Postsecondary Student Mindsets & Transition Research

WERA Convening
Wednesday, May 29, 2024

SOVA

About Sova Solutions

Facilitating transformative change within higher education.

Sova is a consultancy organization that seeks to build meaningful partnerships with dedicated individuals who drive change in higher education systems, institutions, associations, and philanthropies.

"We build the capacity for large-scale change. Our focus is not just on the systems and institutions themselves but on the incredible people behind them. We offer personalized support, tailored strategies, and hands-on guidance to help you navigate the path toward transformation. Our approach is grounded in collaboration, equity, empathy, and a genuine understanding of your challenges. We provide the tools and resources needed to turn your vision into reality, ensuring that every step you take is purposeful and clear." **sova.org**

Purpose & Need

*Why are we studying postsecondary mindsets and transition?**

- Between 2018 and 2021, the average direct enrollment rate declined from 60% to 50%, a decrease slightly greater than the national average.

- There was a slight average increase in direct enrollment rates from 2020 to 2021, but was not experienced by all students. On average, Latino/a/x and Indigenous students and those from low-income communities continue to experience a decrease in direct enrollment.

- Direct enrollments in Community and Technical Colleges (2 yr institutions) continued to decline, while direct enrollment rates in 4 yr institutions increased slightly from 2020 to 2021 for all but Latino/a/x students.

*general number, may vary by school or ESD

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Scope of Work

What are we doing?

- We are recruiting students, parents and school administrators to participate in focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

Who is our target demographic?

- High school Seniors who are Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous/ Native, and from rural and low income communities.

Where are we conducting the research?

- Across WA state schools in selected areas that meet the demographic and data parameters of intended focus populations.

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Research Questions

1. What postsecondary mindsets are prevalent in WA high school students, especially among our focus students - Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, and rural students, and students from low-income communities? Are there differences by gender?
   a. Do college-going mindsets change over time during high school (and what influences them)?

2. Why do *50% of high school graduates in WA state **not enroll (transition)** into postsecondary institutions?
   a. Particularly, why do Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, and rural students, and students from low-income communities **not directly enroll into post-secondary after high school graduation**?

3. What alternate paths to enrollment in postsecondary education do students take, especially our focus populations, and why?
      *general number, may vary by school or ESD

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Population Sample & Protocols

Primary regions to be targeted for participation:

Greater Seattle Region	Renton and Kent Region
Tacoma/ Pierce Region	Yakima Region
Tri-Cities Region	Northend/Bellingham Region

First Touchpoint: High School Student Focus Groups and/or Interviews

The first touchpoint centers on students and the populations in their "nested" areas of influence:

- **Student Interviews:** One-on-one, in-depth conversations about postsecondary aspirations, decision-making processes, and perceived challenges.
- **Peer Focus Groups:** Discussions among groups of 6-8 students, exploring shared experiences, social influences, and collective perceptions.
- **Parent Focus Groups:** Open, in-depth discussions among groups of 6-8 parents, covering aspirations, involvement, barriers, support systems, and recommendations.
- **School Administrator Interviews (includes Teacher, Prinicpals, Counselor, District and State-level):** Individual interviews focusing on perspectives on students' postsecondary mindsets, school support systems, and experiences of marginalized student groups.

Second Touchpoint Overview: Post High School Student Questionnaire

The second touchpoint includes a questionnaire sent to students/youth who participated in the first touchpoint. The second touchpoint will occur at least 6 months after high school graduation. Each questionnaire will consist of approximately 20-25 questions.

Target Sample Size: A total of 235 student participants/youth will participate over the life of the study (2024 to December 2026), as well as 50 parents or school administrators/staff, for a total of **285 participants (n=285).**

Outcomes

Desired Outcome 1

— To understand the mindsets influencing postsecondary enrollment among Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, rural, and low-income students, in order to identify gaps, opportunities, and highlight changes needed to reduce barriers which may improve transition into postsecondary education.

Desired Outcome 2

— Conduct inclusive, equity-focused, and action driven research centering student voices, leading to shared knowledge for greater improved educational outcomes.

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Project Plan & Timeline

2023 — **2024** — **2025** — **2026** — **2027**

Year 1: Initial Implementation, Discovery & Design (Nov - Dec)

- Project set-up, planning and staffing
- Outputs aim to "set up" project for subsequent years

Year 2: Finalize Implementation, Discovery & Design Phase

- Deepen the continuous improvement of the project
- Building on initial framing (pilot)
- Select students and research sites for participation of Cohort 1
- Provide results presented in progress report

Year 3: Data Collection, Analysis & Sensemaking from Cohort 1 and 2

- Continued data collection and analysis
- Cohort 1 & 2 sense-making
- Continue to process data and analysis for dissemination
- Share progress accomplishments and milestone completion in progress report

Year 4: Finalize Data Collection & Analysis

- Aggregated data from Cohort 1, 2, & 3
- Finalyze sensemaking of findings and analyze data with long lens
- **Final Year:** To include work stated with additional summative articulation and analysis of the overall results, and project in the form of a final report (and/or other products produced over with each cohort)
  - Progress report

Year 5: Project Closeout Actions & Deliverables (Jan - Feb)

- Manage archiving of documents and collateral
- Complete final reporting and other final requirements from funder
  - Progress report

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Advisory Council

Purpose

The Advisory Council serves as a strategic partner to the Sova research team, offering a broad range of expertise to enhance the project's scope, relevance, and outcomes.

Roles and Responsibilities

Perspective and Insight

- Enrich research teams understanding of subject matter

Guidance and Mentorship

- Offer guidance on methodologies and potential challenge and help navigate complexities

Partnership and Collaboration

- Engage with researchers, fostering an environment of open communication and collaboration

Strategic Planning

- Advise on strategic direction of research project

Meeting Structure

Virtual quarterly meetings, but can adjust depending on council workflow and circumstances

Outcomes

Contribute to the overall success of the research project bu provide insight and support to achieve meaningful and impactful outcomes

Thank you.

Sova Team at WERA

Lead Researcher
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Project Manager
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