South Africa, should seek funding to increase financial assistance for students and logistics. The disjointed communication and lack of faculty collaboration was evident to students. Programme administrators need to create commitment to addressing the need for formally educated student affairs practitioners in South Africa. Lastly, the programme should continue sharing U.S. resources with UWC students. The

method of networking with students and materials provided by the visiting professors from CSUF expanded students' knowledge. Having this in place at UWC on an ongoing basis will ensure more learning and ultimately increase black women leaders in higher education.

Conclusion

Females in higher education continue to move past gender barriers and obtain advanced degrees in South Africa. The implementation of a pilot doctoral programme at UWC is one way to close the achievement gap between males and females in positions of educational leadership. It is important to note that all of the students were women aged between 32 and 60. The students juggled multiple identities as students, wives and mothers as well as professionals and aspiring scholars. Despite the path for academic leadership being modelled on a path for men rather than women, programmes such as this are currently being piloted and established to bridge that gap. Some barriers to this are funding issues, which some of the students at UWC experienced, and which hindered their path to academic success.

All of the students were extremely motivated to obtain their degrees. Most of them cited a lack of formalised training programmes in student affairs in South Africa as a motivating factor for applying to the programme. Students believed that they would be able to use the skills obtained from participating in this pilot programme to further their careers in student affairs. Therefore, it is important to establish similar doctoral programmes to allow more educational access for those within student affairs fields.

Student affairs practitioners in South Africa are in the prime position to help inspire others to pursue higher education because there are not as many professionals within the area. Through participating in doctoral programmes in student affairs, women are able to move past gendered underrepresentation within higher education, improve their career prospects and projections, and meet their goals.

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Appendix: Evaluation goals and research questions

Questions that guided the student interviews included:

1. What led you to choose this PhD programme?
2. What were your expectations before beginning the programme? Of yourself? Faculty? Cohort members? Students?
   a) Have they been met? In what ways?
3. Describe your experience with the programme? What have been the
   a) Challenges?
   b) Weaknesses?
4. In terms of the programme model, what are the
   a) Strengths?
   b) Weaknesses?
5. What are you most looking forward to within the programme?
6. Do you believe you will finish the programme? How long do you think this will take?
7. Of what are you most fearful?
8. Have you changed since entering the programme? Please explain.
9. What do you see yourself doing in the future with the PhD?
10. What will be the benefits for you? Others?