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Determined to succeed: Salient factors that foster academic success for academically unprepared Black Males at a Black College

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DETERMINED TO SUCCEED: SALIENT FACTORS THAT FOSTER ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ACADEMICALLY UNPREPARED BLACK MALES AT A BLACK COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

Attrition for Black men is a serious problem in higher education. While researchers have explored factors of retention for Black men attending historically White institutions (HWIs), less research explains factors under-lying the success of Black men attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), particularly those men who are academically unprepared. Eleven Black men, who entered a public, urban HBCU through its pre-college program and persisted to graduation, provided a retrospective view of factors promoting their success. The result from this study may help universities enhance retention for Black men by understanding salient variables in their academic achievement and retention.

A recent report from the American Council on Education (ACE, 2006) indicated an increase in the participation rates for African Americans in higher education. The report suggested that college participation for African Americans increased 42.7% between 1993 and 2003 (ACE, 2006). While this data may trigger a sense of euphoria, the vexing news is there is a growing disparity between the partici-pation rates of Black men and women in higher education. Once the province of men, females are increasingly dominating college campuses. This gender disparity

is not endemic to African Americans. Surprisingly, however, gender disparities are most pronounced among Blacks (Cross & Slater, 2000; Cuyjet, 2006; Hale, 2001; Polite & Davis, 1999; Roach, 2001; Ross, 1998).

The number of Black men entering college increased during the late 1960s, and again during the 1980s and 1990s (Cross & Slater, 2000; Cuyjet, 2006; Hale, 2001; Roach, 2001; Ross, 1998). Currently, Black men continue to lag behind their White and other minority male counterparts with respect to college participation, retention, and degree completion rates (Polite & Davis, 1999). Black men account for less than 5% of the total enrollment of 4-year higher education institutions in the United States (Horn, Berger, & Carroll, 2004). This has caused major concern among scholars, administrators, policy makers, and academicians (Jackson & Moore, 2006). More alarming, Fleming (1984) and Schwartz and Washington (2002) explained that most African-American men in higher education face significant challenges to attain their degrees, resulting in high attrition for Black males (Mortenson, Research Seminar on Public Policy Analysis of Opportunity for Postsecondary Education, 2001). Identifying malleable factors that promote Black male student success and retention is critical. The purpose of this article is to discuss salient factors to the academic success for 11 academically unprepared Black men who entered a Black college through its pre-college program and persisted to graduation.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Many studies have characterized Black males as an endangered species (Cuyjet, 1997; Davis & Jordon, 1994). Research suggests this characterization has emerged for several reasons. For example, in elementary and secondary education, educators and counselors are more likely to discourage Black males from attending college compared with their White counterparts (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Furthermore, Black males are disproportionately disciplined, more likely to face expulsions, and suspended longer and more frequently than White students (Polite & Davis, 1999). Black males are also overwhelmingly concentrated in special education and are disproportionately tracked into low academic ability classrooms (Epps, 1995). Another central problem with Black males succeeding in education revolves around their academic achievement—that is, they are reported to have the lowest high school grade point average (GPA) and score poorly on standardized tests (Hale, 2001).

Academic failure for African-American men begins early, impinging their ability to graduate high school (Davis, 2003; Garibaldi, 1992). The inability of Black men finishing school has an impact on their literacy and employment ability (Majors & Billson, 1992). Blake and Darling (1994) speculated that some African-American men reach 10th grade or even graduate high school without sufficient literacy skills. These researchers argue that African-American men are disinclined to invest in education because they are less likely to yield a

favorable return on their investment compared to White men. Kunjufu (2001) supported this in arguing that African-American men with bachelor's degree will earn 72% of what White men with comparable education earn.

THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK MEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Studies examining the experiences of Black men in higher education have centered on examining their challenges at historically White institutions (HWIs) compared to their challenges at many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Research has shown that Black men have better learning experiences at HBCUs (Allen, 1992; Cokley, 2003; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella, 2006). For instance, Fleming (1984) reported that Black students on Black campuses are satisfied, engaged, and ill-adjusted to the campus. Roebuck and Murty (1993) stated that Black students persisted at much higher rates on Black campuses than on White campuses. Black students on White campuses had lower persistence rates between freshmen and senior year, had lower academic achievement levels, were less likely to enroll in an advanced degree program, and had lower post-graduation rates and earnings (Allen, 1992). Although a large body of research has shown that HBCUs provide an optimal environment for Black men to develop (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Jones, 2001; Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella, 2006), a significant number of these universities have problems with attrition for Black male students (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006).

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Researchers (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 1997, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002) have investigated the experiences of African Americans attending HWIs in comparison to HBCUs. Many of these studies neglect to disaggregate the experiences of African Americans "by gender and achievement patterns" (Harper, 2007, p. 2). As such, a lack of current literature exist (e.g., Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Ross, 1998) to document the experiences of African-American men at HBCUs, particularly those students who enter higher education as academically unprepared and persist to graduation.

This study contributes to the literature by assessing factors that affect the academic success of Black men at an HBCU. Specifically, this study examined factors related to the success for Black male juniors or seniors who entered a mid-Atlantic 4-year, state-supported HBCU as academically unprepared and persisted toward graduation. The central question guiding this study was how do educational and personal factors contribute to the academic success of academically unprepared Black males attending an urban, public, 4-year historically Black institution?

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

We conducted this study at a public, doctoral research intensive HBCU in a mid-Atlantic state. According to the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at this university, approximately 6,000 undergraduate and 400 graduate students were enrolled when data were collected. With regard to the freshmen class, the average high school grade point average is a 3.00. Twenty-four percent of the new students scored over 500 on the SAT verbal exam and 25% scored over 500 on the SAT math exam.

We used a qualitative approach to guide this study because we sought to understand the social experiences of African-American men in a particular context. Specifically, we used in-depth interviews complemented by secondary data. As such, our epistemological approach was anchored in the constructivist tradition to construct knowledge, understanding, and meaning through human interactions (Jones, Toress, & Armino, 2006).

Participants for this study consisted of African-American male juniors and seniors who entered a public, HBCU through its pre-college program and persisted to graduation. The pre-college program serves as an intervention for academically unprepared students who do not meet traditional academic standards (e.g., GPA, SAT, and ACT) for admission to the university. Students in this study participated in this 6-week intensive summer preparatory program to strengthen their academic skills for college. To complete the program successfully, students must earn at least a grade of "C" in all pre-college courses, complete all assignments, and attend all scheduled events.

Procedures and Participants

The University's Office of Institutional Research provided us with a list of 111 African-American male students who entered the university through its pre-college program during the summers of 2000 through 2003. Of the 111 students, 38 had graduated by the time we commenced the study, leaving 73 potential participants. We e-mailed the 73 students a poster about the study and asked them to contact us if they were interested in participating. We later followed this e-mail by sending a letter to the students' on campus address or home residence. As an incentive, we offered participants a $20 gift certificate. We also sought the help of staff members (or gatekeepers) at the university who we believed knew students who matriculated to the university through the pre-college program (Creswell, 1998). The staff members identified and contacted students who met the study's criteria (Creswell, 1998). We recruited additional participants through snowball sampling (i.e., asking those who joined the study to recommend others who might meet our criteria).

Although 73 students were contacted, few displayed an interest in participating in the study. With snowball sampling and help from university administrators, we recruited 11 African-American men to participate. The average student

involved was 21 years of age, majored in business, earned 93 credits, and had a 2.7 grade point average (GPA). Participants' fathers' occupations included a teacher, lawyer, police officer, minister, and maintenance worker and their educational attainment ranged from a general education degree (GED) to professional and graduate school. Participants' mothers' occupations included a pediatrician, minister, congressional representative, daycare worker, and United States Postal Service (USPS) worker. Educational attainment among the participants' father ranged from a high school diploma to doctoral and professional degrees. Participants' mothers' educational attainment ranged from high school to medical school. Seven participants were raised in the suburbs, three were raised in a large city, and one was raised in a small city. Many of the participants came from a two-parent household. Most of the participants planned to further their education beyond their baccalaureate degrees. Specifically, four participants planned to obtain doctoral degrees, six planned to obtain master's degree, and one participant did not have plans to further his education.

Data Analyses and Reporting

We conducted 70-90 minute, face-to-face, in-depth interviews with each participant. All interviews were completed within 6 weeks. Prior to beginning the interviews, participants signed a consent form and completed a brief demographic form, and completed a short open-ended questionnaire, to understand factors germane to their academic success. With the participants' consent, we also obtained information about their grades and GPA from the director of the pre-college program, who has tracked the participants' academic progress since their matriculation into the university. During these interviews, we engaged participants about their academic and social experiences at the university. Specifically, we asked participants 25 questions to help us understand salient factors in their academic success. These questions served as the catalyst for the participants to talk at length about academic and social variables promoting their success, their experiences at the university, persons instrumental in their success, and their pre-college experiences and its impact on their academic achievement.

Many of the questions were open-ended, which enabled participants to talk in-depth about their experiences. We recorded our observations regarding how the participants responded to a question and their willingness to engage in the interview. We also conducted follow-up phone interviews with participants to clarify issues that emerged. We audio-taped and transcribed all of the interviews.

We used constant comparative analysis on field notes, observations, and interview transcripts. Constant comparative analysis engages the researcher in a process of collecting and analyzing the data simultaneously at "all stages of the data collection and interpretation process, and results in the identification of codes" (Jones et al., 2006, p. 44). We used ATLASTI, a qualitative data management software program, to organize, manage, and code the data. We used

open coding to identify themes, analyzed the interview data obtained from each participant independently, and included cross-case analysis as well (Yin, 2006). In discussing the findings, we present excerpts from the participants' responses verbatim to paint a picture of the participants' voices. We used pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of each participant. In addition, we excluded information that would compromise the confidentiality of the participants, administrators, faculty, and staff.

Credibility

We employed several techniques presented by Merriam (1998) to ensure credibility of the study. For example, we provide thick-description in this article so that others interested can draw their own conclusions from the data. Moreover, providing thick description enables the reader to vicariously experience the participants' challenges at the university and the strategies they employed to surmount them.

We also returned the transcribed interviews to all participants so they could check for accuracy and clarity in the information from open-ended interviews. Lastly, we used feedback from five peer-debriefers who were well-versed in the topic of exploration and case study methods. These debriefers provided their own interpretations of the themes from the data to ensure credibility (Jones et al., 2006).

LIMITATIONS

A limitation of qualitative research is that the findings can only be generalized to other cases similar to the case of focus. Moreover, interviews may not be an effective way to collect reliable information when the questions pertain to matters the participants perceive as personally sensitive. In addition, the accuracy of the findings is contingent upon how well we analyzed the data.

We proceeded with the qualitative methodology because we were interested in investigating the social experiences of academically unprepared Black men. We specifically focused on Black men at a Black institution because of the scarcity of research on retention and persistence for African-American men attending these institutions.

FINDINGS

In this section, we summarized the major themes, which emerged from the interviews. Participants first discussed the importance of student involvement and its relationship to their academic success. Interestingly, despite the assertion that campus involvement is beneficial to students, participants indicated that most males are not involved on-campus compared with their female counterparts. The second theme described their experiences and interactions with faculty. The final theme concerned their reflections on their own responsibility for their success.

A Sense of Belonging:
Campus Involvement and Integration

Some participants perceived engagement in on-campus activities as pivotal to their success. These students explained that student involvement fostered a sense of commitment to the campus and facilitated their time management skills. Additionally, participants indicated how student involvement helped them become familiar with campus resources.

James described how student involvement fostered a commitment to the university:

> I hated the [university] when I first came here. I did not like the school . . . but once I realized that [I am] here to stay, let me make the best of it. I don't want to lose credits . . . so that's when I became really active. That helped me a lot, because I felt that I was a part of the university.

James continued, "the thing that was critical to my academic success was simply being involved." James' explanation of how student involvement spurred a connection to the university is consistent with Tinto's (1987) research on student departure. Tinto explained that student involvement in on-campus activities aided students' ability to become academically and socially integrated into the fabric of the university community, which helped to foster a commitment to the university.

While James noted the relationship between student involvement and developing a commitment to the university, Lawrence saw student involvement as fostering relationships with campus constituents. He stated:

> A lot of times class is going on and you really don't get a chance to talk to people while the instructor is teaching. You may see them later at a social event or something, and then you get a chance to talk about class a little more . . . so campus involvement is a big upside to having success at the [university]." He added, "I met a lot of important people just by being involved in things . . . so, once you get involved, that's like networking and it becomes an advantage to you, because you get to meet people that you never even knew had those titles and positions.

For Lawrence, student involvement enabled him to increase his social network and fostered out-of-class interaction with professors.

Chris also indicated how student involvement enabled him to cultivate relationships with the campus community: He explained:

> Through campus involvement, you're able to interact with people. You're able to socialize. I swim a lot. I mean, I haven't swum a lot this semester, but last time, I swam just about every other day. And through that I was able to speak to different people. I was able to socialize . . . I was able to see how many races and . . . cultures go to this school, and see how many people of different ethnic backgrounds. . . . I didn't know there were so many [different] people . . . in this world. I met this one guy, he's from Egypt, and I met this other guy from Ethiopia. I met a guy from Trinidad and Jamaica.

Not only did student involvement increase social networking by way of social integration, but also for Chris, student involvement enabled him to have a better understanding of the diversity that existed at this Black school.

Simmons underscored the importance of involvement in sporting activities and time management. He professed:

> Campus involvement does have a lot. . . . Sometimes I have to wake up early in the morning, probably like 5:00 or 5:30. And it's like I come outside and I just see people standing out there talking. And they look like they'd been there ever since yesterday. I'm like "you have all this time, why don't you use it for something better." Me, personally, if I didn't have football, I don't think I would have matured like I have. I'll probably be still doing dumb stuff, like, just running around chasing after girls, doing stupid stuff. Having your time taken from you to do something productive, is very good.

WHERE ARE THE MEN?

Despite the participants' emphasis on campus involvement and its impact on establishing meaningful relationships on campus, fostering a sense of commitment to the university, participants indicated that more females are involved on-campus than males. James explained, "Mostly women are involved not men . . . I definitely need to get Black male involvement in school activities, not even just like SGA [student government association] but like get involved with your major." Anderson supported this statement by stating:

> There is a lack of involvement from Black males on campus. I saw more involvement in high school with Black males than I do here. There was a time where the Black male was prevalent in every aspect of the Black community and now it is the opposite. The woman . . . has taken up that responsibility because the man is just not there, and so on campus you'll find the presence of most organizations that are for males and females, more are females. The whole executive board is women . . . [men] don't even try to join.

Wilson offered a new perspective that may explain the lack of involvement from Black males at this HBCU. He suggested that some Black men were not engaged on campus because the university did not understanding what held the interest of Black men.

> I would like to see the [university] take more initiative to come up with programs, come up with different, organizations that can drive all Black men to come. Market, I guess, gives it more of a life—instead of just a dull flyer or something . . . make it more lively to make us [to join] . . . find out what our interests are. A lot of young Black men, like music . . . try to find something that focus on what I like, and then market that, but use it in a way to draw us and then to help us.

Perhaps this is a valid reason that African-American men are not involved. College students of today are not the same as college students of yesterday. Much

like a company needs to have a keen understanding of their customers, colleges must strive to understand their students and develop programs based on their interests, while promoting students' growth and development.

Going Beyond and Above their Role: Faculty and Academic Success

Participants also commented on the linkage of supportive faculty to academic success. Faculty supported these students by displaying concern, not only for their academic success, but also for their welfare. Faculty also displayed empathy with their students and tried to help students maximize their potential. A strong body of literature has characterized Black students' interaction with faculty at HBCUs as positive. The faculty is purported to take a keen interest in Black students and engage them in co-curricular activities while cultivating a sense of self-efficacy.

Studies (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2007; Palmer & Young, in press; Roebuck & Murty, 1993) of Black students at HBCUs show that these students experience greater personal inter-action with their professors than at HWIs. The participants supported this finding. Participants discussed the impact faculty had on their academic success. These participants explained that faculty were available and wanted to establish a rapport with them. James explained:

> I go to my teacher's office all the time. All of my teachers know me on a first name basis, like they say I live there. So, it's good because I'm able to make that relationship with them. They know if I am trying or if I am not. They also know me personally.

While James indicated that faculty was available, he emphasized that he is proactive about building relationships with faculty. James seemed to be personally invested in his education. He took the initiative to visit with professors during office hours and showed that he is interested in the subject matter. James also pointed out that some Black professors at this HBCU challenged Black students more than non-Black professors.

> Most of them are Black [the faculty], which I do appreciate because what I learned is that the teachers who are not Black usually water things down. I feel like the Black professors are usually harder because they know that you have the potential and they'll push you, and drive you, which of course will only help you in the long run.

Samuel also commended how professors made themselves available and accessible.

> Knowing the professors there, [one professor] has really stepped in. . . . You can e-mail him. You can call him. . . . He's willing to tell you things that some professors won't tell you. He takes the extra initiative.

Samuel indicated that one of his professors was consistently available to him and shared key information that other professors were not willing to share. This showed Samuel that his professor cared about him succeeding academically and enhancing his personal growth by exposing him to the university's "hidden curriculum."

Wilson indicated he felt faculty created a warm, welcoming environment, indicative of a "home away from home." Wilson indicated:

> Especially for the people that . . . don't live here, you might not always have the opportunity to run home, run to someone as a family member. Here, there are people that care about you. Even though you are not able to get home, you know the surrounding physical site, but here they try to make it home—you can talk to them. You can look up to them, people that really care.

Robert underscored how faculty demonstrated empathy and established a supportive relationship with students. He explained:

> I had an assignment to write an essay talking about something that happened in the past. I wrote an essay . . . I don't even remember what the essay was about, but the professor came to me after class and was like, "Oh, XYZ, you know I went through the same thing or you know if you have any problems, you can call me." She gave me her phone number, her e-mail address. I was able to call her if I had problems with homework or if I needed help with the assignment.

This seemed to be pivotal in promoting student success. By showing empathy, Robert's professor showed that she identified with his experiences. This enabled the professor to cultivate a trusting and a supportive bond with Robert, which transcended the formal role of a professor merely engaging in teaching and research. Robert's professor demonstrated that she cared about not only Robert's academic success, but also his psychosocial growth and development. Furthermore, Robert understood that he had someone on campus to turn to for guidance and nurturing.

Intrinsic Motivation:
Personal Responsibility for Success

Participants indicated the impact of non-cognitive variables on their success. Anderson voiced the following:

> I think the most important leadership skills you can have is yourself. To get up in the morning, and say "I'm not going to sleep the day away, I'm going to get up and do something productive today. To say, I'm not going to pick up that bottle and drink, knowing I should be studying." Before you can lead anybody, you got to be a leader to yourself.

Anderson indicated that intrinsic motivation is a salient factor to success. This may suggest that success in college is really a joint responsibility between the university and students. While the university must do its part to ensure student success by providing the necessary resources, students must motivate themselves to attend classes, study, and seek support.

Douglas' remarks echoed those of Anderson. He emphasized that intrinsic motivation is significant to academic success.

> I think there are two types of . . . Black men I see here—those who are motivated and those who need motivation. . . . You can pick out those who are leaders and those who are motivated to make a change, to make a difference. . . . You have those who are nonchalant. . . . I say that it's all personal with them. You have to say, "I want this," and you take the steps accordingly to get to where you need to be.

DISCUSSION

Successfully completing college has enormous social and economic implications. Many Black men are bereft of these benefits because, while many may get to college, the issue of retaining Black men is a serious issue for higher education. This study explored factors of persistence for Black men entering a public HBCU through its pre-college program and persisting to graduation. The results of this study revealed that student involvement promoted academic and social integration, provided structure, and helped students to foster meaningful relationships with the campus constituencies. The assertion that student involvement is associated with persistence is consistent with earlier research by Astin (1985, 1999), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Tinto (1987). Astin (1985) noted that the more students become engaged with the institution's resources, the more satisfied and successful they will be with their experience. Similarly, Kuh et al. (2005) suggested that students who engage in educationally purposeful activities are more likely to persist than students who do not. The finding that student engagement influences academic and social integration is consistent with Tinto's Theory of Student Departure. Student involvement is so important to the success of college students that Kuh et al. (2005) emphasized that "what students do during college counts more in terms of desired outcomes than who they are or even where they go to school" (p. 8).

Researchers have argued that Tinto's theory of Student Departure has limited utility when applied to retention of minority students (Flowers, 2004; Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1992). For example, Guiffrida (2006) argued that Tinto's theory does not take into consideration minority students' support systems outside of the college and there influence on persistence. However, some scholars (Flowers, 2004, 2004-2005) have used Tinto's work to examine the departure of Blacks attending White universities. While this study found the tenets of Tinto's theory applicable to examining retention for

African-American men attending a Black college, many participants emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships with members outside of the college community and their impact on academic success. Though the latter research was not included in this study, it supports the efficacy of Tinto's theory on the departure of Black students attending HBCU. Nonetheless, it also acknowledges the need for Tinto's theory to recognize supportive forces that lie outside of the college community.

This study's finding that more females are involved on campus than males at this Black college is consistent with recent research (De Sousa & King, 1992; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Roach, 2001). Roach reported that Black males are increasingly withdrawn from campus leadership positions as females increased their involvement. Kimbrough and Harper explained that many Black males are disengaged on campus because of the lack of Black men involved in on campus activity, provoking many Black men to think that campus engagement is socially irrelevant and perhaps even feminine.

The study's second finding concerned positive interactions with faculty. The respondents described supportive faculty who demonstrated empathy, concern, and belief in their ability to succeed, all of which emerged as significant variables to academic success. This finding is akin to Guiffrida's (2005) research on African-American students' perceptions of student-centered faculty at a White university. Guiffrida found that Black students perceived student-centered faculty as faculty that go beyond and above their duties, much like the faculty discussed in this study, to improve their retention and persistence. According to Guiffrida, these faculty members do not limit their professional responsibilities solely to teaching and research, but work to enhance students' psychosocial and emotional development. They displayed a deep-rooted interest in the students' academic and personal success at the university. As such, Guiffrida coined the term "over-mothering" to describe faculty, most of whom were African Americans, inter-actions with students. Researchers (Chickering & Ressier, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987) have discussed the importance of faculty-student interaction, particularly out of the classroom interaction with faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Fleming (1984) and Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) have noted that Black students at Black colleges have a healthy, supportive relationship with faculty. Researchers (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2007; Palmer & Young, in press) characterized HBCUs as supportive enclaves. Allen (1992) reported that "Black universities provide positive social and psychological environments for Black students that compare to those experienced by White students attending White Universities" (p. 40). He explained that the social aspects encompassed a network of peers, social outlets, and supportive relationships. The psychological component, on the other hand, included a heightened level of self-confidence, self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and ownership of the campus. Davis (2006) indicated that, "at HBCUs, it takes the entire institutional family to produce competent graduates.

The administration, faculty, staff, alumni, and community people who take a personal interest in the student" acts as an extended family (p. 44).

Finally, we found that non-cognitive skills were also variables facilitating success. Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) indicated that non-cognitive variables are predictor of success for Blacks. More recently, other researchers have indicated that non-cognitive variables are important to the success of Black students (Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2007; Schwartz & Washington, 2002; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Moore (2001) argued "success in college has less to do with aptitude in cognitive measures . . . than non-cognitive measures such as self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, and persistence" (p. 77).

NEW PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Though many of these factors of success are identified in the literature, this study not only substantiates those factors, but also seems to provide new ways for higher education to understand success for academically unprepared Black men at Black colleges. Included are the following:

a) *Mentoring and Personal Relationships:* Success in college may not lie in the hand of any one person; rather, the entire university community works together to address persistence.

b) *You Can Lead a Horse to Water:* Non-cognitive variables (e.g., motivation, resilience, ability to seek support, positive self-talk) are essential components of success. Pace's (1990) Quality of Student Effort indicated that the onus is on institutions to provide resources for students' success. However, the onus is on students to invest energy into the resources in order to become academically success. It seems as though universities only can do so much. Students must do the rest (i.e., go to class, seek support, interact with faculty, form relationships with peers, staff, administrators, and faculty, get involved on campus, and manage time).

c) *Cultural Identity and Success:* Despite the persisting inequalities of Black colleges, they possess a unique ability to promote student success. Though the research is replete with studies examining the supportive climate of HBCUs, cultural identity and its impact on student success at HBCUs and HWIs ought to be studied for similarities and differences. Such a study might reveal that faculty, staff, and administrators, who are of similar race, ethnicity, and culture as students, may exert a more meaningful impact on success at Black colleges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study may help HBCUs of similar institutional type to create best practices to positively impact retention for Black men. Specifically, student affairs practitioners might examine creative ways to promote student

involvement in activities that are educationally purposeful. It may behoove universities to survey its students to see what kinds of activities strongly appeal to them. HBCUs may enforce programmatic initiatives that aid out-of-the-classroom contact between faculty and students. To enhance such contact, the university may consider relocating faculty offices to locations students are known to frequent (e.g., student union center). Colleges may also consider making out-of-the-classroom interaction between faculty and students a prerequisite for tenure. Institutions can enhance student-faculty interaction through a faculty mentor program. According to Lavant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1997), the establishment of such a program has positively influenced retention for all Blacks entering the University of Louisville. Furthermore, colleges may encourage faculty to become invested in their students' success. University might encourage faculty to go beyond their prescribed roles as professors to strengthen the supportive campus climate established by the educational institutions.

HBCUs may also consider developing leadership programs that help develop students' non-cognitive skills and foster cognitive maturation. Institutions, such as City University of New York and University of West Georgia that have implemented similar programs have experienced a surge in retention of Black men. Not only do these organizations provide a social network for these students, but they also help cultivate non-cognitive skills, which students can apply to the classroom (Holsendolph, 2005; Watson, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Educational attainment has consequences for social mobility, future earning opportunities, and marketability. Although more Black males are entering colleges, many universities are fraught with difficulties in retaining African-American males. Furthermore, despite the marginal increase in the number of Black males in higher education, they continue to lag behind their female counterparts. The problems of retaining Black males have many social and economic implications. This article discussed a study on factors of academic success for African-American men who entered a Black college as academically unprepared and persisted to graduation. Participants indicated that student involvement in on campus activities, interaction with faculty and positive peers, connection with role mentors and models, and non-cognitive variables, were factors significant to their success in college. We hope that student affairs practitioners will find these factors helpful to promote student success and help students to get the most out of college.

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