



Insights into Persistence among African American Males at a Predominantly White Institution

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Issue at hand...

- Widespread concern about low retention and graduation outcomes among undergraduate Black males at baccalaureate institutions
- Low graduation outcomes compared to general college student population (6 years)
- Institutional accountability...push for retaining students
- Priority of retaining students...critical need

Purpose and Question

- ◉ Examining the nature of undergraduate African American male persistence at a predominantly white university
- ◉ How do undergraduate African American males persist at a predominantly White institution?
- ◉ Research gap - few studies that analyze and synthesize higher education trajectories of African American males
- ◉ Who's asking? Opportunity knocks...

Defining Persistence

- A student's desire and wherewithal to remain in college from matriculation to degree attainment (Seidman, 2005).
- Personal efforts that students make to engage with the academic and social realms of their institutions through graduation (Astin, 1993; Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinback, 2005).

Interactionalist Theory (Tinto, 1975)

- ⦿ Universal model of undergraduate student persistence
- ⦿ Core theoretical components
 - Personal background factors (race, gender, socioeconomic status, parental education)
 - Academic preparedness (rigorous HS curriculum)
 - Goals and commitments
 - Academic and social Integration (engagement)

Conceptual Model of Black Student Attrition (Bennett & Bean, 1984)

- Compensates for the misapplication of interactionalist theory
- Draws on variables related to undergraduate African American male student persistence
- Nine independent variables, “intent to leave” as the dependent
- Emphasis on satisfaction, less trauma, and college GPA as significant to persistence

Lessons from Bennett and Bean (1984)

- Practices that include ways of increasing a student's ability to perform college work
- Need to facilitate adjustment for first and second year African American males in higher education

Methodology

- Qualitative case study approach to understand how African American males persist at a Predominantly White Institution
- Single Context - Large Public Southern University
- Participants - 11 undergraduate African American males
- Semi-structured interviews and field notes
- Coding technique for analyzing interview data

Overall Findings

- Understanding African American male persistence is complex, different ways of persisting
- Cognitive factors important, but non-cognitive factors dominant in explaining persistence

Specific Findings

- ⦿ Exposure to Advanced Placement curriculum in high school
- ⦿ Encouragement was essential
- ⦿ Being motivated to persist (correlation between bachelor's degree and securing employment)

Specific Findings

- Aspirations and goals (earning graduate degrees)
- Involvement in campus-based organizations
- Meaningful interactions with faculty and staff

Summation

- **For this study, persistence was predicated on:**
 - Personal and family background
 - Degree of academic preparation in high school
 - Levels of family encouragement and support
 - Early insights into future education and career goals
 - Engagement with academic and social communities of campus (including faculty interaction)

Thinking Ahead...

- An opportunity for higher education administrators and professionals to develop practices and policies geared toward non-cognitive components that shape African American male persistence

Thinking Ahead...

- Specific programs geared toward enhancing academic performance for at-risk African American males
- Student affairs professionals to connect African American males with others or through activities that can nurture their motivations and aspirations
- Be more strategic in involving African American males in student organizations
- Policies around recruiting and retaining more ethnic minority faculty



Mahalo!

**QUESTIONS
OR
THOUGHTS**