



Successful Black Males at a Hispanic Serving Community College: A Qualitative Multiple Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand experiences of Black males who successfully graduated from a northeast Hispanic serving community college (HSCC). The local model of successful minority students (LMSMS) was used as the conceptual framework for this study. There were two groups of participants, Black males who participated in a minority male initiative program and Black males who did not. The findings revealed that: 1) Black males at the HSCC faced both internal and external barriers that impeded their persistence to graduation, 2) Black male student engagement with similar peers and in cohort programs improved persistence and graduation, 3) Black males who created an internal “family” that encompassed faculty, peers, and staff at the institution were able to persist to graduation, 4) the lack of organization at the institution was a discouragement that Black males had to overcome to successfully persist to graduation.

Keywords: Black males, community colleges, Hispanic serving institutions, minority male initiatives

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

One population of students who enroll in community colleges in large numbers is Black men (Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCCSE], 2014). In fact, Bush and Bush (2010) indicated that community colleges serve as the primary point of entry into postsecondary education for Black men. In 2014, 570,080 Black men enrolled in community colleges (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2016). The vast majority of Black males enrolled in community colleges attend institutions without a specific designation or population served. According to IPEDS (2016), in 2014, 470,267 (82.5%) of the 570,080 Black males were enrolled in public community colleges that did not have a specific designation or population served (IPEDS, 2016).

Although more than 570,000 Black men enrolled in community colleges in 2014, many may never attain a certificate or Associate’s degree. Harris, Wood, and Newman (2015) found that nearly 70% of Black men begin their academic careers in community colleges, but 68% of Black men who start college do not graduate within six years (Harper, 2006). Scholars have conducted research studies to discover why Black men enter community colleges in large numbers yet drop- or stop-out in large numbers (Mason, 1998; Wood, 2012).

Definitions

- **African American:** Participants in this study self-identified as African American/Black as their race/ethnicity according to the institution's records. Used interchangeably with *Black* to define participant's race/ethnicity.
- **Black:** Participants in this study self-identify as African American/Black as their race/ethnicity according to the institution's records. Used interchangeably with *African American* to define participant's race/ethnicity.
- **Hispanic Serving Community College (HSCC):** community colleges that fit the criteria established by the Department of Education for Hispanic Serving Institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine experiences of Black male community college graduates of a Hispanic serving community college (HSCC); some of whom participated in a minority male initiative program and others who did not. Understanding the experiences of Black males who successfully complete community college was relevant because research has concluded that although Black males are the most engaged and enroll in community colleges in large numbers, they have the lowest persistence and completion rates (CCCSE, 2014). Furthermore, Béjar (2008) indicated, because Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are the fastest-growing higher education institutions in the United States, it is important to explore and understand the experiences of Black males who successfully earn an Associate's degree at HSIs. By asking Black males who successfully graduated, some of whom participated in a minority male initiative program and some who did not, about their experiences at a Hispanic serving community college, this qualitative multiple case-study may reach a thorough and in-depth understanding of what, if any, role a minority male initiative program contributes to their success.

Pinewood Community College (PCC) (pseudonym), the northeast Hispanic serving community college in this study was chosen because of its geographic location, its student population demographics, and its minority male initiative program. Historically, most research conducted at Hispanic Serving Institutions has been in the Southwest and focused on Hispanic persistence and graduation (Cuella, 2012; Marrero, 2013; Herber-Valdez, 2008). Furthermore, the ethnicity of the population studied at Southwest HSIs has primarily been Mexican. This study is unique because it focused on examining the experiences of Black males at a Hispanic Serving Community College. Studying Black males, understanding their experiences, and how they overcome barriers to graduate from a HSCC was an essential part of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Characteristics and Trends of Black Men in Community Colleges

Black males have historically been more likely to start their postsecondary education at a community college (Edwards, 2007; Lee & Ransom, 2011; Palmer et al., 2014). According to Wood and Williams (2013), "Black men in community college are more likely to be older, be classified as low-income, have dependents (e.g., children), be married, and have delayed their enrollment in higher education" (p. 3). They are more likely to have attended public schools and less likely to have completed college preparatory courses in foreign language, mathematics, and science (Wood, 2011; Palmer et al., 2014). Palmer et al. (2014) indicated that, overall, 67.7% of Black collegians and 71.8% of Black community college students are first-generation college attendees.

Research conducted in 2014 by the CCCSE, an organization that produces new information about community college quality and performance, concluded that Black male community college students agree on four key points: personal connections, high expectations, instructor quality, and engagement, all of which mattered to their success in college (CCCSE, 2014). According to the CCCSE's (2014) study, "Students consistently refer to the power of having strong relationships—a formal or informal network on campus that includes peers, instructors, advisors, and/or mentors" (p. 8). CCCSE further indicated that a recurring theme related to personal connection was mentioned during interviews by study participants that included "the value of someone who believes in me, someone the student respects and who makes time when the student needs help" (CCCSE, 2014, p. 8). Further, the study found that Black male community college students saw value in on-campus diversity and the presence of more faculty and staff of color (CCCSE, 2014).

Wood and Turner (2011) conducted interviews with Black male community college students and found that participants "who received attention from faculty members felt more positive about their relationships with them [faculty] and as a result, experienced greater engagement with faculty inside and outside the classroom" (Bauer, 2014, p. 158). Furthermore, Wood and Turner's study found that participants commonly referred to elements of faculty-student engagement as friendliness, encouragement, checking-in, listening to concerns, and monitoring school performance. Grant (2013) suggested that "high levels of institutional support, close contact with faculty mentors, and campus activity involvement all positively impact success rates for Black male collegians" (para. 4).

Some Black men who face low socio-economic conditions drop-out of community colleges after demonstrating average and above-average academic abilities; "yet, they make the decision to discontinue their education in most institutions of higher learning" (Tyler et al., 2013, para. 3). Tyler et al. further indicates, the nuclear family, peer groups, community, family-friendly system, and the school itself are significant influences on Black males' decision to persist in community college after demonstrating average and above-average academic abilities.

Minority Male Initiatives

In response to the urgent need to improve Black male persistence and graduation rates at community colleges, some have established minority male initiative (MMI) programs (Watson, 2015). According to Kevin Christian, Senior Program Associate for Diversity, Inclusion and Equity at the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), in 2010, AACC created a self-reported minority male student success database that lists minority male initiative programs at community colleges (K. Christian, personal communication, April 25, 2016; AACC, n. d.). However, Christian indicated that after a five-year period, nearly twenty programs decided not to report their programs because of loss of funding, leadership changes, legal issues surrounding programs dedicated to select populations, and insufficient institutional resources.

Formal and informal networks on campus powerfully influence Black male community college students' academic success (CCCSE, 2014). Formal and informal networks are often components of MMI programs and include peers, instructors, advisors, and/or mentors (CCCSE, 2014). Black males who participate in MMI programs have demonstrated positive academic outcomes and success, certainly suggesting that programs should be replicated and expanded in new places and settings (Wimer & Bloom, 2014). MMI programs do not operate at all community colleges and reaches only a limited number of minority males. This study looked at whether a minority male initiative program played a role in Black males' successfully graduating from a single Hispanic Serving Community College.

Barriers Faced by Black Male College Students

Padilla's et al.'s (1997) local model of successful minority students identified barriers faced by minority students who earned a degree at a large research university in the Southwest. Barriers identified in LMSMS included discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resources (Padilla et al., 1997). Discontinuity barriers include obstacles that hinder "a student's smooth and continuous transition from high school to college" (Padilla et al., p. 129). Lack of nurturing barriers "dealt with the absence of supportive resources on the campus needed to facilitate the adjustment and development of minority students" (Padilla et al., p. 131). According to Padilla et al., (1997), "Lack-of-presence barriers [are] associated with the absence of minorities in the curriculum, in the university's programs, and in the general university population of students, staff, and faculty" (p. 131). Resource barriers include lack of money and difficulty associated with the financial aid system in general (Padilla et al., 1997).

Some Black men encounter academic barriers prior to and upon entering college. The barriers can decrease their abilities to persist to graduation from post-secondary institutions. According to Edwards (2007), African Americans' college admissions rates, grade-point averages, and graduation rates are lower than the rates of their White and Asian counterparts. Furthermore, Edwards held that African Americans' have an inability to afford college, are over-represented in special education programs, and attain low scores on standardized tests. Anderson (1995) indicated that students entering college face barriers relating to lack of academic assessments and information about academic support services offered at the institution.

African Americans, and specifically African American men, can face numerous financial barriers while enrolled in college (Edwards, 2007; Palmer et al., 2014). The financial barriers include money for food, housing, transportation, books, supplies, and personal expenses (Anderson, 1995; Edwards, 2007; Smith, 2015). Anderson (1995) asserted that "Sufficient financial support is important: when it is not available [;] students must expend time and energy, which are not available for academic demands, to earn money" (p. 56).

Lacking family and relationship support has been identified as a barrier faced by Black male college students (Palmer et al., 2014). According to Palmer, "While research has shown a relationship between family support and academic success for Black males, some research has suggested that if Black males enrolled in community colleges are overwhelmed with family responsibilities (Strayhorn, 2011), this could impede their success" (p. 80). Furthermore, Wood (2011) observed that family responsibilities were likely to hinder the success of Black men entering community colleges compared to those who were already enrolled and had made progress towards their degrees.

Black men entering college face barriers related to social integration into the college. Tinto (1993) noted that the integration of students into college involves interactions with fellow students and faculty. Tinto (1993) indicated that students entering college go through steps similar to a rite of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation. Separation occurs when the student is in the process of disassociating from relationships, norms, and previous memberships. Transition involves students who are "in-between," leaving high school and acquiring the norms of college. Incorporation is the student becoming integrated into the norms of the college. If interactions experienced by Black males integrating into college are negative, it is likely they will leave. In contrast, if the overall interaction is positive, the student successfully integrates into college both socially, and academically, it is likely the student will persist.

Black Males at Hispanic-Serving Community Colleges

Excelencia in Education, a not-for-profit organization and information source for Latino educational achievement, indicated that the U. S. Department of Education defines Hispanic-serving institutions as “accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with twenty-five percent or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment” (Excelencia in Education, 2015, para. 2). HSIs are the fastest-growing higher education institutions in the United States (Béjar, 2008). HSIs operate as both two- and four-year institutions, the most common type being public two-year community colleges (Benitez, 1998). Almost half of all HSIs are community colleges (Excelencia in Education, 2015).

Nguyen et al., (2015) indicated that African Americans/Blacks were 10% of the student population at HSCCs, and the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2015) indicated that 46% of HSIs’ students were males. According to IPEDS (2015), in 2012, 102,285 and, in 2013, 103,010, Black males enrolled in HSCCs. Although Black male enrollment increased in 2012 and 2013, enrollment of Black males declined in 2014 at HSCCs to 99,813. The small decrease in enrollment in HSCCs reflected the nationwide trend of declining enrollment in community colleges (Juszkiewicz, 2015). Despite the downward enrollment of Black males in 2014 at HSCCs, IPEDS indicated that during the same period, graduation rates of Black males at HSCCs continued to increase. According to IPEDS, 9,783 out of 102,285 (9.5%) Black males graduated from HSCCs in 2012; 10,401 out of 103,010 (10%) graduated in 2013; and 11,242 out of 99,813 (11%) Black males graduated from an HSCC in 2014.

The education of students at Hispanic-Serving institutions is important, and HSIs must not ignore the educational experiences of students of other races/ethnicities. Santiago and Andrade (2010) stated that

Serving Latino students does not mean that institutions serve Latinos at the expense of other students. A Latino student success model is not an either/or proposition. Rather institutions that serve their students well can build on what works in serving Latino students effectively to better serve other students as well. (p. 8)

Due to the large number of Black males enrolling in community colleges (CCCSE,2014), specifically HSCCs, and because Hispanic Serving Institutions are the fastest growing segment of higher education in the United States (Béjar,2008), it is important that researchers fully understand Black males academic and personal experiences at HSCCs.

RESEARCH METHOD

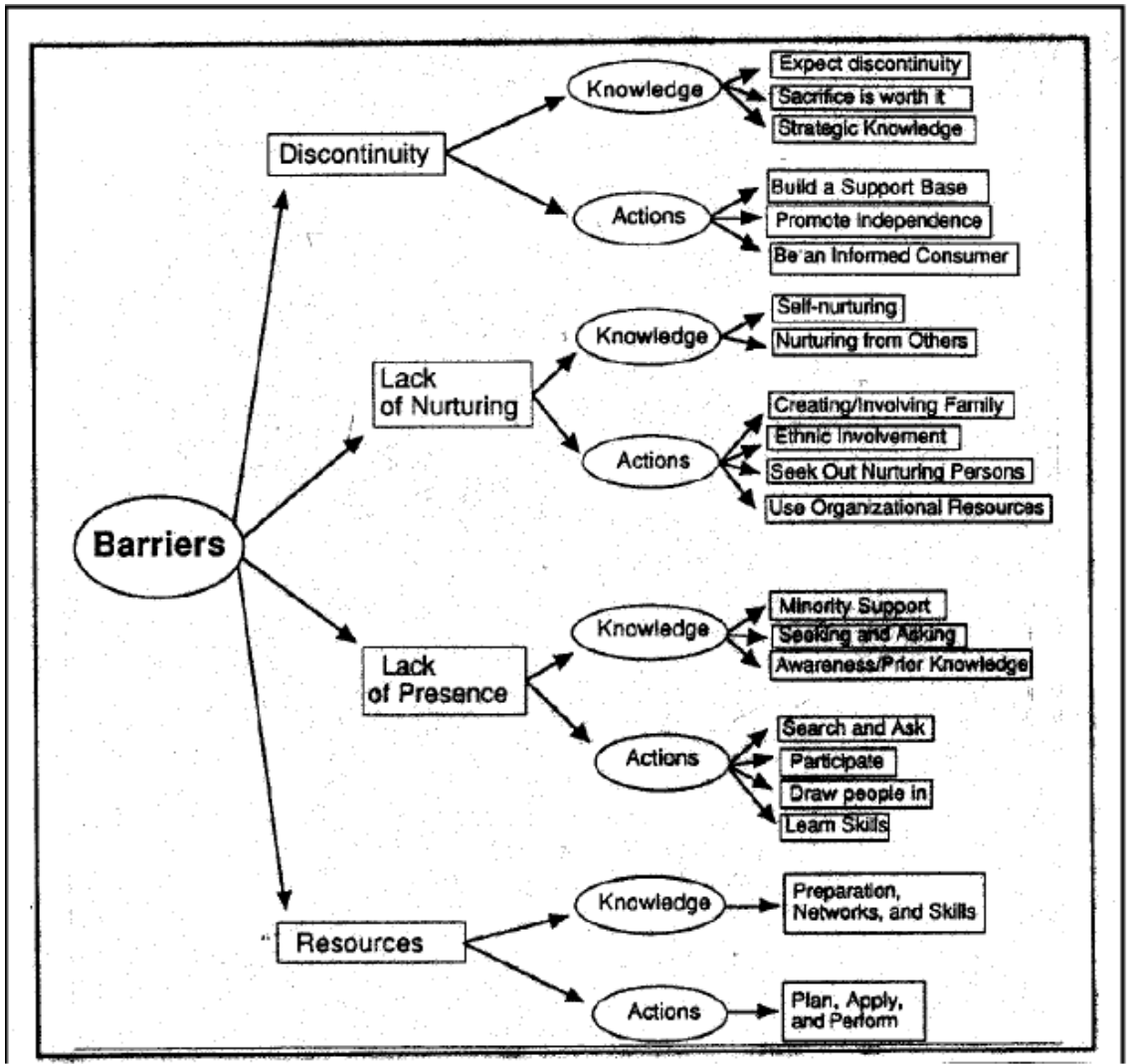
Padilla et al. (1997) developed the local model of successful minority students (LMSMS) that was used as the conceptual framework for this study. LMSMS is a further development of Padilla’s (1991, 1994) expertise model of successful college students, focusing on the actions and learned knowledge of students who successfully overcame barriers (discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resource barriers), while completing college. Padilla’s (1991,1994), earlier *expertise model of successful college students* “focused on knowledge successful students possess and the actions they employ to overcome barriers” (p. 126). Furthermore, the model indicated that “all students enter college with some level of theoretical and practical knowledge [and] suggests that successful college students are those who are in effect *experts* at being successful as students at a specific college or university” (p. 126). As Padilla points out, “Upon arrival on campus and throughout their tenure as students, they are

challenged by the institution to demonstrate increasing levels of theoretical knowledge before they can be awarded a degree. Such knowledge is typically acquired through courses and demonstrated through performance on tests or other formal assessment procedures” (Padilla et al., 1997, p. 126). Padilla’s early focus on minority students in college centered on engagement issues and not on how students overcame barriers. This model was then redeveloped as a “local” model to determine constraints or barriers such students encountered in addition to the more formal knowledge students encountered in the “expertise model”—sometimes referred to as the formal model—which inquired about institutional concerns of students. The new local model focused on “informal” issues instead and became the *informal model*—seeking to determine whether informal institutional practices had effects on minority students.

The local model of successful minority students advanced Padilla’s (1991, 1994) expertise model of successful students utilizing identified barriers faced by successful students and narrowly focused on minority students’ success at a specific campus. According to Padilla et al., (1997) the local model of successful minority students “was designed to reveal the strategies that successful minority students employ to overcome barriers to academic success in college” (p.125). Padilla et al., (1997) wanted to “[assess] the informal knowledge [that is] required by minority students to succeed in a specific campus” (p.125). Padilla et al., (1997) further indicated that a local model also could identify the heuristic, or formal knowledge associated with successful degree completion on a specific campus. Reference to the earlier Padilla model referred to the students’ acquisition of practical knowledge concerning college requirements leading to a successful college career. The local model assumes this ‘heuristic’ frame but also identifies issues, problems, and roadblocks minority males may experience at an institution in which they are outnumbered by other ethnic groups, but specifically located in Hispanic serving institutions (those whose numbers support a special designation by the federal government).

In this multiple case study, the local model of successful minority students identified barriers faced by Black males including those who participated in a minority male initiative program and those who had successfully earned an Associate’s degree at a single Hispanic-serving community college. Furthermore, this study utilized LMSMS to understand how Black males at a single Hispanic serving community college, some of whom participated in a minority male initiative program and some who did not, overcame the identified barriers and successfully graduated. The focus of this study mirrors the “local” Padilla study inasmuch as it also looks at an HSI and the issues Black males encountered there. The local model is presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Padilla's local Model-LMSMS. Reprinted from "College student retention: Focus on success," by R. V. Padilla, 1999, *Journal of College Student Retention* 1(2), 141. Reprinted with permission.



For each of the set of barriers identified, students can begin to understand and deal with barriers by identification and explanation. Willingness to confront these barriers is essential to student success, which Padilla suggests is graduation (1999). Each of these four barriers became the bases for the research questions that center on Black students attending Pinewood Community College, an HSI in this study. While some authors may argue that the “issues” minority males encounter in college relate to identity issues (which minority males encounter as “counter-culture”; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Saenz, 2013; Strayhorn, 2011), these same authors are, as Padilla suggests, offering new models of inclusion of these students in such institutions as they choose to attend.

Discontinuity barriers include obstacles that hinder “a student’s smooth and continuous transition from high school to college” (Padilla et al., 1997, p. 129). Padilla et al. (1997) held that

lack of nurturing barriers “dealt with the absence of supportive resources on the campus needed to facilitate the adjustment and development of minority students” (p. 131). According to Padilla et al., (1997) “Lack-of-presence barriers [are] associated with the absence of minorities in the curriculum, in the university’s programs, and in the general university population of students, staff, and faculty” (p. 131). Resource barriers include students’ lacking money and having difficulty associated with the financial aid system in general (Padilla et al., 1997). Utilizing Padilla’s LMSMS allowed this author to explore the experiences (discontinuity, supportive resources, lack of nurturing, lack-of-presence barriers) of HSCC Black men who successfully graduated. In this study, it was helpful to understand how and if Black males overcame barriers identified in Padilla’s et al., (1997) study. Research questions in this qualitative study capitalized on the framework used by Padilla et al. (lack of nurturing barriers). This work also questioned whether Black male students enrolled in an HSI encounter similar barriers of discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resources. In other words, does the type of institutional focus affect the students’ success (described as graduation)?

Methodology/Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to examine the experiences of Black male graduates of Pinewood Community College, who may or may not have participated in Urban Men of Color Initiative (UMOCI), a minority male initiative program. The overarching research question for this study was *How do the experiences of Black male students who participated in a male initiative program at Pinewood Community College differ from those of Black males who did not?*

Setting of the Study

Pinewood Community College is a large, urban, single site Hispanic-serving community college that enrolled 11,506 students in fall of 2014 (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2016). The College is part of Today’s University System (TUS) (pseudonym), a higher education system that includes community colleges, four-year colleges, a graduate center, and professional schools. Additionally, the College’s student population consists of 95% minorities: 64% Hispanic, 28% Black/African American, and 3% Asian (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2014). The Hispanic population at the institution is comprised of students with ethnic identities connected to the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and South America. The Black/African American student population is comprised of students with ethnic identities connected to all areas of the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean Islands.

Sample Selection

This study used a purposeful sampling approach to identify participants who were Black male graduates of Pinewood Community College. Furthermore, the selected participants could provide valuable and significant answers to the overarching research question: *How do the experiences of Black male students who participated in a male initiative program at Pinewood Community College differ from those of Black males who did not?*

PARTICIPANTS

Based on the focus of this study, participants’ self-identified as Black, male, over the age of 18, and a graduate of Pinewood Community College between 2014-2016. Upon identifying participants who met those general participation requirements, two separate participant groups

were formed. One group consisted of Black men who met general participant requirements and participated in the UMOCI program at PCC. The second group consisted of Black men who met general participant requirements but did not participate in the UMOCI program at PCC. The two groups were established to compare experiences of Black men who participated in the UMOCI program to those who did not and successfully graduate from the institution. Tables 1 and 2 provide a brief background of each participant.

Table 1. Geographical overview of UMOCI participants.

Pseudonym	#1 - Anthony	#2 - Richie	#3 - Andre	#4 - Don	#5 - Thomas
Age	26	26	30	35	26
Enrollment	Full-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Full-time
Employment	Full-time	Part-time	Part-time	Unemployed	Unemployed/ part-time
Marital status	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
Children	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Goal entering college	Transfer to 4-yr college	Transfer to 4-yr college	Transfer to 4-yr college	Transfer to 4-yr college	Transfer to 4-yr college
Grade point average	>3.0	<3.0	<3.0	<3.0	>3.0
Enrollment	2013	2013	2008	2003; 2014	2014
Completion	2014; reverse transferred credits	2014	2016	2016	2016
Remedial courses	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Funding	FA & loans	FA	FA & loans	FA	FA & self-pay

Note. FA = federal assistance.

Table 2. Geographical overview of non-UMOCI participants.

Pseudonym	#6 - KJ	#7 - DayShawn	#8 - Roy	#9 - Michael	#10 - Jimmy
Age	25	21	27	33	30
Enrollment	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time
Employment	Full-time	Part-time	Part-time	Unemployed	Part-time
Marital status	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
Children	No	No	No	No	No

Pseudonym	#6 - KJ	#7 - DayShawn	#8 – Roy	#9 - Michael	#10 - Jimmy
Goal entering college	Transfer to 4-yr college	Earning 60 credits/not transferring	Transfer to 4-yr college	Transfer to 4-yr college	Transfer to 4-yr college
Grade point average	Under 3.0	Under 3.0	Over 3.0	Under 3.0	Over 3.0
Enrollment	2014	2013	2013	2006/2012	2013
Completion	2016	2016	2015	2016	2014
Remedial courses	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Funding source	FA	SP	Loans	FA	FA/SP

Note. FA= federal assistance; SP = self-pay.

In addition to meeting the established criteria for the study, participants also had one or more of the following characteristics: single fathers, reared by grandparents, openly gay, reared in single and/or two parent households, and first generation college students. Nine of the ten participants attended PCC full time and one participant attended the institution part-time. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 35. Half of the participants had to complete remedial courses before graduating from PCC. Four of the participants had cumulative GPAs over 3.0 and six participants had cumulative GPAs of less than 3.0.

Data Collection

During the data collection phase of this study, some participants lived locally and others attended four-year universities outside of the northeast city. The author decided that the best data collection method for this study was to employ Skype as the primary source for conducting semi-structured interviews. During the recorded Skype interviews, the author asked participants questions related to their experiences as Black men attending Pinewood Community College.

Each of the questions followed the conceptual framework posited by Padilla (1997) focusing on discontinuity (high school to college experiences), lack of nurturing (elective family groups), lack of presence (skill building), and lack of resources (institutional support).

Data Analysis

A cross-case analysis, search for similarities and differences across multiple cases (Johnson & Christensen, 2014), was performed in this study. Once the semi-structured interviews were conducted and transcribed, open-coding was performed to organize and analyze the data. The analysis included reviewing transcripts several times in search of common phrases, nuances, and subthemes.

RESULTS

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and attempt to understand experiences of Black males who successfully graduated from a single northeast Hispanic serving community college. The major focus and general question of this study was: How does the local model of

successful students, based on Padilla's models (1991, 1994, 1997), reflect differences in the experiences of successful Black male community college students at PCC, some whom participated in a minority male initiative program and some who did not participate in the MMI program?

Table (3) is a summary analysis of the responses by UMOCI participants to non-UMOCI participants for each of the research questions. There is no question about the similarities of the responses of the two groups; in fact, the data indicate that the two groups' responses were nearly identical in terms of positive and negative aspects (Padilla's concept of "discontinuity") of being a student at Pinewood. Results of this study indicated that the UMOCI program played a similar role as other student support programs aiding the success of Black males at PCC. Most UMOCI participants indicated some aspects of the program that helped with their persistence and success at PCC. For most of the UMOCI participants, the program was a resource (peer-family, guidance to overcome personal and institutional barriers) that supported their success.

Reflecting on Padilla et al.'s (1997) model and specifically on "discontinuity" factors, these factors were only barriers if students had dropped out, stopped out and/or never graduated. That was not the case in this study, all the participants eventually graduated. They came to the institution understanding that there were formal (institutional) factors, which would affect their success, and they managed to overcome those factors (barriers) as they went through their respective programs. Therefore, the formal (institutional) barriers did not hinder student success.

Looking at the negative aspects (discontinuity) of UMOCI and non-UMOCI students at PCC, demonstrated similarities as they explained lack of activities that supported their admission and progressive continuity toward graduation, no doubt as an effect of institutional "disorganization". The difference between them was that UMOCI students began the refrain that they would continue throughout their interviews concerning the lack of Black faculty who would serve as role models. The non-UMOCI students also began their own discussion about finances that could have eroded their continued enrollment.

By comparing the UMOCI and non-UMOCI student responses it was evident that support systems and the students' abilities to develop skills requisite to program progress were completely similar as seen in their responses referencing special programs, positive relationships to faculty, staff, and administrators, involvement in student government and student activities. Only non-UMOCI students explained their reliance on mentors and specific support programs. The author was somewhat amazed at the fictive "family" that emerged from both sets of participants who saw external support in terms of developing a replacement family to aid in their college matriculation. This was in keeping with Padilla's concept of students' replacing formal support systems with informal ones.

There is no question that organizational barriers (poor advising, resource acquisition), prevented smooth transition from student to graduate in both cases of participants. However, what did emerge were the students' descriptions of obligations in the form of family responsibilities, money, housing, pressure from peers (UMOCI), and transportation (non-UMOCI).

Recommendations were pointed at bringing greater support and aid to Black males in specifically designed programs for student success—training, hiring more Black faculty, identification of issues that might arise out of predominant ethnic discrepancies (Hispanic verses Black), and increased student engagement (as in Tinto's (1993) model). Analysis of these recommendations focused on Padilla et al.'s (1997) and discovery of informal issues that conflicted with formal and institutional issues.

Table 3. Comparison of responses received by UMOCI participants to non-UMOCI participants.

Research Question	Common UMOCI Responses	Common Non-UMOCI Responses
1. What would you consider to be positive and negative aspects of being a student at Pinewood Community College?	Positive aspects of Pinewood Community College: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Faculty 2. Engagement with peers 3. Participating in UMOCI 4. Program administrators and staff 5. Student life activities 6. Diversity of the student population 	Positive aspects of Pinewood Community College: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Faculty 2. Engagement with peers 3. Participating in student support programs 4. Program administrators and staff 5. Student life activities 6. Diversity of the student population
	Negative aspects of Pinewood Community College: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disorganization of the college and specific departments 2. Lack of student life activities 3. Lack of Black faculty 	Negative aspects of Pinewood Community College: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disorganization of the college and specific departments 2. Lack of student life activities 3. Tuition increases
2. Were there internal or external mechanisms that helped you to successfully enter and graduate from Pinewood Community College?	Internal support mechanisms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UMOCI program and its staff/administrators 2. Faculty 3. Peers 4. Student clubs and student life activities 5. Participation on student government association 	Internal support mechanisms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Particular programs 2. Staff and administrators of a particular program 3. Faculty 4. Peers 5. Participating in student government association and clubs 6. Participating in student life activities 7. Mentors 8. Support services
	External support mechanisms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family and close friends 	External support mechanisms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family and close friends
3. Were there internal or external barriers that made it difficult for you to	Internal barriers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poor advisement 2. Lack of organization of the college 	Internal barriers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of organization of the college 2. Access to resources

Research Question	Common UMOCI Responses	Common Non-UMOCI Responses
successfully graduate from Pinewood Community College?	External barriers: 1. Finances 2. Housing 3. Peer pressure 4. Family/children obligations	External barriers: 1. Lack of finances 2. Housing 3. Transportation to school
4. What experiences did you have as a Black male at Pinewood Community College that made your formal and informal processes more difficult or easier than someone who is a Non-black male?	More difficult: 1. Not being Hispanic 2. Not speaking Spanish 3. Being a Black male in general	More difficult: 1. Not Being Hispanic
5. What further institutional support would you suggest to help more Black males graduate from Pinewood Community College?	Participant recommendations: 1. Expanding current and creating more programs for Black males 2. General counseling/training 3. College leadership interacting with students 4. More student life activities/engagement 5. Hiring more Black faculty and counselors 6. Better organization of the institution	Participant recommendations: 1. Expanding current and creating more programs for Black males 2. On-board training 3. More student life activities/engagement 4. Better organization of the institution

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings produced three general themes that aided in the understanding of the experiences of Black males who successfully persisted to graduation at Pinewood Community College:

1. Black males demonstrated positive regard for internal relationships with mentors, peers, faculty, and program staff,
2. Black males explained their positive regard for participation in student life activities and cohort support programs as positive,
3. Black males acknowledged that-“lacking organizational structure” discourages and sometimes impedes their progress toward graduation.

Review of Themes

Many of the themes discovered in this study were overwhelmingly similar for participants in both UMOCI and non-UMOCI groups. Overall, students in both groups reported a positive perception of their matriculation at Pinewood Community College. The theme related to a positive regard for internal relationships with mentors, peers, faculty, and program staff was expressed by all participants in the study. The participants formed relationships with mentors, peers, faculty, and program staff as descriptive of the success of Black male students at the institution. All UMOCI participants discussed their representation in at least one student life activity, club, or student government organization at the institution; and this activity was an example of positive engagement in the institutional and formal aspects of PCC. Some non-UMOCI participants who did not participate in student life activities, mostly due to obligations outside of school, did not mention student life activities as a positive support to their continued persistence to graduation. Study participants, regardless of the group, reported dissatisfaction with the organization of the College's student services and operations. The lack of organization in areas such as financial aid, admissions, and advisement was mentioned by nearly all of the participants as specific areas that impeded their persistence to graduation. Specifically, study participants reported experiences that included: (a) lack of collaboration among departments and divisions, (b) lack of departmental procedures, and (c) layout and locations of administrative offices. The results of the study reflected that Black males who successfully graduated from the College had similar experiences regardless of whether they participated in UMOCI or not.

IMPLICATIONS

Understanding experiences of Black males who successfully persist to graduation at Hispanic-serving community colleges is deemed essential for community college administrators who want to increase the persistence and graduation rates of Black males. Several practical implications of this study are provided and developed from the experiences of Black males who successfully completed an Associate's degree at a Hispanic-serving community college.

This study provided evidence that both the minority male initiative as well as other small cohort support programs that group students by commonalities, supported Black male persistence at the College. As most support programs at post-secondary institutions are voluntary, consideration should be given to making student participation in a support program mandatory for incoming and continuing Black male students. Black males in both groups described the support and assistance they received from peers, staff, and faculty by participating in support programs as positive. This study demonstrated Black males referred to aspects of and participation in small cohort programs, as a positive mechanism that supported their ability to persist and graduate.

Scholars have pointed out that peer and student support programs and initiatives have provided pathways for Black male college students to attain academic success (Flowers 2006; Strayhorn 2011; Wood 2011). Black males in this study pointed out that they would like to have more on-board exposures that included an introduction to support services offered at the college as well as academic skills building. Institutions should consider establishing a pre-entry program designed for new-entering Black males. The pre-entry program can be arranged by majors/academic departments, personal and social interest, and be staffed by Black male and female faculty and staff members. Creating such a program might make Black males feel more welcomed and connect them with similar peers and employees of the college. Although this is a

practice that is suggested for Black males; it could be expanded to serve other students at the institution.

Based on the theme that the institution's lack of organization caused Black males strife in overcoming barriers, institutions are encouraged to engage in a continual data collection of student experiences as it relates to campus operations. Furthermore, it is highly recommended that post-secondary institutions form a campus-wide committee, inclusive of students, tasked to annually review data results and make recommendations to the institution's senior administration. This practice could not only improve Black males success, it could have implication for all students attending post-secondary institutions.

Ashford (2014) indicated colleges can use new and emerging technology to promote and assist student persistence. As suggested by a UMOCI participant, institutions could include an interactive component to its website, reflective of an *on-line* generalist/advisor. In addition to the on-line advisor, institutions can implement an application that can be accessible for students through multiple devices including cell phones and tablets. The interactive application can provide Black males with immediate information about locations of services and possibly be enhanced to perform functions such as making appointments in academic and support service departments. Today's community college students utilize technology as part of daily routines and living; they expect their educational institution to be in-tune to new and changing technology. This implication may not only improve persistence and graduation of Black males; it could be beneficial for all students.

Institutions should consider creating an in-take form to gather information about the barriers that students face. Analysis of the data from the in-take form could ultimately result in services that are available throughout the institution that could support Black male students while matriculating.

The majority of the Black male participants in this study spoke negatively about the daunting task they faced in understanding, navigating, and receiving assistance from staff in the financial aid department at the College. In order to overcome barriers faced by successful minority students, Padilla et al., (1997) suggested that they had to "prepare early for the financial aid process, network with people who understood the financial aid system, and develop their time management skills" (p.131). Given the issues surrounding financial aid, institutions might consider reviewing and improving current financial aid processes to provide extra time and assistance for Black males. Recommendations include finding ways to automate necessary processes and tasks that students must complete in person. Additionally, institutions should implement processes that allow Black males to begin the financial aid process earlier and at off-peak times, allowing for more personalized attention. An option for this practice is to have financial aid staff members attend and be available at new student orientations designed primarily for Black male incoming students. This practice implication is one that could not only benefit the success of Black males at the institution; it could result in the success of other populations of students as well.

Finally, this study suggests that Black males found participating in student-life activities a positive experience during their matriculation at the College; however, many of the participants indicated dissatisfaction with the number of and diversity of student life activities offered. As part of the implications for practice, it is suggested that the institution develop new and expanded student life activities. Institutions should consider creating a student life activity such as a peer-to-peer mentoring program for Black males; the last three consecutive student government association presidents were active members of the UMOCI program. Therefore, building a formal leadership development program to enhance leadership skills of Black males may encourage more to persist to graduation.

The recommendations necessitate the urgent need for post-secondary educators to develop cohort relevant programs that provides Black male community college students the opportunity to connect to one another whom have similarities. Implementation of these recommendations can enhance and further the success rates of Black males who enroll at Hispanic serving community colleges.

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