

"At the Center of Everything"

Understanding Rural Brain Drain
Through the Perspectives of Educators

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Abstract:

The goal of this study is to examine the phenomenon of brain drain within rural communities by utilizing the unique and central perspectives of rural educators. In this study, twelve rural educators from the same mostly rural county in Oregon were interviewed. They were asked about their relationship to their community, post-secondary advising practices, and perception of potential “brain drain” in their community. Several common themes emerged. The first is that in order to form a salient identity as a rural educator, teachers first had to be accepted into their communities. Rural educators understood the brain drain phenomenon as a product of both limits on economic and social capital. They saw this as a two-way system that both trapped some students, and pushed others out. Educator’s own experiences, understanding of brain drain and identity in relation to the community shaped how they engaged with students. After interviews were conducted, several programs aimed at increasing access to higher education were reviewed. This analysis put the challenges identified by educators in conversation with the goals and strategies of programs. Areas in which these aligned and diverged were identified. Finally, several strategies are suggested to further utilize the perspectives and experiences of rural educators to improve student outcomes and intervention programs.

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Introduction:

Within the American context, rural schools are the social and cultural hubs of rural communities, and teachers are at the center of these schools (Tieken, 2014). Rural educators are arguably some of the most socially and culturally influential members of rural communities. This puts them in a potentially influential role, but one that also requires them to uniquely navigate the complex social systems and structures of their communities. In many ways, the educational experiences of rural youth in America are characterized by contradiction. For example, rural identity has been historically contentious, the same social and cultural factors that promote connection to the community for some students create a sense of exclusion for other (Harkins, 2003). The experiences and perspectives of rural educators in the communities they work in can offer potentially novel insight into these complex and often contradictory experiences within rural communities.

Educators are figures central to their students' lives and the academic community as a whole. Within all locales they can find themselves in possibly conflicted roles as they navigate the contradictions that their students face. However, the interconnected nature of rural communities and schools intensifies this position. Authors McDonough, Gildersleeve, and Jarsky characterize rural life as a "golden cage", a metaphor that captures a particularly salient contradiction that rural communities, students, and teachers face. They explain that, "rural life, as fulfilling and sustaining as it is to these students now, is also trapping them into a low-mobility, low-flexibility, low-socioeconomic status" (pg 204). In their work, educators are not immune to this kind of conflict: they

must confront these conditions in their classrooms as they relate to their students' performance and experiences.

Specifically, educators must confront this potential conflict when engaging with students about their post-secondary plans. This is a particularly complicated decision for any student, but rural students face a specific set of influential social and cultural factors. Educators' unique place in the community puts them in a position to influence the expectations and experiences of their students outside of their direct academic engagement (Huber, 2017; Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011).

Rural students have also historically attended colleges and universities at lower rates than their urban and suburban counterparts, but there is not a comparably significant difference in their academic performance (Provasnik et al. 2007, Smith, Beaulieu, & Seraphine, 1995). This problem of college access and attainment within rural communities is more complicated than simply motivating more students to apply post-secondary programs. At the same time as students struggle to leave these rural communities to pursue higher education, rural areas have faced higher levels of outmigration as the traditional economies of these communities have declined (Mills & Hazarika, 2001).

The people who leave these communities are not random. In a system known as "brain drain", or "human capital flight", the populations usually leaving in highest numbers are those with the most access to economic, intellectual, and cultural capital. As industries such as timber, mining, and agriculture that once supported rural communities increasingly face new challenges, the previously flourishing economic opportunities they once provided are constricted (Budge, 2006; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley,

2006). While family, community, and culture may encourage students to stay, greater educational and economic opportunities may encourage them to leave. As students must ask themselves *if* and *how* they want to leave, their communities are left with conundrums too: how do they replace the intellectual and economic potential of the students they “lose”? For these communities, it can be disheartening and detrimental to see the highest achieving students choose to leave (Sherman & Sage, 2011) for the students, it can seem like the one real chance they have at success and upward social mobility. At the center of this tension between communities and students are rural educators. When the ambitions of students and communities seem to be in contradiction with one another, educators find themselves having to respond to the needs of both.

The experience and perspective of rural educators is one of potential value that has been underutilized within the literature. In this paper I will examine the phenomenon of brain drain through the perspectives of these educators. I will not build an independent theory on these perspectives, but instead aim to highlight and analyze the educators’ own understandings of their students and rural towns. I ask the following questions to explore how educators view their own positions within their communities, and how this affects their interactions with students:

- ❖ How do rural educators form their rural identity and how is this connected to their position within their community and role as an educator?
- ❖ In what ways do teachers in rural areas understand the “brain drain” phenomenon? Does this concept shape how teachers in rural areas view their role in helping students with their post-secondary plans?
- ❖ How does a teacher’s own educational background and relationship to the community shape their interactions with students regarding their post-secondary plans?

I will also review several intervention programs that address access to higher education, in order to evaluate their coherence in relationship to situations as identified and described by rural educators.

In a time of heightened political and social unrest, one which has been increasingly framed on a conceptual urban versus rural political and moral divide (Scala & Johnson, 2017), it is critical to understand the processes which are shaping these locales in unique ways. Brain drain and economic strife are not conditions exclusive to rural communities, but they do manifest differently in different contexts. Individuals also react differently within social and political realms when they are faced with these potentially life altering cultural phenomenon. Rural educators offer an important perspective into the circumstances of rural communities, and the lives of rural youth.

Literature Review

In order to approach the specific questions raised here about the experience of rural educators, I will draw upon the broad sociological literature on rural life and education in America, starting with theoretical definitions and classifications of “rural”. I will then draw upon the existing research on rural student performance and college-going behavior. This will provide vital context for the phenomenon of brain drain, and outline the professional environment in which rural educators operate. Building on this background, I will review the current literature on rural schools and teachers beyond student performance. Finally, I will present the existing scholarly understanding of brain drain both broadly, and within the context of rural America.

Defining “Rural”

The United States Census Bureau defines rural areas as, “encompassing all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area” (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). There are two classifications of “urban” areas: Urbanized Areas, of 50,000 or more people, and Urban Clusters of 2,500 to 50,000 people. According to this definition, 80.7% of the American population lives in urban areas (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Although there is diversity among rural towns, most are similar in their relatively small populations, and physical isolation. Similarly, rural schools are also classified by both size and distance from urban centers. Despite demographic variation between specific rural schools, they face similar challenges posed by their size and relative isolation. The United States Department of Education defines school locale based on this definition, classifying schools either in Cities, Suburbs, Towns, or Rural areas. Each classification consisting of subcategories as well, within “Rural” subcategories include “fringe”, “distant”, and “remote” which describe increasingly more isolated locales, respectively (Common Core of Data). Fifty-three percent of American school districts are categorized as “Rural”. In the year 2013, roughly 30% of students attended public schools in these classifications, over 14 million students nationally (Common Core of Data).

There is a long cultural and theoretical tradition of distinguishing between categories of locale, specifically between “urban” and “rural”. Rural locales are defined in negative terms, of what they are not—i.e. not urban. However recently, there has been more focus on suburban areas in addition to strictly urban and rural divides. Recent research has focused on the performance of suburban schools, which has created

mysticism of success surrounding the “suburbs”. While performance in these schools can be higher than in other locales, suburbanization has also been connected to modern segregation and racial inequalities (Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012; Lleras, 2008). Suburbs have since become commonly associated with being white, affluent, and successful (Orfield, & Lee, 2005). All locales are similarly distinguished through outsider’s perceptions in different way, but shared experiences that are associated with place also create locale specific identities among those who reside in these areas.

Within rural areas, these shared experiences create “rural identity”. Historically, rural identity has been strongly associated with place. People construct “ruralness” as *who* they are because of *where* they are (Falk, 1996). Many traditional rural industries are also based off the land and natural resources, for example logging, mining and agriculture. Community kinship, and shared closeness to nature are some common components of rural identity (Bell, 1992). This certain attachment to and understanding of the land is characteristic of rural identity and symbolic of fundamentally divergent thinking from an urbanized identity (Greider, & Garkovich, 1994; Petrzalka, 2004). However, these same rural industries that have flourished in the past have declined in recent years. As the economic opportunities these industries provided have shrunk, the economic situation in many rural areas has declined (Budge, 2006; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006).

There are several narratives that have historically been used to understand and characterize rural life. Among these, two main generalizations have been explicitly identified. The first are romanticized and pastoral conceptions of the countryside, and idealization of rural life and people (Little, 1999; Bell, 1992). The second is the image of

backwards, uneducated hillbillies (Harkins, 2003). This popular conception of ruralness in particular is characterized by deficits in social and cultural capital, leading rural communities to commonly be presented as “regressive” or “ignorant” (Theobald & Wood 2010). These narratives are two opposing caricatures of rural life, and have influenced public perception and interaction with rural areas.

Within rural communities, the tightness and “neighborliness” can enable the formation of salient and healthy rural identities. However, some rural residents find it more difficult to form this identity and connection within their community. When aspects of personal identity and beliefs are not in line with community values, the supportive forces of the community can instead become exclusionary. Individuals who are excluded from the community, or determined to be outsiders, face barriers to community acceptance and resources.

It is important to highlight the potentially challenging, as well as potentially supportive, environment rural communities can create. In addition to individuals’ personal relationships to their communities, there are groups who have historically faced aggression from small, homogenous rural communities in particular. Religious and racial minorities as well as LGBTQ individuals, for example, have faced reoccurring hostility from rural communities (Cloke, 2006). Rural racial tensions stem from a long history of oppression and exploitation, especially in the rural south (Danbom, 2017). LGBTQ students face more hostile school and community environments which can lead to worse mental health outcomes, lower graduation and college attainment rates (Palmer, Kosciw, & Bartkiewicz, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009).

“Rural” has been defined in many different terms, both administratively and culturally. Many definitions, however, overlook the processes throughout which different members of rural communities form rural identity. Children who are raised within a rural locale interact with a specific set of environmental factors. Whether or not they feel connected to or isolated by their rural community, rural students’ experiences are shaped by their surrounding context. As well as students, teachers interact with the circumstance of their rural communities in a specific role, which leads to a complex understanding of their own identity as a “rural educator”, and connection to their community.

Rural Student Performance and Post-Secondary Planning

In order to fully unpack educator’s experiences, and the professional context they work within, trends in rural student achievement and post-secondary pathways must be understood. Theoretically, high school students’ process of post-secondary planning can be thought of as three general stages: pre-college academic preparation, the college search and application process, and post-matriculation. This is a general timeline that can be used to conceptualize a traditional path to college. In each of these stages, educators interact with students in unique and specific ways, and advising can potentially occur throughout.

In general, the specific merit and ability of an individual does not automatically correspond to their success or ability to achieve in the workforce or other similar institutions. This is due to differences in past opportunity, and social and cultural capital. Glenn Loury found that notable differences in income and employment are not necessarily due to a difference in inherent skill, but instead access to human and social capital resources (Loury 1977, 1981). This same framework can be applied to the

situation in rural communities to understand student achievement. Rural students pursue post-secondary education at lower rates than their urban and suburban peers (Provasnik et al. 2007, Smith, Beaulieu, & Seraphine 1995), and are less likely to have high aspirations to pursue post-secondary degrees (Hu 2003). However, rural districts score higher on measures of proficiency and have lower dropout rates than urban school counterparts, but are outperformed on average on both metrics by suburban schools (Provasnik et al. 2007). Rural students face an opportunity gap when applying to college, not necessarily a gap in academic achievement or skill.

First, students who attend rural schools they face barriers to academic preparation in the classroom before they may even consider their post-secondary options. Traditional Advanced Placement and college preparatory courses are offered at lower rates within rural schools, at 51.4% respectively compared to 93.8%, and 97.3% of suburban, and urban districts (Gagnon & Mattingly 2016). School size accounts for some of, but the entirety of this gap, while a lack of other rigorous or advanced courses outside this official program also contributes (Graham 2009). These courses increase students' academic preparation and overall academic expectations, but when students do not have the opportunity to take more advanced courses, their overall academic preparation suffers.

Rural educators must attempt to overcome the limitations and effects that restricted resources within schools have on student's performance and post-graduation aspirations. However, they must simultaneously contend with out of school factors that influence student outcomes. Students' socioeconomic backgrounds and level of parental

education affect student success across all locales (Sewell & Shah 1968, Coleman 1966). These effects can be exacerbated in rural areas.

On average, rural areas face particularly high rates of poverty (Byun et al. 2012). In a 2012 report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2013), only 28% of students from low-income rural schools enrolled in four-year institutions after high school graduation. This number was the lowest among all of the presented school demographics, including low-income urban schools at 30% and higher income rural schools at forty-four percent. In addition to school resources and characteristics, student background and other out of school factors account for large variations in achievement (Coleman 1966).

These barriers are not necessarily just a “rural problem”. Commonly identified educational opportunity gaps created by disparities in socioeconomic status affect students across all locales (Byun et al. 2012; Sewell & Shah 1968; Coleman 1966). For instance, high-achieving, low-income high school students have performance records similar to rural students. These students achieve academically, but fail to enroll in, or even apply to, colleges that would be an academic “match” —schools at which students’ test scores fall in the middle 50 percentile (Hoxby & Avery 2012). Higher income students of the same academic qualifications have the knowledge, and support necessary to apply to “match” schools. Without the necessary information, social encouragement, and connections, low-income students “undermatch” to colleges and universities (Hoxby et al. 2012). For many of these students, the barrier to attending college is choosing to apply in the first place. Without the expectation or encouragement, students who are academically qualified don’t apply, or apply only to “safety” schools—schools where

students' test scores are in the top 25 percentile. Under and over matching to colleges is more a factor of students' application and enrollment decisions, rather than the admission decisions of the colleges themselves (Dillon & Smith, 2013).

This stems from lack of both economic and cultural resources, both factors that are positively correlated with students' enrolling in post-secondary institutions (McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky 2010). These resources are material manifestations of social and cultural capital, such as higher parental degrees, and broader social networks.

Cultural capital exists in embodied, objectified, and institutionalized forms (Bourdieu, 1986). One's embodied cultural capital is learned and internalized, displayed through means such as patterns of behavior and speech, while objectified cultural capital is signified through possessions. The institutionalized form is a type of objectified capital. Taking the shape of formal qualifications or degrees, it is the institutional recognition of the possession of this capital. For example, parental education is a form of institutionalized cultural capital that can aid students in their own pursuit of it. In the absence of this, and other, direct transfer of cultural capital, students may be able to turn to peers or other members of the community. However, in this context, it is likely that others in the community have similar cultural resources available.

Outside of the classroom, these cultural and social resources are particularly influential in rural students' educational achievement, and their decisions to pursue post-secondary education. Even though educators cannot control the amount of resources available to them within their schools, they can work to overcome some of the barriers this creates for students. Educators have less ability to mitigate the affects of external

factors, such as tangible forms of cultural capital that affect student aspirations and performance. One significant example of this is parental education and involvement.

Parents who have at least a bachelor's degree have more leverage to influence their children's education. They often have a better ability and more confidence to interact with teachers and administrators to ask questions, and make requests on behalf of students (Lareau 2000). The educational expectations that parents hold of their children also have an effect on their college going behavior. Lower percentages of rural students report that their parents have the expectation that they will attend college (Byun et al. 2012, Hu 2013).

Students also benefit from taking courses that are viewed as "high brow" or fine arts, such as visual arts or music. They may receive more attention from instructors who view them as "more cultured", and gain a better understanding of these subjects which could potentially increase their embodied and objectified cultural capital later (DiMaggio 1982). It is not random which students take these courses. Students who initially have more interest and exposure to these forms of capital could be more likely to self-select into these classes. The deficits in resources and social and cultural are felt by rural students, even those who have access to the most opportunities in their home communities.

Educators must manage the effects these potential deficits in resources and information have on their students, both in classroom performance and in their future planning. Educators are not the only actors taking notice of these deficits. To target these shortages, different programs, policies, and non-profits have also designed interventions that aim at delivering information through different means. Much of the research on this

has been focuses on programs that target traditionally underrepresented students, including minority, low income, or first-generation students. Many of these programs operate within rural contexts, and engage with students, educators, administrators, and parents to varying degrees. The majority of these programs target the second “stage” of students’ journey in the college going process, providing supports and resources to students on how to search for and apply to post-secondary programs.

One of the most straightforward ways to increase college access is simplifying information and offering it to students in accessible formats. This has been found, for example, to increase access and completion of admission and financial applications. This assistance can take the form of text message reminders (Castleman & Page, 2015) or online financial aid assistance (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012). Many of these programs use this tactic as part of their model.

Targeted early intervention, one-on-one student advising, and establishing adult role models and advisors are a few other commonly deployed strategies (Gullatt & Jan 2003). These are some of the many strategies that are shared among different college access programs that target specifically underrepresented students. These approaches have been implemented in response to specific barriers these students face. Even though different programs implement them in different ways, they are meant to solve similar challenges.

While some research has been done on empirical effects of these programs, less research has been done on the design or implementation. When studying the efficacy of a program, it is assumed that these interventions are addressing identified barriers to significant predictors of success. However, this is not always the case (Perna, 2002). In

addition to thinking about the affects these programs appear to have, it is important to evaluate whether these interventions are in line with the experiences of students and educators.

In addition to asking if these solutions have measurable effects on student outcomes, studies must investigate how these interventions are engaging with those they hope to benefit. Currently, there is a deficit of studies examining if solutions these interventions implement take into account the social and cultural context of the communities they serve. There is also only a limited amount of scholarship that attempts to put the accounts of educators and students in conversation with the policies and programs designed to help them. Educators are engaging within the same spaces as these policies, often times with similar goals in mind.

Students who do successfully choose to pursue a post-secondary degree can be affected by their rural educational experiences as well. Upon leaving their community, students must navigate the ways in which their identity, and social and interpersonal skills were shaped by their rural upbringing. Educators do not cease all influence or contact with students once they pursue these programs. Interactions with students up until this point influences students college success and behavior, and educators may continually offer advice to students about academic or personal decisions.

In one study of rural, first generation college students, participants felt surprised by a number of experiences their first semester (Schultz, 2004). They felt inadequately prepared to make new social bonds, and felt out of place as they adjusted to a more populous and culturally diverse environment (Schultz, 2004). In a small explorative dissertation study, Lisa Handke examined the differences in perceptions of rural college

students who were freshmen, and those who were seniors. Both groups described their home communities in terms of isolation, and failing infrastructure. The freshmen experience social difficulties due to the small population of their towns. For some, upon going to college and interacting with more of their urban peers, they became more accurately aware of their background and rural identity (Handke, 2012). In these cases, the experience of urban others crystalized students' identities that they had previously been less aware of.

Overall, this phenomenon has not been ignored within the literature, but there has been a focus on specific perspectives. In particular, the educational system has been understood in terms of student performance without also understanding the role and influence of teachers' experiences. This approach views teachers solely as resources that schools and students need in order to succeed. Research has used the experiences and opinions of educators to understand their students' performance, instead of attempting to understand the formation and implications of these perceptions themselves.

Perspectives of Rural Educators

Within the limited existing sociological literature on rural education, the perspectives of educators have been particularly neglected. Current scholarship suggests that rural educators are aware of the complex economic and sociocultural environment they operate within, and they are aware of the potentially dire economic situations their communities face (Budge, 2006). But much of the current research has been focused on difficulties schools face; there has been less focus on rural teacher's experiences and perspectives on challenges they face.

Burton, Brown, and Johnson conducted a meta analysis of the existing literature on rural educators and found four main themes throughout the narrative of rural teachers: feelings of professional isolation, lack of credentials or professional knowledge, a resistance to change, and an emphasis on rural/urban comparisons (Burton, Brown, & Johnson, 2013). These trends align with the existing research on rural identity and rural sociology education as broad fields. Rural teachers feel professionally isolated because of the relative isolation of their community. This feeling is of isolation from the “outside” world, in addition to feelings of connectedness to their community (Trentham, & Schaer, 1985; Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, & Williamson, 1986).

Rural teachers’ resistance to change or new practices is linked to their connection to rural identity and understanding of their community. Many rural teachers are from rural areas themselves, as many educators decide to teach close to where they grew up (Jimerson 2003). Their impetus to return “home”—or to a place similar to their own home— indicates an inherent closeness to the community, or at least a connection to a rural identity and way of life. They may be attached to an idea of teaching how they were taught, or resistant to staying too far from these methods (Burton & Johnson, 2010).

Rural communities struggle to recruit new teaching staff from outside, which increases the challenge of bringing in new ideas, experiences, and resources (Monk 2007). Rural districts struggle to offer appealing incentive to possible new hires. On average, teacher’s salaries are lowest in rural areas; even though the cost of living may be much lower than in urbanized areas, there are both economic and social costs, such as a lack of public transportation or relative isolation, that new teachers must also weigh (Jimerson 2003). When attempting to recruit from urban areas, rural districts may face

stereotypes or stigma surrounding rural areas as well. Some non-rural teachers can view rural teachers, or rural locales in general, as barriers to progress, or as being closed-minded or isolated from “the rest” –meaning urban— of teachers (Barter, 2008 p 47).

Slight distrust or skepticism from outsiders, especially urban influences, is also a commonality in rural identity (Bell, 1992). This increases resistance and skepticism to change within education as well (Burton et al., 2013). This analysis, however, fails to address the process in which “outsider” status is determined. There are complex channels through which individuals become a part of rural in-groups, and educators’ understanding of and experience with this process has not been engaged with thoroughly. The education profession usually involves heavy meaning making processes, by both educators and community members, and educators usually bring personal motivations to the profession (Lavy & Bocker, 2018). Because of this, slow or difficult induction into a new rural community can create potential feelings of personal as well as professional isolation (Lemke, 1994).

Teachers in these areas also tend to be less qualified, and have less formal subject training than those in other regions (Monk 2007). Rural teachers are not by nature under qualified or uneducated, but these regions have difficulty recruiting and more qualified or experienced teachers, because of lower pay, and social costs of living in a remote area (Monk 2007).

Traditionally “urban” trained teachers can also be underprepared for the specific environment of a rural community, unless they are from a rural area themselves (Zost, 2010). This is a common narrative that has emerged in force over the past 20 years, as popular school reform efforts have focused on teacher accountability and performance

(Burton et al., 2013). Both of these narratives, of underprepared teachers and teachers' resistance to change play into the rural stereotypes of being "backward or uneducated".

The constant comparison of rural and urban, or other non-rural locales, has contributed further to the urban/rural divide. This distinction is a helpful tool for understanding which factors in each locale uniquely influence student outcomes, but these comparisons can also be framed in a way that privileges one locale as being the "ideal" (Burton et al., 2013). Most commonly, one of two false narratives is created. First, urban areas are seen as being sites of more progressive change, and more intellectual engagement. Alternatively, rural areas are romanticized as being "authentic", simpler, or safer than their urban counterparts (Burton et al. 2013). Rarely are the common difficulties between rural and urban compared in a way that fosters understanding and empathy. Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Deve and Crowley, found in a 2006 study that students from rural areas and inner-city urban districts faced similar deficits in resources, and social and cultural capital that resulted in lower educational attainment when both groups were compared to their suburban peers.

Rural educators commonly see the rural locale as both a blessing and a curse for students, acknowledging the hardship it may cause as well as benefits. Many teachers, even those who highly value their community, realize that not all of their students are able to find opportunities in their fields of interest within their rural homes. In many places, community leaders and teachers value the close proximity to nature as well as the close-knit environment of the community (Budge, 2006). They also acknowledge that there aren't often many choices for young people in these places. Community members

and teachers alike see leaving, especially leaving for higher education, as a “necessary evil” at the very least (Sherman & Sage, 2011, pg 7).

Educators aim to serve both their students and their community, but these goals sometimes appear to be conflict with one another (Harmon, 2001; Sherman & Sage, 2011). This potential conflict between teacher’s aspirations for their students, and their own commitment to their community creates a dilemma for rural educators that has yet to be fully explored. Rural educators’ must reevaluate their own rural identities as they navigate their roles. More extensive research could be done to further understand their position and the personal conflict that this may create. There has been no extensive research into how rural educators form and re-form their rural identity in the face of this, and how this affects their engagements with students about their post graduation plans. Existing literature has not fully utilized the potential insights that educators may provide by focusing on rural educators as a means to understand student outcomes, or other phenomenon.

“Brain Drain”

Human capital flight is the emigration of individuals from a country or community who have had some form of valuable education or training; it is a complex phenomenon, and the distinction between “normal” capital movement and flight is sometimes hard to make, (Depple & Williamson 1987). This process is also known as “brain drain”: resources are expended on individuals and they leave, draining the community of their potential economic and intellectual capital. I use the arguably more colloquial term “brain drain” because of the conceptual implications it has on the meaning of this phenomenon. “Drain” implies a slow leakage or depletion of a substance

or resource, as opposed to the image of mass exodus that “capital flight” conjures. Both terms refer to the same process within the literature.

This phenomenon occurs internationally when portions of a population that are more skilled or formally educated relative to the surrounding population emigrate from a country or economy; traditionally it has been used to examine emigration from less to more “developed” countries (Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2001). In certain economic context emigration can increase income levels, investment in education, and income equity (Mountford 1997; Beine et al, 2001). However, when there is limited opportunity for economic return on investment into education, healthy emigration turns into potentially detrimental brain drain. When leaving a community or country is a choice, people often choose to follow opportunities (Dustmann, Fadlon, & Weiss, 2011).

Rural brain drain cannot be perfectly equated with patterns of international migration, but many of the same mechanisms are in effect. In the 1990’s, rural areas saw a slight increase in immigration, but other than these few years, the annual number of people leaving has been larger than those entering rural areas since the 1970s (Domina, 2006). In these communities outmigration is driven heavily by young people leaving as they pursue higher education. When rural students leave and receive higher degrees, they are less incentivized to return to their town of origin because the level of potential economic return would likely be higher in metropolitan areas (Mills & Hazarika, 2001). There is a certain amount of immigration to rural areas, but college-educated individuals are the least likely to enter the community, and the most likely to leave (Gibbs & Cromartie, 1994). The most educated are those least likely to stay or return if the

economic situation appears bleak in their home community, even if they are sentimentally attached to their town (Petrin, Schafft, & Meece, 2014).

Rural identity has been studied as a barrier to college attainment, and a deterrent of brain drain. In migration studies, those who do not move are often times considered “immobile” (Morse & Mudgett, 2018). However, there is another group of “immobile individuals who choose not to leave. These “stayers” are actively making the decision not to move, equating them with those who are trapped in immobility. either social or physical, ignores these peoples’ agency and motivations. Some rural “stayers”, are immobile, but some stay because of their personal attachments and identity (Morse & Mudgett, 2018).

Brain drain must be understood both in terms of who stays *and* who leaves. There is not a causal relationship between brain drain and rural identity, but they also cannot be understood as two isolated phenomena operating on rural communities; they must be understood together. Limited economic, and social capital, varied cultural views on education, and differing ties to the community are all mechanisms that keep some students within these communities, and discourage others from returning if they do leave. Brain drain is a combination of powerful contradictions like these, which make it a potentially emotional and personally social process for those affected by it.

Parents and other adults within rural communities acknowledge the brain drain affecting their hometowns, but this does not stop them from wishing the best for their children, even if that necessitates them leaving (Budge, 2006; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Within rural communities, though, not all members hold schooling as a pillar of their community. Those who hold education in low regards are often times those who are the

most economically disadvantaged, and who themselves have low levels of schooling (Sherman & Sage, 2011). The potential personal conflict community leaders experience in the face of brain drain has not been extensively investigated. Educators, as just one example of potentially highly regarded rural community members, must reconcile with their wishes for the community as a whole and for individual community members.

Students also acknowledge the significance of their decision. Outside of the economic and cultural factors which influence student performance, there are a host of elements influencing students' decision whether to stay or go, and whether to return if they do. Educators must understand these competing interests that students weigh in order to engage with them through this decision-making process.

In pursuing higher education and forming educational aspirations rural students demonstrate inconsistent desires to both stay close to home, and leave to pursue new opportunities (Hlinka, Mobelini, Giltner, 2015; Hektner, 1994). When it comes to high achieving students with strong ties to their own community, students' perception of possible economic opportunities within their community is highly influential in whether or not they choose to leave (Petrin et. al., 2014). High achieving students, even if they have a strong affinity for their home, value the opportunities for high paying jobs and high quality schooling; this push may be stronger than the pull they feel to stay home (Howley, 1997). Compared to urban students, rural students leave home earlier, but are more likely to stay within the same community. Highly educated urban students who migrate to other urban areas after leaving home are more likely to stay within the state, whereas similar rural students are more likely to leave the state to migrate to an urbanized area (Garasky, 2002).

Some “college able” students do not choose to pursue higher education immediately after high school. Students who are “work bound” often see themselves as entering the “real world”, and view higher education as a continuation of adolescence. These students plan to start their “real” adult life, and contribute to their community (Burnell, 2003). However, many of these students never leave their communities to receive additional training or education. Rural to rural migration eases some loss of human capital if this counterbalances the loss in population; this does not introduce new forms of economic or social resources to the community.

Many rural students face conflicting personal feelings about leaving their homes (Demi, et al., 2010; Friesen, & Purc-Stephenson, 2016). They feel connected to their friends, family, and community (Hummon, 1992), but these students are often facing a much larger identity crisis as they face the prospect of migrating to a non-rural area. However, they understand that the schools they attend are not the highest quality when compared to larger more well resourced, often urban, schools. Even if they do successfully leave to pursue higher education, they are likely to be initially behind academically (Theobald & Wood, 2010).

The existing research on the college-going behavior of rural students explains many factors that create their unique situation, and contribute to the “brain drain” phenomenon within rural areas. It shows that there are layers to this process beyond student achievement and college preparation. Even if students are informed and prepared to attend a post-secondary program, their decision to do so is burdened with additional considerations.

The research that does explore the experience of rural educators shows that similar “rural factors” affect the practices and perspectives of rural educators. Moving forward, I will contribute to the existing understanding of brain drain and rural students’ achievement by examining these processes through the lens of the educators who serve them. This approach will also center these experiences. It will attempt to better understand how educators’ opinions and perspectives are informed, and how different aspects of educators’ experiences and identities interact.

Methodology

The goal of this analysis is to identify the ways in which rural educators’ experiences shape their rural identity, advising practices, and understanding of the brain drain phenomenon. In conducting qualitative interviews as a main data source, I attempted to center the narratives and direct experiences of educators in order to better understand their position within their communities and relationship to students.

In addition to conducting interviews, I performed a small pilot study analysis of four different public policy and private program interventions, all targeted at improving access to higher education in Oregon. These policies were analyzed after interview data had been collected and reviewed.

Qualitative Interviews:

Participants & “Golden County”:

I interviewed twelve rural high school teachers. Eligibility for participation was limited by three factors: locale, location, and subject. First, my sample was limited only to educators who taught at schools classified as “rural” by the Department of Education. There were educators who represented schools classified as rural remote, rural distant,

and rural fringe. All of the participants currently teach in schools located within Golden County¹, a mostly rural county located in Oregon. Due to the limited scope of this project, I chose to constrain my research to one geographic area, specifically one county. This limits outside factors that could potentially influence both student and teacher experience: all of the schools are situated within roughly similar economic, political, and historical contexts. All of the schools also receive services from the same education service district, which includes almost the entire county.

Finally, all twelve participants taught at least one core subject, defined as English/language arts, writing, mathematics, science, history, or social studies. Teachers' subject placements were determined by the staff directories available on their schools' websites. Participants were limited to "core" subject teachers for two reasons. The first is that these teachers are more likely to have a larger percentage of the student body in class. It is not uncommon for schools to have only one or two educators teach required subjects, in which case these teachers have most if not all students at least once over four years. The second reason is because students are advised to ask teachers of "core subjects" to write college recommendation letters, and submit other supplementary materials. Because of this, it is assumed that these teachers have more interaction with students surrounding topics of college planning and applications. Below, Table 1 shows more demographic and personal information of the educator participants.

¹ All names of places and people have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participants.

Table 1

NAME*	GENDER	DISTRICT NUMBER	SUBJECT	YEARS TEACHING/SUBBING
Katie	Female	1	Math	13
Mike	Male	1	Social Studies & Language Arts	8
Peter	Male	2	Science	12
Derek	Male	3	Science	13
Daniel	Male	3	Math	44
Penny	Female	3	Math	11
Jill	Female	4	English	10
Adam	Male	4	Science	20
Lewis	Male	5	Social Studies & PE	6
Samuel	Male	6	Science	31
Amelia	Female	7	Science	7
Charles	Male	7	Language Arts	11

**all names have been changed to pseudonyms*

In 2010, 41.2% of the population of Golden County lived in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It is just over 5,000 square miles large, and has a population of just over 100,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It is a largely racially homogenous county, with 92.5% of the population identifying as white. Some of the largest economic industries are timber and forest products, and agriculture. Over the past three decades, the timber and forestry industry has seen a significant decline due to environmental concerns and most recently the crash in the housing market of the great recession (Simmons, Scudder, Morgan, Berg, & Christensen, 2016). This, coupled with increases in mechanization, has shrunk the number of available jobs, and constrained economic opportunity. In 2017 22.8% of all families in Golden County with related children of the householder under 18 years old had income below the poverty line, compared with 16.7%

nationally. Of all people under 18, 23.3% were living under the poverty line the same year as compared to 20.3% nationally (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Many of the communities interview participants taught in face similar levels of poverty, and some face levels that are much higher. Below, Table 2 shows population data for school communities, and districts. Values for rows title “town” are representative of only the primary town in which the school is located. Some communities are classified as “unincorporated communities” by the census, meaning specific census data was not available. In this case, the primary zip code was used to collect data for the community. All of these districts include areas outside of the town itself. Rows titled “district” are representative of the student population, regardless of town or district residence.

Table 2

DISTRICT NUMBER	LOCALE TYPE	TOWN POPULATION	TOWN POVERTY RATE	DISTRICT STUDENT POPULATION	DISTRICT FRPL RATE
1	remote	215	22.8	258	60.4
2	fringe	1202	16.2	243	70.8
3	fringe	3960	19.8	408	70.1
4	fringe	733	16.4	541	56.7
5	distant	731	22.4	343	77
6	distant	324	33.3	194	64.5
7*	remote	1222	29.1	188	68

*This town is an unincorporated territory, town data is collected from the main zip code of the area
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2017) American Community Survey 5-year estimates

Procedures:

Recruitment of interview participants was done completely through email. I collected emails of all eligible educators—currently teaching a “core” subject at a rural school located within Golden County— from school websites and sent emails inviting them to participate. There are fourteen school districts within Golden County, nine of

which are classified as “rural”. One rural school district was eliminated from the sample due to potential personal bias. Of the eight school districts, seven are represented in this sample, as no teachers from one district were able to participate.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were based on a guide included in Appendix A. Interviews ranged from 30 60 minutes, with the average length being 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted remotely, eleven were conducted over the phone, and one was conducted over a video communication platform. Educators were asked questions about three primary topics: their own educational experiences, their experience teaching within their rural community, and their college advising practices.

With permission of the participants, all interviews were audio recorded. These audio recordings were transcribed in full and coded for data analysis.

Content Analysis of Policy and Programs:

Over half of the interview respondents mentioned some type of outside resource or intervention-based program that influenced students’ decisions to apply to or attend college. Educators identified many barriers to higher education they perceived their students facing. They also discussed interactions with programs that were aimed at reducing said barriers. The target of this analysis is to evaluate the current goals of these specific intervention and service based programs.

Four separate programs were reviewed: Gear Up Oregon, TRiO, Ford Family Foundation, and Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program. These programs were chosen because educators mentioned them directly during interviews. In the case of the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, educators mentioned “loan forgiveness” programs generally, and this program was chosen due to its relevance to the teaching profession and Golden

County. The four programs represent four different levels at which intervention programs are designed, implemented, and/or funded: at the level of individual participating schools (Gear Up Oregon), at the federal level (TRiO), through the private or non-profit sectors (Ford Family Foundation), and at the state level (Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program).

The mission statements, goals, structures, and highlighted outcomes of success of all four programs were evaluated through content analysis of the programs' online presence. All information was collected from the programs' official websites. In my analysis, I first outline these aspects of the four different programs. I then compared these to the specific challenges and barriers that had been identified by educators. This comparison attempts to identify the root causes of barriers to college access that educators are experiencing, and the root causes that these programs are addressing. The goal of the subsequent analysis to identify areas in which this information aligns with each other, and in what areas the goals and problems identified by separate parties diverge. This analysis is not meant to recommend the ideal structure of these programs, or to rank those studied in any way.

Results: Qualitative Interviews

This section examines how rural educators interact with and form connections within the communities where they teach. First, I describe how rural educators formed their identities in conjunction with the rural communities they serve. This is shaped by their connections to their community and role as an educator. However, in order for teachers to form a salient identity as a rural educator, they must first be accepted into the community. Next I will describe the terms in which educators described brain drain, and

how their relationship to the community informs how they conceptualized and understood this phenomenon.

Finally, I will discuss how teachers utilized their own educational experiences to inform how they advise students on their post graduation plans, drawing upon their own experience as tangible examples. Educators who had a strong connection to the community used more positive language to describe staying compared to those who still felt ostracized by their schools, or that had less direct personal connections. Overall, educators privileged the success of their students over that of the school or community.

Identity Formation and Community Connection

Educators indicated having complex roles and relationships in the communities they teach within. All of the respondents navigated different combinations of many positions, a few being community members, teachers, parents, coaches, and more. The connections educators made with the community were defined by the different roles that they occupy. The connections to their communities affected the relationships to parents and students, and their own conceptualization of their place within the school and community. In order for educators to form a salient identity as a rural educator, they first had to be accepted into the community.

All of the educators talked about their relationships to the community. These positions and relationships can classify these educators as either “insiders” or “outsiders” in relation to the community. Even for those who did not explicitly talk about their inclusion or exclusion from the community in-group, all cited in some form that being trusted and respected by their students was an important component of effective teaching, which was aided by the acceptance into the community.

Gaining Entrance to the Community

The ability of educators to be fully accepted into their community was shaped by their existing connection to the town and community; assuming the nominal role of “teacher” did not grant automatic entrance into the community, or assure feelings of acceptance. Gaining acceptance in the community was important for teachers in their interactions with students. This aspect of their personal and professional identity was foundational as educators formed more complex understandings of their students’ performance and decisions; they also formed their conceptualizations of brain drain within the context of these relationships to community.

All respondents shared the identity of “teacher” within their community, and many also shared the role of “community member”, but neither of these guaranteed the same social position within the community. Eight of the educators interviewed also occupied the role of “community member”, the remaining four commuted into their communities from larger, nearby towns. Other possible mitigating factors included prior residency in the town, or attendance at the school, and existing background experience with rural schools or towns. Understanding of local industries also helped educators connect with their communities. Table 3 shows some of this information for the twelve respondents.

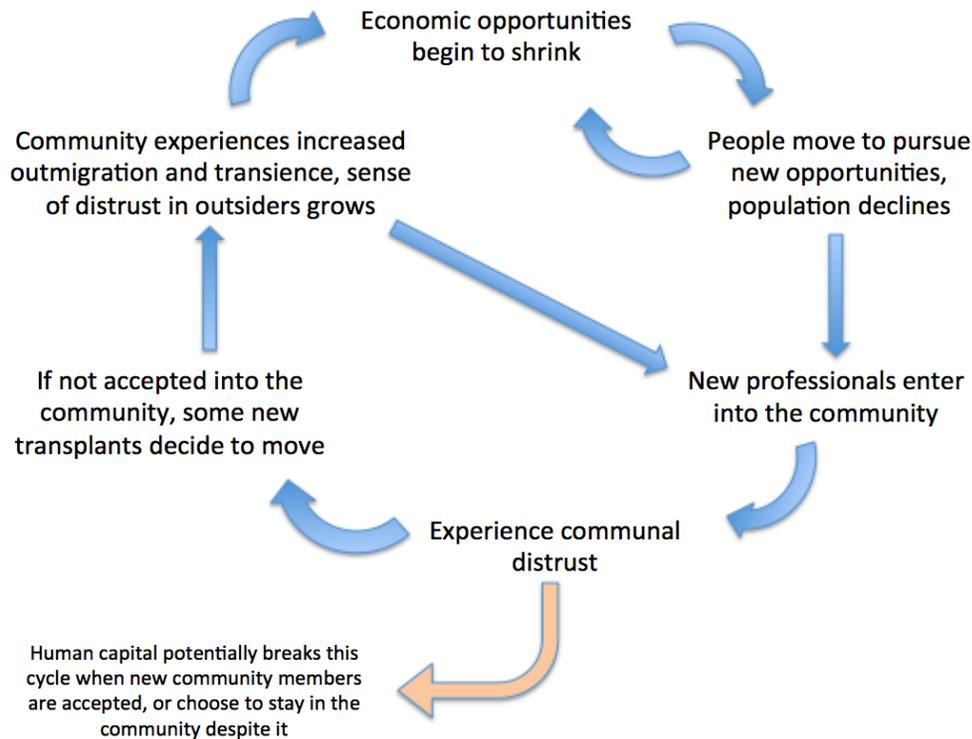
When asked to describe the role of the school in the community, one educator, Jill, stated that it was “at the center of everything”. This was a common sentiment among educators. The educators actively feel the importance that the community places on the school. They were aware of the heightened level of responsibility their role carried.

Table 3

NAME*	FROM RURAL TOWN	FROM OREGON	FROM COUNTY	GRADUATE OF CURRENT SCHOOL	LIVE IN THE COMMUNITY	# OF YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION
Samuel	X	X	X	X	X	31
Jill	X	X	X	X	X	5
David	X				X	13
Derek	X	X	X		X	5
Amelia	X					4
Lewis	X				X	4
Penny	X	X	X			2
Katie	X	X	X		X	2
Adam					X	18
Charles		X				11
Peter						8
Mike					X	1

**all names have been changed to pseudonyms*

Within these communities, there is a cycle of economic factors and movement of human capital that creates a sense of transience and unrest. As the brain drain phenomenon takes effect, and the economic opportunities shrink within these areas, more people are encouraged to leave. As more people leave and are not replaced by newcomers economic diversity declines. At first, employment vacancies provide new opportunities, but as the population and available economic resources continue to decline, businesses struggle to remain operational. Those who stay within the community witness this, and forge judgments of new community members based on the assumption that they will soon too leave. No matter the stated or demonstrated commitment new members show, they are met with a weary reception from established community members. Having a relatable personal connection mitigates some of this initial distrust. This cycle begins for communities once an initial downturn in economic opportunity. Educators who enter into the cycle once this decline has begun face the possible communal distrust it sparked. This cycle is represented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1:

Movement and instability characterize this cycle of brain drain. It affects how communities view educators, and shapes the process through which educators are either accepted or rejected. Amelia, a teacher who has been teaching for four years in her current position lived roughly 30 miles away from the community she teaches in. She explicitly talked about her struggles with feeling like an “outsider”:

It's that ‘us versus them’ mentality. I think that's my theory. I'm not a member of the community I don't live in [the community]. I don't have kids in the school system. I'm very foreign to them I think.”

Even though Amelia is originally from a small town, and has lived and worked within this county for over a decade, she is from out of state, and does not have any previous connections to the community. She stated that she was not the only teacher at this school who felt they had trouble gaining insider trust and access.

Charles, a teacher at the same school, had a different experience transitioning into the school, even though he commutes from the same town as Amelia.

[My transition] was, it was smoothed by the fact that my wife had already been teaching out here for a couple of years, I think her transition initially was a little bit rough because turnover at the time was fairly high and there were some rocky leadership situations that she had to go through. By the time I got out here though they had just gotten a new administrator who really kind of helped right the ship and the kids have really grown to accept and love her and so I was given the benefit of the doubt probably.

The key differences between Charles and Amelia are that they had different entrance points into the community. Charles had his wife, who was also a teacher, that gave him an in to an already existing community at the school. He also had several kids who attended schools within the district where he teaches. This provides him with another role in addition to “teacher” within the community: parent. This role is an additional foundation to build relationships with parents on, and shows additional commitment to the community. Amelia even commented on this as well, saying, that “the only exception [to feeling like an outsider] might be the married couple teachers that have had...their kids came through the school system and so they have some more relationships with families because of that.”

Other factors that reinforced educators’ sense of “reliability” aided in building relationships to communities. Derek and Daniel, two teachers at the same school, expressed making connections within the community through different channels. Both lived within the community they teach, and neither grew up in the town.

Derek is originally from a nearby rural town, within the same county. Derek developed a sense of connection and acceptance that extended past the school and immediate students he served, into the surrounding community of the town.

Moving into this community was sort of like coming home...I'm you know 25 miles from the place where I was born and 40 miles from where I grew up...So they didn't know who I was when I first came here but because of my connection with the logging industry and just sort of the working class people in this community I've made connections fairly quickly. The fact I can relate to the parents and so forth and I'm from this background really helps.

This connection made engagement with parents easier, because of the rapport built by his background, especially his connection to the timber industry, which is a major employer in the area. By many parents, there was an assumption that he understood their family's situation and could offer reliable advice to their students.

Derek said there had been "about a dozen students here who have had the unfortunate experience of having me show up on their porch of their house to visit with their parents." This is not "considered to be wrong" in this community, he added, and that, "most of the time it turns out to be a very positive visit." The connection to and acceptance from the community he experiences allows him to interact with students and parents in this way.

Experience and teaching ability aids educators in their professional transition to the community, however it was not a predictor of an easier social transition. Daniel has been an educator for 44 years in many rural schools across several states. Still, his move into this particularly insular community was difficult. Before his arrival, there had been high rates of teacher turnover, and earning trust from the students was a long process.

And so it was almost a full year, that first year was just it was an awful, it was really an awful transition for me and it was just because of the fact that these kids had driven their teachers out of here.

Daniel attributed the difficulty of retaining these teachers to the restrictions of the rural locale.

Like if you're not from a small town, if you're from a city.... It's a tough place for you because there's not a lot for you to do here in a small town that's not associated with your job. But because I'm from small town-- I grew up small, I've lived small-- it's not a big deal for me.

Even though he wasn't from this community originally, his experience and affinity for a rural lifestyle allowed him to connect and settle in this community.

Constant pushback from the community can inspire otherwise dedicated educators to consider leaving the community. Lewis, who grew up in a small midwestern town, faced consistent resistance from the community. Similarly to other educators, he cited administration and teacher turnover prior to his arrival as a contributing factor to his difficult transition. This inconsistency fostered the strong sense of distrust among parents, students, and the community that extended past just respect and authority in the classroom. Lewis expressed still struggling with distrust from parents, even after teaching for four years:

I know several parents didn't trust me with their kids for the first two or three.. well probably some of them still don't, but definitely the first couple of years it was a- the kind of thing if I was going to take a field trip or something, parents weren't signing permission slips to say yes unless they knew an adult from the community was going with us a chaperone. *I wasn't enough.*

Lewis is the girl's basketball coach and he is also one of the few teachers that lived in the community itself, while he said most other teachers commute from surrounding towns. These factors have helped him gain some trust and access to the community, however it has still not alleviated his "outsider" status completely.

Among different communities, the necessary connections needed order to feel like an "insider" varies. The ability of educators to build "insider" relationships and established an understanding of trust between parents and students, allows them to not only teach more effectively, but also advise students on aspects outside of the classroom,

including their post-secondary plans. This is also the first step in building a salient identity as a rural educator. Teachers struggled to relate to a rural identity while they were still forced into the out-group among other educators and community members.

Conceptualizing Brain Drain:

Educators understood the brain drain phenomenon in terms of available capital within their communities, both economic and cultural. These factors have been identified as barriers to students in previous studies that examine only student perspectives (Byun et al. 2012; Sewell & Shah 1968; Coleman 1966; Hoxby et al. 2012). Educators further confirm these theories and add a new layer of understanding to them.

The first explanation most educators turned to was economic, citing pragmatic causes of outmigration such as poverty and a lack of skilled job opportunities. The second explanation was a factor of community ties, and cultural capital. Educators saw economic and cultural factors as both encouraging some students to leave, and others to stay. Whether or not they thought of brain drain in terms of economic or cultural terms, or both, educators did not conceptualize it as product of the personal, or separate choice of individual students. In focusing on the community factors, educators understood brain drain instead as a systemic issue.

Educators also understood brain drain as a two-way phenomenon. They were aware both of the students who do leave, and leave for good, and those who never do, or never can. Educators spoke of the few academically advanced students leaving, but more often than not, they highlighted those who couldn't leave or chose not to. This shows that for the way in which brain drain operates within these communities, is not only important to consider who leaves, but also who stays. If every graduate left, these communities

would be facing a phenomenon of desertion. The population that remains, whether they chose to stay or not, must continue to face the economic and infrastructure decline that then may encourage others to leave.

Educators understood brain drain in practice, even when they didn't have a term to label it as such. When introduced with the term "brain drain" they recognized the process as something that occurred within their communities. Most of their discussion of the roles of economic and cultural capital, which is the majority of what is analyzed in the coming sections, took place before they were specifically talking about "brain drain". These elements were just a part of the challenges and reality of their communities.

High Poverty Rates & Limited Economic Opportunity

Ten of the twelve educators interviewed cited poverty, economic hardship, or related out of school factors as major challenges to their students' success. Only two (Jill and Adam) did not explicitly mention these elements. Both of these educators taught in district 4, which had the lowest percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch.

All of the other educators spoke about some sort of barriers that living in poverty create to academic success. Charles and Amelia both teach at district 7. Charles, who has been teaching in his current position for 11 years, spoke to the severity of many students' situation.

You're talking about kids who are living in generational poverty whose parents grew up in that, and their parents before them and that comes with its own unique set of stressors... A lot of kids don't have access to computers at home, most of them have internet but it's through their cell phones, which doesn't necessarily help them when it comes to getting papers done and things like that.

This teacher talked about the immediate tangible challenges that his students in poverty face. Other teachers also highlighted the barriers that severe, generational poverty pose as students form their post graduation plans.

Amelia, at the same school as Charles, expressed the emotional and psychological impacts that poverty can have on students. Over five years of teaching, she said she has never had a student that she knew of enroll directly into a four-year university program directly after high school, because these programs seem out of reach. Students instead chose to enroll in the local community college or went straight into local work.

They just don't [think about leaving]. It's that poverty mindset. You know it's the culture of poverty... The culture of poverty is that they only see here and now and they don't really look into the future because you can't when you're hungry or your parents are on drugs.

When trying to encourage students to consider these options, she consistently found it difficult to get students to think of options outside of their immediate community because they seem financially or socially infeasible.

High poverty was understood as a major barrier to students considering higher education, however it was also understood as a deterrent to re-entry. Students who are able to successfully attend a college or university and obtain a degree struggle to justify returning to their home communities if they cannot secure stable, high-paying employment. Students from low or moderate-income households do not have a financial safety net provided by family members, so must support themselves fully after they receive their degrees; this economic pressure more deeply affects students who have taken out loans to finance their education. Students are more likely to be debt adverse, and hesitant to take out loans to finance their degrees, especially if they do not think they can find employment after graduation (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Educators recognize this,

and see students' decisions not to return to their home communities as a precautionary measure in order to avoid the risk of falling back into poverty or financial insecurity.

Related to poverty are the declining economic opportunities in these communities. Educators consistently understood the limited economic opportunity in these communities as a major barrier to student success regardless of their post-graduation plans: it restricts students' ability to leave for college, and further limits their mobility if they do choose to stay.

Economic community factors heavily influence the students' aspirations and goals. David has taught for nearly 45 years, in several different locations across the country. He has lived in the community he currently teaches in for over a decade, and characterized it as "limited". He described the economy as being sparse in technical or other skilled jobs. In this community, students who want to work in these types of job have the ability stay, but those who don't must leave in order to find employment outside of unskilled labor. Most of the schools he has taught in have been relatively small, but as far as the differences between the communities, he said "it's not so much the kids as it is the community they come out of."

Educators kept the economic challenges their students face in mind when advising their students on their post secondary plans. There was little immediate support these teachers could offer outside of their classes, especially in terms of the advising they could offer students. The most common form this took was advising students to seek out scholarship opportunities to help cover costs associated with higher education. Some educators were frustrated at the indifference their students had to these opportunities and their advice. Peter in particular expressed frustration over this:

We have, every year, scholarships not getting claimed because kids don't get around to filling out applications. This money is specifically meant for [our] high school graduates. It doesn't get given to them, then we have kids that get money and it's enough essentially to get them through two years for an associate's degree and they don't follow through on it. A kid got a full ride to the University of Oregon and he was done in two months.

Educators are aware that there are more than economic factors at play in their students' decisions. This becomes most apparent when students are able to find means, like scholarships, to reduce the financial barriers. Teachers understand these additional factors, and must incorporate advising strategies that recognize these as well.

Personal Conflicts and Cultural Capital

In addition to understanding brain drain as an economic process, educators cited personal, familial, and cultural considerations as shaping students' plans to stay, leave, or return. Influential factors in this category fell into two main groups. The first were students' and family's personal identities and beliefs. The second were different embodiments of cultural capital. Both types of these social factors influenced different students in different ways.

Some students' socially fit in with a traditional rural lifestyle and identity, which is typically focused on outdoor activity and industry, and can be conventionally more masculine (Brandth & Haugen 2005). Other students have personal identities and interests that are seemingly in conflict with the historical values of their community.

Educators highlighted their targeted efforts to make the school more inclusive for specific groups of students, especially those who fell into this later category. One educator started a "nerd club" for those students on the margins who don't fit in with a traditionally mainstream group of students; another focused on talented and gifted students who often struggled to find challenging material in their other courses. Half of

the educators talked about the difficulties that the socially and politically conservative environment of the rural towns posed to either them or subsets of their students. They recognized that this particular social context pushes some students to leave, but that many students thrive in this social environment.

Two educators talked specifically about the challenges LGBTQ students in their schools face, and the work that they have done to decrease bullying within their school. Jill, who graduated from the school at which she now teaches, talked at length about efforts to make the community she values a home for traditionally marginalized student groups.

I'm trying to do a lot of personal development around just like LGBTQ (issues) and being supportive of those kids in my school because I just see that it's a huge need and it kind of reminds me of some of the stuff that I've learned about how a lot of these kids don't feel accepted in their communities and so they move and they move to larger cities.

Jill and her community is an example of how these rural communities can be supportive for some, and harmful for others. Jill returned to her own home to teach and contribute to her community, which she found extremely beneficial. However, she acknowledges that for some of her students, and her own peers, this is or was not a culturally secure environment for them. Another educator Penny, who is also from Golden County originally, mentioned a similar experience of making targeted efforts to increase the inclusivity of LGBTQ students.

In addition to the conflicts students experienced in terms of culture and personal identity, students also faced more systemic challenges due to limited types of cultural capital available to them. Only a limited number of students have access to objectified and institutionalized forms of this capital, such as parents with post-secondary degrees.

This can influence the academic expectations and resources for students (Bourdieu, 1986).

More than half of the educators interviewed talked about parental and familial expectations or opinions restricting what a student chose to do after graduation. In some of these cases, educators identified parental involvement as a negative intervention for students who could have or may have considered moving out of the community to pursue higher degrees. This was something that frustrated many of the educators, including Mike who had struggled to encourage students to consider looking at options outside of their town.

A lot of them (students) really do just accept that they're going to basically do whatever their parents did. They're going to live within an 80 mile radius of this area their entire lives, and that's all they're going to do. Once in a while you're able to get one of those kids to see that they could do more. I would say...one of the biggest challenges we actually have...is the parents not wanting the students to do better than them in life. The parents having that attitude of, "Why should they get an opportunity I didn't have?"

In some cases, parents simply did not emphasize education as an important aspect of their children's upbringing. In others, parents and students were co-dependent on one another, which made leaving the community an unrealistic option.

Due to the relatively small, and typically culturally and racially homogenous populations in these communities, students are not exposed to diverse cultural representation or experiences that would be traditionally considered "high brow" culture. Educators cited this as challenges to both getting students to think more open-mindedly, and getting them to view college as an obtainable goal. Adam was one of several educators who put in extra time and resources to expose students to outside cultural experiences.

So I can take these kids on trips like again, just go to Portland and we do things like, just things that they've never done before. See like performances or go to a museum they haven't seen or go to, like one year we took them to see the Blue Man Group... So, anyway we did a, we did an escape room one year. You know, anyway I just try to kind of broaden their horizons a little bit

Getting to Portland, Oregon from Golden County takes several hours of driving, which requires a fair amount of coordination and resources. Given this, educators must have had strong rationale for the importance of these trips. Adam, like other educators, pointed to the novel experiences that these kinds of excursion bring to students. Often times, the “educational” aspect of these trips focuses on culturally educating students; for example taking students to performances or art galleries. Another educator, Charles, talked about taking students on a trip to New York City for a similar experience in the past.

Even though students do face limited access to cultural capital outside of the community—parental degrees, or knowledge of traditionally “high” culture, for example—some students have cultural capital that is valuable within the community. Educators spoke about students whose families have been in the community for several generations. In some of these cases, these families own land or businesses that are central to the community. These students could utilize this localized form of cultural capital. In this case, students may feel especially connected to their communities, and be averse to leaving.

Some students who do leave, however, are proud that they have left their community and that they can be viewed as “successful” because of it. They are seen as pursuing this cultural capital of education and experience, in addition to economic capital as they work in more skilled or higher paying jobs. Educators who have been at their respective schools for longer periods of time have been able to connect with students

after they have graduated and left the community for a substantial amount of time. Daniel said he has seen this trend repeat over several years, within different groups of students:

It's almost like they want to come back to show me how well they're doing. Like, "see I told you I could do it" kind of a thing- It's almost like they show up and they're very proud of what they have accomplished... The first thing they almost always say to me is, they want to let me know that they're in school.

For these students who leave, the cultural significance of success outside of the community is important to convey.

All of the educators that mentioned of students who had successfully received a college degree or pursued outside employment spoke about them with high regard. However, educators noted that other members of the community were not as supportive of those who left without planning on returning. It is not uncommon that students who leave are conceptualized as one of two extremes: as being outstanding examples, or as abandoning their homes.

Unlike when their students were faced with deficits in economic capital, educators took actions to try and supplement social and or cultural deficits, like taking students out of their rural context for cultural experiences. Educators also deployed advising strategies that addressed the unique role cultural capital and students' rural identities played in their post-secondary planning process. Jill, an educator who returned to her hometown to teach after receiving her education, talked to her students about her own experiences studying forestry in college. These examples were used to make higher education feel relevant to students. She also said she tells students that her, "family is all loggers, but they also read". In doing this she showcased the intersection of forms of traditional cultural capital such as education, and the localized cultural capital both her and her family had because of their involvement with the timber industry.

Brain Drain as a Two-Way System

At first, when educators spoke about the patterns of their students' post-secondary plans, it appeared that they told two separate stories: those students who leave, and those who stay. When discussing the typical patterns of their students' post-graduation plans, educators tended to focus first on the majority of their students who do not travel far from the community, or pursue post-secondary education. However, these educators also talked about the few students they have seen leave their communities to successfully earn degrees. As they spoke about both of these scenarios, they cited the same mechanisms affecting all their students that kept some students home, and others away. Educators viewed this as a two-way system, which had unique effects on their community.

Mike, an educator who grew up in a rural community out of state, discussed the challenges that both the economic and cultural context posed for those who wish to stay. He said culturally, rural communities tend to, "run smart people out like they are apostates." But he also understood that many students want to stay. He talked about his friends in urban areas who would move to rural areas if they could.

It's not necessarily just because of the culture, but because of the economic situation. You know, and I tell the students this. I tell them over and over that I can think of 20 people I know who would love to come and live in an area like this, but they just can't afford to move. And if they move here, what would they do?

Here, he talked about both the cultural and economic situations being a draw and a deterrent for people to stay or move into rural communities. He also talked about how he incorporates this into his conversations with students.

Others educators saw brain drain as an interconnected system of both outmigration and population stagnation. They saw their students leave and stay for the same reasons, and then had to adjust their advising strategies accordingly. Like Mike,

other educators also directly talked to their students about this process. They used this understanding to more directly target the students who were struggling with their decisions.

Half of the educators also mentioned using past students who broke the brain drain cycle as examples for students who were struggling with the dichotomy that this process presents. In these cases, educators highlighted students who returned to the town after receiving degrees. Some of these examples were of other teachers who taught at the school; in other cases, it was students who studied subjects like forestry or environmental studies, which are majors that students could use to find further employment in their home communities' existing industries.

Approaches to Post-Secondary Advising

Educators' approaches to advising their students were shaped by their position within the community, and their understanding of the brain drain phenomenon. All of the educators interviewed encouraged students in some way to consider pursuing higher education after they graduated from high school. Overall, educators implemented advising techniques that addressed the barriers they viewed as being the most detrimental to students' success.

Educators used their own experiences to inform their advising practices. This strategy was deployed in response to students' hesitations over considering college and moving away from the community. In accordance with educators' understanding of economic and cultural barriers, personal anecdotes and past experience was used to show students that post-secondary education was an attainable goal. Katie said she told stories from her and her partner's educational background to try and engage students.

Yeah I try and tell them stories because I think kids are fairly, I mean there's a limit of what they want to hear from adults but these stories get boring. But if I can think of something funny or entertaining that I know will, that you know might stick with them

She spoke about trying to engage seniors in particular around these topics in order to make college seem like a realistic option. She not only encouraged students to think about pursuing higher education, but also tries to work with them on plans to stay in college, citing concern over high college dropout rates.

Katie was not the only educator who strongly encouraged students to make financial and academic plans for college prior to leaving to attend these institutions. More than half of educators said that they were careful in their advising, and tried to speak with students about the economic factors of attending college. Amelia and Daniel both talked to their students about their own experience with loans and debt. Both encouraged students to take these financial decisions seriously. Their solution was to recommend community college, or other two-year programs to students who did not have concrete academic plans or passions.

What educators saw as influencing brain drain, and what they perceived to be the advising need of their students' were in line with one another. In addition to this, educators' position within the community also affected how they spoke about their advising practices. Beyond granting educators closer access to parents and students, "insider" connections to the community shaped the way educators discussed students leaving or staying in their home community. None of the educators mentioned discouraging students to leave. Most, in fact, were frustrated with the fact that more students did not consider applying to or attending college. There was a difference in the language educators used about students returning to their home communities.

Those who had the closest connections to their communities generally used more positive language regarding students who chose to stay in the community after graduation. Derek was one such educator with a strong insider status. He had grown up nearby and returned to the county to teach. Although he encouraged some students to pursue higher education, he viewed staying in the community, or returning, as an equally admirable goal.

I don't know if, getting away from this community seems to be part of the deal... Coming back to this community isn't a bad thing. Even after having gone away to college.

He listed off several of the teachers and administrators at the high school level who were graduates of the school itself. Outside of the teaching, however, he acknowledged that there were few jobs available for students who wanted to return if they had obtained a college degree or technical training.

Other educators who also shared a similar insider status were excited to see students leave if it meant their personal success. Katie, like Derek, was quickly accepted into her community. She has observed that students who are successful in completing their degrees rarely come back, but despite her commitment to the area, she did not frame this in a negative light.

If they make it they tend to fly, from there [college]. You know there's not a lot of job opportunities- well that's probably it- but also, they get a taste of what's out there and I think that's exciting for them.

Katie was excited to see her students achieve no matter what, whether or not that meant returning or leaving. She talked at length about two of her students, one of which recently returned to the community after receiving a bachelor's degree, and one who had moved

to the east coast to pursue a graduate degree. In advising her current students, she used these graduates as examples, revering both with equal respect.

Educators' views on students leaving the communities were also shaped by their regard for the community outside of the school. There was variation among educators' views of leaving, even among subjects who had similar status within communities. These opinions and advising practices always stemmed from their intentions to help students achieve success. It was how they conceptualized success that guided their advising practices.

Educators' values and past experiences informed these ideals of success; these were then reflected in the advising they engaged in with students. In one example, both Lewis and Peter's relationships to their respective communities were characterized by exclusion and distrust. Their outsider status informed parts of their approach to advising, but their ultimate ideas of success shaped how they spoke about students leaving. Peter recognized the limitation the community created for students, and encouraged students to consider higher education. However, he realized that not all of his students would or could have this goal, and actively incorporated this into his advising.

I am always encouraging the kids I have my classroom to think in terms of what they want to do, who they want to become... I don't want kids to walk out of my room believing they have to go to college to be successful because so many of them have plan already engrained on them not to go to college. So I'm careful with that.

Lewis shared the same goal: that his students are happy and successful. However, he spoke about leaving in a much different light. He expressed thinking certain students could "do better", if they just left their community. His approach to advising was instead

focused on getting these students to make the academic leap into college, and away from home.

All 12 of the educators cited getting to know their students better, and getting to interact with them more as one of their favorite parts of teaching in a small, rural setting. Despite the host of challenges and frustrations they faced, this was what kept them at their schools. Educators had to reconcile their own connection to the community, with the success of their students. Sometimes these goals were at odds with one another, and educators acknowledged this. Daniel recognized specifically the strain that constantly encouraging the top students to leave put on his community.

I think our very best students... don't come back here. I think the students that are lower, those are the ones who are not going to get, you know, academic or technical careers- they are the ones that stay here. And so now you've got a second and a third generation of kids where your brightest kids have gone away. Now you're a second generation of kids that are the lower academic achievers in your school and so that over time builds up.

This example encapsulates the cycle of brain drain within these places, and the difficult position it puts educators in. Even in the face of this, no subjects expressed sentiments that the success and growth of the community or town came before that of their students. If these two goals were in opposition to one another, educators chose to prioritize the students' needs.

Policy & Program Review

This section examines four selected programs that are focused on educational and economic improvement of low-income and rural areas of Oregon. This is a preliminary review of efforts that both public and private entities are making to address barriers to success these people and places face. For each of the selected programs—GearUp TRiO, Ford Family Foundation, and Teacher loan forgiveness program—I will first review the

goal, model, and funding sources. I will then analyze the underlying root problems that each of these programs addresses, along with the solutions that it presents through its mission and services. Finally I will put these perceived problems and solutions into conversation with the problems and solutions that educators identified. Table 4 below outlines the goals and solutions among other information for the four programs.

The objective of this review is not to evaluate the effectiveness or success of these policies. Instead, it is to identify the core abstract problems these programs attempt to solve. In this process, I aim to illuminate areas in which the goals and solutions of these programs may be misaligned with the experiences of practicing educators. I argue that in doing so, future areas of improvement can be addressed through collaboration with practicing educators.

Table 4

Name:	Gear Up, Oregon	TRiO	Ford Family Foundation	Teacher loan forgiveness program
Funding Source:	Federal competitive grant, funding, additional private and foundation donations	Federal funding	Private Fundraising	Federal Financial Aid
Type of Program:	State branch of federal program	Federal program	Private Foundation	State program
Target Population:	Rural, low income 7th-12th grade students	First generation, low income 9th-12th grade students	Low and moderate income 12th grade students, rural communities	Educated Professionals
Identified Problem:	Rural students face economic and cultural barriers to college access including: lack of college going culture, financial barriers, and limited information	Students face barriers to information and advising around the college search, application, and going process	Students and communities face limited economic resources and support to necessary for improvement, but possess the necessary motivation and goals	Educated professionals have no incentive to work in economic struggling areas; this limits the amount of new information and skill entering rural or low-income areas
Solution:	Provide funding and structure to selected schools to build tailored programming and advising to students, focused on early intervention. Provide accessible resources for other non-participating schools.	Provide select students with outside advisors who have training and content knowledge, and programming targeted at college readiness	Provide students and communities that have the desire or goal of improvement with necessary financial resources to do so	Provide financial incentives which allow educated professionals to fill vacancies and contribute new knowledge and skill to an otherwise closed and struggling system

Gear Up

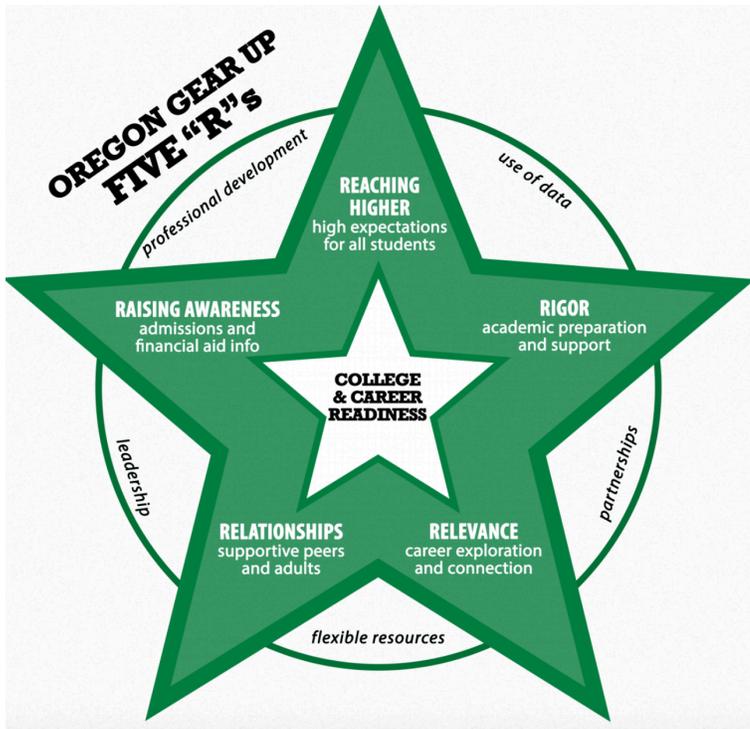
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, or “Gear Up”, is a federal discretionary grant program that is active in 45 states (About Gear Up, 2018). The grant process is competitive, with only 1 in 5 applicants receiving funding nationwide to receive funding to develop Gear Up services. The Department of Education awards 6-year state and partnership grants. The programs must include an early-intervention component, and be aimed to increase college going expectations and attainment for low-income students. For the purpose of this analysis I will be focusing on the organization, implementation and branding of Gear Up specifically within Oregon.

Since 2002 Gear Up Oregon has served 109 schools, and over 40,000 students (Oregon GEAR UP, n.d -d). The goal of Gear Up Oregon, in accordance with the federal grant program, is to increase awareness of college, and college readiness for low-income students. There have been four clusters of schools that have participated in Gear Up programs. Schools of various sizes have been served, but there has been a specific focus on rural schools in the more recent clusters that have been added. Clusters have been focused within Golden County and surrounding counties that are similarly rural and economically depressed. In the past, Gear Up had served districts one, two, five, and seven. Currently, only district seven receives Gear Up funding.

Gear Up Oregon programs are designed around a system of five guiding principles in order to increase college awareness and access: reaching higher, rigor, relevance, relationships, raising awareness. Figure 2 below presents a graphic from the Oregon Gear Up website that describes the envisioned structure of this framework. Schools that receive Gear Up funding work to design programming around this

framework. Programming includes college visits, scholarship workshops, and engagement with families and parents.

Figure 2



This figure shows the “Five Rs”, the structure on which Gear Up Oregon advising is meant to be built off of. This diagram shows the ways in which some of the strategies, listed in the outer circle, are used to support the five key principles. It shows that all of this work is done in service of the main goal at the literal center of Gear Up: college and career readiness.

Source: Oregon GEAR UP. (n.d -a), Our Model.

The “five R” structure is central to the approach Gear Up Oregon takes; it reveals how the program conceptualizes the problems they aim to solve. The core problem that Gear Up Oregon addresses is the underrepresentation of certain groups of students pursuing higher education, specifically low-income and rural students. Gear Up Oregon approaches solving this larger problem by addressing smaller, compounding barriers to success: financial barriers, a lack of college-going culture, and a lack of information for students, parents, and teachers. These three barriers are identified within the support for the five R model. This research informs the five R model, and the entire approach Gear Up takes. Each principle of the “five Rs” is informed by this research, and in line with the grant standards.

Gear Up offers strategies aimed at overcoming these three barriers that align with each of the “R” principles. The strategies are designed to work in tandem with one another. For example, one strategy listed under “Raising Awareness” is to, “Organize workshops for parents and students to inform them prior to 12th grade about college affordability, scholarships and aid sources, and financial aid processes” (Oregon GEAR UP, n.d -b, para 2) This addresses the lack of information around college affordability. By involving the families of students, this strategy also does work to overcome potential parental aversion around higher education. Under “Relevance”, it is advised to, “provide opportunities for youth to hear from their peers or near peers about how their future goals align with their cultural traditions and values” (Oregon GEAR UP, n.d -c, para 3). Again, this addresses both lack of information and helps to align a new college-going culture with the existing culture and values of the students and community. Some Gear Up schools offer scholarship funds to graduating seniors to directly fund their higher education plans.

Gear Up Oregon highlights dozens of student narratives on their website; these student experiences range from students staying at home and pursuing associate degrees from local community colleges, to traveling across the country to attend private institutions. These featured examples aim to define success as any college attainment, and highlight graduates from similar rural and low-income backgrounds. Preliminary data collected by Oregon State University also found a significant increase in college enrollment in Gear Up schools (Archambault, 2016).

Barriers addresses by Gear Up Oregon are similar to those identified and discussed by educators from Golden County. Educators understood the financial stress of

college, and the lack of importance placed on higher education to be some of the most prevalent and difficult barriers students face. Those educators who spoke about Gear Up viewed the program as positively impacting students in their college search process.

Katie was one of the several educators who mentioned Gear Up, and its impact at her school.

We had gear up and the grant has run out but they kept-- it's a classified position so an aid kind of position not an actual school counselor which we don't have-- but the woman who did that has kept her on. And so she continues to do college trips to and does try to keep the kids on track filling out their FAFSA of whatever which is vital because I don't know what we do if we didn't have her. But so because of her I think they really do try. Few of them seem to go straight to a four year college. I'm not really sure why because there are some brilliant kids. I know would get financial aid. I don't think they quite realize how much financial aid they can get but anyway for whatever reason

In this example, Katie talked about the lasting importance the Gear Up program had at her school. In the absence of a fulltime college counselor, the Gear Up classified position took the brunt of the college counseling and advising, which teachers would have had to pick up otherwise. Katie is frustrated however, that students still have little information, or misinformation about available financial aid resources. Even with these extra resources, students and advisors still struggle to overcome the engrained perceptions of higher education.

The cycle of brain drain that rural communities face creates a sense of distrust and aversion towards outsiders. Even educators who had been imbedded within the school community for several years felt this sense of exclusion. The design of the federal Gear Up grant program allows for states, partners, communities, and individual schools to design their own programing to address their unique social, economic, and educational contexts. Gear Up Oregon provides scaffolding for schools to build their own

interventions upon. This allows insiders— community members, parents, and educators— to implement this advising, instead of depending on the community to grant access and legitimacy to an outside program.

In addition to working directly with clusters of school that receive grant funding, Gear Up Oregon provides a wealth of online resources that are built around their core principles. Anyone can access these resources, which include the Five R strategies, family and student workshops, professional development for teachers, and college-search tools. These resources could be tailored and implemented by anyone, however while a third of interviewed educators mentioned Gear Up, not a single educator mentioned personal utilizing any other resources Gear Up provided. The single challenge that most educators cited in working within a small, rural setting, was managing their numerous roles and responsibilities. It was common for educators to have up to seven unique classes, in addition to many other advising or coaching roles they juggled. If there was not a Gear Up coordinator or counselor present at their school, it was likely that educators did not have the time to search for these resources, or implement formal, structured workshops around these topics. For most, advising was informal and in addition to complete academic curriculums.

TRiO

Like Gear Up, TRiO is a federally funded and organized program targeted at increasing college attainment for traditionally underrepresented students. TRiO is an umbrella organization that encompasses different programs that support students from college readiness through receiving their degrees. Unlike Gear Up, TRiO does not provide any direct financial support or scholarships. TRiO directs students in finding

scholarships and aid to overcome financial barriers, and focuses programming more directly on helping students overcome additional class, cultural, and social barriers.

The TRiO program focuses on first generation college students, and low-income students. There is not a targeted focus on rural students, but there are high populations of these students within rural districts. Educational Talent search (ETS) and Upward Bound are the two most common programs that TRiO offers. Both Upward Bound and ETS aim at addressing barriers that first-generation and low-income students face in graduating from high school, and successfully attending a post-secondary program. They target these barriers in slightly different ways. ETS provides advising to students on course selection, financial aid and scholarships, college entrance exams, and completing admission applications. Upward Bound provides more exposure to a diverse range of academic and cultural programming, tutoring and mentoring services, and advising on the college application process.

TRiO's vision is focused on those who are in the program, and not on all of the students at a given school, "Our goal is to ensure that all TRiO students and staff in Oregon have the resources and tools needed to achieve their full potential" (Oregon TRIO Association n.d.-a, para 2). Access to TRiO programs is more limited within Golden County than Gear Up. Of the districts in which interviewed educators taught, only district three is served by a TRiO program. There are other non-rural districts within Golden County that offer TRiO programming. Only one educator mentioned Upward Bound specifically. There are no additional resources for educators to utilize on their own or in addition to formal TRiO programming presented on the TRiO website. The goals and challenges of TRiO, like Gear Up, are aligned with those of rural educators in terms

of increasing college access for rural students, however the policy is limited in scope and reach within these rural communities.

The challenges all TRiO programs address are similar to those of Gear Up, but the implementation and structure are significantly different. Of the 20 TRiO sites in Oregon, 18 operate out of a college or university, the remaining two operate out of a school district and educational service district (Oregon TRIO Association, n.d.-b). In most of these areas, both Upward Bound and ETS counselors are based at a local college, and travel to various schools throughout the week. This structure of advising in rural schools does nothing to mitigate the difficulties outsiders may face when interacting with students and families. These advisors may face additional challenges overcoming this if they are only present in the school environment for a limited amount of time, usually one or two days in a given week. For counselors who are serving a more diverse range of student populations, from urban to rural, the ability to provide more tailored, context specific advising is constrained by their workload and available resources.

The structure of this program, specifically that someone from outside of the community is providing the advising services, poses potential advantages and challenges. Even some educators who have decades of teaching experience, and had come from rural areas themselves, said they found entrance to particularly insular communities difficult. Advisors who are only present in the school for a short period of time each week could potentially face similar reactions. These advisors need to be trusted, and maintain a status of legitimacy in order for students and parents to heed their advice. If students or parents do not believe that advisors fully understand or appreciate their circumstances, they may be skeptical of advice offered. However, they are working with a specific population of

students who usually are seeking the advising out themselves, which might relieve some of the initial tension.

These advisors do bring in potentially novel insight and resources to rural communities. This is valuable because rural areas are often rather closed systems, which do not have a steady flow of new information from outside of the community. Instead members may have a smaller number of strong ties within the community, and few beneficial weak ties to outside resources (Granovetter 1973). One educator, Derek, who mentioned Upward Bound program in his school, highlighted this. He spoke about one of his students, a sophomore, who was applying for the Upward Bound program. He was excited that this student was already interested in attending college, and was able to seek out these additional resources right within the same school. When advisors can alleviate the potential of being seen as an “outsider”, they can connect with rural students within their own environment, making the college process seem closer, and less daunting to younger students.

Ford Family Foundation

The Ford Family Foundation is a private non-profit foundation based within another Oregon county that has a very similar economic and social profile to Golden County. Ford Family Foundation focuses on rural communities within Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The founder was a resident of a local community who was a prominent figure in the regional timber industry. This origin influences the way in which the foundation designs programming and engages with the surrounding communities. When interacting with towns and individuals from Golden County and other similar locations across the state, the foundation has a possible insider connection because of the

association with the timber industry, and the perception of “understanding” this common working-class profession.

The foundation has two focuses areas, “Successful Citizens” which targets improving outcomes for children from pre-kindergarten through post secondary programs, and “Vital Rural Communities” which supports the development of rural communities (The Ford Family Foundation, n.d -c). This foundation provides very little direct programming, the main services being focused on providing grant and scholarship money to those with project proposals.

In their programs aimed at supporting and revitalizing rural communities, The Ford Family Foundation follows an approach based on community building. These central principles stress the importance of keeping the community and the community’s unique needs at the center of the work. The foundation’s materials say that their efforts are guided by, “rural residents taking the lead to build their community’s future” (The Ford Family Foundation, n.d -a). Members of the foundation are not those at the helm of community projects, instead their model awards grants to community members, and organizations that propose vitalization efforts. The foundation’s “community building approach” emphasizes the partnership with the community; they use language that emphasizes listening, planning, and inclusivity. They also create teams of rural residents who advise and work with foundation staff, with the goal of ensuring the voices of the target communities are heard. Below Figure 3, from the Ford Family Foundation website, diagrams these guiding principles.

Figure 3



Ford Family Foundation uses this graphic to display the core values they use to ground their community building approach. In their organizing, the community is always “at the center” of these principles and the work that they do.

Source: The Ford Family Foundation (n.d - a). Community Building Approach

The Ford Family Foundation has an economic development program that supports projects focused on small businesses, or job and skill training in addition to their community building efforts. This program is offered free of charge. These strategies address a separate part of the brain drain issue from both Gear Up and TRiO: declining conditions within communities that encourage people to leave. By utilizing the people and resources of these communities, the efforts are less likely to face extreme resistance solely because of the outside intervention. The problems that The Ford Family Foundation has identified are not with the community itself, but with the resources and supports available to the communities. By valuing the community’s input and opinions in these efforts, The Ford Family Foundation demonstrates the belief that solutions to many of these problems can be found within the community itself.

In addition to the community improvement efforts of The Ford Family Foundation, they offer several college scholarships. Although there are many the foundation offers, this analysis will focus on the scholars program that is offered to graduating high school seniors. The scholars program targets low and moderate income students who have demonstrated academic achievement. Eligible students must graduate with at least a 3.0 grade point average from a high school within Oregon or Siskiyou County, and have an expected family contribution of less than \$6,000 (The Ford Family Foundation, n.d -c).

The scholarship covers 90% of otherwise unmet need of awardees. Students awarded the scholarship receive advising and become a part of the scholar's network once entering college. It is only available for students from Oregon or Siskiyou County, California who attend college or university within their respective home states, out of state tuition is not covered.

The Ford Family Foundation's Scholar program provides little-to-no post-secondary advising prior to awarding the scholarship. The program's tagline states, "If you have the will, we can help you find a way" (The Ford Family Foundation, n.d -c). The foundation targets only the financial barrier to attending college, and addresses addition barriers to success after students matriculate. In order to benefit from this resource, students must first be motivated to attend college or university. This addresses the economic issue that educators identified, but not the issues of motivation or deficits in cultural capital.

The Ford Family Foundation addresses the economic decline in rural communities that motivates both the push and pull factors of brain drain which educators identified.

The foundation builds their approach to supporting both students and communities on the assumption that the target population is motivated to seek these resources out. Educators cited a lack of student motivation, and fixed mindsets about education as major difficulties in advising. For these students, the solution implemented by The Ford Family Foundation does not apply. Similarly, this foundation does not engage heavily with communities that do not recognize areas in need of improvement, or who are preemptively discouraged by the belief that economic resources are unavailable.

Along with the more tangible supports this foundation provides, it can also work to increase the cultural value placed on education. Founded by a working class family who focused on local economies, the program's roots are similar to many of the rural families with the least collective exposure or experience to higher education. The scholarship in particular that the foundation offers is competitive and often viewed as prestigious in local Oregon communities. One educator mentioned a student who was a The Ford Family Foundation scholar, who returned to her community to open a business after she received her degree. Both her scholarship and degree increased her cultural capital, which was recognized both broadly, and also by local authority.

Educators mentioned how "far away" higher education as a goal could feel to students, both ideologically and physically. This foundation brings educational value and goal setting closer to rural students because of its local history and through the economic support it can offer. Educators struggled more to help students find ways to overcome deficits in economic rather than cultural capital, but The Ford Family Foundation provides a potential example and resource that educators could point to which is physically and conceptually close to students, and yet still significant enough to appear

meaningful. Having this early in students' educational career could aid educators in inspiring academic motivation in younger students, who may decide to pursue higher education later on.

Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program

For the purpose of this analysis I will focus on one Oregon loan repayment program that is targeted at educators in particular. There are several other programs targeted at other professionals within the state, including health professionals and bar certified lawyers. Unlike the previously discussed programs, this policy targets another challenge of brain drain: recruiting and retaining qualified educators.

The goal of the teacher loan forgiveness program is to provide financial support for early teachers who teach in designated low-income schools and districts. School with rates of student poverty of 30.2% or higher can apply to be eligible for this program (Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, n.d). This program does not specifically or exclusively target rural schools or districts. Instead, it targets areas of high concentrations of student poverty. All of the districts within Golden County represented by interview participants qualify for this program. Educators at qualifying schools are eligible after teaching full-time in one of these schools as a "highly qualified" educator for 5 or more consecutive years. Educators with certain positions and loans are eligible for up to \$17,500 of forgiveness (Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program, n.d.). This program is funded by federal student aid.

The teacher loan forgiveness program targets individuals who possess the potential to bring new intellectual capital into rural communities. By the nature of the eligibility requirements, the individuals targeted have high levels of education and

qualification as teachers. Low income and rural schools struggle to recruit and retain educators with higher levels of experience and graduate degrees because there are few unique benefits these schools can offer. These districts can struggle to offer competitive salaries. Even if qualified educators prefer to work in rural or low-income areas, these constraints may limit their ability to do so, especially if they are struggling to pay back loans incurred from receiving this credentials.

In addition to financial constraints, the surrounding communities can provide limited social and cultural opportunities, especially if educators are new to the area. This program incentivizes teachers to work in these areas for a prolonged period of time.

Educators discussed the challenges their schools faced in recruiting new educators. If students from the area do not pursue further education, or hesitate to return, then these districts are forced to recruit outside talent. In schools that faced high turnover rates, educators cited the relatively low pay and restricted opportunities in surrounding areas. The solution implemented by the teacher loan forgiveness program targets only the financial barrier in recruiting and maintaining talent. However, the requirement of a five-year minimum contract length may serve to mitigate some of the barriers to entrance into the community, as educators become more welcomed and ingrained over time.

Similar to The Ford Family Foundation, the motivation that this program provides could be as helpful as the supports themselves. If aspiring educators see this as a potential opportunity, they could plan accordingly in their educational trajectory. This program makes returning rather than leaving seem like a possibility. Educators saw brain drain as a phenomenon that limited aspirations to both leave, and return. Given this, there must be programs that target both directions of mobility.

Discussion: Utilizing Valuable Perspectives

Rural educators work at the fulcrum of the needs of the students and the needs of the community. They traverse multiple identities within their environment, as community members, educators, parents, coaches, advisors, and more. Outside intervention programs should utilize this wide perspective and potential mobility within the community in order to design the most effective intervention strategies. Educators understand processes such as the slow and specific ways of acceptance into the community in unique ways.

Teachers and outside advising or scholarship programs occupy the same space within these communities, and are often subject to the same community scrutiny or reaction regardless if they work with or beside each other. When a more collaborative approach is taken, both groups can more easily navigate these social spaces, resulting in a more effective, targeted approach to their shared goal of student success.

Both educators and outside policies and programs focus on improving the outcomes for rural students, and improving conditions in rural communities. Even when educators do not engage directly with outside resources or programs, their advising interacts within the same space as these programs, and targets the same students. Several state and private programs (Gear Up Oregon, TRiO, The Ford Family Foundation, and the Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program) all share these same common goals. However, each identifies a slightly different problem that impedes this goal, and devises different solutions to overcome this problem. Above, Table 4 outlined these identified problems and solutions for each program. For each of these programs, the proposed problems and solutions align in part with the experience of rural educators. While each solution

targeted a different aspect influencing the brain drain cycle, no single policy aligned completely with all the needs and challenges identified by rural educators.

In this analysis, I do not propose a policy that is superior to any other. Instead, I recommend strategies to incorporate the perspectives of educators with existing policies to improve potential approaches and outcomes. Each of the programs targeted specific pieces of the brain drain cycle. I argue that even though this specificity may limit the broad impact of a single program or policy, that allows for the policy to grow in efficacy in this extremely targeted way. It is understandable that no singular policy that I reviewed here addressed all of the concerns and challenges raised by educators. This being said, it is vital that these different programs work together, or are utilized in such a way that services address the different barriers for students.

The experience of rural educators provides valuable insight into the inner workings of the communities and educational contexts of rural students. Advising and available programs and resources should work in tandem with one another, each advancing the work of the other in order to achieve the most. Below, I have outlined five strategies and recommendations. These are ways in which both programs and educators can collaborate to better attain student-centered goals, and better address the potentially detrimental community affects of brain drain on rural communities.

- ❖ Programs that rely on outside advisors or resources should make targeted efforts to include educators and other members of the schools they serve. This should be built into training and structure for these programs, especially in situations that expect outside advisors to enter into rural schools to offer resources or advising and on a recurring basis.
- ❖ If available, private foundations should offer support, either in resources, information, or funding to others programs that address different aspects of the

brain drain cycle. For example, The Ford Family Foundation in the past has been a donor for Gear Up. This allowed the program to offer additional services outside of the scope of grant funding. Sharing resources may seem counter intuitive to success, but each of these programs addresses specific and different aspects of the cycle, and students' success depends on interventions at multiple levels. If students are not aware of college as an option, a private scholarship foundation cannot increase access to these traditionally underserved populations.

- ❖ Within schools that are served by on-site programs such as Gear Up or TRiO, educators and program leaders should work to create some type of alumni connections. Students who are graduates of the school already have the insider knowledge and connection to the community. At the same time, these graduates can answer practical questions about their experiences, and make these goals seem more attainable for current students.
- ❖ Both educators and programs should make targeted efforts to inform students of programs that are available to them after receiving a college degree, such as loan forgiveness programs. These programs lessen the future burden and potential financial anxiety that students may face later. Knowing these possibilities well in advance could ease students' decision-making process, and help them plan more effectively sooner.
- ❖ Early interventions and conversations that programs, advisors, and teachers have with students should be based in practical planning and solution building. Informational exposure to these programs are important early on so students start to internalize a more college-oriented mindset if they wish to pursue higher education later, but concrete steps in order to prepare for this need also be taken. Some examples include course schedule planning, connecting students with work or volunteer options, or exploring test preparation options. Preparing students to be competitive on college and scholarship applications needs to start early in their educational careers, so they have to opportunity to consider applying later on.

Although this study focused on only the specific cultural and social context of rural areas, there is no evidence that utilizing the experiences of these rural educators are

more valuable in the policy sphere than educators of other populations. An educator's practice is never divorced from their own experiences outside of their classrooms. Just like their students, their "classroom performance" is influenced by out of school factors. Understanding the specific ways in which these factors play into educators' classroom practices allows outside actors to better understand educators' practices and offer support.

There is overwhelming evidence that credentialed, experienced, dedicated educators can make large differences in students' academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). For this reason, the ways in which educators interact with students in the classroom is a topic of much interest as it relates to academic outcomes. However educators interact with students in a number of other ways in addition to formal instruction. These interactions can be as influential as direct instruction, warranting the study of how educators interact with students, and what factors shape the way in which educators interact with students. The broader implication of this study is to show the ways in which studying the positions and experiences of educators is not only important, but vital in creating policy and addressing systemic challenges.

Conclusion

In this paper I have aimed to both highlight rural educators' experience, and gain a deeper understanding of how these educators' engagement with their students is informed by their own educational and personal experiences.

Participants' formations of their identity as rural educators were built on their perceived acceptance into the community. The main way in which people were granted entrance to community was through establishing a commitment to the area, and gaining the trust of long-standing community members. Those with preexisting "insider

connections” to the area gained this trust more quickly. These connections included past experience or upbringing in a rural area, connections to rural industries, or familial connection within the community.

Educators conceptualized brain drain in economic and cultural terms. They recognized brain drain as a two-way function, that encourages some people to stay, and others to leave and not to return. The limited economic opportunities and high poverty rates discouraged students from applying to post-secondary programs, and limited the ability of those who did to return. The lack of value placed on education within the community acted in the same way on the community.

Advising practices were influenced by a combination of educators’ views of the community and primary understanding of brain drain. Advising addressed the barriers that educators saw as being the primary obstacle their students faced. In communities in which poverty was less prevalent, educators could focus more directly on expanding cultural experiences for their students, and working to increase the communal value placed on education. In communities where poverty rates were higher, educators were more focused on overcoming these challenges in their advising before targeting cultural norms and values.

While all educators engaged in positive advising, encouraging their students to consider higher education, some educators had less favorable views of students staying within the community after their graduation. All educators wanted their students to be “successful” after their graduation, but their advising depended on the educators’ ideal of “success”. Those who had more contentious relationships with their communities could

not see students being successful within the communities, and therefore had more negative reactions to students staying within the community after their graduations.

Further research is needed to explore in more detail the deficits in resources and advising facing rural students. This project was meant to be a survey analysis of the under studied perspective of rural educators. Although the analysis and sampling were systematic and rigorous, the small scope of this project created a number of limitations. The sample size of both educators interviewed and policies reviewed were relatively small. The decision to focus on one county, specifically Golden County, was done in order to limit the possible effect of unaccounted factors. However, this limited the diversity in educators' perspectives as well. For the most part, the county is racially homogenous, at 92.5% of residents identifying as white only (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It is not uncommon for rural locales to be racially homogenous, but this limits the diversity in experience nonetheless.

The decision to interview only educators was also made in order to conduct a more focused and thorough analysis. However, this does limit the understanding of these communities. Further research could continue to explore the ways in which the experiences of rural educators interact with students, school administrators, families, and other community members.

There was also a possible self-selection bias in the educators interviewed. Outreach to educators was systematic and targeted, but the responses received were not random. Those who were willing to participate may have been motivated to do so because they have had particularly strong interest, opinions, or experiences. I also must divulge my own potential bias in this topic, since I myself am from a rural school, and

interacted with some of the programs mentioned. Knowing this, I took precautions to avoid bias in my interview questions and analysis.

Some may argue that programs and teachers have neither the time nor motivation to devote more resources to additional advising engagements. This thought was in line with my initial hypotheses. I theorized that teachers would be aware of issues surrounding brain drain, but not to the extent that they were. I was surprised to find such cohesive narratives between the educators and different communities. Finally, I had expected to find that at least one educator had misgivings about advising their students to leave the community. However, as outlined already, this was not the case.

Politics and inequities of place are not a novel theoretical contribution. These topics have been studied in the past, including the theoretical focus on the rural locale. Out of this has even emerged a fascination with the unique role attachment to and isolation from place plays in these areas (Paige, 1996). However, this fascination has never been on the direct experiences of rural educators. In the past educators' expertise have been used as windows into student life and performance (Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, & Lawson, 2014; Burnell, 2003; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; Huber, 2017; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Studies have also used educators to examine challenges faced by rural schools more broadly, in which educators are a component, but not the main focus (Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2005; Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005). Rural educators are motivated, in most cases, to serve their students and communities; they experience the rural social landscape as individuals in addition to experiencing it as they work in service of others.

Within the scholarly context, rural educators have repeatedly been *used* to study other topics, but rarely have they been treated as contributing insights individually. For those exploring these topics— either to design policies and programs, or produce academic literature— the first step must be to ask, and the second to listen. The answers to outstanding theoretical and practical questions of rural success may already lie with rural educators.

Appendix A: Educator Interview Guide

- How did you become interested in teaching?
 - When did you first consider going into this profession?
 - Can you walk me through this decision?
 - How long have you been teaching?
- Have you taught anywhere else in the past?
 - How did you hear about that/those position(s)?
- How long have been teaching here?
- How did you first hear about this position, and how did you decide to take it?
- Did you have to move here to take this job, or were you already in the area?
 - Can you walk me through the experience of moving here?
 - What were your first impressions about this town/area?
 - Were there any challenges in coming to or adjusting to this area at first?
- How would you describe your role in this community?
- What role do you think the school plays in the community?
- What do you enjoy about teaching here?
- Are there any challenges to teaching here because of the location?
- Can you tell me about the students you teach?
- What do most students from this school do after high school?
- When do students normally start thinking about post-graduation plans?
- How do you talk to students about these plans?
 - Who normally initiates these conversations?
 - Do students ask you questions about their post-graduation plans?
 - What kinds of questions do they ask?
- How do you talk to student who aren't considering college about their plans?
- Are there ever students who aren't considering college who you try to encourage to reconsider?
 - What do these types of conversations looks like?
 - What are some typical reasons these students have for not considering college?
 - What are their alternative plans?
- Do you ever talk to students who are unsure about what they want to do after graduation?
 - Could you walk me through what this kind of conversation usually looks like?
- For students who choose to go to college, where do most of them go?
- Do students come to you with questions about applying to college specifically?
 - Do they ask you to edit their essays/for letters of recommendation?
- Do you ever feel conflicted or unsure about advising students on such a large life choice?
- Have you ever heard of "Brain Drain" otherwise known as human capital flight? (if not, I'll explain)
 - What does this term mean to you?
 - Do you think this is affecting this community at all?

----- If educational experiences were not discussed:-----

- Where are you from?
- How would you describe your own hometown?
 - How big was the town?
 - Can you describe the geography and physical location (ex: distance to nearest town)?
 - What types of industries did people work in, what are the major employers?
- Where did you go to college?
 - Did you choose to leave your town?
 - Can you walk me through how you made that decision?
 - How was your experience leaving the place you grew up?
- Is there anything else you want me to know?
- Is there anything I didn't ask that I should have?

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