

Male Student Success Initiative: Creating Alignment Across College Communities

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ABSTRACT

For many years, the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) has engaged in efforts to improve the retention and academic success of minority males, as our institution experienced a dramatic increase in enrollment of students of color at a time when the economy was struggling and the new financial aid regulations had not been enacted. Some of the instruments under consideration for future use are the Community College Student Survey Inventory, an institutional-level needs assessment tool for identifying factors influencing the success of college men of color, and the Male Program Assessment for College Excellence, an outcomes-based assessment tool for programs and initiatives serving men of color.

FULL TEXT

For many years, the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) has engaged in efforts to improve the retention and academic success of minority males, as our institution experienced a dramatic increase in enrollment of students of color at a time when the economy was struggling and the new financial aid regulations had not been enacted. In 1990, CCBC created an all-African American male orientation course to support the needs of this population. This course, Student Development for African American Males, was the first step in what has become a purposeful effort to address the persistence and success of African American men at CCBC.

WORKING TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH TWO PROGRAMS

In 2009, CCBC joined Achieving the Dream, a national reform network between the private sector and community colleges that promotes best practices for improving student retention and achievement. At this time we began to look more closely at one of our own strategic retention strands, the freshman orientation course Academic Development: Transitioning to College (ACDV 101), with particular focus on the all-African American male sections. From the inception of this course, we understood that offering an engaging course taught by an African American instructor was vitally important because many of these students would not have the opportunity to study under another African American instructor during the remainder of their time at CCBC. From that vantage point we knew that scaling up the course to more than twenty sections per academic year would positively impact these students' academic success, and eventually we created enough sections to reach 200-300 African American males each semester. This was particularly important because in this course students experienced multiple high-impact practices simultaneously. For example, instructors were assigned as mentors and advisors, students were provided contextualized learning that addressed important issues facing this population, and content was delivered through culturally responsive teaching principles taught directly to students.

In 2011, after analyzing the academic success rates in courses beyond the orientation course, we found that there was a need to design a program that supported the needs of students who had exited the course. Up until that time, many of the ACDV 101 instructors were faculty or staff of color who volunteered their time so as to have a presence on campus. This presence became "the program"-an unstructured, unofficial, and unfunded way to maintain a level of engagement with these young men. During that time, we continued to refine and add new content to

the course, to recruit and train additional instructors, and to design the foundations of a program for men of color. As CCBC's membership in Achieving the Dream continued, in 2013 the college joined another strategic academic support initiative, the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Roadmap project. Through the synergy of our work with the Achieving the Dream and the Roadmap programs, we began building momentum toward putting substance to our conceptualized ideas of how we could increase the retention and academic success of minority males. We believed that one of the important factors in creating a program was to be able to assess African American male perception of campus climate. It was important to see if there were ways in which we could further understand the whole student-beyond test scores and deficit thinking. In addition, we needed to find a way to improve and further address their concerns while incorporating reform strategies into the course and the eventual program.

CREATING THE MALE STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

The CCBC team, as members of the Roadmap project, spent a week attending AAC&Us Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success. From that experience, we designed our own Roadmap campus initiative to engage, support, and prepare African American male students. For our initiative to be successful, we needed internal stakeholders to extend our work into their instructional disciplines. In addition, we needed to partner with external scholars to find other theoretical and methodological means to support these students' academic and career success. Participation in the Roadmap and Achieving the Dream projects informed the program we ultimately created: the Male Student Success Initiative (MSSI).

To support MSSI, CCBC applied for and received a College Access Challenge grant from the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). In fall 2013, CCBC labeled our grant initiative All In: Making the Grades, Defying the Odds. For this program, targeted to minority males, we recruited first-year male college students who needed no more than one developmental course and who registered for the orientation course specifically for men. To be a participant, students also had to sign a contract that would allow case managers to monitor and regulate such things as registration, drop/add, and schedule adjustments. From the outset we believed that a full-day orientation in the summer was necessary for these students to begin engaging with peers, mentors, and faculty, as well as to develop comfort with the college environment. We also felt that developing some level of cohort learning in an orientation setting would be an effective way to begin affiliation with the program.

The MHEC grant began in fall 2014, and preliminary results from the MSSI are promising. Seventy-five percent of the original thirty-seven students enrolled in the program persisted to the spring 2015 semester, and approximately 50 percent of the original cohort has registered for the fall 2015 semester. However, because of the limited number of males who were eligible for the program, we were not able to formally support many students who were interested. As a next step, we hope to expand the program to include students who placed into more than one developmental-level course. Another future goal is to expand the program into the disciplines. These learning experiences would further anchor the program and might increase students' persistence as they move through developmental coursework.

During this initial pilot program, we were able to identify other successful practices at CCBC that would provide this student population with additional support to help them progress through developmental coursework. CCBC piloted acceleration in English and reading and implemented financial literacy intervention during our membership in Achieving the Dream. Program leaders believed that incorporating these elements into the program requirements would enhance student success. At the same time, MSSI staff engaged English faculty to consider contextualizing accelerated courses. This resulted in the design of contextualized acceleration in English and reading for African American males. These courses allowed students to move through developmental English and reading in one semester.

SHARING INFORMATION ACROSS CAMPUSES

To better capture data on the target population, during fall 2013 CCBC began working with an instrument designed by the Minority Male Community College Collaborative (M2C3)-a group led by John Luke Wood, associate professor of community college leadership from San Diego State University, and Frank Harris, associate professor

of postsecondary education at San Diego State University. This instrument, the Community College Survey of Men (CCSA4), was designed to gather data on factors contributing to minority male student focus and effort in college in order to identify the most salient predictors of success. CCBC was the last participating community college to help validate the instrument in the third and final pilot phase. Prior to the distribution, the CCSM had been subjected to rigorous validation testing over a two-year, three-phase process that included more than twenty community colleges. Every community college that participated in the three pilot phases of the survey became college partners with the M2C3 network.

Maurice Johnson, a doctoral candidate in Community College Leadership at Morgan State University, administered the survey across the entire CCBC campus. The two hundred survey respondents were drawn from men of color enrolled in a required academic development course, which fosters the development of decision-making skills and learning strategies. These students completed the thirty-minute CCSA4 instrument, which comprised thirty-two block questions.

The findings showed that black men at CCBC place greater effort and focus in their academic studies when faculty and staff communicate validating messages to them, when campus services are accessible and effective, and when black men exhibit help-seeking behavior. Thus, the survey identified the incremental role of non-cognitive factors in academic success. These results were important because they provided us with information vital to the design of a student success program directly targeting African American males.

CONNECTING TO THE MINORITY MALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE COLLABORATIVE

The CCS A4 results led to CCBC's interest in becoming a member of the M2C3 national consortium and working much closer with Wood and Harris. To begin this process, we invited Wood to be the keynote speaker at the colleges fall 2014 Faculty Development Education Symposium. Wood addressed the CCBC faculty on how national CCS A4 findings can be interpreted to enhance access, achievement, and success among minority male community college students.

During his talk, Wood further emphasized to CCBC faculty members that, based on preliminary findings, CCS A4 results suggest that black men in CCBC place greater effort and focus in their academic studies when the following conditions exist:

- * Campus services are easy to access and available when needed.
- * Campus services are effective in helping them to address their concerns with accurate information.
- * Men perceive that they have a sense of control over their academic futures (i.e., internal locus of control).
- * Men have greater levels of confidence in their academic abilities (i.e., self-efficacy).
- * Men have an authentic interest in course content and learning (i.e., intrinsic interest).
- * Men believe that school is a domain equally suited for both men and women.

The foundation of this program has been high-impact practices that support the achievement and academic success of minority males. Based on our work in the first year of the grant, the Male Student Success Initiative has been awarded a second MHEC grant to scale the number of students reached through the program to more than 100 men of color. We recently added the subtitle Network of Scholars to our program name after participating in M2C3's webinars on men of color—some of the findings presented in one webinar suggest that the name of a college-wide male initiative should be inclusive. The webinar was especially relevant to a trend we were already experiencing. As word spread of MSSSI services, such as academic advising, tutoring, promotional events, and standing mentoring availability, males not formally enrolled in the program began showing up on an ad hoc basis. We welcomed this interest both as a recruiting opportunity but also as an opportunity to project a campus ethos that encouraged students to engage and that provided effective campus resources with MSSSI staff who served as validating agents for students. Such a welcoming ethos could also be effective in introducing high school students to CCBC, as the MSSSI participated in dual enrollment programs already in place at the college.

NEXT STEPS

We plan to extend the services to other males who expressed interest in additional support. We also intend to extend an invitation to those schools that many of our African American male students come from to partner with

CCBC. The design and implementation stage of the second iteration of program, begun early in January, has new eligibility criteria that provide additional case manager supports, extends that program college-wide, and engages feeder high schools.

The Male Student Success Initiative: Network of Scholars will integrate a number of high-impact practices within this program design that are informed by empirical research and evidence-based practices from other instruments from the national consortiums. Project director Mark Williams and program coordinator Maurice Johnson participated in the National Consortium Working Group in summer 2015 with other community college advisors across the United States to further gain insight on upcoming webinar topics, theories, and new instrument usage. The MSSI program plans to utilize an array of assessment and evaluation tools that support institutions in advancing outcomes for historically underrepresented and underserved students, particularly men of color. Some of the instruments under consideration for future use are the Community College Student Survey Inventory, an institutional-level needs assessment tool for identifying factors influencing the success of college men of color, and the Male Program Assessment for College Excellence, an outcomes-based assessment tool for programs and initiatives serving men of color.

New to the program is the infusion of service learning in the form of partnerships with local elementary, middle, and high schools. We will continue developing contextualized learning communities beyond developmental courses and provide culturally responsive training for students. In addition, faculty who teach the accelerated developmental courses in English for African American males have formed a black male "think tank" to gather input in the design of content relevant to this population. It's also important to provide a semester-long orientation program beyond the course. This semester-long engagement includes career workshops, leadership training, and academic planning.

CCBC is excited to ease the main challenges that men of color experience by helping these students secure financial stability, balance work and school obligations, and navigate other life stressors. We look forward to the labor-intensive work of implementing a range of strategic support initiatives for the 2015-2016 academic year. It is our hope that CCBC students will benefit from these programs, as well as other interventions, such as mentoring and intrusive advising, that will guide them to successful academic pathways and eventually to realized careers.

Sidebar

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