Chapter 2
Implementing Black Male Initiative Programs: A Model for Promoting African American Male Success at a Metropolitan University

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ABSTRACT

The impetus behind this manuscript is to provide practitioners the transparency of executing a Black Male Initiative Program. Although established only for a year, the University of Central Oklahoma has created a framework for institutions of higher learning – specifically predominantly white, metropolitan institutions – that could be implemented to combat the social and cultural barriers that African-American males encounter during or before their college experience. Using Critical Race Theory and Dr. Shaun Harper’s anti-deficit framework as the theoretical structure for the Black Male Initiative program, this manuscript will further report the planning for the program, illustrate the significance of recruiting, retaining and graduating Black males and the transformative implications of African-American male success.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. -Nelson Mandela

It is no secret that Black men often encounter academic and social challenges. Fifty-four percent of Black men graduate from high school, compared to 75% of their Caucasian and Asian American peers. The research has been consistent in noting that this lack of success in higher education for Black males
has a profound impact on their ability to be productive citizens who are able to contribute to society in terms of public service, the democratic process, economic development, and socioeconomic mobility and status (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Robert Palmer and Dina Maramba share that other researchers (e.g., Farley, 1993; Robinson, 2000; West, 2001) explain that discrimination is a major factor prohibiting Black men from advancing through the educational pipeline.

However, each semester Black men enter into universities and colleges across the country with the intention of becoming college graduates. Taking into consideration prior societal conditioning and the lack of academic preparedness of Black men, matriculation into college is no easy task. However, once on campus, the historical disenfranchisement experienced by Black students leads to a lack of academic confidence. Paired with a sense of not belonging, degree completion is challenging at best and almost impossible if a student must navigate these circumstances alone. This manuscript will center on the Black Male Initiative implemented at the University of Central Oklahoma, a comprehensive master’s degree granting institution, located within the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area. This chapter will share insights into the diversity climate Black men encounter, the research conducted when designing a Black Male Initiative program, share insight on the challenges and successes of fulfilling such program and provide similar predominately white, metropolitan institutions, with the framework used to implement a Black Male Initiative that resulted in a program that provided academic support and structure as well as revealed the power of students’ resilience and hope.

**MAIN FOCUS**

The six-year graduating rate for Black male students attending college is 33.3%, compared to 48.1% for students overall (Harper, 2012). This was reflective of the graduation and retention rates experienced at the University of Central Oklahoma. The analysis of data began with a review of the persistence rates of first time freshmen at the institution. The first to second fall persistence rates for the institution were consistently at 65% from 2007 – 2013 (UCO Factbook, 2014), an area in which the leadership saw an opportunity for improvement. Upon further analysis, it was discovered that first-time, full-time Black male students were persisting at a rate of only 48% compared with the overall cohort’s rate during the same time period.

The challenges facing the Black male population at institutions of higher education are not isolated to the University of Central Oklahoma. Nor are these challenges the result of recent phenomenon. It is important to put into context the plight of the Black student within higher education, especially as it relates to their experiences at predominantly White institutions.

Harper (2013) shared that at many predominantly White colleges and universities, Black students have been excluded longer than they have been afforded opportunities to matriculate. For nearly two centuries after the first institution of higher learning in the New World was established in 1636, no Black student received a degree from an American college or university (Slater, 1994). Although there is some debate on who was the first Black person to graduate from college, these authors found that Alexander Lucius Twilight, a Vermont native, graduated from Middlebury College in 1823 (Slater, 1994). Before the end of the Civil War, approximately 40 Blacks had graduated from colleges and universities, all of which were in the North (Slater, 1994). This was not an easy achievement, particularly when considering the common perception of Black intellect. Thomas Jefferson’s sentiments are reflective of the common perception of the intellectual capacity of Black citizens during the early 18th century when he stated,