Country Roads Take Me…Where?: Understanding College Choice from the Perspective of Rural Students

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Why Rural?

- Urban bias
- 25% of public school children in rural school districts (12 million+)
- Only 17% of rural adults have a college degree
- Rural students (18-24 yr olds) less likely to attend college than their suburban and urban counterparts (31% vs. 42% vs. 46%)
- Rural community decline
- Rural poverty

Coal company house, Isaban, WV (still occupied today).
Rural youth more likely to...

- Live in counties with no college
- Have little access to college information
- Have lower educational aspirations
- Have parents who did not attend college
- Have parents that are less likely to encourage higher education (rural student perception)
- Have fewer highly educated role models
Purpose of the Study

Examine the college pathways (college access and success) of rural, first-generation, low-SES students.
Social Ecological Overview of Mingo County

- Rural, high poverty
- College-going rates higher than predicted
- Community college, no 4-year college
Findings: Family

- Attachment to Family
- Four-year/two-year
- Pressure to stay

Mingo County native, Bob Maguire (on left), visiting family cemetery in Newtown, WV.
Findings: Family cont.

- Family Legacies
- Gender norms
- Increased pressure to carry on legacies

Mountain top removal site near Gilbert, WV.
Findings: Family cont.

Parental Encouragement and Support

- Financial
- Encouragement
- Help with Applications
- Education as a Priority
- Cultural Capital
Findings: Family cont.

- Do Better Than Parents
- Success for Others
Findings: Leaving & Returning/Staying

I think most of ‘em sticking around here, like the guys, you’ll see them going off [inaudible] and going in the coal mines and going in the ground [inaudible] or doing something like timber and stuff. That’s pretty much all that’s open around here. And then the girls that normally don’t go to college from up around here pretty much after a few years you see ‘em married off, and have families, which is not a bad thing, you know? But that’s normally how [the] pattern. It’s kinda like if you don’t take your chance and get out when you can, you never find the opportunity again. It’s like once you get sucked in, you’re here for good (student interview).
Additional Findings

- Community, High Schools, and Peers
- High School Encouragement
- Extracurricular Involvement
- Peer Support

Gilbert, WV, Gilbert High School 2009 homecoming parade.
Additional Findings cont.

- Other College Success Factors and Barriers
  - Student Worries/Concerns
  - Negative Stereotypes

Matewan, WV
Conclusion

Policy and Practical Implications

Williamson, WV, county seat of Mingo County.