

10-2018

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### Recommended Citation

Crenshaw, Andrè, "Community College Student Retention Improvement: Positive Impact of an Afrocentric Learning Community on African American Males Student Retention and Sense of Belonging" (2018). Pepperdine University, *Education Division Scholarship*. Paper 101. <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/gsepedu/101>

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# Community College Student Retention Improvement: Positive Impact of an Afrocentric Learning Community on African American Males Student Retention and Sense of Belonging

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## Abstract

This proposed study explores the impact Afrocentric learning communities (ALC) have on African American Males (AAM) student's retention and sense of belonging in community colleges. Sixty-five percent of AAMs perusing postsecondary educational pursuits do not graduate within six years. Establishing the lowest post-secondary completion rate in America, inclusive of all genders and racial groups (Harper, 2012). Research depicts the academic underachievement of AAM in higher education encompassing the last five decades with a minimal amount of literature on their actual academic achievements. Proposing to Utilize (post-) positivism explanatory Sequential Mixed Method and analyzing the successful progression of AAM in a learning community. This study proposes to use surveys and secondary data to determine if the results of the study will identify how the retention of AAMs can be improved. The researcher will apply Tintos' Student Integration Model (SIM) (Tinto, 2006), as the theoretical framework. The researcher proposes the outcomes of the study will identify how learning communities can best impact the retention of AAM in community college. Also, how AAM can be empowered and how faculty, administrators, and stakeholders can benefit from the body of research.

Keywords:

African American Male, Afrocentric, community college, learning community, microaggressions, persistence, retention, sense of belonging, under-represented.

## The Significance of the Study

What contributes to the retention of AAMs at the community college level? Further, what contributes to the negative trends of AAMs educational underachievement? Mass amounts of literature use a deficit-information framework, depicting AAM students as at-risk to fail, incapable, disadvantaged, and unintelligent, fostering negative stereotypes (Kim, and Hargrove, 2013). Scholars agree on the importance of the anti-deficit framework of highlighting the academic achievements of AAMs (Harper, 2010). Outcomes from this proposed study of an Afrocentric LC proposes to inform Administrators, AAM students, faculty, and counselors.

Of all African Americans entering post-secondary education, forty-eight point-five percent enter at community colleges (Shapiro, 2017). Measuring all academic outcomes, grade point average, persistence rates and percentage of associate degrees earned, AAMs are underachieving disproportionately in community colleges in comparison to other groups including ethnic and gender subgroups (Bush & Bush, 2010). The significant disparities between AAMs and their counterparts include certificate attainment, transfer to a four-year institution, and associate's degrees (Woods, Harris, 2013). A primary factor influencing achievement for AAMs is a sense of belonging (Perrakis, 2008). This study explores the positive impact of LCs on AAMs at the community college level, student retention, institutional commitment, social integration, LCs, LC counselors and a sense of belonging. The outcomes of this proposed study seek to assist institutions in how to more efficiently allocate resources to programs to improve retention for AAMs in higher education.



## Background

The California community college learning community (LC) has over 49 consortium members serving over 4000 students. The proposed sample population is LC counselors from nine community colleges within the Southern California area. Over Sixty-five percent of the student population are people of color (UC, 2011) and serving the highest level of low-income communities in the United States (UC, 2011). The Board of Governors officially recognized the studied LC as a legitimate statewide student success program on January 14, 2008 (elcamino.edu, 2017). The LC serves highly motivated, at risk, underrepresented students.

The focus of this study is on the retention rate of AAM in California community colleges. Twenty-five percent of the incoming AAM students who enrolled in a Southern California community college at the start of a cohort did not persist past their first semester (Bush, and Bush, 2010). Twenty-four months after the entrance of AAMs into community college, fifty-six percent of the AAM population had dropped out (Bush & Bush, 2010). Seventy-six percent of African American men in California who enrolled as first-time freshmen remain retained after the first year, the lowest rate of all other groups (Bush & Bush, 2010). These low persistence rates confirm the importance and need for Afrocentric LCs in community colleges.

Research conducted on the topic of a sense of belonging with AAM on college campuses resulted in two emerging themes, anti-Black male stereotyping and marginality, causing extreme hyper-surveillance and control (Smith, Allen, Danley, 2007). Participants in the research encountered racial microaggressions in three domains: (a) campus-academic, (b) campus-social, and (c) campus-public spaces (Smith et al., 2007). AAMs are under extreme scrutiny from law enforcement on and off campus (Smith et al., 2007). AAMs identified as being out of place and with no sense of legitimately belonging on a college campus (Smith et al., 2007). Research shows that AAMs experience hostility on college campuses more than all other segments of the population (Smith et al., 2007).



## Methodology

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods will be used to analyze data. The quantitative data and results provide a general depiction of the research problem with the subsequent analysis. Qualitative data collection is used to refine and further explain the general picture. Qualitative data analysis follows the quantitative data collection. In Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods, the procedure consists of integrating the two collections of data with analytical designs that can include theoretical frameworks and philosophical assumptions (Creswell, 2014). The integration of the two methods produces a more insightful comprehension of the problem than both methods alone (Creswell, 2014). The proposed timing of the data methods is sequential, with emphasis on the quantitative portion of the data collection first.

Number one, LC will be provided with a survey consisting of twenty-five questions, including four demographic questions. Number two, Collected surveys will be analyzed using Qualtrics, research instruments used to produce data from surveys. Number Three, the proposed analysis procedures will consist of interviews with the LC counselors from the nine consortiums, for a sample size of approximately twenty LC counselors. Number four, The researcher proposes to analyze the relationship between the following variables, retention, a sense of belonging, institutional commitment, social integration, LC, and LC counselors.

The researcher has an established relationship with the state-wide coordinator for the consortiums in the LC. The researcher regularly attends monthly progress meetings with the twenty counselors from the nine sample LC locations. The LC is agreeable to providing access to the researcher to collect data. Before data collection, the appropriate IRB approval process will take place.

## Data Analysis

A comparison analysis will examine a sample population of learning communities (LC) counselors from the nine sites to determine what variables could potentially explain the differences in retention rates. The research will conduct quantitative analysis by applying inferential statistical analysis and testing and analyzing research questions with IBM SPSS software. This proposed study will consist of eight categorical independent variables and six interval dependent variables. The generation of descriptive statistics will be analyzed first, including percentages, means, frequencies, and standard deviations to provide characteristics of the samples. According to Field (2012), the analysis of categorical independent variables containing one or more interval dependent variables, a comparison of means is the most effective process to determine outcomes. The data analysis method proposed a multivariate analysis of variance (MONOVA), this will determine the significant effects of each of the eight independent variables against the six interval dependent variables. Proposing further post hoc analysis utilized for the significant effects of each of the independent variables with several categories. Significant effects discovered by post hoc comparisons identified by analysis of variance (ANOVA). The level of significance will be set at alpha = .05 the statistical test.

## Hypothesis

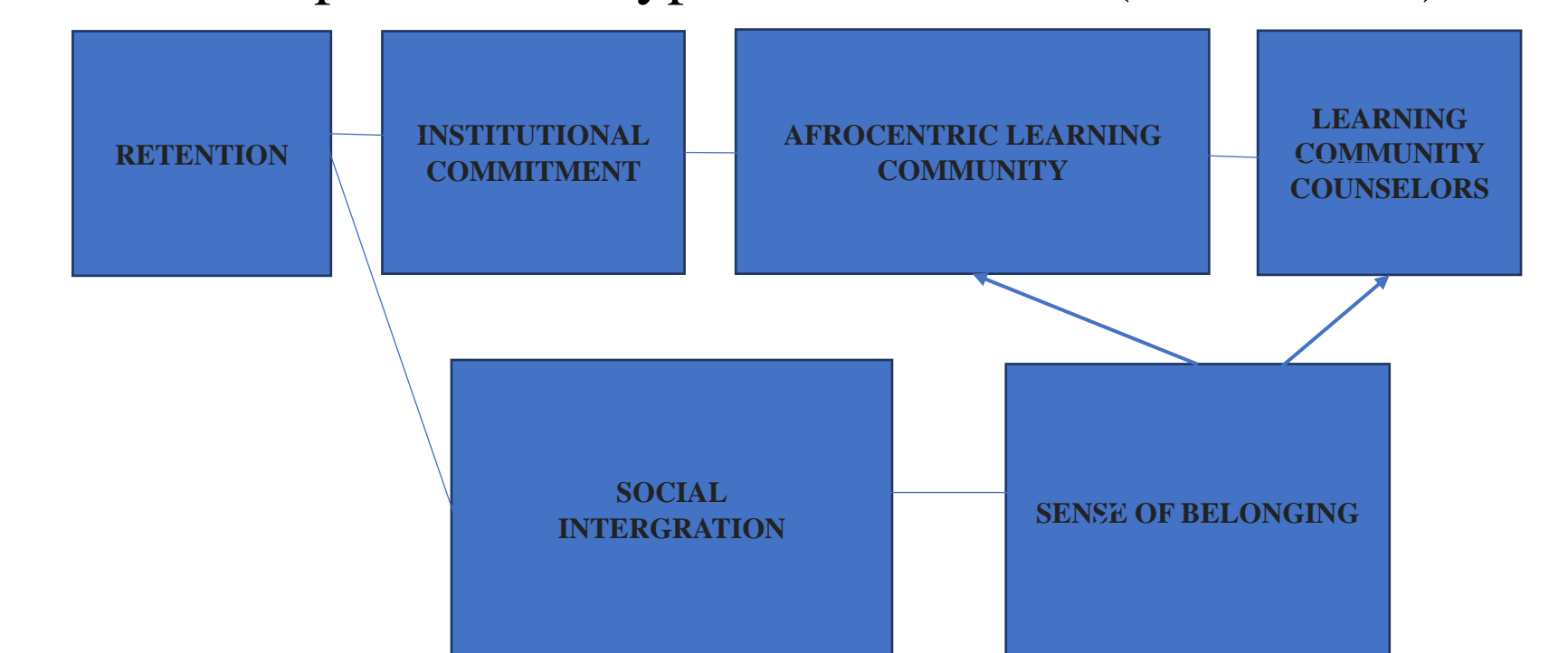
The hypothesis is, test results will show a statistical significance > .05% in retention of AAM community college students and, the impact that Afrocentric LCs have on their retention. Analyzing inter-group-related differences, determining what variables could potentially explain those differences (Creswell, 2014); contrasting sample groups from nine LC sites, processes and practices implemented (MONOVA) (Field, 2012). Proposing this process because, there are nine means of independent groups for different effects of multiple dependent variables (Field, 2012).

## Status

Next Steps:

- Preliminary Defense
- Submit IRB Approval
- Analyze Data
- Complete Chapters 4 and 5
- Schedule Dissertation Final Defense
- Seek Publication, Funding, Independent Research Award

Adapted from, Hypothetical Model (Tinto, 2005)



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