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McNair Scholars: Overcoming the Obstacles of Underrepresented Students

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Smell

McNair Scholars: Overcoming the Obstacles of Underrepresented Students

Presenter: Adrianna Smell

Faculty Mentor: Joshua Packard

Abstract: Previous research identifies agents of socialization that reinforce stereotypes about underrepresented populations' abilities and how these biases create obstacles for underrepresented students in academia, but lacks in understanding how underrepresented students combat biases in higher education. Using qualitative methodology, this study identifies obstacles faced by students underrepresented in academia (i.e., first-generation, low income, race/ethnic and gender minorities) participating in a high impact program, and how they maintain self-efficacy while combating obstacles. Studying students engaged in a high impact program adds a new dimension to understanding the relationship between underserved populations in academia, self-efficacy and student success. Preliminary findings based on interviews with 9 students suggest financial stability, lack of inclusion and awareness of resources are the biggest obstacles for students. While universities are implementing first year seminar courses for underrepresented students, this population needs more attention from administration and faculty; they are unaware of the opportunities that campuses have to offer.