ABSTRACT

The retention of African-American male students in U.S. institutions of higher education is a complex and multifaceted problem that is comprised of both individual and institutional factors. Researchers have highlighted several individual factors that inhibit the academic persistence of African-American men in higher education institutions including poor academic preparation, financial constraints, low self-esteem, a lack of student involvement, and a lack of “connectedness” to the institution. This chapter will shed light on the state of the African-American male students engaged in higher education. It will also reveal the impact of this population’s participation in various versions of first-year experience (FYE) programs.
The African-American Male First-Year Experience

INTRODUCTION

The retention of African American male students in U.S. institutions of higher education is a complex and multifaceted problem – that is comprised of both individual and institutional factors. These factors, along with others, have had a major impact on the retention and success of African American males in higher education through and beyond their first-year experience.

In recent years college retention of African American men has been an increasing concern for colleges and universities (Palmer and Young, 2008). To combat this ever-growing trend, several institutions have designed and implemented diverse programs which seek to positively influence the student outcomes of African American males on their campuses (Cuyjet, 2006). Research has shown that these programs are beneficial in influencing the college experiences of African American males (Flowers, 2004). African American Male Initiatives (AAMIs) or Black Male Initiatives (BMIs) have recently emerged as campus initiatives designed to impact the persistence of first year African American male students. AAMIs or BMIs have been documented as programs that have facilitated the engagement and involvement of African American males both at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Palmer and Wood, 2015).

Researchers have also examined the role that higher education institutions play in the low retention rates of African American men. Factors like institutional exclusion, limited support networks (peer, faculty, and administration), and the absence of resources identifiable with men of color are cited as major problems surrounding the retention of African American male students (McClure, 2006; Tinto, 1993). The combination of institutional and individual factors that thwart the success of this student population have created a need to examine solutions to address the issue of retention of African American males in higher education.

Johnson and McGowan (2017) discussed in the Journal of African American Males in Education the host of challenges African American males face and are forced to navigate in the educational pipeline. HBCUs have been applauded for providing a nurturing and affirming environment for its students, yet their role in promoting access to college and ultimately degree attainment for African American males to and through their first-year experience is missing. Findings from interviews conducted by Johnson and McGowan, with 19 African American male alumni from nine institutions, indicate that early experiences grappling with negative stereotypes associated with African American male achievement strongly influenced their decisions to attend an HBCU. The campus environment in general fostered opportunities for positive interactions that proved to be important in the academic, personal, and professional development of African American male students. Findings from this study provide
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