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Impact of Finances on Persistence of African American Males at Community College

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INTRODUCTION

- There are currently low completion rates at community colleges, especially among minority groups.
- Within minority groups, African American males have the lowest graduation rates (AACC, 2009).
- The disparity that exists within these graduation rates raises the question, "What influences the persistence of African American males in community college?"
- The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine, describe, and analyze the experiences of African American males who persisted in an urban Louisiana community college.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

- Student Departure Theory
 - students depart higher educational systems during the first two years of college, the greatest proportion occurring in the first year of college.
 - a student's choice to persist at an institution is heavily predicated upon his or her experiences on campus with various social and institutional factors (Tinto, 1993)
- African American Men in Education
 - Black men are now more likely than they were in 1960 to be unemployed, involved in the criminal justice ; Black men are suspended; placed in developmental courses and special education(Cuyjet, 2006)
 - In order to properly address the challenges faced by the African American men who make up a small percentage of the college and university population, there must be an attempt to learn about the socio-cultural characteristics of these students (Cuyjet, 1997);
 - Few researchers have examined the role that academic and non-academic factors play in facilitating the success of Black men in college (Strayhorn, 2008;Majors & Billson, 1992; Strayhorn, 2010.)
 - Education is a portal which could lead to economic stability is common belief (St. John & Noell, J., 1989;Kiah, 1992;Clark, 1983)
- Persistence
 - Tinto's model (Tinto, 1975, 1993) suggests a socialization process whereby students who become successfully socialized into the campus academic and social systems are more likely to persist
 - Astin and Terenzini & Pascarella found that student perceptions (impact) play a part in the persistence within the institutions, especially that of minority students and Nora and Cabrera found that discriminatory perceptions at the institutions ensued negative class experiences which impacted ability to integrate;
 - AA males in CC –Flowers found they integrate less socially ; Bush & Bush found institutional variables impact persistence – especially faculty interaction as found with Wood; Strayhorn also stress about supportive relationships for AA males in higher education

METHODS

- Phenomenology
 - A phenomenological research approach was used as the strategy of inquiry to explore experiences of African American males in a community college setting.
- Research Site
 - Louisiana Community College (LCC)
 - The largest community college in the state
 - Multiple campuses
 - Offers certificates, technical degrees, associate degrees
 - largest enrollment of African American males of all community colleges in the state.
 - institution has a majority African American population
- Institution has the most African American male completers
- Participants
 - 8 African American males
- Upperclassman with a remainder of 12 credit hours or fewer needed to receive their associate's degree.
- Data Collection
 - Each student was interviewed on an individual basis.
 - Semi-structured Interviews conducted
 - All interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

LCC Ethnic Profile 2008-2012 Fall Semesters Source: La Board of Regents

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Black Non-Hispanic	37%	38%	40%	41.70%	42.49%
White Non-Hispanic	40%	38%	35%	33.60%	35.33%
Hispanic	6%	7%	7%	7.20%	8.10%
Asian	3%	3%	3%	2.70%	3.36%
Native American	1%	1%	0%	0.40%	0.29%
No indication	11%	10%	12%	11.40%	10.43%

LCC Percentages of Completers by Race for last 4 years

Source: La Board of Regents

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Black	29.60%	27.90%	29.90%	30.70%
White	50.80%	52.70%	48.50%	45.90%
Other	19.60%	48.50%	21.60%	23.40%

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Age	Major	Financial Aid	Years at institution	Employment Status	Children
Clark	27	Business	Yes-grants and loans	6	Part time	Yes-2
Xavier	35	Nursing	Yes-grants and loans	8	Full time	Yes -2
Jordan	25	Chemistry	Yes-grants	2.5	Unemployed	No
Darren	21	Business	No	2	Part time	No
Robair	37	General Studies(science)	Yes-grants	2	Full time	Yes-1
Brandon	29	Business	Yes-loans	7	Unemployed	Yes-1
John	22	General Studies (psychology)	Yes-loans	5	Part time	No
Myles	32	Engineering Technology	No	3	Full time	Yes- 2

RESULTS

- Data revealed finances have considerable bearing on African American males' decision to persist to graduation
- All participants who had negative experiences with financial support, stopped attending school at some point
- Participants lack understanding of Financial Aid: Grants vs Loans
- Family Support among these participants was critical in their decisions to persist
- Data revealed finances have considerable bearing on African American males' decision to persist to graduation
- Participants expect to get jobs which will improve finances
- Developed determination to complete degree despite financial strain
- Family support, along with faculty support, aided these participants in persisting

CONCLUSIONS

- Assistance with job placement
 - African American male fathers need jobs that support efforts to complete education
 - Institutions can cultivate relationships between students and businesses
- Support system within institution for families
 - Many institutions establish family support systems geared toward single mothers
- Implementation of financial counseling institutions
 - Crucial for African American males to be educated about financial aid in addition to personal finances
 - Counseling regarding child support, child care, etc
- Mentoring program geared to African American males
 - Major factor to help those lacking positive family support

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