

Seventeen students at The University of Arizona were analyzed to determine what experiences influence the retention and attrition patterns of men and women in the Nutritional Sciences (NSC) degree program. Eleven of the students were currently enrolled in NSC; the other six students had transferred to a different degree. The research was conducted using one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The findings were then coded by the researcher using Acker's (2012) theory of gendered organizations and revealed four major themes about the retention and attrition patterns of students pursuing the NSC degree.

Key Findings

- **Gendered identities and power dynamics**

When asked what it means to be a man/women in NSC, responses generally geared towards women progressing in the scientific field, while it was common for men to already be there. One student in NSC said: "...it's the trickle up to where it will eventually become balanced, just because, we [women] weren't allowed to do that." As well, students expressed the notion that it was a social norm for men to advance in their degree programs and gain prestigious titles such as a doctor, rather than pursue positions such as a registered dietician. One student said: "I have an appreciation and respect for the males in my degree who are pursuing something that is women, female populated..."

- **The connection between NSC major and body image**

This was an unexpected theme that arose from the data, but contained valuable insight. Students conveyed a sense of judgment and pressure associated with being in the NSC degree. Students felt an obligation to engage in a healthy lifestyle and to conform to societal standards of appearance. Some students utilized this

pressure as motivation for self-improvement.

- **Positive relationships with advisors and professors and the desire for representative role models**

Gender was not a factor when describing relationships with advisors; however, students did recognize the lack of male professors in NSC. The lack of male students was a reflection of the lack of male professors in the program.

- **The culture of the student environment- togetherness, competition, and feminine energy**

There was a common expression of "being in the same boat" amongst the students, representing a common goal. Competition in the NSC major was shown as friendly comradery amongst the men, but as a challenge amongst the women. The NSC major also contained a culture of feminine energy where the women enrolled in it were apparent of the gender ratio. One student said: "...there was a dude who's in our course that kind of got upset and interrupted [the class]. I was like, we don't usually have to deal with this."

Recommendations for Research and Practice

For further research this study recommends:

- Interviewing students in various stages of the major
- Efforts to interview more men
- Interviewing professors and advisors
- Interviewing other majors in CALS

For further practice this study recommends:

- Utilizing the findings in student recruitment initiatives
- Faculty and advisors to consider the findings in regards to how they perpetuate the culture of the major and the implications it can have on both genders