HBCU's Can Maximize Minority Student Achievement and Success

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Abstract: *Since their inception, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have presented educational opportunities to students of color who may not otherwise attend college. HBCUs recognized that numerous Black males were not given the educational advantages or preparation for higher academics that their White counterparts were given. Consistent with their history, HBCUs readily provided the extra attention and tools needed for Black males to succeed in the academy. The article discusses factors that affect Black student persistence and ways HBCUs can maximize student achievement and success.*

Keywords: *Black, males, college, success, graduation*

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have systematically prepared Black males for success and continued growth in the field of higher education. HBCUs were built on the foundations and principles of serving the Black community and racial uplift. Many of these colleges use "open admissions" policies to provide educational opportunities to students who otherwise may not attend college. Compared to other institutions of higher learning such as Ivy League colleges, religious institutions, research one universities, predominantly White institutions (PWIs), and Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), HBCUs have traditionally provided Black males with tools to have greater success in graduating and earning degrees.

According to the most recent statistics on Black male enrollment in colleges and universities across the nation, it is assessed that there are over one million Black male students enrolled in the academy (The Digest of Education Statistics 2010). One million Black male students sound impressive until you delve into the total college aged Black population in the United States. There are approximately 44 million college aged Black students (15-24 years old) in the country. Out of 44 million Black college aged students, a little over 22 million are Black males. Of the one million Black males enrolled annually in colleges across the country, according to the 2010 American Council of Education report only 39% or 350,000 actually graduate and earn degrees. This equates to less than 1% of the total Black male college age population graduating from all institutions of higher learning.

From research conducted, Hilton, Wood, and Lewis (2012) concluded that there are four components that weigh heavily on whether or not a Black male is going to be successful in college:

1) College choice and degree aspirations;

2) Factors affecting student persistence;

3) Student engagement and involvement experiences; and

4) The importance of disaggregated data.

1. COLLEGE CHOICE AND DEGREE ASPIRATIONS

Geographic location plays an undeniable factor in Black student graduation rates. Black student's completion rates at rural institutions such as Bates College in Maine, Grinnell College in Iowa, Oberlin College in Ohio, and Carleton College in Minnesota are lower than at colleges and universities in urban areas. These colleges are not perceived as good fits for Black males due to these institutions being PWIs and because most Black males grow up in urban settings.

Curriculum offered at PWIs also plays a factor in Black student graduation rates. Black students typically amass a small population at science-oriented, high powered schools such as Carnegie Mellon University and California Institute of Technology. White faculty and administrators at these institutions continue to believe that Black students do not have the intellectual capacity to succeed in such disciplines due to elements that affect student persistence. The next sections will delve into the various factors that affect student persistence and explore avenues to increasing retention and advancement.

2. FACTORS THAT AFFECT STUDENT PERSISTENCE

Student persistence can be hindered by many factors. These components spawn to develop a laundry list of disproportional disadvantages for students of color. Inferior K-12 preparation, poor study habits, lack of familial college tradition, lack of familial wealth and ineptness of financial aid policies are factors that affect student persistence for Black males. Attending HBCUs can help Black males succeed due to their recognition that Black males do not have the educational advantages or the collegiate preparation as their White counterparts. With this knowledge, HBCUs readily provide extra devotion and tools necessary for student success.

According to Brown II and Ricard (2007), HBCUs have historically accepted students of color as they were and educated them as much as they could prior to their departure. HBCUs, did not expect pupils to come to college prepared for the rigors of progressive education due to the aforementioned lack of collegiate preparation for students of color. "Open admission" policies as described by Kim (2002) continue to function as avenues for students of color to gain admission to college due to their below average high school grade point averages or standardized test scores. With the admittance of students of color into the academy, efforts must be made to encourage them to be engaged and involved in this new social experience.

3. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT EXPERIENCES

In the academy, Black and White students "social experiences in higher education" (Braxton, Sullivan, Johnson, 1997; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1975, 1988) plays a major factor in student tenacity. The presence of a strong and a comparably large core of students of color helps students adjust to college life at PWIs. A nurturing environment for Black students is almost certain in having a positive impact on Black student retention and graduation rates. For instance, mentoring programs for Black first year students, Black student organizations, or mentoring programs that involve upperclassmen can help with retention and graduation.

According to a study by Kimbrough and Harper (2006), Black males were less likely to be engaged in co-curricular activities due to inclinations such as physical activity (i.e. playing basketball in the gym) were deemed more socially acceptable compared to joining campus leadership groups. In addition, the notion of male students having difficulty working together, the shortage of Black male role models on campus who vigorously promote engagement activities, students prior undervalue of engagement before entering the academy and the lack of the necessary grade point average to participate in organizations such as fraternities are key factors to nonparticipation**.** Harper, Berhanu, Davis III, and McGuire (2015) equate the problem of disengagement more so to students' attitude and behavior and not the institutions in which they attend. We must reverse the negative stigma associated with Black males and student involvement and encourage this subculture to have a proactive approach in their educational success. In the next section we will look at disaggregated data and pinpoint inequalities in the education of students of color.

4. DISAGGREGATED DATA

Disaggregated data is the process of using data broken into segments of the student population versus using data on the population as a whole. Segments typically include students from various racial or ethnic minority groups, those who are disabled, individuals with limited fluency in English and students who are economically disadvantaged. Disaggregated data also allows educators and state governments to see how each subgroup is performing in school. This data can and should be used to allow educational entities to recognize and evaluate disparities in minority student education and help necessitate the steps needed to help males of color perform better starting at the K-12 level through college. Various states have formed committees and associations in an effort to consult, share theory, form research based studies, and develops and implements? various programs to help make corrections and see positive results.

Successful programs that have been implemented are Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) created by Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe in Toledo, Ohio and The Morehouse Male Initiative (MMI) created at Morehouse College. SAAB, operates on the premise of the famous Booker T. Washington quote, "Educate the Black man, mentally and industrially and there will be no doubt of his prosperity." SAAB currently has chapters on more than 250 campuses (including middle and high schools) and in more than 39 states. SAAB members consist of young men of color who enjoy the privilege of social, cultural, and spiritual enrichment. With the implementation of SAAB, the number of African American and Latino men who graduated increased due to the creation of a positive peer community based on the spirt of caring, orienting students to campus life, emphasis on tutoring, and holding of various seminars which on focus on resume writing, financial literacy, and money management.

A similar ingenuity was created at Morehouse College, called The Morehouse Male Initiative (MMI). MMI focuses on the development of the whole man, which includes academics and the integration of leadership training, character building, and community service. A Morehouse spokesman said, "…the program [is structured] around the responsibilities for educated Black males to use their skills and abilities to improve conditions as a whole." Through disaggregated data it is possible to learn of the problem, see the need, determine the solution, and know whether or not the program that was put in place was effective. The next segment will explore additional advantages of attending an HBCU.

5. ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGES OF ATTENDING AN HBCU

Another advantage of attending an HBCU according to an article written by Lederman (2008) is that HBCUs graduate a proportionate amount of Black Americans who go on to pursue Ph.D.s in the realm of science and engineering. In layman's terms, HBCUs highly encourage their students to further their education post the baccalaureate degree. Lederman charts statistics that show Black institutions producing more Black Ph.D. recipients than any other type of institution in 2006. HBCUs as a whole were more likely to produce Ph.D. recipients per capita based on their enrollments. In 2006, alumni of HBCUs received 10.1 doctorates per 1,000 bachelor's degrees awarded to Black students compared to 7.9 percent for non-Black colleges. The last significant difference Black males encounter when attending an HBCU versus attending another type of educational institution is the emphasis placed on giving back to the community. The success of Black males in higher education does not just lie within the walls of HBCUs but within the whole African American community at large. It is the duty of the African American community to give back through such actions as volunteering and mentoring. This process is rather simple and it requires the two simple steps of caring and taking action. As a volunteer, we can help promote proper college preparation through linkage with pre-K-12 educational institutions. Through mentorship, we can encourage African American males to engage in campus activities and advise them academically as they navigate through their path of graduation. We can also encourage African American males to take the leadership role of starting their own Black male initiative program on their campus. We are all stakeholders in the cause of helping future generations of Black males to succeed in higher education. We must continue to make strides to improve graduation rates of African American males from all segments of American colleges and universities. As educated members of society we have the responsibility to lead by example and contribute to solutions and strategies that will move the next generation's experiences in higher education in the right direction.

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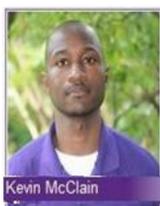
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