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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 (ALCs) have on African American Males (AAMs)’ student’s retention and sense of belonging in college communities. Sixty-five percent of AAMs pursuing 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 Tinto’s 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 African American college students. 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 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.

Methodology

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods will be used to analyze data. The quantitative and qualitative data and results provide a general depiction of the research problem with the subsequent analysis. Qualitative data collection is refined to further refine and explain the general pattern. Qualitative data analysis follows the quantitative data collection. In Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods, the procedure consists of integrating the two components 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 consortium in the LC. The researcher regularly attends monthly progress meetings with the twenty counselors from the nine sample LCs. 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 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 2008 (categorical) analysis of variance (ANOVA), this will determine the significant effects of each of the eight independent variables against the six interval dependent variables. Proposing post hoc analysis utilized for the significant effects of each of the independent variables with several categories. Significant effect discoveries have been identified by analysis of variance (ANOVA). The level of significance will be set at alpha = .05 the statistical test.