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Running head: MINORITY MALES

Exploring the Special Needs of Minority Males

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Western Kentucky University

Exploring the Special Needs of Minority Males

Introduction

Going to college is probably one of the most anticipated events in early life for students and their parents. The significance of a college education varies across cultures, genders, and socioeconomic statuses, it is also largely based on values and expectations set by ones family system. Regardless of the culture, values, or expectations education advocates would agree that college should be an opportunity all children have. Research proves that for certain groups of student's college sits just above the glass ceiling. This paper will attempt to discuss the issues minority males face in relation to college, as well as reveal current programs and initiatives that are helping remove any barriers that make college seem inaccessible and intimidating for minority males.

High School Male Students

Males, especially minority males have college student issues that white males or female minorities do not experience. One big issue that causes these minority males issues in college is that they are less likely to get there than their female counterparts. If the minority males do not make it to college they are obviously less likely to succeed. As student affairs professionals working in a college setting, it is important that we assist the high schools any way we can and in order to assist we must first understand the problem. According to the Civic Report, in the class of 2003 there is a large gender gap in students that graduate from high school. However, the gap is extremely wide compared to minority males and their female counterparts. Based on the Civic Reports findings:

The overall national public high school graduation rate for the class of 2003 was 70 percent. The gender gap in graduation rates is particularly large for minority students. Nationally, about 5 percentage points fewer white male students and 3 percentage points fewer white male students and 3 percentage points fewer Asian male students graduate than their respective female students. While 59 percent of African-American females graduated, only 48 percent of African-American males earned a diploma. Further, the graduation rate was 58 percent for Hispanic females, compared with 49 percent for Hispanic males (Greene, J., Winters, M., 2006).

The low graduation rate of minority males is for a variety of reasons, but if they do graduate high school are they prepared for college coursework? Typically minority male students are systematically excluded from college preparatory classes (Haycock, 2002). Minority male students are not offered the classes necessary to prepare themselves for college coursework, but are overrepresented in special education courses. These factors do not allow for minority males to successfully transition to college (Weatherspoon, 2007).

Current Programs

There are several ideas that work to prepare minority males for university coursework and eventually help them while at the university of their choice. One suggestion that has been sweeping the nation with mixed reviews is Educational Vouchers. An educational voucher allows someone who lives in a more impoverished area to attend the school of their choosing with the financial help of a voucher. The positives of the voucher program are that every child has the possibility to get an equal

education. Another positive is that the school systems will become more competitive with one another. However the argument against the education vouchers is that the majority of schools students attend accepting the vouchers are private, religious institutions causing an issue with separation of church and state due to the vouchers being federally funded (McCloskey, 2008).

Another option schools are beginning to use is an equity officer. The equity officer ensures that everyone in the school has equal access to education regardless of gender or race. One school district in particular added an equity officer and the drop-out rate lowered by 2.5% in just one year. Although, it may seem like a small amount over time this could make a drastic change in the amount of minority males graduating college and inevitably attending college (2007). Along with having an equity officer the school district of Anne Arundel is working collaboratively with parents, community organizations, and each other to better the environment for the minority students.

Recruitment and Admissions

Although some initiative has been taken at the high school level to progressively prepare more minority males for postsecondary study, student affairs professionals in higher education are still asking, where are all the minority men? This question has been a concern in college and university recruitment and admission offices in attempts to increase enrollment numbers for minority men. Minority males represent an underserved student population among many of the countries colleges and universities. Although reasons for such low representation range from financial issues to lack of preparedness academically, researchers are committed to solving this problem and are actively

contributing ways for minority males to have strong representation within higher education academia.

Minority males have to make many important decisions about college as does any other group of college students. Studies suggest that when serving minority males it is important to explore the reasons they choose to attend a certain college over other college and university options. One decision factor minority male's credit to their choice of higher education institution would be the importance of feeling significant to the institution. It is important that this group of students feel attending college contributes more to the institution than just numbers and quotas. Another factor minority men consider would be available financial aid that can offer full coverage for the cost of attending college. In recent years the percentage of minority enrollment at schools specializing in engineering has decreased. According to a recent article by Annie Georges, studies find that, "meeting the financial need of minority students is vital in addressing the problem of attrition observed among engineering communities" (2000). This article also states that family resources for students from families with an annual income of less than $50,000 could only cover an estimated 32% of a four year college education at a public institution. One solution to the problem of minimal financial aid coverage identified by The Education Resources Institute would be more participation in early commitment financial aid programs which are designed to provide middle and high school age children from low socioeconomic families a guarantee of financial aid coverage once they enter postsecondary study (2000).

Minority males also find the presence of diversity within the campus significant when choosing to attend a college or university. Like many minorities, minority males

struggle with assimilating into a predominately white campus. Small liberal arts colleges have the most work to do in this area being that minority students tend to have lower grades and graduation rates at these types of institutions. This can be credited to the smaller minority populations in liberal arts communities, fewer minorities who hold administrative positions and nonsupport of cultural interest across the campus (Zimbroff, 2005). Studies show that linking the mission of the admissions office to diversifying a campus environment can create a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive climate (Elam, 2005). In addition to the above decision factors minority males contemplate upon selecting a college, other reasons include having a strong family support system and feeling academically prepared for college level coursework.

Minority Male Recruitment

While exploring reasons minority males choose college has become increasingly important, researchers are also considering what works for minority males in regards to recruitment and admissions practices among institutions of higher education. A major contribution to the enrollment of minority male college students would be active minority recruitment programs. Minority recruitment programs specialize in meeting the needs of minority students. There are wide arrangements of recruitment programs available that cater to African American and Hispanic students, as well as male student needs. The most successful recruiting programs are ones that also focus on financial aid, graduating, and career exploration. Federal funds and grants ranging from $15,000 to $30,000 have recently been awarded to ten Georgia universities to create and execute programs aimed at preparing and enrolling more black males in the system of higher education (2005). This award is a great accomplishment for The University System of Georgia's Board of

Regents being that minority recruitment is expensive and takes much time and dedication. Institutions committed to increasing the enrollment of minority males should be willing to spend the necessary time and money to locate and educate prospective male students on the possibilities of attending college.

Within specialized minority recruitment programs males also benefit from the idea of minorities recruiting minorities. The "I" versus "Us" mentality demonstrates the importance of minority group recruiting. Students from minority cultures where unified accomplishments are more admirable than single accomplishments may not respond well to the competitiveness within the current college admissions process and may struggle with "promoting themselves as superior college material" (Zimbroff, 2005, p.817). One research article attempts to explain the importance of minorities working with minorities to increase college enrollments. Author Jennifer Zimbroff explains that minority groups "value allegiance and cohesion over individual success and achievement" (2005, p.816).

California State University administrators and admissions officers have teamed up with one of the largest African American churches in Los Angeles, West Angeles Church of God in South Central Los Angeles, in order to attract and educate more black men on the tradition of higher education in hopes to raise the current number of black male attendants from 7,200 to a number closer to the amount of black female students which is approximately 17,000 (Epstein, 2006). California State University Chancellor uses West Angeles Church to deliver Super Sunday education sermons to young black men. Super Sunday sermons have since been extremely successful in advertising college as an obtainable goal to young black men in the Los Angeles community by promoting resources available to help earn a college education. Recruiting through the church and

using its clergy and black male leaders made the possibilities of higher education seem less intimidating for the youth and their families (Epstein, 2006).

Student Affairs professionals should also find significance in breaking the trend of diversifying through football and other athletic organizations on college campuses. When some of our nation's top Division 1 schools retain a student body that has more black male athletes than non athletes, admissions officers and other university administrators should question their institutions recruiting and diversity values. In 2006, top institutions of higher education such as Duke University and Oregon State University, had well over 20% of black male students also serving as athletes, while less than 7% of students at these schools were black male non athletes (Lederman, 2008). Lederman (2008) also suggested that admissions offices adopt the successful recruiting techniques of their institution's athletic department, otherwise known as The Coach Model, in order to diversify the population of minority males enrolled in college. The coach's model can be highly effective for minority males as it encourages serious commitment to locating, matriculating, educating, and graduating recruits. Once minority males have succeeded in the admissions process of college the next step is retaining them as college students pursuing degree completion.

Retention

The retention of minority males is a huge issue on many campuses across the nation. There is a major concern sweeping across the nation as to why minorities are least likely to graduate from higher education institutions. It is well documented that, once admitted to predominantly white institutions of higher education, many ethnic minority students leave school, apparently without achieving their desired education goal, at a much higher

rate than do their white counterparts Sedlacek and Webster (1978). The factors that contribute to high rates of attrition among ethnic minority males include alienation and lack of academic preparation, as well as inadequate counseling Reed (1978). According to Walton (1979) the minority student who has a delayed reaction to academic life but has the potential for academic progress may manifest some or all of the following characteristics:

1. A poor academic record.
2. An apparently uncaring attitude about academic achievement.
3. Enough potential that some faculty recognize that the student is simply not applying himself.
4. A certain wit and quickness in matters apart from the classroom.
5. A tendency to challenge the instructor about the social relevance of certain subject matter, while failing to master that subject matter.

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) identified several "noncognitive predictors," which they found useful in attempting to predict minority male success in higher education, and one such predictor was "the availability of a strong support person." It is posited here that this predictor is critical to the retention of ethnic minority male in higher education, and that the person who functions as a role model for the minority male is perhaps the single most important key to retention Walton (1979). We often only offer these opportunities to students nearing the end of their tenures at our institutions in order to enhance their career possibilities. What happens to our students who do not reach the end? That is the

unanswered question many of our mentoring programs fail to address. Mentors provide just what these students need to be successful in the college and university settings -- support, understanding, positive role modeling, and instruction for people in different stations of life. True mentors motivate and drive us to reach the next level of success, while offering advice on how to get there. By providing academic, career-related and psychosocial assistance to their protégés, mentors also provide the personalized attention minority males need in dealing with the everyday problems they may encounter in the college and university environment.

It is clear that mentoring programs positively influence student retention and success, and research has suggested that there is a positive relationship between participation in mentoring programs and the "persistence rates" of minority students Hurte, Vernon J., Black (2002).

Current Programs

Black Men at Western (BMW) is an organization at Western Kentucky University that specializes in promoting African-American males to strive for excellence. This organization provides guidance for black males, mentoring sessions, networking opportunities, and it helps black men become better role models in the community. The objectives of BMW are:

- Mentoring - Mentoring program that has upperclassmen connect with underclassmen

- Forums - Interview Process, How to Fill Out A Scholarship, Tutoring Sessions, Time Management
- Membership Retention - BMW is a place that black males want to be. Creating a sense of ownership and belonging
- Community Service - @ least 10 hours per semester
- Scholarship(s) - Various Scholarships around WKU Various Other Black Scholarships
- Networking - Meetings, Speakers, Faculty/Student Connection
- Graduation - Help all members of BMW to graduate with a job, internship, or some overall sense of where they want to be headed after WKU.
- Events/Parties/Fun Events - Giving our BMW members a balance between business and fun.

The African-American Male Learning Community, started four years ago at the University of West Georgia (UWG) by Dr. Said Sewell III, is part of the Center for African-American Male Research Success and Leadership. The center addresses challenges faced by Black male students in the academy through several initiatives, including a leadership development program and a pre-college summer conference. Last year, the center and its learning community were honored by the Georgia Board of Regents with a “Best Practices” citation for innovation.

Unlike learning communities founded around various subjects, the program is focused on Black males, a student segment that has been plagued nearly everywhere by high dropout rates in the freshman year, according to a statewide study by the board of

regents. Other elements of West Georgia's retention program help students keep up and push harder toward graduation success.

The good news, say West Georgia officials, is that Black male students introduced to the school through the center, have stayed in school, drawn better grades than before, and in various ways shown better adjustment to college. Obviously growing in comfort and self-confidence, they have shown exceptional leadership skills. Six of them have been elected to the student senate. School records indicate that the mean grade point average for students involved in the center's learning community is a 3.0, while that of Black male students who are not involved is a 2.65. Additionally, of the 25 Black male students who enrolled in the initiative four years ago, 22 are still enrolled at UWG.

Graduation

Hall and Rowan

In a qualitative study of African American males in higher education researchers sought to learn the reasons African American males gave for declines in graduation and enrollment from higher education institutions (Hall & Rowan, 2001). Hall & Rowan conducted six focus group sessions with roughly eight to twelve African American males in each group. After an extensive literature review the researchers selected questions from the current literature to pose to the focus groups. Each group was audio recorded and transcribed. Keywords were then selected from a list after a computer categorized the raw data. Additionally from these keywords researchers analyzed them to locate patterns from which they could then provide conclusions (Hall & Rowan).

From the data analysis Hall & Rowan (2001) found that personal factors was mentioned the most in the focus groups for factors that encouraged these students to attend college. The data also showed race was frequently mentioned in regards to special issues African American males face and the campus environment is a problem African American males have in enrolling and staying in school. Lastly, the data showed that to attract more African American males to higher education institutions, the institutions should diversify the population and to successfully educate these males mentoring programs are necessary.

In addition, the study by Hall & Rowan (2001) shows mentoring programs are not only needed but are requested by African American males when asked. Surprisingly, the campus environment ranked high with 215 mentions in the data analysis. It is vital our institutions of higher education not only improve the campus environment but dig deeper to reveal the connection, if any, of improving the campus environment to diversifying the institution population. Therefore, we can imply diversity in multiple forms is vital to the overall success of African American males and cultural schisms exist between African American males and higher education institutions, among others (Hall & Rowan). In addition to the Hall & Rowan study, Lee (2008) stated the plight of African American men is rooted in social and economic inequities such as attending low-performing schools, low expectations from others, and the absence of black role models. However, colleges and universities are striving towards increasing and supporting African American men in higher education.

Programs

Many institutional programs include retention efforts and supports services. Lee (2008) states what's working is matching student with mentors, establishing black male student groups, summer college courses, and programs which help black men with course planning. In addition to the aforementioned efforts, Lee College created a program to improve the grade point averages of African American men in courses they lagged in. The program used African American men who earned a B or better in the course to retake the course for a stipend in addition to serving as a role model for students who may need help in the class (Lee, 2008). Ohio University has created an alliance with eights historically black schools called the Interlink Alliance. Interlink Alliance not only hopes to focus on student leadership and faculty development among the nine schools but also on recruiting and retaining black men in the nine institutions (Hendricks, 2008). The City University of New York (CUNY) has begun the Black Male Initiative, after a yearlong study, to include such efforts as counseling programs for black men, new centers for academic, financial, and person issues, recruitment in top high schools and prisons, and support for faculty to better reach black students (Jaschik, 2005). CUNY also created the Male Development and Empowerment Center at Medgar Evers (Jaschik). This special program was created to focus on black men. Services include monthly discussion titled "Word Is Bond", covering selected issues that affect black men and the opportunity for these men to raise any issues affecting them. "Phat Pockets", is a series of financial literacy programs covering how to open a bank account and making sense of cashing and making paychecks. Other programs include fatherhood programs which help single fathers who have custody of their children and re-entry programs to help those finishing

prison terms. At the national level “Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count”, was created as a multiyear national initiative to help more community college student succeed. Achieving the Dream is specifically concerned about students that traditionally face significant barriers to success including students of color and low income students, common descriptors for African American men. States supporting the program include Florida, North Carolina, New Mexico, Texas, Virginia, Connecticut, Ohio, Washington, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. Although, many programs may exist more should and can be done not only for African American men but minority men in general.

Conclusion

At the administrative level, institutions should consider further development of faculty and staff on development and understanding minority men. Also, institutions should look to support not only the programs but the faculty and staff who are the mentors of our minority men. Students should be guided to advocate for their needs from not only the institution but at the local, state, and federal level.

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