



University of Idaho

College of Education,
Health and Human Sciences

**Rural College Students'
Academic, Financial, and
Health-Related Obstacles
During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

KRISTA M. SORIA (SHE/HER)

**AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
ASSOCIATION (AERA) ANNUAL MEETING
PHILADELPHIA, PA
APRIL 13, 2024**



Ref.: Ms. No. NACADAJOURNAL-D-23-00030R2

Rural College Students' Academic, Financial, and Health-Related Obstacles During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Academic Advisors

NACADA Journal

Dear Dr. Soria,

I am pleased to inform you that your manuscript, Rural College Students' Academic, Financial, and Health-Related Obstacles During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Academic Advisors, has been accepted for publication in the **NACADA** Journal.

Your manuscript will be sent for a reference citation check and then for copy editing with an anticipated publication in Issue 44(2) out in the summer. Occasionally, as editors, we may find it necessary to adjust publication dates. Should we find it necessary to make this adjustment, we will inform you as soon as this decision is made.

The sharing of ideas and scholarship about academic advising with colleagues and other stakeholders is essential to advancing the profession. In this spirit, we thank you for making your contributions available to others.

With kind regards,

Karen Mottarella, Psy.D.
Editor



RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Rural students encounter structural obstacles that compromise their success

- Since 2008, 15 of the 20 most rural states have decreased funding for public colleges and universities (closing programs, reducing faculty, increasing PT or adjunct faculty)
- 82% of those who live in “complete education deserts” live in rural areas
- Rural areas are more vulnerable to labor market disruptions (e.g., pandemic led to a four-fold increase in unemployment in rural residents)

RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Rural students encounter structural obstacles that compromise their success

- Rural colleges/universities receive three times less funding from state appropriations than suburban/urban institutions, leading to increases of tuition and fees at rural institutions
- The average distance to access inpatient services has increased eightfold since 2012 due to hospital/clinic closures (problematic because rural communities do not have strong infrastructure)



RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

- 29.6% of first-time, full-time students who started in 2013 and attended rural four-year colleges/universities graduated in 8 years compared to 53.4% of students who attended urban four-year colleges/universities

RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

The structural barriers rural students experienced prior to the pandemic may have been exacerbated by pandemic-related disparities

RQ: After controlling for additional demographic, collegiate, and institutional variables, are the odds of experiencing academic, financial, and health-related obstacles during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly different between rural and suburban/urban students?



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Glover et al.'s (2020) framework for mitigating the equity harms of the COVID-19 pandemic

- inequitable COVID-19 policies generate interactive and multiplicative harms upon individuals who were already marginalized, oppressed, and disenfranchised prior to the pandemic



METHODS: INSTRUMENT

Multi-institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) survey, which was administered between January and May 2021 at 73 four-year colleges and universities

Learn more at leadershipstudy.net

Each institution administered the survey to a random sample of 4,000 students (or, if enrollment was lower than 4,000 students, institutions used a census sample)

Response rate: 21.0% (49,307)

METHODS: SAMPLE

The final sample included 31,575 students who responded to all of the items used in analysis

- 7 rural* colleges/universities serving 3,073 students
- 62 suburban/urban colleges/universities serving 28,502 students

*defined using the rural-serving institutions metric developed by Koricich et al. (2023)

METHODS: SAMPLE

- Cisgender women 67.0%, cisgender men 30.8%, transgender or gender non-conforming 2.2%
- Multiracial 11.3%, Asian American 8.8%, Latinx or Hispanic 7.8%, Black or African American 5.0%, White 63.4%, all others 3.7%
- Domestic students 95.7%
- Full-time enrollment 96.1%
- Non-transfer 81.0%



DEPENDENT VARIABLES

19 different academic, financial, or health-related obstacles

Academic

- e.g., lack of access to learning support services

Financial

- e.g., loss of wages from employment

Health-related

- e.g., student contracted COVID requiring hospitalization

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Demographic variables
- Collegiate variables
 - e.g., class level, enrollment intensity, major, residence, employment
- Institutional variables
 - e.g., size, control, Carnegie classification

METHODS: DATA ANALYSIS

19 different logistic regressions

- Independent variables
 - Rural compared to urban/suburban
 - All other demographic, collegiate, and institutional

Additional diagnostics (reported in the full paper)

RESULTS: ACADEMIC OBSTACLES

Compared to suburban/urban students, students attending rural colleges/universities had significantly higher odds of

- Lacking access to instructors (OR 1.107, 41.1%)
- Lacking access to learning support services (OR 1.137, 25.7%)
- Lacking access to an appropriate study space (OR 1.186, 59.3%)
- Lacking access to technology necessary for online learning (OR 1.344, 22.2%)

RESULTS: FINANCIAL OBSTACLES

Compared to suburban/urban students, students attending rural colleges/universities had significantly higher odds of

- Loss of wages from employment (OR 1.304, 34.9%)
- Loss or reduction of scholarship or grant aid (OR 1.333, 11.4%)
- Loss or reduction of insurance coverage (OR 1.326, 7.3%)
- Loss or cancellation of an expected internship (OR 1.296, 20.2%)



RESULTS: FINANCIAL OBSTACLES

Compared to suburban/urban students, students attending rural colleges/universities had significantly higher odds of

- Loss or reduction of family income (OR 1.266, 32.%)
- Concerns about sufficient access to food (OR 1.553, 6.9%)
- Concerns about sufficient access to housing (OR 1.309, 8.6%)
- Concerns about ability to meet routine financial obligations (OR 1.309, 21.9%)

RESULTS: FINANCIAL OBSTACLES

Compared to suburban/urban students, students attending rural colleges/universities had significantly higher odds of

- Concerns about sustainable employment for self (OR 1.375, 34.0%)
- Concerns about sustainable employment for a parent/guardian (OR 1.263, 23.3%)
- Concerns about ability to pay for your education in the future (OR 1.231, 36.3%)

RESULTS: HEALTH-RELATED OBSTACLES

Compared to suburban/urban students, students attending rural colleges/universities had significantly higher odds of

- A family member or close friend passed away from COVID (OR 1.255, 13.6%)
- A family member or friend contracted COVID requiring hospitalization (OR 1.202, 21.3%)
- Contracting COVID requiring hospitalization (OR 1.232, 2.1%)
- Concerns about adequate medical care (OR 1.179, 14.2%)



DISCUSSION

The results corroborate Glover et al.'s (2020) proposition that the policies enacted during the pandemic may have generated additional harms upon individuals who were marginalized prior to the pandemic

If cumulative or multiplicative, those disparities could signal long-term challenges for rural students



RECOMMENDATIONS & REFERENCES

In the full paper, I provide recommendations for academic advisors to support rural college students and remove structural obstacles

Glover, R. E., van Schalkwyk, M. C. I., Akl, E. A., Kristjansson, E., Lotfi, T., Petkovic, J., Petticrew, M. P., Pottie, K., Tugwell, P., & Welch, V. (2020). A framework for identifying and mitigating the equity harms of COVID-19 policy interventions. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, *128*, 35–48. doi: 10.1016/j.jclinepi.2020.06.004

Koricich, A., Sansone, V. A., Fryar, A. H., Orphan, C. M., & McClure, K. R. (2022). *Introducing our nation's rural-serving postsecondary institutions: Moving toward greater visibility and appreciation*. Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges.



THANK YOU!

Contact: Krista Soria, ksoria@uidaho.edu