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Accessing Education: Occupational Therapy Recruitment and Retention for Diverse Students

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Introduction

The United States is often seen as the land of opportunity with New York City being an epicenter of immigration and cultural diversity. The challenge for a NYC OT educational program is recruitment, which extends to this population, the opportunity for the American dream.

Objectives

Entry to professional education can generate high levels of anxiety and may require support for enhanced literacy, communication, affective and cognitive development. Situated in a University whose mission embraces "Excellence and Access" for diverse students, who may be the first in their family to achieve a college education, may be of immigrant, minority or disadvantaged backgrounds; the paradox for educational programs is to uphold high standards of academic quality and promote effective professional development and socialization.

Method

Within the context of the University Middle States review process and occupational therapy professional accreditation process, the OT program of Long Island University applied evaluative and developmental learning experiences to provide comprehensive supports to enhance learning and foster success for students from diverse/multicultural backgrounds.

Description

This approach included a commitment to a continuum from basic learning to complex problem solving. Students participated in assessment of reading, composition, learning styles (PEPS and LASSI), test-taking strategies and stress management. Enrichment and supportive activities included focus on study skills, writing, problem solving and test-taking strategies.

Results

Evaluation of students' normative reading levels indicated a range from 13% to 98%. Through tutorials with the Writing Center and OT faculty professional academic reading and writing were refined. A grading rubric for evaluating writing was implemented throughout the curriculum. Testing with the LASSI indicated students experienced high levels of anxiety, which impacted their attitudes. Stress management activities were provided on both an individual and group level.

Conclusion

Students experienced a variety of supportive learning activities, mastering complex comprehensive examinations throughout the curriculum, developing active problem solving strategies and increased NBCOT pass rates.

Contribution to Occupational Therapy

Learning encompasses cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains and views the student as an active, goal-directed participant to promote qualities of collegial and independent learning mirrored in the clinical and practice environment.

