

Leaving the 2-Year College: Predictors of Black Male Collegian Departure

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J. Luke Wood¹

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate Black male collegians' reported reasons for leaving college. This study examined students in public 2-year colleges, comparing Black male collegians with all other male collegians. Data examined were derived from the first two waves (2003-2004 and 2005-2006) of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. Data were analyzed using logistic regression. Findings from descriptive data indicated that Blacks and non-Blacks had few similarities in the areas they reported as their reasons for leaving. Logistic regression analyses revealed little differences in patterns across the two waves in leaving college for academic problems. However, they illustrated that Black males were less likely to leave college for program dissatisfaction, financial reasons, military reasons, or scheduling issues. In contrast, patterns indicated that Black males were more likely to leave for other reasons not included in the response categories. Two variables examined in this study illustrated differences across the waves. In the first wave, the odds of Black male departure due to family responsibilities were greater for Black males, while they were lower in the second wave. This suggested that Black men who will leave college due to family responsibilities will do so early on. Furthermore, the odds of Black male departure were lower for other reasons in the first wave and greater in the second wave.

¹San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:

J. Luke Wood, 3590 Camino del Rio North, San Diego CA 92108

Email: luke.wood@sdsu.edu

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The two-year college often represents Black men's first experience with postsecondary education, and for many, their last opportunity for obtaining a degree beyond a high-school diploma. (Bush & Bush, 2005, para. 1)

The community college's open-access mission embraces nearly every individual with the intent to pursue postsecondary education.¹ As a result, the community college is perceived as a door of opportunity for students who desire to engage in higher education. This door has been increasingly sought out by a growing body of diverse students. As a result, a large portion of community college enrollees are composed of nontraditional students (e.g., students of color, part-timers, adult returnees, exceptional or special needs, veterans; Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

As noted by the quote above from Bush and Bush (2005), Black males are among those who seek out the benefits of enhanced educational attainment at the community college.² However, while the majority of Black males enter higher education through 2-year colleges (Wood & Turner, 2011), few succeed in this endeavor. Thus, although success stories are evident, researchers and practitioners should recognize that access is not always synonymous with success. For many, the perceived open door to opportunity is not a door at all but merely an entrance to another set of doors that lead to very divergent outcomes. Whereas some doors lead students to their certificate, degree, job skills, personal interest, and transfer goals, many do not lead anywhere at all. Sometimes, students find themselves returning time and time again to the entrance, where they hope to select a better door the next time around (the stop-out phenomenon; Burley, Butner, & Cejda, 2001; Grosset, 1993); and other times, students simply relinquish their pursuit of a better door, leaving the community college altogether and never returning (the dropout phenomenon; Herzog, 2005; Stratton, O'Toole, & Wetzel, 2005).

Chiefly, this manuscript is concerned with the latter, the student who does not continue at the community college. Many words are used to describe this phenomenon: *persistence* and *retention* (terms used for positive continuation) as well as *attrition*, *departure*, and *dropping out* (references to negative continuation). While many groups face persistence challenges, Black males are among some of the most likely to depart from the community college (Glenn, 2003-2004; H. P. Mason, 1994, 1998; Wood & Turner, 2011). This

problem is exponential over time, as 11.5% of Black males will leave the community college without degree attainment after Year 1, 48.9% by Year 3, and 83% by Year 5 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

While it is clear that departure occurs, what is difficult to understand is why it occurs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate Black male collegians' reasons for leaving college. Specifically, this study examined student departure in public 2-year colleges, comparing Black male collegians with all other male collegians. This research takes a unique view of factors affecting students' continuation in college. Typically, studies have employed a persistence lens, focusing on background academic, environmental, psychological, and institutional variables associated with or predictive of student persistence. This study differs in that it examined the perspectives of students who did not continue, as reported by the students themselves. Thus, instead of reporting on factors positively related to continuation, this study reports on factors positively related to departure, as made in comparison with other male students. The next section will discuss relevant literature, which provides context to the topic of departure.

Relevant Literature

Poor success among community college students (e.g., persistence, graduation, achievement, transfer) has led to criticism of the institution (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Richardson, 1987). This issue is of particular importance, given that Nevarez and Wood (2010) have noted that student success is a core mission component of the community college. As noted by Bush (2004), Black male students have placed their confidence in this mission and have been let down, as the community college has failed to facilitate their upward mobility and enhanced livelihood.

While the topic of college persistence and departure has been written about extensively, fewer studies have examined persistence among Black male students in 2-year colleges. Among the studies that have, some congruent findings have emerged. Several metathemes have emerged from literature on Black male success (i.e., persistence, academic success) in the community college. Hagedorn, Maxwell, and Hampton (2001-2002) and Hampton (2002) have indicated that in general, younger students are more likely to persist than older students. Youthfulness also seems to be associated with achievement, as findings from Perrakis (2008) found that age was an important indicator of academic success. Parents' education has also been identified as a variable effecting persistence. For example, Freeman (2003) found that *some* education by students' mothers was a negative factor to student success.

With this in mind, Freeman noted that “some education” meant that students’ mothers had not completed college and that this influence seemed to have a negative relationship with Black males’ college completion.

Another variable relevant to students’ families, family support, has been discussed as well. Both Mosby (2009) and Stevens (2006) have suggested this as a factor for student success. Stevens found that Black males were supported by strong families, specifically, by strong mothers who aided students in achieving success. Although high school grade point average was not found by H. P. Mason (1994, 1998) as relevant to persistence, it was found to have a positive relationship by several other researchers, including Hagedorn et al. (2001-2002), Hampton (2002), Perrakis (2008), Rideaux (2004), and Riley (2007). Having strong educational goals was identified by Mosby (2009) as a strong positive to student success. In essence, students who had goals were more likely to achieve academically than students who had no goals or had goals that were transitory in nature. Similar findings were identified by Dorsey (1996), Freeman (2003), Ihekwaba (2001), Perrakis (2008), and Riley (2007).

Motivation to succeed based on family responsibilities was identified by Beckles (2008), Freeman (2003), Ihekwaba (2001), and H. P. Mason (1994, 1998) as important to student success. Family responsibilities include those related to ancestors, children, immediate family, and nonbiological family. Thus, a student’s desire to make family members proud (even those who were deceased) served as a motivational factor for success. In general, the literature has suggested that an affirming campus climate is a positive factor toward persistence by Beckles (2008), Ihekwaba (2001), and Roberts (2009). Conversely, an unwelcoming climate was identified as a negative factor for persistence (Harrison, 1999; Wilkins, 2005). Lack of diversity among campus personnel has also been found by Riley (2007) and Travis (1994) to be negatively related to student success.

Several authors, including Bush (2004), Freeman (2003), Ihekwaba (2001), Poole (2006), Riley (2007), and Stevens (2006), have connected students’ relationship with faculty to persistence. They concurred that students who talk with faculty outside of class, have ongoing interactions with them, and seek their assistance are more likely to persist than students who do not. In a similar vein, mentorship by campus faculty, staff, and administration was identified as important to student success by Brown (2007), Glenn (2003-2004), Ihekwaba (2001), Jordan (2008), Mosby (2009) and Pope (2006). For instance, Poole indicated that campus friendships were vital to student success, since friendships and institutional commitment may improve students’ academic and social integration.

The vast majority of research on Black male persistence in the 2-year college is influenced by Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1988, 1993) theory on student retention and departure. This theory has been utilized by a number of scholars (Bates, 2007; Dabney-Smith, 2009; Dorsey, 1996; Flowers, 2006; Hagedorn et al., 2001-2002; Hampton, 2002; Ihekwaba, 2001; Jordan, 2008; Miller, 2006; Mosby, 2009; Ray, Carly, & Brown, 2009; Riley, 2007; Scaggs, 2004; Shannon, 2006). Tinto's (1975) theory suggested that student attrition should be viewed from a longitudinal perspective as a process in which social and academic systems are interacting with the individual. These interactions result in constant modifications of academic objectives and dedication to the institution.

Tinto's work was informed by the work of Spady (1970), who perceived the phenomenon of dropping out of college as analogous to suicide. Guided by Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, Spady conceived that few interactions with individuals within an institution and commitment to congruent values presumably leads to higher risk of attrition (in college) or suicide (in society). Thus, Tinto (1975) proffered the notion that the persistence process is impacted by the degree of students' academic and social integration into institutions of higher education. Integration is the degree to which students become committed to and imbedded within the campus academic and social systems. Greater integration is associated with greater commitment to the institution, which in turn leads to a higher likelihood of completion.

While Tinto placed emphasis on the importance of social and academic factors in the process of student persistence, other work has suggested the importance of other considerations. Chief among these is the work of Bean and Metzner (1985) in the model of nontraditional student attrition, which has guided several studies of persistence and academic success both directly (H. P. Mason, 1994, 1998; Riley, 2007) and indirectly (Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011). Bean and Metzner's model of nontraditional student attrition focused on the role of four factors in the attrition of students who commute to school, work part-time, and are older than traditional-age students. As with previous research, Bean and Metzner recognized the importance of (a) background variables (e.g., age, race-ethnicity, gender, educational goals, high school success), (b) academic variables (e.g., course availability, study habits, attendance), and (c) social integration variables (extracurricular activities, on-campus peer relationships). They noted that these serve as important drivers for student persistence.

Bean and Metzner (1985) extended that environmental variables were of chief consideration to the persistence of nontraditional collegians. They suggested that environmental variables are factors over which colleges have

minimal influence but that serve to directly detract from nontraditional students' continuation. The environmental variables in their model included (a) finances, with inadequate income viewed as a primary cause for dropping out; (b) employment, where excessive work commitments, especially those off campus, were viewed as negatively associated with persistence; (c) outside encouragement, in which a dearth of positive encouragement and influence toward success in college and the utility of academic endeavors facilitate attrition; (d) family responsibilities, where commitments to rearing children, family obligations, and supporting dependents superseded one's commitment to, and subsequent engagement in, college; and (e) opportunities to transfer, where the perceived likelihood of transfer to another institution was negatively associated with attrition.

Informed by the work of Bean (1980) and Bean and Metzner, H. P. Mason's (1994, 1998) model of urban Black male persistence in the community college is, to date, the only published persistence model specific to Black males in this institutional type. His work examined Black males who (a) dropped out in their first semester, (b) completed the first semester and did not enroll in the second semester, (c) finished the first semester and began the second, and (d) completed two consecutive semesters. Mason's findings suggested that 14 factors were relevant to student persistence. One background or defining variable, referred to as educational goals, was identified as an important factor for persistence. Three variables relevant to students' academics were also identified, including study habits, absenteeism, and major certainty.

Given the relevance to Bean and Metzner's (1985) model, H. P. Mason (1994, 1998) emphasized the importance of environmental variables, including finances, hopelessness, outside encouragement, and family responsibilities.³ He also identified five psychological outcomes resultant from background, academic, and environmental variables, including utility (the perceived worthiness of one's academic endeavors), satisfaction, goal commitment (one's level of commitment to their academic goals), stress, and goal internalization (the degree to which one has internalized one's academic goals). As a result, Mason's model's specificity to Black male students in community colleges, this study used Mason's model as a conceptual guide into the phenomenon of student persistence. The next section will discuss methods used in this investigation.

Method

In order to examine respondents' reported reasons for leaving college, African American male collegians in 2-year colleges were compared to their

non-Black counterparts. This study employed data derived from the 2004-2009 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). BPS is a national data set conducted through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This data set is designed to investigate factors relevant to student success in college (e.g., enrollment, persistent, attainment). BPS was first conducted in 2003-2004, and two follow-up surveys collected additional data in 3-year interviews, 2006 and 2009, referred to as the first, second, and third waves. BPS is a spinoff survey from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS; Cominole, Wheelless, Dudley, Franklin, & Wine, 2007). Data from this study focus on responses from the first wave and second wave.

NPSAS is representative of respondents who were enrolled in federally designated Title IV institutions. Title IV refers to degree-granting institutions approved by the U.S. government to participate in federal financial aid programs. NPSAS was first conducted in the mid-1980s and has been disseminated every few years since that time. The primary focus on this data set is to investigate how collegians finance their postsecondary endeavors. The survey serves as a base study for both the BPS and the Baccalaureate and Beyond longitudinal study. BPS and NPSAS produce reliable estimates of student characteristics (Cominole, Riccobono, Siegel, Caves, & Rosen, 2008; Cominole, Riccobono, Siegel, & Caves, 2010). To participate in the study, students must have been enrolled in at least one course as part of an academic program. Data collected employ cross-sectional weights, which enable researchers to engage in individual student-level analyses (Cominole et al., 2010). BPS reports on data from approximately 16,100 students. Data from this study included 2,235 respondents; all participants included in this examination were 2-year collegians during the first wave of data collection in 2003-2004. The next section will examine the variables employed from this data set.

Variables

Participants were examined as representative of two dichotomous groups, Black males and non-Black males. As such, racial-ethnic affiliation served as the dependent variable (Y) in this study. Non-Black males was an inclusive category that combined data reported from students of all racial-ethnic categories other than Black, including White, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Other, and more than one race. The primary covariates (X) examined in this study were variables that indicated why students left college. They are referred to interchangeably throughout the findings section as

reasons for leaving and departure. These variables reported on data from students who left college (a) before their academic term ended, (b) without transferring to another institution, (c) without any plans to transfer, and (d) without any plans to be enrolled in the next academic year. Response types for covariates were coded 0 for no and 1 for yes. A description of each covariate used in this study is listed below.

- Academic problems: A dichotomous variable, reflecting whether a student reported academic problems or concerns as a reason for leaving the two-year college.
- Dissatisfied with program: A dichotomous variable, indicating whether the collegian left college as a result of his dissatisfaction with his academic or degree program, the college, campus, or faculty members.
- Family responsibilities: A dichotomous variable, illustrating if the respondent left the 2-year college as a result of family responsibilities or concerns.
- Financial reasons: A dichotomous variable, reflecting if a student's reason for leaving is a result of financial reasons or challenges.
- Other reasons: A dichotomous variable, indicating whether respondents left college for reasons not specified in the other response categories (e.g., academic problems, dissatisfaction with program, family responsibilities).
- Personal reasons: A dichotomous variable, illustrating whether students reported leaving college for personal reasons.
- Scheduling reasons: A dichotomous variable, reflecting if a student's reasons for leaving the 2-year college were a result of scheduling concerns or issues due to unavailable classes or inconvenient course offerings.
- Called for military duty: A dichotomous variable, indicating that the student left college on account of being called for active military service.

In addition to these covariates, one variable for leaving college was omitted from this study. This variable allowed respondents to indicate that they left college as a result of finishing their desired courses. However, there was an insufficient sample size of affirmative responses to include for analysis. Several control variables (*Z*) were employed in this study. Control variables were identified based upon their linkage to student departure in prior research. Respondents' age was included as a control in this study. This variable

was continuous, reflecting the respondent's age as of December 2003 (the initial survey year). Age was included as a control in this study given prior research from Hagedorn et al. (2001-2002), Hampton (2002), and Perrakis (2008), who identified age as an important indicator of persistence and academic success among Black male students in 2-year colleges. Their findings indicated that younger students persist longer and outperform older students. Income percentile rank, a continuous variable, indicating students' income percentile, was also used. This variable was calculated separately for independents and dependents and then merged into one scale ranging from 1 to 100. Finances were included as a control given its treatment in the literature on Black males in 2-year colleges as a predictor of persistence and identified barrier among students (see Hampton, 2002; Mosby, 2009).

In addition to age and income percentile rank, student collegiate grade point average (GPA) was also employed as a control. GPA was a continuous variable, reflecting students' self-reported GPA while in college. This variable calculated on a scale from 4 to 400, with a 400 representing a 4.0 GPA. GPA is often used as a measure of academic success (Perrakis, 2008; Wood, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011) and is used as an outcome variable in persistence studies among Black male students in community colleges (e.g., H. P. Mason, 1994, 1998). The final control used in this study was time status, a continuous variable indicating whether students were enrolled full-time or part-time during the academic year. This variable is based on the number of months enrolled full-time; thus it mitigates differences between semester and quarter systems. This variable is included as a control given prior research that found part-time students and students with lower course loads to have lower persistence and success rates (Freeman, 2003; Hagedorn et al., 2001-2002; Hampton, 2002; Miller, 2006). The next section will discuss the procedure used to analyze the variables identified in this section.

Analytical Procedure

Data were analyzed using logit analysis, also referred to as logistic regression. This procedure was selected given the dichotomous nature of the independent variable and the combination of dichotomous and continuous variables included in the models (Menard, 2002). Peng, So, Stage and St. John (2002) cite two generally acceptable rules for sufficient sample size as articulated by Lawley and Maxwell (1971) and Long (1997). Lawley and Maxwell (1971) required 51 participants beyond the number of variables examined. Long (1997) suggested that at least 10 observations are needed for each variable in the analysis. All analyses conducted in this study well exceeded both criteria.

This study employed a two-stage design with two models developed in each stage. In Stage 1, data from the 2003-2004 BPS were used for students' reasons for leaving college. Two models were examined in this stage. The first model examined the effect of the covariates, reasons for leaving college (X), on the dependent variable, Black versus non-Black respondents (Y). In the second model, data were analyzed using the same approach; however, Model 2 included the control variables (Z). This approach allowed for analysis of departure variables with and without relevant controls, enabling the researcher to determine the effect (if any) of the controls on the analyses. In Stage 2, a similar two-model design was employed; however, Stage 2 examined data from the 2005-2006 BPS to determine differences, by racial-ethnic affiliation, among respondents in reference to their reasons for leaving college. In the third model, the effect of the covariates (Y), student's reasons for leaving college, was examined on the dependent variable (X). This final model computed included data examined in the third model as well as the study control variables (Z). One covariate examined in Stage 2, called for military service, was not included in Stage 1 due to the inclusion of this variable in the second wave of BPS and not in the initial wave.

Data in this study were analyzed using PowerStats, a statistical software accessible through the NCES data lab. In reality, leaving college is likely a confluence of factors. This notion was recognized by NCES; thus it should be noted that respondents in BPS could indicate more than one reason for leaving college. As a result, the researcher examined both variance inflation factor levels and correlations between covariates (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995; R. L. Mason, Gunst, & Hess, 1989; Neter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1983; O'Brien, 2007). Data are reported in the form of odds ratio, a ratio depicting the probability of the occurrence of a particular event (Rudas, 1998). Given that BPS data are a result of a complex design and are not adjusted for nonresponses, p values greater than $p < .01$ should be interpreted with caution (Broene & Rust, 2000; Flowers, 2006). The next section of this manuscript will discuss the limitation of this study.

Limitations

Data collected from BPS present a limited number of potential reasons for respondents' departure. Thus, it is unlikely that the findings from this study represent the totality of factors impacting student departure. Furthermore, given that the data were collected from student perspectives, students may not be able to fully articulate the full range of factors affecting their persistence. For example, it may be more difficult for a student to discuss how

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Reasons for Leaving

Variable	2003-2004		2005-2006	
	Black	Non-Black	Black	Non-Black
Academic problems	13.2	16.3	9.8	19.7
Dissatisfied with program	23.2	14.4	4.2	21.3
Family responsibilities	26.9	12.9	10.5	19.9
Financial reasons	12.3	18.4	14.0	20.0
Other reasons	21.8	13.5	26.0	17.2
Personal reasons	10.1	21.2	22.1	13.8
Scheduling reasons	0.9	17.4	12.1	19.5
Called for military service	—	—	0.9	19.4

cognitive variables (e.g., high school GPA, assessment test scores, SAT or ACT scores) could be related to their persistence. Thus, given the limited number of variables examined, findings from this study should be viewed as an extension of H. P. Mason's (1994, 1998) work rather than a comprehensive model of Black male persistence in 2-year colleges. Additionally, this article presents analyses from the first and second waves of BPS. Participant responses are included in each wave, regardless of their previous responses. Thus, if a student left after the 2003-2004 academic year and returned and left again in 2005-2006, they were likely included in both the 2004 and 2006 variables. However, if they did not return after 2004, then they were omitted. Given the existence of the stop-out phenomenon in the community college, where students leave the institution and then return, it is possible that findings could present data for the same student. However, this is not to assume that the student left college for the same reason(s); thus, this is not a limitation, per se. Finally, the variable "other reasons," which reflected whether respondents left college for reasons not specified, does not provide information beyond excluding those in the general response categories (e.g., academic problems, dissatisfaction with program, family responsibilities). Thus, the rationale for students indicating this as a departure reason is unknown. The next section will present findings derived from the analyses described.

Findings

As evident in Table 1, Black males are most likely to leave due to family responsibilities (26.9%), program dissatisfaction (23.2%), and other reasons

Table 2. Model 1: Departure for Black Males Without Controls, 2003-2004

Variable	OR	95% CI
Academic problems	0.630	[0.15, 2.62]
Dissatisfied with program	2.279*	[1.19, 4.36]
Family responsibilities	4.941***	[2.32, 10.50]
Financial reasons	0.566	[0.27, 1.18]
Other reasons	2.543***	[1.56, 4.13]
Personal reasons	0.254***	[0.12, 0.50]
Scheduling reasons	—	—

Note: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

(21.8%), while non-Black students are most likely to leave due to personal reasons (21.2%). In 2005-2006, Blacks' top reasons for leaving were other reasons (26.0%) and personal reasons (22.1%). As evident in this table, there are few areas where more than 15% of Blacks and non-Blacks reported as their reason for leaving. The only exception to this is other reasons in 2005-2006, which 26.0% and 17.2% of Blacks and non-Blacks cited as rationales for leaving. Thus, a cursory review of these data indicates that Blacks and non-Blacks seem to leave college for differing reasons. This is an important consideration, given that the focus of this analysis is on differences between these groups.

The first stage of analysis examined students' reported reasons for departure, examining students who enrolled in college for the first time in 2003-2004 and left before the 2004-2005 academic year. The first model examined student departure without controls, in order to investigate general findings from the sample. Two nonsignificant findings emerged from this initial analysis: The odds of Black males' leaving college were 37% lower for academic problems and 44% lower for financial reasons. However, several variables indicated significant results; see Table 2. The odds of Black males' leaving college due to dissatisfaction with their programs of study were 127% greater in comparison to other male students, $p < .05$.

Family responsibilities were also presented as an important rationale for departure. The odds of Black male collegians' attributing departure to family responsibilities were 394% greater than those of their male counterparts. This finding was significant at $p < .001$. Black male respondents were also more likely, by odds of 154%, to characterize their rationale for departure as being for other reasons (those not included in the other response categories), $p < .001$. In contrast to their male counterparts, the odds of Black male

collegians' departing from college as a result to personal reasons were 75% lower than those of their male peers, $p < .001$. Although not reported in Table 2 due to instability of the relative standard errors and estimates, Black males were certainly less likely to leave college for scheduling reasons.

In the second model, data from the initial analysis were subjected to several controls (e.g., age, income percentile rank, college GPA, and full-time status). As noted earlier, according to the literature on Black men in 2-year community colleges, these variables are related to student performance. Even with these controls in place, minimal differences in significant findings were evident between the first and second models in this study. One difference identified is that the controls mitigated for student dissatisfaction. In the first model, the odds of Black males' departure for dissatisfaction with their program were 127% greater than those of their counterparts; however, controls reduced the odds to 58%. As such, this variable was not significant in the second model, $p = ns$. In contrast, while the financial reasons variable was not significant in the first model, significant differences were detected in the second, $p < .05$. Findings from the second model revealed that the odds of Black male collegians' leaving college for financial reasons were 51% less than those of other male students. In terms of nonsignificant findings, as with the first model, there were no significant differences in leaving college for academic problems between Black males and their counterparts (see Table 3).

Several items that were significant in the first model remained significant in the second. For instance, the odds of Black males' departure for family responsibilities were 453% greater than those of their male counterparts, an increase in odds size from the first analysis, $p < .001$. Further, the odds of leaving college for other reasons remained significant, with departure for other reasons being 137% greater for Black males, $p < .001$. Further, the odds of Black males' departure remained lower, by 80%, for personal reasons. This finding was significant at $p < .001$. Further, as with the first model, Black males were certainly less likely to cite schedule issues as a rationale for departure.

In the second analytic stage, departure data were examined for Black males who entered college in 2003-2004 and left college either after their 1st year of study or during the 2006 data collection year. Thus the second stage includes responses not for students examined in the first stage but for those who persisted for a longer period of time. As with the first analytic stage, data were compared with and without controls. Findings from data with controls (the third model) indicated two nonsignificant and six significant findings. With respect to nonsignificant findings, the odds of Black males' departure for academic problems and financial reasons were lower than those of their male counterparts ($p = ns$), by 25% and 5%, respectively (see Table 4).

Table 3. Model 2: Departure for Black Males With Controls, 2003-2004

Variable	OR	95% CI
Academic problems	0.546	[0.13, 2.18]
Dissatisfied with program	1.580	[0.82, 3.04]
Family responsibilities	5.539***	[2.36, 12.95]
Financial reasons	0.494*	[0.24, 1.01]
Other reasons	2.371***	[1.40, 4.01]
Personal reasons	0.206***	[0.09, 0.43]
Scheduling reasons	—	—

Note: Controls included age, income percentile rank, grade point average, and time status.
OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

Table 4. Model 3: Departure for Black Males Without Controls, 2005-2006

Variable	OR	95% CI
Academic problems	0.754	[0.27, 2.07]
Dissatisfied with program	0.161***	[0.02, 0.99]
Family responsibilities	0.374**	[0.15, 0.92]
Financial reasons	0.958	[0.48, 1.90]
Other reasons	3.743***	[2.13, 6.55]
Personal reasons	2.299***	[1.58, 3.33]
Scheduling reasons	0.295*	[0.09, 0.95]
Called for military service	0.092***	[0.00, 66.357]

Note: OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

As with previous models, program dissatisfaction was a significant finding. The odds of Black males' departure for dissatisfaction with their program were 84% lower than those of their male counterparts, $p < .001$. In terms of family responsibilities, the odds of Black males' departure for family responsibilities were 63% lower than those of other males in public 2-year colleges, $p < .01$. Further, the odds of departure were also lower for scheduling reasons, as Black males were 71% less likely to report scheduling as a rationale for leaving the 2-year college, $p < .05$. In addition, the odds of departure due to being called for military service were 91% lower than those of their male counterparts, $p < .001$. Two variables illustrated that Black males were more likely than their peers to depart from college. The odds of

Table 5. Model 4: Departure for Black Males With Controls, 2005-2006

Variable	OR	95% CI
Academic problems	0.944	[0.34, 2.62]
Dissatisfied with program	0.140***	[0.02, 0.86]
Family responsibilities	0.327**	[0.13, 0.79]
Financial reasons	0.826	[0.42, 1.62]
Other reasons	3.208***	[1.80, 5.71]
Personal reasons	1.846**	[1.22, 2.78]
Scheduling reasons	0.347*	[0.10, 1.14]
Called for military service	0.088***	[0.00, 61.78]

Note: Controls included age, income percentile rank, grade point average, and time status.
OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

Black males' departure for other reasons were 274% greater than those of other male collegians. Also, Black males' odds of departure for personal reasons were 128% greater than those of their male counterparts. Both of these findings were significant at $p < .001$.

Even with controls added, the fourth model presented (see Table 5) illustrated similar findings to the third model. Two variables were found to have nonsignificant findings, indicating that the odds of Black males' departure for academic problems and financial reasons were 6% and 18% lower than those of other male collegians in the 2-year college, $p = ns$. Findings from Model 4 indicated that the odds of Black males' departure were lower on four significant variables. The odds of leaving were 86% lower for Black males in comparison to their peers for dissatisfaction with their programs. This finding was significant at $p < .001$. Also, departure odds were lower for family responsibilities. The analysis revealed that the odds of Black males' leaving college as a result of family responsibilities were 68% lower than those of their peers, $p < .01$. The odds of leaving college, among Black males, were 66% lower than those of their peers for scheduling reasons, $p < .05$. Further, the odds of leaving college were 92% lower for Black males in comparison to other males at 2-year colleges, $p < .001$. However, as with the third model, Black males were more likely to report leaving college for other reasons and personal reasons. The odds of Black males' departure for other reasons were 220% greater than those of their peers, $p < .001$. In addition, departure odds for personal reasons were 84% greater for Black males in comparison to other male students in 2-year colleges, $p < .01$.

Table 6. Comparison of Findings From 2003-2004 and 2005-2006

Variable	2003-2004	2005-2006
Without controls		
Academic problems	Less (<i>ns</i>)	Less (<i>ns</i>)
Dissatisfied with program	Greater (*)	Less (***)
Family responsibilities	Greater (***)	Less (**)
Financial reasons	Less (<i>ns</i>)	Less (<i>ns</i>)
Other reasons	Greater (***)	Greater (***)
Personal reasons	Less (***)	Greater (***)
Scheduling reasons	—	Less (*)
With controls		
Academic problems	Less (<i>ns</i>)	Less (<i>ns</i>)
Dissatisfied with program	Less (<i>ns</i>)	Less (***)
Family responsibilities	Greater (***)	Less (**)
Financial reasons	Less (*)	Less (<i>ns</i>)
Other reasons	Greater (***)	Greater (***)
Personal reasons	Less (***)	Greater (**)
Scheduling reasons	—	Less (*)
Called for military service	—	Less (***)

Discussion

Comparing findings across 2003-2004 and 2005-2006 data provides for interesting insights and generalities across 1- and 3-year departure reasons (see Table 6). The analyses in this study revealed that there were no real differences between Black males and their non-Black counterparts in leaving college for academic problems. However, in general, Black males were less likely to leave college for program dissatisfaction, financial reasons, military reasons, or scheduling issues. In contrast, they were more likely to leave for personal reasons not included in the response categories.

Two variables examined in this study illustrated how differences occurred over time. In the 2003-2004 sample, the odds of Black males' departure due to family responsibilities were greater; however, in the 2005-2006 sample, Black males were less likely to leave for family reasons. Possibly, family responsibilities serve to have a greater influence on Black males' departure within their 1st year of college; however, those persisting past the 1st year may not be as challenged by family responsibilities. In essence, those who will leave college as a result of family responsibilities will do so early. Either

way, this finding is consistent with findings from H. P. Mason's (1994, 1998) model that identified family responsibilities as a factor effecting Black male students' persistence in the community college.

Further, the odds of Black males' departure in the 2003-2004 sample was lower for other reasons while greater in the 2005-2006 sample. Possibly, respondents selected this category due to issues with campus personnel (e.g., faculty, administration), goal modification, inadequate understanding of campus policies, or a lack of perceived utility (the worthiness of their academic endeavors). All of these issues have been addressed in prior research as directly relating to student persistence (Brown, 2007; Dorsey, 1996; Freeman, 2003; Glenn, 2003-2004; Ikehwa, 2001; Jordan, 2008; H. P. Mason, 1994, 1998; Mosby, 2009; Perrakis, 2008; Pope, 2006; Poole, 2006; Riley, 2007; Travis, 1994; Wilkins, 2005). Unfortunately, given that the reasons are not necessarily specified, it is difficult to deduce why this may have occurred.

In all, findings from this study did indicate higher reported rates of departure for Black males, in comparison to other college males, who were challenged by personal reasons, finances, and other reasons. These findings seem to reinforce the notion proffered by Bean and Metzner (1985) and extended by H. P. Mason (1994, 1998) that environmental variables are an important persistence consideration for nontraditional students, in this case, African American male students. This is not to disaffirm the role of social and academic considerations in Black male persistence. Rather, findings suggest that there is a need to consider the role of factors external to an institution, understanding with the objective of better understanding how these factors impact outcomes within an institution.

It should be noted that Bean and Metzner (1985) believed that environmental variables were "factors over which the institution has little control" (p. 502), thereby displacing the role of the institution in providing an environment conducive to success for collegians. As noted by Bush (2004), Glenn (2003-2004), and Wood and Turner (2011), the institution is of central importance to the success of students and can serve to mitigate external factors. As noted by Bush and Bush (2010), "both in practice and in the body of the literature the institution as a focus is likened to the elephant in the room that no one desires to engage" (p. 57). The next section will address the "elephant" by providing recommendations for institutions to address the issues identified in this study.

Implications for Practice and Research

Recommendations for practice are offered that emphasize the role of the institution in supporting student persistence. Suggestions include the implementation of

a mandatory orientation, pre-entry counseling, formal and informal mentorships, and an early warning system. A description of each recommendation follows.

Mandatory orientation. Community colleges should have mandatory in-person orientation sessions that discuss the time commitment needed for success in college. As part of this orientation, students can complete real or mock weekly schedules that include (at a minimum) their class time and time needed to study for each course. This will better allow students to prepare for and determine how to best balance their personal and family responsibilities with their collegiate obligations.

Pre-entry counseling. To reinforce the time commitment required for success in college, students should engage in mandatory first-semester counseling. This counseling should not be limited solely to academic course work but should include issues of school-life balance. Counselors should encourage students to consider the timeliness of their academic enterprises in relationship to their familial obligations. Further, students should be required to engage discussions that require them to consider how they will avoid conflicting obligations. This will necessitate that students consider academic programs, degree intensity (part- or full-time), and flexible offerings (evening, weekend, online, hybrid) that will allow them to balance personal and family responsibilities.

Formal and informal mentoring or role models. Once a student enters the community college, the institution should establish formal or informal mentoring or role-modeling relationships. This necessitates that faculty and staff members as well as administrators establish personal relationships with students that go beyond social niceties. Institutional personnel must know their students' nonverbal and verbal communication patterns. Bonds must be established that allow mentors and role models to ask questions of students specific to school-life balance, to provide meaningful encouragement, and to refer students to resources as necessary. Once institutional affiliates (e.g., faculty members, administrators, staff members, students) become aware of personal, family, and other issues impacting students, a reporting mechanism should be in place to encourage the student to seek counseling services.

Early warning system. As part of after entry monitoring, colleges should establish early warning systems. An early warning system is a tracking system that provides an early warning to college staff and administration when a student is not making adequate progress. An early warning policy would require institutional personnel (e.g., counselors, staff, faculty, administrators) to file a report when students' performance (primarily measured by grades, attendance, completion of homework, and/or classroom engagement)

becomes a concern. Once a student has been reported for one or more of these issues, counselors, faculty, and administrators can meet with the student and enact immediate interventions, provide referral and guidance, and support the student with all reasonable means of the institution to prevent attrition and/or poor academic success.

This study has illustrated the importance of environmental factors in Black male departure in the community college. While this study made comparisons between Black males collegians and all other males in 2-year colleges, future research should disaggregate the other male students by racial-ethnic affiliation. This will allow for more intricate comparisons (e.g., Black vs. White, Black vs. Hispanic or Latino, Black vs. Asian), thereby providing more insight into issues of student departure. Further, if sample size permits, various subgroups (e.g., older, low income, biracial, immigrant, married) among Black males should be examined. These intricacies could be examined within group (among Black males) and between groups, as this study has done. Most importantly, future research should seek to better understand what the categories “other reasons” and “personal reasons” mean to Black males. Determining why these categories were selected and what factors these students identified that affect their persistence, which was not addressed in the questionnaire, would add an important element to the departure puzzle.

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Notes

1. This study uses the terms *2-year college* and *community college* interchangeably, as the overwhelming majority of community colleges are 2-year degree-granting institutions.
2. This study uses the terms *Black* and *African American* interchangeably.
3. H. P. Mason (1994, 1998) classified hopelessness as an environmental variable. He defined hopelessness as “the perception that whatever is attempted, or however much effort is devoted to that attempt, it will not be successful because of the societal forces that tend to work against the subjects” (p. 123). This variable seems to be misclassified, as it is almost undoubtedly a psychological outcome variable rather than an environmental variable.

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Bio

J. Luke Wood, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Administration, Rehabilitation, and Postsecondary Education (ARPE)/Interwork Institute at San Diego State University. Dr. Wood is Chair of the Multicultural & Multiethnic Education (MME) special interest group of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). His research focuses on community colleges, specifically in the areas of ethical leadership and decision-making, Black male achievement, and leadership development.