

FACTORS THAT INCREASE AND DECREASE PERSISTENCE FOR AFRICAN  
AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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by

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## Abstract

### FACTORS THAT INCREASE AND DECREASE PERSISTENCE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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This paper explored the fact that retention of college students remains an important goal for all postsecondary institutions (Flowers, 2004-2005). African American student has challenges completing the secondary education. Traditional retention strategies that are employed to retain white student will not always yield the same result for African-American students (Conley & Hamilin, 2009). African American students find themselves being exposed racism and social exile in their first years of college. Tinto (1999) provide practical suggestions for broad student retention strategies. Students that are not African American students' needs to be educated about multicultural students and learn to stand up for social injustice. There are also underrepresented students' cultural differences that must be taken into consideration in efforts of retention. Tinto (1993) also mentioned that it needs to be integrated into school campus culture.

Gruffrida stated first-and second-generation high achievers placed vital importance on the educational achievement of their parents when elaborating on the parental support they received. He also indicated that with second-generation college students it was helpful when parents who assist their kids/students with their homework, finances and college process students tend to retain in college (Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Willett, 1989). The literature review uncovered that African American students need support and financial support student's percentage are low for parental financial aid and that leads to students worrying about finances and not focus on their academic goals. Universities need to develop strategies and staff training to support African American students. African American students go to predominantly African American schools they tend not have any exposure to any other race but their own. African American student's African American students first experience with different cultures besides their race begins when they enter college and by oppressing or lack of support in surrounding would need a solid foundation in the beginning years of school for them to be successful. African American students are unrepresented in universities

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## Chapter One: Introduction

First-year students in college experience a critical period during their first year in terms of dealing with identities, attitudes, and goals within themselves. The first year of college is when many students discover beliefs, adjustments, future successes in higher education (Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, Oestreicher, 2016). For first-year students, it's the beginning of a learning process. Not only are they learning about their curriculum, but they also soon begin to learn a few things about themselves. Their likes and dislikes; what type support they will need; are they looking for help, or friendships. African males believes that if African-American men have a good relationship with white faculty students, they are more likely to be satisfied. Additionally, Black students who have a positive relationship with faculty facilitate healthy social and personal development. Baldwin, Chambliss, and Towler (2017) examined empirical studies that show an association between dispositional optimism and stress within a college population of Africa-American students are sparse. Carter, D. F. (2006) believes that the critical areas for minority students to be prosperous in college are academic preparation, adequate financial aid, and secure support networks in school. Carter, D.F. (2006) went on to express that a lost was learned about the challenges that minority students had faced yet the gaps remain in persistence with minorities. In fact, minority students can tend to feel a sense of inadequacy when it comes to obtaining a college education. There can be many obstacles that make a minority student feel like there is no support for them. They may "hear" about support groups but fail to see it. When it comes to seeking out help, first-year students don't have enough time between their classes to seek out organizations. There are numerous factors that contribute to African American retention in higher education.

According to Martin, J. & Figueroa, J. (2010) many factors play a significant part in reasons why African Americans as a population seem to have difficulty graduating from college. African American students need to feel like they belong to have a connection with staff and their peers. During the Fall semester of 2001 at a HBCU in Texas, 250 students at a historic black university participated in a survey to identify how many students had a mentor and how many students felt it was necessary to have an African American professor as a mentor for the success in college (Hickson, Ed. D). The survey showed that students thought that it was important that students have mentors and the majority of students think it is essential for their professor mentor to be of the same race. African Americans in specific have one of the lowest retention and degree achievement rates nationwide with only 42% earning their bachelor's degree within six years at the University of California, Los Angeles (Hickson, 2001). It can be a scary environment when an African-American attempt to attend college. The phrase, "not seeing anyone like me," can make them feel isolated. Thus, making them feel intimidated and reluctant to follow their course.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is important to investigate the effects of financial factors and socio-economic, and the declining of graduation of African American males places a significant burden on America, especially when the growing economy are competing for jobs and developing a workable and robust nation are essential (Reid & More, 2008; Schleicher, 2008). Unfortunately for a lot of young African-American men, they still tend to believe that they don't need a secondary education because they will become the athlete. They look at athletes such LeBron James who immediately went pro after high school.

Additionally, conflicts of cultures are based expectations that occur in academic environments, negative stereotypes, a lack of African American role models in the curriculum, and a lack of importance on the positive aids that African American educational quality (Robinson & Biran, 2006). Role models in low-income neighborhoods tend to have fewer examples of role models, due to the struggle that is endured by the majority. Gruffrida (2008) stated that an ideal scenario seems to be meaningful partnerships between public high schools serving African American students and local public colleges in which curriculum, expectations, cognitive factors, psycho-social factors, and academic support are discussed at the high school and collegiate level.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Retention:** *Students meeting clearly defined educational goals whether they are course credits, career advancement, or achievement of new skills (Tinto, 1993)*

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study will discover the main factors that cause African-American students to drop out of college and review literature that demonstrates successful retention strategies, and intervention approach that are useful for African American students in higher education. Additionally, this study aims to promote and improve retention in higher education and improve graduation success for African American students.

### **The Significance of This Study**

The significance of this study is to uncover factors that will help improve success rates of African-American students. O'Neal (2017) found three themes that have a significant effect on



African American students in school; 1. An institutional environment that expands on how and what this will look like. 2. Institutional support and expanded on what it will look like. 3. A decision to withdraw from college. This paper explores these findings and makes appropriate recommendations.

### **Limitations of Research**

Internet search information was limited. A limitation of the study was limited research on African-American students who were able to succeed despite challenges. Also, another limitations shortage of programs and services that couple academic, social support, financial support.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature**

Chapter two will address retention problems African American students face; such as social exile, financial stress, and academic stress. It will also go into detail how African American students don't have faculty support. The chapter will also explain how universities should develop retention strategies and intervention approaches for the student's success.

### **Retention problems with African-American**

The factors of increasing persistence with African American students in college can fall between lacks school support, social exile, financial overwhelmed. African American students are not born with silver spoon in their mouth meaning a means to pay for college. Some students are the first to go college in their family, and they experienced factors in higher education that their parents or guardians are unable to advise on because of their lack of experienced.

Baldwin, Chambliss, Towler (2017) examine the role of life event stress on African-American college students attending college they discovered that the differences respect to the perception of threat, desirability, personal resources, ability to cope and response options (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1984). Baldwin, Chambliss, Towler (2017) found racial and ethnic differences have been found among adolescents regarding life stress exposure. Additionally, Baldwin, Chambliss, Towler (2017) suggest that minority students are more likely to express apprehension about the academic rigor compared to non-minority counterparts. There is also this internal "obstacle" that many minorities feel, about being unable to perform because they are a minority, and because of this they think that they may not be able to follow or keep up with the courses and ultimately fall behind.

## **Social Exile**

African-American students and athletes are considered at-risk students due to the many hindrances that they suffer from while attending college. Social isolation is one of the leading obstacles that African-American's suffer from. Racial profiling is a significant part because if a student is attending a mostly white dominated school, they tend to become social outcasts because there is no one available who can support their concerns regarding the feeling of being unaccepted due to their race. African-American student-athletes are pressured at not only succeeding in their academic studies but also succeeding in their sports. African-American student athletes face many challenges from their peers, teachers, and even their coaches. They must learn to balance, "their athletic and academic endeavors." (Parham, 1993). Athletes must find a way to make both their education and the responsibility to their teamwork. Obtaining an education and playing a sport at the same time can be very demanding. If a minority student-athlete wants to be successful, they must be vocal when it comes to needing support.

African American students can experience isolation and identity issues from the lack of peer support geared toward real academic aims (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Witherspoon et al., 1997). When you're a first-year student it's effortless to feel alone and wonder who you are and how will you get through this hurdle. It can be a little more overwhelming for African-American students because they are already put in a category of having a disadvantage.

Researchers say it's imperative for African-American male college students to have a positive relationship with the white faculty. According to researcher's African-American male's students who have a good relationship with the white department are more likely to be

satisfied in the white college environment. With a positive social adjustment and personal development, black males can be a success in college (Robertson, Ph.D., Mason). White students gain opportunities to develop the racial identity they should subsequently be educated about how to use their privilege towards social justice efforts. Baldwin, Chambliss, Towler (2017) states that African-American college students have been exposed social exile and disconnection with the faculty and peers (Fleming, 1984; June, Curry, and Gear, 1990; Sedlacek, 1987). Campbell, M.A. mentioned that students of a constant color report on their views on racist and lacking acceptance in the university. Harper and Hurtado (2007) say because of the racial climates with predominately white college campus consistently shows there are gaps in social satisfaction among ethnic groups. Astin's (1999) also states exploratory social theory suggests that a successful student is one who is highly connected to the campus and environment, because it gives students a devotion to study. Futhermore, participating in student organizations and frequently remain on campus also give them positive relations with faculty and peers.

African-American students on predominantly white campus tend to isolate themselves because of they feel alienated academically and socially. Egerton (1969) revealed mostly white institution continually resists necessary structural changes to accommodate for African-American students to help them academically be a success. Rhoads and Black (1995) stated that students with social justice perspective feel a sense of social responsibility to help shift our society into one that is just too all citizens and is concerned with educating others about their social responsibility to disrupt the oppressive system. Additionally, findings concluded that African-American students on white campuses seem to want black studies to be a means of providing essential information about the history and culture of blacks and promote black solidarity, identity, and positive self-concept. Predominantly white campuses are pre-dominantly

white for a reason. When a minority is thrust into a different environment than they are accustomed to, they tend to draw back and withdraw into themselves because they feel that no one understands them or no one can relate to their fears and worries.

Feagin's (1998) theory of cumulative discrimination is used to connect theory with data. Feagin's (1998) proposed that the severe impact of racial discrimination may take one of four forms; (1) aggression; (2) exclusion, including social ostracism; (3) dismissal of subculture; and (4) typecasting. Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, and, Oestreicher, (2016) outline that the goals are to assist African-American students with the transition from high school to the university environment, to facilitate social engagement with other students, the lead instructor, and assigned peer advisors, and to promote active learning skills and strategies. Tinto (1993) and Astin (1984) had identified several factors that would be contributed to student decline in student success. Social, academic integration influences can keep persistence in school retention. Tinto found various built-in characteristics that influence student's persistence family background, K-12 educational achievements, academic abilities, personal traits.

### **Financial Stress**

Studies show that African-American students with higher socioeconomic background do better in predominantly white college than students from a working-class background. Morton (1982) states that African-American students have an increased need for financial support, and because of this they loss focus on their academic success because of the concerned about finances. Often African-American student do not adequately prepare for college because they are lacking the financial support to complete college (Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke 1998). African-American college students from lower socioeconomic status families are more

likely to have trouble graduating because of financially challenged. Financial challenges can impact African-American student persistence; evidence also suggests that even with attempts to improve degree programs, colleges have failed to improve the learning experiences that garner the engagement of African-American students (Enstrom and Tinto, 2008). When a student has to worry about money, and if they'll make it to the next semester, it can take a toll on their studies. Because of the continual change in financial support, a first-year student worries if they would be able to afford to continue their education.

### **Academic Stress**

According to Berger and Milem (2000) students begin their higher education learning with their schema based on individual experiences. Students will have learned how to study from their socioeconomic experiences. African-American would learn better study skills from joining study groups interaction of new developments of friends. If they develop a functional group of friends, the influence will affect the study skills. Study groups give students more opportunities to interact with other students. They can learn about support groups and programs that would benefit them. African-Americans who suffer from some learning disability or just want to learn how to be part of a team.

### **Lack of Faculty Support**

Tinto (1993) says that students have elevated levels of integration generally with faculty and with peers in college life. Students' involvement in intellectual and social activities holds more relevance to degree completion among men than it does for women (Stage & Hossler, 2000). College students interacting with faculty help, the student, excel pursuing a degree (Harvey-Smith, 2003). Faculty members should encourage student involvement. Students exposed to a

various instructional organization with clarity by the faculty member will have more confidence in their academic achievement goals (Braxton, Bray, and Berger (2000). It's hard enough when a first-year student is in a different environment and feels loss completely. But when a student feels that they don't have their teacher's support, it can feel worse. Faculty members' door should always be open when it comes to students. If teacher's see that the student is struggling, they should offer support. It's disheartening when a teacher considers it a burden on their workload when a student asks for help.

### **Retention Strategies and Intervention Approaches**

- McGlynn (2009) stated a productive college would monitor year-to-year changes in student's studies to have an impact on using different interventions on student's successful outcomes. Declared that interventions and approaches to improve student retention and success should as far as possible be embedded into mainstream provision to ensure all students participate and benefit from them (Tatum and Rasool 1996). Novoa (1999) the development of trust and understanding with different culture group that you don't associate or collaborate with gives a sense of cohesion.

Slade, Eatmon, Staley, and Dixon (2015) states first-year students, are first-generation college students and addressing non-academic aspects of college preparation. The preparation would be resources that are available to access when needed, financial aid, writing centers, counseling and career centers. Students need to know how to navigate them when in need. Avoid academic probation and returned to school following semester.

College institutions should also develop a summer bridge program. An example of this is a program at North Carolina A&T State University. Slade, Eatmon, Staley and Dixon (2015) explain that the summer bridge program have first-year students provide enrichment credit-earn courses getting them prepared for their dominant they will be taking. ATSU summer bridge program is designed to offset the challenges of poorly willing students, and they offer developmental remediation courses.

Seidman (2005) argues that the positive experiences and interventions for African-American students will strengthen their intentions and commitments. While negative experiences would fade the persistence away in the committing to college success (Pascarell, Smart, & Ethington, 1986). Strayhorn, (2008) explains that campus-based interventions, and supports, such as a peer mentoring programs and study groups, learning communities is an excellent service to African-American students. Kezar, (2004) Summer Bridge or other early intervention program help students with transitions from high school to college by having academic classes providing mentoring and relationship building during the summer before college life begins.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

Tinto, Russo, and Kadel, (1994) explain that African American student persistent at a non-tradition higher education provides an insight of an impact of external factors on student's persistence but also how student involvement is critical to student's retention. If an African-American student is persistent enough, they can be able to withstand the stereotype or pressure that comes with gaining a college education.

Martin (2010) also states that retention programs, in general, are more successful when they are access correctly and comprehensive information about student's needs, and the factors



that affect retention (Lotkowski et al. 2004, 4). La Vant et al. (1987) mentioned that an effective faculty mentoring programs could be useful if the application promotes and enhances academic retention achievement and leadership development in African American men. Mentorships can be arranged formally and informally. Undecided students are high to drop out and not continue college because of lack of knowing what career goal they interested in often the main reason students give for not returning or pursuing a college degree. These programs would also target these students especially for undecided students and have proven to reduce attrition rates significantly.

Mortenson (1993) believes that student's perceptions of their family's financial sacrifices are just as important in encouraging and supporting students as the amount of money they receive. Gruffrida (1996) stated that the importance success or failure at college is influenced by many factors that are not addressed academic preparation, involvement with student's peers and relationships with faculty. What is important to remember, is that when a first-year student feels that they have the support of their teacher, it can have a profound effect on their psyche as well as their academic studies. Sometimes all a student needs to see is that their academic success matter to their teacher.

### **Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations**

In this chapter, strategies for African American students will be discussed. The chapter also explores how African American students can be successful with the support of Universities. Faculty support for African American students will be addressed. Additionally, this section will also explain how universities should develop more financial aid support and for the student's success.

#### **Solution to College Retention for African American Students**

Hausmann, Schofield, Woods, (2007) state that there is an importance of a sense of belonging in empirical studies of student persistence. A sense of belonging was found to be very important related with the institutional commitment at the start of the school year. In summary, researchers have consistently found that the following variables have a strong influence on college student's dropout's financial problems. Lack of social support interpersonal difficulties and poor academic skills and preparation for college (Bean, 1982; Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Johnson, 1997; Maudal, Butcher, &Mauger, 1974; Snell, Mekies, Green, &Tesar, 1993; Mohr, Eiche, &Sedlacek, 1998; Snell, Mekies, Green, & Tesar, 1993; Tinto, 1993). First-year students can feel like its kindergarten school all over again. A different environment, unfamiliar faces, challenges, all the things that can make them feel as if they are starting the education process all over again. When you can make friends, or even just one friend that can become a study buddy, it can make the transition smoother.

According to Noel-Levitz (2017), there are areas that higher education needs to target that will help African American students can be successful: *Recruiting*: Providing students with enough and right information to assist students making the best school selections to fit students' needs which would improve retention. *Admission Selectivity*: The academic ability is a strong predictor of student retention. A relationship between the degree of admission selectivity and institutional retention rates. University needs to commit to a student success that will lead to higher and predicted retention rates and performance. *Financial Aid*: Financial aid can have either a positive or negative influence on students. With this, it will have students deciding if they should have remained in college because they would worry about living cost and tuition. *Commuter Students*: Noel-Levitz (2017) believes that commuter students shared a universal need and concerned they have transportation issues, and they limited to spending time on campus. They have multiple life roles and having also integrated themselves to support systems like students that already on campus. Harris and Wood (2013) suggested that are five domains that are factors that influence success: Precollege consideration, Academic area, Environmental area, Non-cognitive area, Institutional space.

Pope (2006) recommended higher education to help with African American students engaged and motivated during their quest for successful degree completion should implement the following retention strategies for intervention: (a) academic and social integration; (b) eliminate racism (c) assist students in overcoming awareness; (d) improve counseling for students; (e) provide effective orientation programming more informative; (f) evaluate program effectiveness; (g) hire more African American administrators, faculty, staff, and students; ( h) create ethnic, cultural, and social support groups; and (i) create programs that connect with African American males' communities. Martin (2010) for retention to be successful an institution needs to have a

program that targets the whole student and all parts of his/her life. Novoa (1999) suggestions should be made by students and staff, faculty and they should reflect on their perception that the institution and the surrounding community are unaware of their impact on student's social adjustments and academic persistence. Students should be able to note about lack of awareness and that it's a result of alienation as one of the primary factors which involved retention. The counselor should be an instrument for increasing the level of institutional sensitivity to the systematic barriers that students of color encounter and in developing a community of diverse students. Snowden (2013) believe mentorship would also help in succeeding in student's retention. They believe that it can have a positive impact on the learning experience by improving assessment performance, reducing stress and anxiety, enhancing participation and engagement in the academic community and add value to student outcomes. Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013) believe if institutions would create a partnership with local colleges and universities to establish pipelines for male teachers of color for black students who are interested in becoming a teacher and willing to work with high schools. This will give them exposure to the profession and provide them with opportunities hone in on their intended career, and it would allow them to be an added resource for the high school students. Having a mentor provides a structure that can be built when a student gains a mentorship. They can obtain advice and learn from the experiences their mentor has that would make their transition into adult education easier.

Research shows that life is a struggle for African-Americans in our society, but men and women of color not only have a more stressful challenge of being judged on their race, they also have a lack of staff support. When you are giving the opportunity to attend college, there shouldn't be an internal struggle where students think, will I survive or will the staff support me,

or will I get enough aid to complete my courses. The research demonstrates that African-American students will walk away from their academics in higher education because of lack of finances and support. Therefore, colleges and universities need to get a better support system for students. For African-American's to be successful in a college, they need to look for help in the form of a mentor or even a friend. Students who have emotional and scholastic support have an easier transition. It is important for students to feel like they belong and not exiled. African-American students can be successful when they have better finance support and academic, and social support. If universities would stay focused and provided resources for African-American students to succeed, it won't be so hard for African-American man or woman to be retained in college.

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