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Academic Achievement amongst Minority Students

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The crux of equal education for all stems from the decision from a Supreme Court case in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*. In this case, Oliver Brown, along with several other plaintiffs and the NAACP, was suing the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education because of the segregation and inequality children faced in the school system. For example, Brown's daughter had to walk one mile through a railroad switchyard to get to her all black elementary middle school, even though there was an all white elementary school seven blocks away from the Brown home. With such a strong court ruling in place for over fifty years, one would think the education system in America welcomed all with open arms, unfortunately, this is not the case. Due to this inequality or segregation as some may refer to it as, there are special needs specifically for racial minority students. It is extremely important to understand and dissect the obstacles racial minority students face in order to, as Student Affairs professionals, develop means to overcome or lessen these obstacles. Some obstacles or trends discussed in this paper include: academic achievement amongst racial minority students, retention rates and programs amongst this population of students, mentoring programs for these students, as well as the specific needs of Latino students.

Educational Gap

What causes so much disparity and inequality for our racial minority students? Many blame the inequality at the collegiate level amongst the racial minority students is due to the fact that there already exists an educational divide or gap prior to students even entering the collegiate realm. It's important however, that Student Affairs professionals and administrators do not label racial minority students as being "students at risk" just

because of their racial identity (Chaudari, et.al, 2008). Many individuals that identify as being a racial minority come from a household or family in which education is strongly valued, are economically sound, and have many generations of college graduates (Guiffrida & Douthit). Therefore, when speaking of this educational gap, and any special need or issue these minority students face, one must be careful to look at these students as having the ability to succeed just like any other student, however, these students may need help identifying and overcoming certain obstacles.

According to an article written at the University of Rochester, nearly 45% of the African American population have attended college which is fairly close to the 53% of the White population that has attended college (Guiffrida & Douthit). However, what is even more alarming is that recent studies indicate that only 40% of African American college students who begin college will actually graduate compared to the drastically higher 60% of White students who will graduate college that being the experience (Cross, 2005). Student Affairs professionals and administrators must look at barriers as a means to create an opportunity for the minority students. Additionally, Student Affairs professionals must look at creating opportunities by rejuvenating education not creating remedial opportunities. Many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic Serving Institutes (HSIs) already have programs and curriculums in place that help in the process of rejuvenating education instead of lowering the academic standards for minority students. Student Affairs professionals must also look at the impact that attending Primarily White Institutions (PWIs) has upon minority students. Minority students at PWIs tend to have lower GPAs due to challenges way beyond the apparent academic gap or lack of academic preparedness prior to entering college (Bowen & Bok,

1998). Appendix A, Figure 1, shows the differences in grades received categorized by various ethnic or racial identities. Our minority college students face many more challenges and burdens beyond the academia realm, all in which play a factor in the students' grades.

First Generation College Students

Another issue many of our minority students face is in succeeding in academia, is that they are first generation college students. What this means is that these students are the first individual in their immediate family to attend college, meaning they may not have the support system needed to transition smoothly into college. The first year of college for any individual can be a tough transition, but many students have a family member that has been through the collegiate experience before, so he/she can give their student the behind the scenes tour of college life as well as the ins and outs of registering for classes, financial aid, and so much more. Without that vital 'insider' information, these first generation students miss out on a lot of opportunities and important deadlines and dates, causing more obstacles for them to overcome. Additionally, many of the students do not get support for their families in general, and it may not be due to the fact that their families are unfamiliar with the college experience. This lack of support could come from many different venues.

Low Income Backgrounds

Many times, the minority students that attend college are also from a lower socioeconomically class than the majority group of students creating a cyclical type of problem that minority students may face through the duration of the collegiate career. These students are encouraged to file for grants and scholarships as much as possible, but

sometimes the state government runs out of funding, or the students do not have the academic resume to receive a scholarship, or perhaps the student has no idea how to go about finding and applying for grants, scholarships, and even loans. Many of these students also may feel guilt for attending college if their families are struggling back home (Awad, 2008). According to a study in ACPA's Journal of College Student Development, many minority students would not ask or accept help from home due to feeling like a financial burden, when in fact, many of the students actually work numerous jobs off and on campus to pay the bills and send extra money home to the family (Chaudhari, P., et al, 2008). Therefore, many of our minority students are working to pay for school and living expenses, as well as the possibility of sending money back home to their families in addition to going to school. Having multiple jobs or even one job full time does not leave much time for a student to study and succeed in college.

Home and Family Relationships

A minority student's home and family can also play a big role in how well they do in college. However, the studies that show this are focusing primarily at PWIs, not HBCUS. Researchers Fordham and Ogbu have spent a lot of time looking at African American students and what relates to their academic achievement. In their 1986 study, they argued that if an African American student wanted to succeed in college, he or she must essentially break ties with their family members (Awad, 2008). Fordham and Ogbu also discussed the theory of 'acting white', or becoming raceless, in order to excel in a predominantly white world of academia (Awad, 2008). Additionally, there is the idea out there that many minority students come from low income families and are predominantly

first generation students, so they must distance themselves from their families as well in order to find support elsewhere (Awad, 2008). Tinto, in his 1993 breakaway theory study stated something very similar. Tinto believed that minority students must break away from individuals from back home in order to succeed. However, many feel that this theory is not adequate due to the fact that Tinto's theory is more applicable to individuals transitioning within a culture such as from a college freshman to sophomore, not someone entering a new culture completely as in a high school student entering college (Awad, 2008).

Family members and friends can either become an asset or a liability for minority students in college. If a family member or friend contributes in some way to the students' experience, even if that family member or friend has not attended college, that individual is seen as an asset to the student. However, if the family member or friend has expressed any type of fear that the student will become better than the individual, forget his or her 'roots', or any other type of fear statement as well as any type of disapproval of the students' aspirations those individuals are considered a liability and a possible detriment (Guiffrida & Douthit).

Racial Identity

Understanding and accepting one's racial identity is a large component in individual success which in turn is a component in academic success. According to an article in ACPA's 49th volume of Journal of College Student Development:

ethnic identity [is] a dynamic, developmental, and contextual construct that can be described as one's affiliation and membership with a particular ethnic group that is based on one's conception of knowledge, attitudes, and feelings for that group (Chaudhari et. al, p. 302).

Positively utilizing a student's racial or ethnic identity can be an impactful tool in order to enhance a student's success, especially since there are so many negative images and messages in the public eye about minority groups. One way to use identity as that impactful tool is to help students create identities that include academic achievement as a positive and desirable trait of a certain racial group. Additionally, that trait needs to be achievable as well, so that the student isn't setting themselves up for failure and recreating a cycle all over again (Chaudhari, et.al, 2008). Once these positive academic achievement goals are in place in correlation with the racial or ethnic identity, this gives the student a strong sense of self and personal identity as well as the idea that he or she can excel in college and the ability to ignore negative attacks on their ability and identity. This idea can be backed by theorists Phinney, whose ethnic identity development theory of 1989 is one in which the person explores his or her cultural and ethnic issues and relations that to himself or herself (Chaudhari, et.al., 2008). This more individualistic approach and its three stages allow the idea of a strong self image for minority students in college. High achieving African American students especially gain more affirmation and personal strength when their self identity within their group is strongly grasped.

Another strong racial identity model was developed by William Cross called Cross's Model of Psychological Nigrescence. Cross's model is more of a cyclical model as opposed to a linear model like Phinney's, however Cross's model is a little more in depth with five stages as opposed to three (Evans, Forney, & DiBrito, 1998). Additionally, Phinney's model was mainly used in looking at adolescents as opposed to adults and is more of a collective identity process instead of simply looking at oneself. If Phinney's model is somehow incorporated into a type of mentoring program for minority

students during their first year in college, the adjustment process should go smoother as well as academic achievement being higher than it would be without Phinney's model.

Lack of Holistic Development

An additional explanation as to why minority students may have lower levels of academic achievement is due to the lack of holistic development in college. Many minority students are used to the concept of 'othermothering', meaning that they are used to multiple family members and other older friends taking care of them and always being there (Guiffrida & Douthit). Since they are used to this concept, they expect it once they reach college as well. PWIs however, are not accustomed to this, and many of their faculty and staff do not offer a holistic teaching style that encompasses a concept like 'othermothering'. At HBCUs however, are trained that it not only their professional duty, but as well as their moral and spiritual duty to holistically develop their students (Guiffrida & Douthit). Due to the lack of holistic development teaching amongst faculty and staff, many minority students are not getting what they need in order to succeed.

Faculty and Staff Relationships

Many minority students feel as if there is a lack of connection between their faculty and staff members at PWIs, since most of the faculty and staff are white. Due to the under representation of minority faculty and staff, many minority students feel a distance between their professors and administrators. One of the reasons specifically African American students do not connect well with their White professors is due to the fact that the students feel as if the professors are culturally insensitive (Guiffrida & Douthit). Some basic examples of this insensitivity may include stereotypical remarks made in class about African Americans or other racial groups, generalizing students' opinions in class as representing those of all African Americans, and not including other

racial perspectives in the curriculum (Guiffriday & Douthit). Due to this feeling of insensitivity, minority students are less likely to seek out help or advice from White faculty and staff members and will either go without the help they need or will ask it from other minority individuals.

Best Practices

Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York is an extremely selective liberal arts college that has a several opportunity programs in place for minority students. During the summer they have an academic boot camp in which 40 freshmen attend a four and a half week program to prepare them for college (Schmidt, 2007). They take rigorous writing and math courses, have tutors, mandatory study hours and basically required to academically succeed. This program appears to work, in the fall of 2006, As “60 percent of the 133 students involved in the Skidmore programs had grade point averages of at least 3.0, and more than a fourth had at least 3.5” (Schmidt, 2007).

The Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS) is another opportunity program put in place in 2000 by 37 private, select liberal arts colleges and small universities. These institutions have made it a commitment to promote high academic achievement amongst other things within minority students (trinoll.edu)

The Meyerhoff Scholars Program offered by the University of Maryland – Baltimore County is a program that recruits high achieving students that are interested in the fields of science, math and engineering and ensures that they perform to the levels that are indicated by their standardized test scores. Mentors, study groups, and monitoring the students’ success is a key part of the success of this program (Schmidt, 2007).

Minority Student Retention and Graduation

In an effort to diversify campus and provide equity in access to higher education, universities are enrolling larger number of minority students than ever. Often times, however, recruiting these students takes center stage while very little attention is devoted to guaranteeing that they finish school with a degree. There is a national gap between the graduation rates of white students and minority students, and at some universities the difference may be as high as twenty percentage points (Roach, 2008). The chart in Appendix A, Figure 2 better illustrates retention rates.

With the exception of Asian students, who actually graduate at higher rates than white students, the most current statistics reveal that less than half of minority students who enter four-year universities will leave with a bachelor's degree in six years or less (Carey, 2008). University efforts to increase minority enrollment are short-sighted when the resources expended to recruit these students is not matched by the resources used to support these students through a successful college career.

Many universities are learning from each other insofar as what does or does not improve college student retention rates. Some of the most common practices include three main components: first year programs, academic advising, and learning support. Numerous universities now utilize first year programs. It is most commonly a course offered for credit that focuses on acclimating new students to the campus and teaching them college "survival skills." (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). These courses present a variety of topics and could include sections on student health and safety, lessons on diversity, financial responsibility, utilizing campus libraries, writing research papers, alcohol and drug abuse, and career planning. The most successful programs are required, worth full course credit, and combine aspects of social and academic success. The next

most commonly cited tactic aimed at increasing retention rates is academic advising. Advising meetings may be mandated for some students, particularly those with less than satisfactory GPAs who have not accumulated many credit hours. Some universities take what they consider a proactive approach by mandating advising for certain groups that have been identified as “high risk” due to their “dropout proneness.” (Tinto, 1995). This might include first generation college students, low socioeconomic status college students, and nontraditional college students. Opponents to this practice argue that it is less proactive and more of a labeling technique that singles out students as “potential failures.” (Tinto, 1995). The final retention technique frequently utilized is providing learning support. Academic support in the form of supplemental education resources may include reading and writing centers, mathematics laboratories, required developmental course work, supplemental instruction and tutoring, and success workshops. Though all of these methods may have shown to contribute significantly to student retention, they could still be lacking key components. For instance, these programs are much less likely to be effective for minority students if there is a lack of diversity among the faculty and staff teaching the first year programs, advising the students, and providing the tutoring.

A university’s approach to minority retention enhancement can be highly influenced by that institution’s understanding of why those students leave college in the first place, and there are colleges that focus primarily on student characteristics. That would somewhat misguided, as the whole story lies in the interplay of a host of both internal and external factors. There are, however, three commonly cited reasons that college students at two year and four year institutes drop out of school. They are lack of financial aid, unwelcome campus climate, and curriculum issues (Habley & McClanahan,

2004). Sixty-nine percent of minority students who dropped out and did not return after the first year cited student loan debt as a primary reason (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2006). The amount or availability of financial resources in the form of grants and scholarships is inadequate. Some argue that this is a class issue and not a race issue, but a large number of minority students are already entering college at an economic disadvantage. Student loans have become the predominant means to finance a college education, and that create yet another financial burden for minority students. A second issue that minority students might be faced with is an unwelcome campus climate. Diversity plays a large role in creating a positive campus climate; therefore a lack of diversity among the student body, staff and faculty may prove detrimental for some minority students (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Schools that lack diversity may fail to provide social and cultural experiences of interest to minority students. Attachment and sense of belonging is deepened by involvement with campus unions, organizations, and student activism, but campuses that lack these outlets for minority students may see lower graduation rates for those students (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2006). Minority student groups and organizations may also provide buffers against incidents of racism, including negative attitudes and opinions about minority students which create unwelcome and sometimes hostile social environments. Lastly, failure to diversify faculty and staff on college campuses limits mentorship opportunities for minority students, and mentoring programs have consistently proven to be successful (Scott & Homant, 2007). A third factor linked to attrition among minority students involves curriculum issues. A Eurocentric approach to what is taught in the classroom and how it is taught does not create an engaging learning environment for minority students. Providing stimulating and

supportive classroom environments is crucial to academic success for all students, and many of the current classroom curriculums are short-changing minority students (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). It is also worth mentioning that teacher expectations play a role in student academic performance. Teachers with preconceived notions about a student's academic ability may lower their expectations for that student. This may be especially true at technical or science based institutions (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2006). The teacher's attitudes do not go unnoticed by students whose self-efficacy may become deeply damaged contributing to the "self-fulfilling prophecy" phenomenon. The most common "curriculum issue" however relates more to lack of academic preparedness. Many minority students are already entering college at an academic disadvantage due to under-developed reading and writing skills (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). In turn, their ability to complete college level assignments and other course work becomes a difficult feat.

One institution that has made great strides in fusing a diverse campus climate and mentorship opportunities within its own campus is Florida State University. Their university now graduates more minority students than white students (Carey, 2008). A large part of the universities minority student graduation success has been attributed to its CARE (Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement) program (Graves 2008). CARE at FSU has designed a summer bridge program that provides preparation, orientation and academic support programming to first-generation, economically disadvantaged, academically underprepared and/or minority students, and currently more than two-thirds of the program participants come from minority groups. The program initiatives are to motivate and prepare targeted middle and high school students to pursue

higher education and to prepare and support targeted first time freshmen for successful adaptation to college life (FSU 2008). All of the program participants live together in campus housing along with upperclassmen students, who serve as peer mentors, during the initial summer term. One hundred percent of the summer term is paid for from non-loan resources for those who have a financial need. During their time in the program participants become familiar with the campus facilities and the local community, meet university faculty, staff and administrators (who become part of their support system), meet campus student leaders and representatives from various student organizations (where they will learn about opportunities for campus involvement), and attend cultural enrichment events and activities. The participants also receive academic support through special classes, workshops, study halls and tutoring sessions, as well as, assistance in refining study and test taking skills. This program also provides information sessions and meeting for the parents of these prospective and newly enrolled students. The students in this program benefit most of all, however, from continued support and advocacy from the CARE staff throughout the duration of their undergraduate education (FSU 2008).

An overall approach to retention simply will not work, in that, what proves applicable for the student population as a whole may not necessarily work for minority students. Universities must be willing to devote time and resources to finding what works to retain minority students specifically. Further examination of the reasons why minority students leave college may provide insight into finding out how to make them stay. Yet staying is not the only issue. For instance, lessening the financial burden by awarding more scholarships and grants might keep students from dropping out, but attention must also be paid to how to make these students successful college graduates. One of top

priorities for all institutions should be creating an open and welcoming campus environment for all. Cornell University has tackled this issue with the unique approach of developing a Minority Leadership Conference and town hall meetings on race. The entire campus was invited to attend these events which aimed to “open up dialogue between different interest groups on campus” (Vargas, 1998). Institutions must continue to recruit a diverse student body, faculty and staff, but they must also realize that the hard work does not end there. Necessary components in this equation include continued support, particularly through resource allocation, along with the creation of strong and active student unions and Diversity and Multicultural Centers on campus. Also, with the proven success of mentoring programs, it is critical to develop, support and maintain these types of opportunities for all minority students. Lastly, it is very important for different departments on a given campus to work together toward common goals, particularly in academic advising, career counseling and orientation. Students value an education more when they can identify the purpose behind it, or easily relate what they are doing in the classroom to their long-term goals. If a campus truly values differences, then diversity issues should be heavily incorporated into orientation and “freshman seminar” courses. Over two decades ago, an article in the ERIC Digest offered ten tips to successfully graduate minority students, and despite everything else that has changed during this time, those principles are still applicable today. The article suggests the following: 1) make eliminating racial and ethnic disparity in degree achievement a public priority by announcing it to all and talking about it often, 2) invest the institution’s discretionary dollars to recruit, retain and graduate minority students, 3) show that diversity is valued by recruiting well-qualified minority staff and leaders, 4) track progress by collecting

detailed information on minority and non-minority achievement patterns, 5) take a proactive role in providing for financial aid and comprehensive support services, 6) don't just focus on graduating minority students, but with providing them with a high quality education, 7) make minority retention a community outreach effort by involving local elementary, middle and high schools, non-profit agencies, businesses, churches and other community groups, 8) provide bridge programs for academically underprepared students that includes supplemental instruction, learning laboratories, tutoring, collaborative study groups and intrusive advising, 9) Award promotions and tenure to teachers who mentor, are culturally sensitive, and have high expectations for all students, 10) construct non-threatening social environments by making stamping out racism a top campus priority (Richardson & de los Santos, 1988). There is no doubt that the gap between white and minority student graduation rates continues to persist, but it also seems that for some time, a formula for combating this has also been in existence. Now it is not so much a question of "how" can this be fixed, but rather, "when" will this be remedied.

Mentoring Programs for Minorities

Because the retention and graduation rates are very obvious misbalanced as was previously discussed, increased attention is being given to the success of minority retention programs across college and university campuses. "Evidence shows that when black men have been given the opportunity to participate in higher education, and when well-conceived and formalized support systems are put into place to promote achievement, black men have been successful." (LaVant, Anderson, Tiggs, 1997). Documentation has shown that persistent programs of quality nature have been very successful in raising the retention and graduation rates of minority students. However, the

assessment of many mentoring programs is limited either because of the informality of the relationship or because they simply haven't been documented properly.

Several key issues affect students today and create a need for guidance and support in a collegiate setting. A study conducted by Reichert and Absher (1997) compiled specific issues which are said to affect minority students. "Their list includes inadequate academic preparation, substandard educational resources, mismatched social and academic expectations, lack of encouragement, psychological intimidation, unstable familial and financial circumstances, inadequate peer support, lack of role modeling and mentoring, and so on" (Stromei 2000). This list could be seen as very subjective and applicable to any student regardless of race, but does create a basis to understanding minority student challenges. Statistics show that 40% of African American students who begin college graduate compared to over 61% of White students (Guiffrida). Mentoring programs has repeatedly been one of the key suggestions listed to improve retention of these students.

Perhaps the description that Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993) presented as to what contributes to student attrition is much more relatable to the topic at hand. "Tinto found that students arrive on campus with various built-in characteristics, including family backgrounds, pre-college educational achievements, academic abilities, and other various personal attributes, all of which significantly influence rates of student persistence. Some African American male students enter college socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged. By integrating them into the social fabric of the institution their chances of matriculation are enhanced" (LaVant et al. 1997).

There are multiple types of mentoring programs and relationships that occur in Higher Education. “Formal mentoring programs are designed to increase enrollment and retention of minority and other students, as well as increase student satisfaction with the academic experience.” (LaVant, et al. 1997). Informal mentoring is a spontaneous and mutually-beneficial relationship that occurs spontaneously and has been suggested to spur more formal mentoring programs. Other models of mentorship include what is referred to as Grooming & Networking. Grooming mentoring is a very traditional, organized and education-based relationship between two individuals for the benefit of the student. Knowledge transference strictly takes place from the mentor to the protégé and is best for individuals who are being guided in a specific area. It is important to note that the mentor in this model is typically teaching based on their expertise and vision of the desired developmental goals (Haring 1999). It is because of this rigidness that Networking mentoring, which is a relatively new concept, is becoming more common in Higher Education. Its key concepts include transference of knowledge between multiple parties, which is beneficial to all involved. “Ideal participants in a networking mentoring program for minorities are highly motivated individuals who seek equity and an environment for change. That change may involve curriculum, topics and modes of inquiry, or cultural activities as examples.”

AMIGOS (Arranged Mentor for Instructional Guidance and Organizational Support) is a mentoring model that was developed based on research of mentoring programs and is probably the most currently used model. Although it is a formal program format it does incorporate the Networking mentoring approach in that it is beneficial to both the mentor and the protégé. AMIGOS is based on four key components within the

model. They are as follows: The IDEA (Individual Diagnosis, Evaluation and Assessment) center, The TIPS (Training Instruction Practical Tips) center, The COPE (Center for Organizational Problem Enlightenment), and The FUN (Friendship, Understanding, and Nurturing) center (Stromei 2000). This particular model is designed to be a year-long mentorship program which is often one of the criticisms of formal mentoring relationships. It is often difficult to gauge the affects and results of these programs after just one year, but oftentimes those formal relationships will continue to develop informally.

Whether a college or university decides to implement a Networking or Grooming mentoring program, there are several factors to consider which will help to help enhance success in retention rates, academic achievement, and leadership development.

“Leadership within the institution must be committed to the idea, there must be resources, human and financial, available for the program, a university committee should identify individuals who are potential participants, there must be willing, capable and enthusiastic mentors available, the mentor program coordinator should work closely with the admissions and registrar offices, there must be a quality training program, community support should be engaged and ongoing assessment conducted” (LaVant et al. 1997). If these concepts are supported wholeheartedly, then the potential for a successful minority program would warrant the work involved in order to provide tremendous benefits and guidance for student protégés.

There are several mentoring programs which have documented success in the above areas. Minority needs are being met better than they were originally, retention and graduation rates have risen as well as GPA's, minorities report having an increased sense

of worth and an easier time transitioning to the professional world. One of the longest running and most successful mentoring programs for minorities is The Faculty Mentor Program at University of Louisville which began in 1984. Mentors are assigned to incoming freshman based on their degree of study. The mentor roles are described as providing friendship, guidance, counseling, referrals, encouragement and playing student advocate at times. The mentor is actively involved with the student through phone, letter, email and personal contact. Program events and developmental activities are supported through the university and the community. These are often social in nature and intended to help foster the mentor-protégé relationship, but character building is often incorporated. “At the University of Louisville, experience has shown that when African American men are provided with opportunities to partake of the services of an institution and become connected with compassionate and knowledgeable faculty within the system, they successfully compete with their white counterparts” (LaVant et al. 1997). This was evident through data provided on program participants entering fall 1992. There were 85 participants in all, 29 of which were men and by fall of 1996 two-thirds of the black males had either graduated or were continuing their education successfully (LaVant et al.1997).

Mentoring programs are a very successful way to build a student’s identity within the university while also connecting them with faculty, administrators and other students. There is clearly a need for specialized support of minority students and mentoring programs can be instrumental in providing needed support for students while at the same time encouraging development of all involved. Students should be encouraged to thrive

and made comfortable in their surroundings and to some the chance to engage in a mentoring program could provide that very opportunity needed to ensure success.

Latin American/Hispanic Students

Latin Americans have become the fastest growing and largest minority group within the United States. “In July 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau announced that Latinos had become the nation’s largest non-dominant group with a population of 38.8 million, surpassing the African American population now numbered at 38.3 million” (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002b). Llagas and Snyder (2003) state:

Latinos are overrepresented among the poor with about a third of families living below the poverty line. They are a relatively young group with 35% under the age of 18 compared to less than 25% of non-Latino Whites. Because of their low income status and the high school-aged population, the education of Latinos has become a major concern in this country.

Because Latin Americans have become the largest minority group it is important that the higher education system in the United States begin to acknowledge and address the needs of these students.

Latin American students or Hispanic students are from diverse backgrounds. “Despite their linguistic and cultural similarities, the nation’s Hispanic residents are very diverse. Experts on educating them generally agree that getting a larger proportion though college will require focusing on educational differences that the collective term “Hispanic” now masks” (Schmidt, 2003). Schmidt (2003) quotes Eduardo J. Pádrón, president of Miami Dade College who says:

If they come here as a result of political circumstances, what you find is that some of them are better prepared than our native students. If the immigration is economic immigration, what you find is that most of these people come with a lack of knowledge of the culture and language. Even in their own language, they are not well prepared.

One way that the United States has begun to address the needs of Latino or Hispanic students is through the acknowledgement and support of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). These colleges are “public or private nonprofit degree-granting colleges with enrollment of 25% or more Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent enrollment” (Santiago, 2008). “In 2003-04, almost half of Latino undergraduate students were concentrated in the 6 percent of institutions of higher education in the United States identified as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (236 institutions)” (Santiago, 2007). Santiago also explains that:

HSIs are very concentrated geographically. Over 75% of HSIs are located in three states and Puerto Rico. California has the most HSIs (68), followed by Puerto Rico (52), Texas (37), and New Mexico (23). HSIs are also growing in states not generally known for having large Latino populations, such as Kansas, Massachusetts, and Washington.

What is also unique about HSIs is that:

Latino student choices create HSIs. The classification of a campus as an HSI shows no evidence of influencing Latino student college choices. However, most HSIs have institutional characteristics that align with Latino student priorities and needs and explain why many students choose HSIs (Santiago, 2007).

Factors that influence Hispanic students include; cost, proximity to family, and accessibility (Santiago, 2007). “One in five Latina/os express a major concern about their ability to finance college at the start of the school year” (Hurtado, Sáenz, Santo, & Cabrera, 2008). Santiago explains that “College cost and location are interrelated” (2007). Santiago (2007) goes on to say that Latinos:

stated that they chose to enroll at their institution either because they did not want to leave their family, their family did not want them to leave, or they had current responsibilities in the area (work or relationships) that required them to choose an institution nearby.

Hurtado, Sáenz, Santo, & Cabrera also state that Latinos:

are just “catching up” in 2006 to the proportion of non-Hispanic White students who reported in 1975 that they come from households where parents had at least some college. Moreover, more than half of Mexican American/Chicana/o students came from families where the mother or father had only a high school degree or less.

This means that these students are primarily first generation students.

There have been successful models for serving Latino students. In order for colleges and universities to better serve Latinos it would be best to study the higher education institutions that are currently doing so. By looking at successful HSIs other universities will be able better serve Latino students. Santiago (2008) explains that the most important practice is the emphasis in academic support. In Santiago’s 2008 brief, all 12 of the participating institutions offered:

courses that prepare students for college-level work, and some have created free summer or winter immersion programs to prepare incoming and returning students for placement exams in English, writing, and mathematics. All of the campuses have also invested considerable resources in examining student data and designing interventions to strengthen freshmen student performance.

Santiago's brief continues to explain that there are five main areas that practices worked to improve: "community outreach, academic support, data use, faculty development, and transfer paths." HSIs work with the local communities to support and encourage college graduation of Latinos by working with local businesses and high schools and by providing college preparation courses. Tutoring, First Year programs and holistic advising helped improve academic support for Latino students. By collecting accurate data, allowing faculty and staff to have access to data that is collected, using data to identify issues, and collaboration efforts HSIs are able to find creative ways to address issues found through data collection. Faculty at HSIs are committed to the success of their students and have a large part in developing institutional practices developed to serve their students. Faculty are trained in understanding the student body and Santiago explains that EL Camino College even "offered the Pronunciation of Names course as part of its professional development programs and activities to teach faculty how to pronounce non-English student names correctly (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, etc.) and to make it easier for instructors to call on student" (2008). Finally because Latino students typically begin their experience in college at a community college HSIs work with two-year institutions to share data, and improve the pathways to four year institutions.

Models for success for Latin American Students have been a fairly recent trend in the United States. As the Latin American population spreads throughout the country more higher education institutions will need to address this populations needs. More data and models need to be developed for institutions that are not primarily HSIs. Educators need to find ways to retain Latin American students and help these students achieve success through degree obtainment. Finally educators need to continuously re-evaluate its education methods to ensure that the ever changing current student population needs are being meet.

Every student perceives and experiences the college experience differently, but programming for individual students is nearly impossible on most college campuses. Taking an “overall” approach will continue to allow some groups of students, minority college students in particular, to fall through the cracks. There is no “secret to success” for minority students; we know what it takes and what they need to be successful in college. A proactive approach to working with minority college students is necessary, and should not be confused with labeling. Labeling leads to self-fulfilling prophecies, but being proactive means recognizing. It requires admitting that disparities continue to exist in minority student achievement patterns, retention and graduation rates. Then, it demands a response in the form of change: recognize the issue, identify those who are at risk, create opportunities for them, encourage them to succeed, continue to offer them support and watch them grow.

Appendix A

	Percentage earning ...	
	mostly A's	mostly C's or lower
Black	9.6%	40.7%
Hispanic	12.7%	34.6%
American Indian	13.2%	32.5%
Pacific Islander	14.4%	32%
Asian	16.9%	25.6%
White	19.3%	24%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Education Institutions, 2003-4

Figure 1

(Schmidt, 2007).

	Retained 1 st to 2 nd Year	Graduation Rate
White	80%	57%
Black	75%	42%
Hispanic	76%	42%
American Indian	67%	36%
Asian	87%	61%

Figure 2

(Seidman, 2005)

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