



Understanding Minority Male Persistence and Encouraging Student Success

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THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Historically, higher education research has had an eye toward pathology with a focus on repairing students' problems (Shushok & Hulme, 2006). To this end, much research exists on why students fail to persist as opposed to why they succeed. Strength-based approaches to the study of undergraduate retention involve studying successful students. Studying what is right with students may illuminate new aspects of successful student experiences which can in turn be applied to supporting all students.



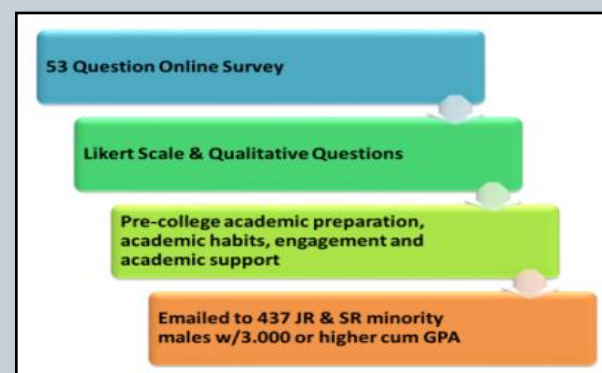
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has strong undergraduate graduation rates (80% of the 2007 cohort graduated within 4 years); however, minority male students are significantly less likely than non-minority males to graduate in a timely manner. African American, Hispanic, and Native American males are among the least likely to persist.

Purpose

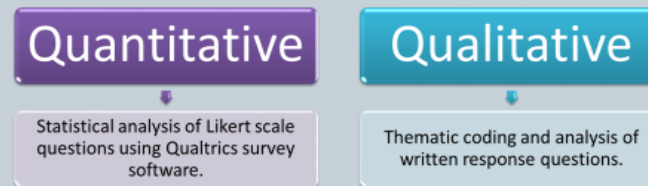
Minority male failure to persist is widely studied (Lee, Ransom & Williams, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuletta, Phoummarath, & Van Lendingham, 2006; Guilroy, 2009). Far few studies have examined the experiences of successful minority males (Fries-Britt, 1998; Harper, 2006). To inform best practices for retention, the authors conducted a study to explore the academic experiences of successful minority males at UNC Chapel Hill. Study objectives included:

- Describe minority male persistence at UNC-Chapel Hill.
- Identify characteristics and behaviors of successful minority male students at UNC-Chapel Hill.
- Collect student recommendations for enhancing the support of minority male students.

Method



Analysis



Preliminary Findings

Successful minority male students at UNC Chapel Hill:

- I. Are skilled at academic self-management
- II. Have self-awareness of their academic strengths
- III. Engage in learning activities outside of the classroom
- IV. Are likely to intentionally engage with non-minority students
- V. May or may not participate in mentorship

I. Academic Self-Management

Academic self-management is control over internal and external factors influencing academic performance, including perspectives, characteristics or behaviors (Dembo, 2000).

Respondents demonstrated **self-agency** and **intrinsic motivation** for success in college. When asked which people had the most influence on them to excel academically, 71% of respondents ranked himself as having the highest influence. Other options included academic advisor, instructor, peers, family or other.

60% of respondents indicated their "desire to excel" most influenced their academic success, followed closely by persistence (51%).



The majority of respondents (45%) met with an academic advisor two times in the previous semester.

88% of respondents indicated they modify their plans as they learn, change and grow.

70% of respondents indicated time management contributed to their academic success.

II. Awareness of Academic Strengths

99% of respondents indicated that they strongly agree or agree that they are aware of their own academic strengths.

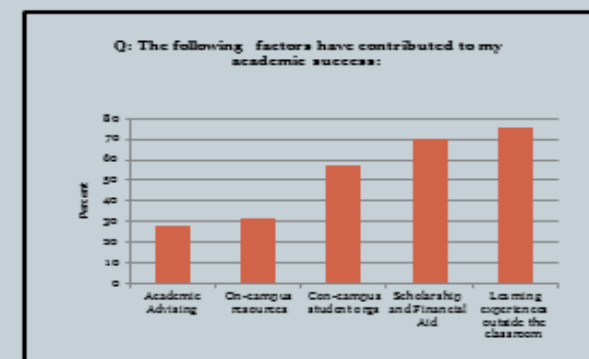
88% of respondents chose their academic major based on their interest in the subject. 79% chose their major because it aligned with their natural strengths and skills.



III. Learning Activities Outside of the Classroom

Learning experiences outside of the classroom appears to contribute significantly to the success of the majority of respondents.

- 76% of respondents indicated learning experiences outside of the classroom contributed greatly to their academic success



- 80% of respondents indicated they were involved in an on-campus student organization
- 36% of respondents participated in Undergraduate Research

IV. Engagement with Non-Minority Students

An analysis of qualitative responses found engagement with non-minority students and non-minority-centered student organizations contributed to many respondents' academic success.

Q: What advice would you give a new minority male student at Carolina? (Representative responses)

"Push yourself. Make everyone around you proud, and don't limit your friends to people of your race. Meet everyone, and broaden your horizons."

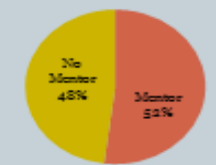
"Don't self-segregate."

"Break away from or lessen the habit/desire to hang-out with the peers of your own race or ethnicity..."

"Branch out of your comfort zone and explore the many groups and resources around campus."

V. Mentorship

About half of respondents indicated that they had a mentor who supported their academic success.



Most mentors were male (78%), with the majority being split between an equal percentage of white and African American mentors (38%, respectively). Most mentors were faculty members (27%).

80% of respondents who indicated they have a mentor said their mentor relationship developed organically, and is not affiliated with any formal program.

Study Limitations

The response rate was just under 20%.

The study defined successful, in part, by a 3.000 or higher cum GPA. Students with a 2.000 to 3.000 cum GPA could also be defined as successful. The study may have benefited from changing the definition of success.

Findings are not generalizable to all minority male students. The study focused on a distinct group of students at a competitive, public, research institution.

Discussion

A significant number of colleges and universities have created formal minority-male mentoring programs (Cuyjet, 2006). An analysis of the survey responses in this study indicate that mentorship appears to be helpful, but not necessarily essential for a significant majority of respondents. Very few respondents were mentored as result of a formal university program.

Recommendations

Important goals for the University moving forward will be to intentionally:

- Encourage sustainable academic self-management skills that contribute to increased motivation, confidence and resiliency
- Help minority male students identify their academic strengths and choose an aligning academic path
- Encourage involvement in learning experiences outside of the classroom with diverse peers that challenge them cognitively, socially and culturally