

## **ABSTRACT**

Lannis E. Smith, Jr., UNDERSTANDING HOW INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES CONTRIBUTE TO MINORITY MALE STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY (Under the direction of Dr. David Siegel). Department of Educational Leadership, April, 2015.

This comparative case study examined how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male student persistence and success in two Southeastern community colleges. Using Padilla's local model of successful minority students (LMSMS) (Padilla, 1997) as a framework, six themes and 12 subthemes emerged from semi-structured interviews of 10 African American males. Findings of this study revealed that (a) meaningful interactions with minority male mentors and college staff contribute to minority male persistence and success; (b) college student success courses contribute to minority male student persistence and success by assisting students to become aware of campus resources for success, and (c) student clubs and organizations, especially minority male mentoring programs, contribute to minority male persistence and success through engaging activities and peer support. Theoretical implications of this study include inserting peer support and hunger in Padilla's LMSMS lack of nurturing barrier. Finally, practical implications for community colleges included the following: (1) implement aggressive financial aid assistance for minority males; (2) require enrollment in a College Success Course during the first semester of enrollment; (3) create food pantries and meal plans for community colleges; (4) fund campus clubs and organizations to reduce fund raisers and increase student service learning; (5) dedicate facility resources for the minority male mentoring programs; (6) incorporate minority male students in recruiting efforts to increase enrollment of minority males by demonstrating a welcoming, nurturing, peer supported environment; (7) allocated institutional funds to support minority male mentoring programs; (8) implement minority male learning

communities and cohorts; (9) scale up minority male mentoring programs to impact a larger percentage of students, and (10) provide professional development for staff and faculty regarding the importance of meaningful student interactions and the barriers minority students have to overcome to pursue higher education.



UNDERSTANDING HOW INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES CONTRIBUTE TO MINORITY  
MALE STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
SETTING: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Floyd and Mildred Smith, and my mother, Sharon Smith.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

No accomplishment in life worth achieving is made without dedication, sacrifice, and the support of others. My journey through this process is no exception.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In the field of higher education, understanding why students choose to persist in their academic endeavors and what institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence to completion has never been more important (Barnett, 2011; Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008; Crisp, 2010; Nakajima, M. A., Dembo, M. H., & Mossler, R., 2012; 2005; Teske, DiCarlo, & Cahoy, 2013). Today, the importance of persistence and degree completion is highlighted by the fact that the percentage of American adults with postsecondary credentials is not keeping pace with other industrialized nations (College Board, 2012). The American Graduation Initiative (AGI), proposed by President Obama in 2009, seeks to increase the number of postsecondary certificates and degrees awarded by the United States by an additional five million by the year 2020 by increasing support for community colleges (Kotamraju & Blackman, 2011). The importance of persistence is accentuated in United States community colleges because they enroll almost half of all higher education students in the United States, but graduate or successfully transfer to where fewer than 50% of students within six years (White House, 2011). This is especially concerning when the accessibility and comparatively low cost of community colleges make them important higher education access points for low-income, minority, and first-generation students (Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, Martin, & Castro, 2010). Community college systems within the United States have developed their own graduation programs to increase the number of credentials awarded. For example, in the largest system of higher education in the United States in terms of number of colleges and students, the California Community College System Student Success Initiative (CCCSSSI) provides 22 policy changes and recommendations that aim to close achievement gaps and improve academic outcomes for all students. Another goal for the CCCSSSI is to make the California system the most

accountable system of public higher education in the nation, in terms of completers (California Community College System, 2014). Similarly, the second largest community college system, Virginia Community Colleges, has implemented Achieve 2015 that includes several initiatives, including a developmental education overhaul and career coaches to increase the number of completers (Virginia Community College System, 2014). The Florida College System (2014) has developed a strategic plan for 2012-2018 that includes Complete College America to increase statewide and institutional goals for completion, exploration of the Developmental Education Initiative to improve student success, and Finish up, Florida, designed to re-engage disconnected adult students to complete their associate degree. The North Carolina Community College System, ranked third largest system in the United States, has implemented the SuccessNC initiative, consisting of 14 initiatives designed to increase the number of credentialed completers (SuccessNC, 2014).

Although community colleges are making an attempt to increase the number of total completers, a recent estimate from the latest United States Census Bureau (2010) suggests that diversity within higher education lags behind the rapidly changing makeup of the American society. The trend of a progressive increase in the minority population is expected for Black, Hispanic and Asian groups, through the years 2020 and 2050. If the reverse trend in college completion is not addressed, a well-educated population, essential to maintaining a strong democracy, as well as maintaining global competitiveness and economic future, is not likely.

The role of the institution must be considered by colleges that are attempting to improve student achievement (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 2006-2007). Although many institutions of higher education throughout the United States provide initiatives to increase persistence and success for minority males, only a few studies have focused on the students' perspectives of the



impact of these initiatives (Crisp, 2010; Simmons, 2013; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007; Sutton, 2006; Wood & Turner, 2011; Wood & Williams, 2013). Wimer and Bloom (2014) suggest that although many colleges are trying variations of targeting initiatives for male students of color, few studies have been conducted to determine how the initiatives and what configuration of initiatives yield the best outcomes from students at the lowest cost.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Consistently, data show a persistence gap separating minority males from other student groups on measures of academic progress and college completion (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). According to Lee and Ransom (2011), as of 2008, only 42% of 25 to 34 year olds in the United States had attained an associate degree and higher. Only 30% of Blacks and 20% of Latinos in the same age range had attained an associate degree or higher, compared to 49% for White Americans and 71% for Asian Americans. According to data from the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (2009), Black males have the lowest retention and graduation rates among their peers. For example, 68% of Black men who start college do not graduate in six years, which is the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups (Harper, 2006). Furthermore, of Black males who enter the community college, only 42% will have persisted or attained a degree within 3 years, compared to 53.2% of Latino males, 55.6% of White males, and 76.7% of Asian American males (Beginning Postsecondary Students 2009). Although the literature on student persistence is extensive (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Osequera, 2008; Ostrove & Long, 2007), researchers continue to request additional persistence research/theory specific to community college students (Barnette, 2011; Nakijama, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012; Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998).

Furthermore, most of the published research on minority males in community colleges is quantitative. Although there may be many advantages to quantitative research, qualitative research, as exemplified in this study, allows for important contextual insights and illuminations of how minority males benefit from institutional initiatives aimed to increase persistence and success. For example, Flowers (2006) suggests that to further assist two-year and four-year higher education institutions in improving the campus environment to better support Black male student development, more research is needed to determine, from the students' perspectives, which aspects of Black male students' experiences can be improved through institutional means.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative embedded case study is to compare how minority males perceive community college initiatives contribute to their persistence and success at two southeastern community colleges. The perception of successful minority males is important because minority males have the lowest rates of persistence and success (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). By asking minority males how institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence and success, I can get to the complex details and in-depth understanding of initiatives that require budget and human resources and better understanding how such initiatives should be implemented in these community colleges.

The two southeastern community colleges are selected based upon their geographical location (urban vs rural), participation in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant funded Completion by Design (CBD) initiative, and implementation of institutional initiatives designed to increase student persistence and success.

The overarching research question for this study is as follows: How do minority males perceive that community college institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence and

success? In this study, an institutional initiative is defined as a strategy, process, or measure designed to increase minority male persistence and success and receives institutional funding. Institutional initiative examples may include accelerated or fast-track developmental education, college student success courses, and mentoring programs. Institutional initiatives will be isolated via documents, archival records, direct observations, participant observations, interviews, and physical artifacts (Creswell, 2007). A successful student in this study is defined as one who is performing satisfactorily in college and making progress towards his or her goals, which can include graduation and/or transfer to a four-year university (Padilla, 1994).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has potential to positively impact major stakeholders, including higher education institutions and society as a whole. Higher education institutions can benefit from this research by gaining efficiencies in budget allocations toward retaining students, thereby increasing enrollment funding. In addition, persistence and success are means of evaluation and performance funding for many community colleges. Increased persistence of minority males benefits society because college-educated citizens contribute in multiple ways to the social good and are less likely to engage in harmful behaviors (Barton, 2002; Carey, 2004; Fiske, 2004). In addition, college educated adults are more likely than adults without a college education to gain employment, earn higher wages, receive health insurance and pension benefits from their employers, donate more time to organizations, lead healthier lifestyles, and engage in more educational activities with their children (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Ultimately, this study adds to the literature on the persistence and success of underrepresented minority males in U.S. higher education and community colleges, specifically.

The role of institutional initiatives that intend to increase persistence and success of underrepresented minorities is an area that requires more analysis. Many initiatives, costing millions of dollars, are implemented each year without a clear understanding of how the initiatives contribute minority male persistence and success. While there is research that focuses on persistence of post-secondary Black students, much of the attention has been focused on those who enroll in four-year colleges and universities (Wood, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011; Schwartz & Washington, 2002; Spradley, 1996). This research gap is surprising considering that in 2012, 49% of all Black undergraduates and 56% of all Latino undergraduates enrolled at community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012). Investigating how institutional initiatives at the community college level contribute to minority male persistence and success is the research gap to be addressed in this study. Of particular interest in this study is the analysis of experiences of successful minority males in relation to institutional initiatives designed and funded to contribute to success. Previous research using successful students (Hernandez, 2000; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997) has focused on the perspectives of successful students who have graduated, or who were in their senior year of study at a four-year institution. In contrast, this study will include the perceptions of minority male students who have successfully completed two semesters of study at the community college or have successfully graduated from the community college or transferred to a four-year institution. Padilla (1991) notes that while it is necessary to understand why some students fail to complete their programs of study, it is crucial to understand why students are successful. By focusing on success rather than failure, this study may help to increase student persistence and success in the future.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations of this case study include the selection of two community colleges located in specific geographic regions of the United States and within North Carolina. The venues were chosen because of their geographical characteristics, participation in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant funded Completion by Design, and implementation of institutional initiatives designed to increase student persistence and success. Only male minority students who participate in one or more institutional initiatives and persist at least two semesters are included in this study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of qualitative research include bias of the researcher and the bias of research participants. The limitations included in this study are researcher and participant bias and are based upon positionality. Bias of the researcher can occur in data interpretation, whereas bias of the research participant can occur in answers to questions that are favorable to themselves or the institution. Cultural sensitivity will be employed throughout the study. In this study, data triangulation by conducting semi-structured interviews, collecting documents, and making observations will reduce but probably not eliminate biases brought into the study.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

#### **Study Design**

This study incorporates an embedded comparative case study research design for data collection, using semi-structured interviews, documents, archival records, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. This design is appropriate because the overarching research question asks how minority males perceive community college institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence and success, and thus relies on the lived experiences of

minority males in their community college and their perspective of how institutional initiatives contributed to their success (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell, it is beneficial to employ maximum variation to represent diverse cases and to fully describe multiple perspectives about the case. In this study, participants will be selected based upon participation in a Minority Male Mentoring program and achieving success at the community college.

### **Data Collection**

Data will be collected using a variety of methods to ensure a thorough understanding of how community college initiatives contribute to minority male student persistence and success. Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, retrieval and analysis of institutional documents, and site observations. Student interviews will be conducted to ascertain student perceptions of how the community college initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success.

### **Data Analysis**

All data collected will be organized and coded for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2007). The coding scheme will be based initially upon the theoretical framework of this study. It is expected that themes surrounding discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resources will be discovered as starter codes. Comparison of the data will be conducted to examine how initiatives contribute to persistence and success of minority male community college students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Raymond Padilla's local model of successful minority students (LMSMS) (1997) provides the theoretical framework for this study. This theoretical framework will be used to

guide data collection and data analysis. Padilla's (1991, 1994) development of the expertise model of successful college students led to the local model of successful minority students. This expertise model of successful college students focuses on the knowledge that successful students possess and the actions they employ to overcome barriers. Harmon and King (1985) suggest that successful college students are "experts" at being successful as students at a specific college or university. This expertise is viewed as theoretical and heuristic knowledge (Harmon & King, 1985). Students gain theoretical knowledge through coursework and formal study whereas heuristic knowledge is typically locally defined and is acquired experientially and systematically. Student success often relies upon the acquisition and expansion of heuristic knowledge throughout the college years.

The local model of successful minority students is used to identify knowledge of barriers and actions necessary to overcome barriers that prevent minority male persistence and success during their college experience. The barriers include discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resources. Discontinuity barriers often refer to a student's ability to adapt to a new environment by fitting in. The student must learn to prioritize between immediate employment and the benefit of obtaining an education. The lack of nurturing barrier refers to the absence of role models, the negative perceptions of students by faculty and staff members, and very little or no family support. The lack of presence barriers refers to the exposure to racial isolation, cultural isolation, lack of minority role models, inadequate minority concerns in the curriculum, and not enough support programs for minorities. Finally, the resource barrier refers to the well-known fact that many students do not have enough money or sufficient knowledge about financial aid in the institution's financial aid system. Students that have knowledge of these particular barriers are often able to take the necessary steps to succeed (Padilla, 1998).

Padilla acknowledges the importance of the involvement of the student and the institution in order to achieve student success.

### **Organization of the Study**

In Chapter One of this work, I have introduced the study, stated the problem of understanding initiatives that promote minority male achievement in higher education, and explained the significance of my research. Chapter Two contains a review the literature as it pertains to the study. Chapter Three will explain the methodology of the study. Chapter Four will share the results of the analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter Five will include a summary of the work, conclusions, and recommendations for future research. The work will conclude with appendices.



## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

This review is designed to articulate an understanding of major areas of concern related to minority male persistence and success and the institutional initiatives designed to increase persistence and success of minority male students. The first section discusses the population demographics of the United States and the implications of underrepresented minorities achieving higher education goals. The second section addresses the achievement gap of ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities in higher education degree attainment. The third section describes relevant research regarding persistence in higher education, specifically among underrepresented minorities. The fourth section describes relevant research on minority student success with subsections to include barriers to community college student success, barriers to community college student transfer to the university, differences between community college success and university success, student perspectives of success, and institutional factors that contribute to student success. The fifth section describes relevant literature on institutional initiatives designed to increase student success including college student success courses, the Developmental Education Initiative, and mentoring. Specific examples review of community college initiatives throughout the United States and North Carolina in particular, are presented. A summary is included in the literature review.

### **Population Demographics and Degree Attainment**

Recent United States census data indicate that the nation is experiencing unprecedented change in the characteristics of its population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Since 1980, the Hispanic American population has more than doubled, Native American population increased 62%, and Black population increased 31%, while the non-ethnic population has remained almost

the same (Ethnic Majority, 2006). Likewise, the total enrollment in United States colleges and universities over the last 40 years has increased by 40% overall, with minority student enrollment increasing by 146% (Crutcher, 2007; Li, 2007). More specifically, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) notes that enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased by 9% between 1989 and 1999 and continued to increase by 38% between 1999 and 2009. From 1976 to 2009, the percentage of Hispanic students degree attainment increased from 3% to 12%, the Asian/Pacific Islander student degree attainment increased from 2% to 7%, and the percentage of Black student degree attainment rose from 9% to 14%. During the same time frame, the percentage of White students' degree attainment fell from 83% to 62%.

These increases in minority enrollment in higher education have not been proportional to the degree attainment and thus a gap exists between ethnic minority and ethnic majority students in the attainment of higher education degrees (Allen, 1992; Pathways to College Network, 2003).

### **Post-Secondary Achievement Gap Among Black Males**

An achievement gap exists between ethnic minorities and ethnic majority students in the attainment of higher education degrees (Bush & Bush, 2010; DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2002; Harper, 2006; Myers, 2003; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013; Pathways to College Network, 2003; Rovai, Gallien, & Stiff-Williams, 2007; Strayhorn, 2010). Rovai et al. (2007) specifically address the Black student achievement gap in reference to the lag of Blacks behind their White peers, both in and out of the classroom, through standardized achievement tests, grade outcomes and drop-out rates. Although this phenomenon is frequently considered in the kindergarten through grade 12 setting, the achievement gap also exists for college students and is one of the most pressing and perplexing problems facing higher education. While approximately 57% of all first-time students who entered higher education in 2002 completed a

bachelor's degree within six years, only 40% of Black students completed a bachelor's degree and more specifically, the graduation rate of Black males was 34% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). These low rates of graduation are accompanied by many detrimental consequences for individual students and society at large (Baum & Payea, 2004; Cross & Slater, 2001; Museus & Quaye, 2009). For example, according to the College Board (2010), the median earnings of bachelor degree recipients working full-time, year-round in 2008 was \$55,700 or \$21,900 more than the median earning of high school graduates. In fact, individuals with some college, but no degree, earn 17% more than high school graduates. In addition, college educated adults are more likely than others to receive health insurance and pension benefits from their employers, donate more time to organizations, lead healthier lifestyles, and engage in more educational activities with their children (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Furthermore, if current demographics and educational trends continue in the minority population in America, especially for men of color in the next ten years, the overall educational level of the American workforce will probably decline (College Board, 2010). Stern (2009) further emphasizes the risk of not completing college by noting that without a degree, people are relegated to minimum-wage jobs for the rest of their lives and likely will never enter middle-class income range. Over 25 years ago, Stewart (1988) asserted that the most urgent need in higher education was the successful participation and retention of minority students. This need continues to require a great amount of attention and funding in 2014.

### **Persistence**

Research by Hicks (2005) suggests that higher education institutions have been concerned about persistence of college students for many decades. The 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, Barack Obama, emphasizes student retention and persistence in the College

Completion Agenda of 2010 and the Race to the Top for Higher Education of 2012. In both proposals, the important role of community colleges is highlighted in moving the nation toward economic prosperity. With the projected growth in minority student participation in postsecondary education (Hussar & Bailey, 2006), combined with the relatively low overall graduation rates this population students, and external pressures for institutional accountability for student learning (Bok, 2006; Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006), the need to better understand how institutional initiatives influence student success in college is urgent. Community college leaders are attempting to meet the challenge to ensure more students leave their campus with degree completion or at least one year of community college experience (Jaschik, 2009; Jenkins & Bailey, 2009; O'Banion, 2010). Pelkey (2011) suggests that the challenge is greater than just creating access for increased number of underprepared students but extends to how to increase the persistence of underprepared students entering community colleges. By uncovering differences in persistence patterns across diverse groups, institutions of higher education can illuminate factors that inhibit equal opportunity, as well as policy factors that might be able to improve opportunity (Carter, 2006).

Such efforts require college administrators, stakeholders, and policy makers to identify factors, strategies, and activities that increase opportunities for student retention and success in postsecondary education. The Center for Community College Engagement (2010) suggests the factors for student success are the same as those outlined 50 years ago and institutions that are able to provide students with effective support services are more likely to increase retention and persistence rates (Kuh et al., 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005).

The focus on retention and completion is continued in Miranda's (2011) research that suggests that the success of institutional retention requires intentional actions and participation of

the entire campus community. Effective programs within the institution that influence retention are those programs in which faculty and staff reach out to their students in efforts to make contact and personal connections to ensure the social and intellectual development of the program's student members (Achieving the Dream Community Colleges Count, 2009).

Furthermore, students who are not connected to the campus community or who do not integrate their learning experience across departmental lines and divisions are more likely to leave prior to achieving their academic goals (Astin, 1996; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Tinto, 1997).

The aforementioned research corresponds to Astin's (1984) and Tinto's (2005) suggestion that faculty and administrators must be willing to work in a collaborative effort to ensure students are provided with learning opportunities that support academic and personal growth by fully engaging their students in the learning process.

Astin's (1984) student development theory suggests that student attrition is based on the amount of physical or psychological involvement devoted to the academic experience and directly influences academic performance and persistence. His input-environment-output (I-E-O) model suggests that inputs (student demographics, backgrounds, experiences, etc.) interact with the college environment (people, programs, policies, etc.) to determine student outcomes (learning, development, persistence, etc.). In addition, Astin (1975) suggests that factors that contribute to students' persistence in college result from greater involvement, whereas factors contributing to a students' attrition imply lack of involvement. Astin defines involvement as academic engagement, as well as any interaction with faculty or other students through curricular or co-curricular activities. Chaves (2006) states that although Astin's research concentrates on the study of traditional students attending senior colleges, the connection between involvement

and persistence is particularly relevant at community colleges. This is notable that community colleges typically enroll commuters and employ a high percentage of adjuncts, thus limiting the opportunities for student involvement, as compared to universities. It is also worth noting that some researchers argue that Astin's model does not technically constitute a theory because it does not articulate how the input and environment impact outcomes, but has served as the conceptual basis of many ensuing theories (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The most often used theoretical framework used to examine predictors of attainment and persistence in higher education is Tinto's model of student departure (1982, 1993). Building on the research of Spady (1970, 1971), Tinto (1982) proposes a model that was initially based on the sociological concept of suicide as proposed by Durkheim (1951). Tinto (1993) also incorporates Van Gennep's (1960) ideas regarding rites of passage into adulthood in tribal societies into his model in later explorations of student departure. Tinto proposes that the occurrence of college student departure provides a window on the social and academic communities in which students experience colleges and universities. His theory acknowledges that students enter higher education institutions with a unique set of personal, family, and academic characteristics and skills and these initial student goals and commitments to the organization evolve over time in response to ongoing interactions between themselves and the academic and social structures at the institution, as well as through their formal and informal experiences with faculty and staff. The student's level of involvement in the formal and informal academic and social systems of an institution accounts for his or her decision to continue or to leave college (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1993) research also concludes that students, who enter college lacking strong support from their friends and family members, tend to possess lower levels of commitment to

college, integrate poorly into the academic and social structure of the college, and exhibit behaviors and decisions leading to attrition. Alternatively, students with strong support systems from friends and family, as well as the values, abilities, and aspirations that meet with the intellectual demands and curricular offerings at a college, have a greater potential to integrate well, have a more satisfying experience, and persist to graduation.

Getzlaf, Sedlacek, Kearney, and Blackwell (1984), as well as Pascarella and Terezini (1980), recognize the utility of the Tinto model in predicting college student attrition. Conversely, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997), as well as Tierney (1992), suggest Tinto's model has limited applicability to minority students.

Research conducted by Pascarella (1985) suggests that student outcomes are influenced by a set of five variables. Pascarella's model implies that students backgrounds and characteristics, in conjunction with institutional characteristics, including size, selectivity, and other variables, work to form the institution's environment. The institution's environment then affects the students' socializing interactions on campus. In addition, the student effort is shaped by the students' background, institutional environment and socialization experiences. All variables work together to impact students' outcomes.

Additional research indicates that a student's undergraduate grade point average (GPA) is the strongest predictor of persistence to degree attainment (Astin, 1975). Similarly, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggest the importance of academic achievement as one of the strongest predictors of earning a bachelor's degree. Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington's (1986) investigation of the factors that contribute to long-term persistence of two-year college students led to the conclusion that the two most significant factors are academic environment and the social integration the students experienced at the college. The research of Padilla, Trevino,

Gonzalez, and Trevino (1997) identifies successful students as those who possess two distinct knowledge components: (a) theoretical knowledge and (b) heuristic knowledge. Theoretical knowledge is obtained through coursework and formal study, whereas heuristic knowledge is gained by a student's college experience and environment. Padilla (1998) further asserts that all students enter college with various levels of theoretical and heuristic knowledge. In order to overcome the barriers to success, students must apply both theoretical and heuristic knowledge during their college experience. In order for students to persist, they must demonstrate the ability to gain and apply theoretical and heuristic knowledge (Padilla, 1998).

Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1998) indicate that an inclusive and welcoming institutional environment and the connection to students to that environment are linked to persistence. Furthermore, Kuh (1995) suggests student engagement and student involvement are important factors in retaining students. Likewise, students who engage on campus are more likely to take advantage of more opportunities to secure academic membership and increase their chances of persistence (Bonous-Hammarth, 2000). Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) propose that in-college experiences affect student persistence more than student backgrounds. Along these same lines, Myers (2003) asserts that the institutional environment is important in retention. This research suggests that the most successful institutions in retention are those that are responsive to academic, social, and cultural needs of their students. Tinto (1993) concludes that successful retention programs are longitudinal, are tied to the admissions process, and involve a wide range of institutional factors.

Researchers such as Astin (1997), Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster (1999), as well as Peltier, Laden, and Matranga (1999) make the suggestion that race is a significant predictor of persistence. Carey (2004) and Pascarella (1996) suggest that students of color perceive the



college environment to be less supportive and are thus less likely to persist to graduation. The racially conscious retention constructs in the research include a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), validation (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005; Rendon, 1994), and stereotype threat (Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Steele, 1997). Sedlacek (1996) suggests ways to improve retention rates for students of color are to help students develop self-esteem and self-confidence, offer leadership experience and experience in dealing effectively with racism, and encourage them to develop social and academic support networks. Lee (1999), Pope (2002), and Santos and Reigadas (2004) suggests that faculty-student mentoring programs can be dynamic way to help underrepresented and at-risk students adjust to college. This is particularly true for Black students at predominantly White institutions who often report feeling lonely, isolated, and without adequate levels of support (Cuyjet & Associates, 2006; Hurtada & Carter, 1997).

Research by Bean (2005) and Tinto (1993) suggest a strong correlation of satisfaction with student retention. More specifically, students who interact frequently with faculty and other university personnel are more satisfied with college than those who do not connect with faculty (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977). The same is reported for Black college students (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Thus such findings have implications for those who are charged with improving campus retention rates such as provosts, deans, and student affairs administrators.

### **Student Success**

Several scholars have considered the experiences and outcomes of underrepresented and underserved men in education for decades (Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Davis & Polite, 1999; Harper, 2006; Harris & Wood, 2013; Noguera, 2003; Padilla & Pavel, 1986; Hilton, Wood & Lewis, 2012). Student success is difficult to define for community college students given that students

enroll in community colleges for disparate reasons, including to earn associate degrees, to complete certificate programs, to gain some credits before transferring to a four-year institutions, to complete a single class for employment skills, and to take noncredit coursework. However, there is general agreement that a large proportion of community college students leave without fulfilling their academic and career goals (Venezia & Hughes, 2013). This literature review provides evidence that researchers have specifically explored the barriers to success, barriers to successful transfer to the university, institutional barriers, and institutional initiatives such as college student success, developmental education initiatives, and mentoring.

### **Barriers to Community College Student Success**

The literature review provides several examples of researchers examining barriers to student success. For example, Padilla and Pavel (1986) conducted research on the success of students enrolled in community college. The researchers were able to develop a taxonomy of barriers to success for Hispanic students in two campuses of a large community college district in a southwestern city. Institutional processes, classroom functions and instruction, financial matters, and student personal characteristics were among the barriers identified in this study. Rendon (1993) utilized focus group interviews in a study of 49 at-risk community college students to conclude that invalidation was the major barrier to successful learning. Student interactions with noncaring faculty and faculty who discounted student life experiences were the main sources of invalidation. Rendon also noted that the student's family and friends discrediting the collegiate nature of community colleges was a barrier to success. Rendon developed a list of characteristics of student who had difficulty getting involved and thus difficulty in navigating the campus life. Immaturity, fearfulness, academic underpreparedness,

self-centeredness or introversion, a lack of self-initiative, the absence of clear goals, self-doubt, and failure to ask the right questions were among the list of characteristics.

Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) discovered challenges and stressors faced by community college students in two urban, two suburban, and two rural community college in a nonspecified geographical area. This study identified three predominant challenges including academic success, balancing academic and social life, and college costs. Thinking about the future, finding career and personal direction, and making lifestyle choices were also identified as barriers to student success. Finding transportation, making choices regarding health issues, and finding spiritual direction least challenged students. Response strategies to these challenges included consulting with a family member, using college academic advising, and financial aid services.

LeSure-Lester (2003) developed a list of key factors determining college persistence decisions for Latino students in a study of 111 Hispanic students enrolled in liberal arts classes in a Southern California community college. Among the factors were academic development, faculty concern, and faculty interest in students.

Kazis and Liebowitz (2003) explored program design strategies that would enhance the success of low-income community college students. This study, utilizing an unidentified number of focus group interviews, found that time constraints due to combined family, work, and school responsibilities, as well as basic skills deficiencies were barriers to success.

Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) conducted a qualitative study to examine common characteristics of community college students who graduate. Semi-structured interviews of 17 students and 8 faculty, staff, and administrators were used to determine that

successful graduates have clear goals, strong motivation, the ability to manage external demands, and self-empowerment.

### **Community College Student Transfer to University**

Research has also indicated success barriers regarding the transfer from community college to the university. For example, Rendon's (1995) community college transfer student success study involved the identification of barriers to transfer to the university. The barriers were divided into three groups including institutional, cultural barriers, and out-of-class barriers. Institutional barriers include poor counseling, college costs, lack of articulation, and channeling students into vocational-technical tracks. Cultural barriers were highlighted among Hispanic students as unsupportive families and fear of leaving home. Lack of role models, absence of encouragement, and discouraging peer pressure were included in the out-of-class barriers. Similarly, Lynch, Harnish, and Brown (1994) identified success barriers related to transfer credit courses from community colleges to senior colleges and universities. These barriers included faculty attitudes, the lack of an institutional commitment to access, campus inaccessibility, financial challenges, and structural constraints.

### **Differences Between Community College and University**

Wood and Turner (2011) posit that while some commonalities between Black males in two- and four-year higher education institutions, scholars should be cautious presupposing homogeneity in their experiences as numerous differences exist (e.g. Student population, faculty credentials, funding and resourcing, organizational structure, and prestige). As such, these differences may serve to impact factors affecting student success within these institutions. This is exemplified by Flowers' (2006) research that suggested differences in the social integration of community college students occurs at a lower level than university students. Flowers conducted

a study to explore the impact of attending a two-year (vs. a four-year) institution on Black male students' academic and social integration experiences in the first year of college. This descriptive and multivariate analysis of the data from approximately 12,000 beginning students from 832 institutions in the 1996/1998 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study revealed that Black males attending four-year institutions were more likely to report higher levels of academic and social integration in the first year of college. Flowers suggested that student affairs professionals of two-year institutions seek to develop appropriate interventions to ensure that Black males are engaging in academic and social integration experiences during the first year of college. The researcher also highlighted the need for two-year colleges to study their institutional practices and policies that are directed toward the enhancement of academic and social integration experiences for Black males. This study also suggest that theories, models, and research specific to Black males in four-year colleges may not be applicable to Black men at two-year institutions.

Additionally, Woods (2011) discovered that Black males enrolled in universities are much different than their counterparts in community college in terms of backgrounds and experiences. In his study utilizing national data from a longitudinal study of beginning postsecondary students, Woods notes that Black males in two-year colleges are more likely to be older, have dependents, delay their enrollment into postsecondary education, and are married. In addition, he found that the two-year Black male is less likely to have high degree expectations, to have attended private high school, and to have high levels of pre-college preparation in foreign language, math, and science.

## **Student Perspective**

The student perspective of student success has also been explored in the literature. Pope (2006) developed an instrument to assess minority student perceptions of environmental factors related to diversity on their campuses. As a result of this study, recommendations for a campus climate that is conducive to Black male success including hiring more administrators and faculty of color, increase efforts to mentor effectively, and participation and promotion of diversity by community college administrators. Pope also made recommendations regarding retention including complete academic and social integration into the campus, elimination of racism, promoting diversity, assisting students in overcoming triple consciousness, enhancing counseling, providing effective orientation programming, evaluating program effectiveness, employing more Black administrators, faculty, staff, and students, creating ethnic, cultural, and social support groups, and creating programs that connect with Black males' communities. Enhancing the transition to four-year institutions also promotes student success. Improving external articulation agreements, improving internal articulation agreements, creating transfer centers with transfer counselors, and connecting Black males with mentors at four-year institutions are ways transfer success strategies increase success at community colleges. Pope ultimately suggests that community college administrators provide adequate resources and services to ensure the retention and graduation of these students. The researcher recommends the most urgent strategy to accomplishing this task is by making the community college environment more welcoming for Black male students.

Jordan (2008) discovered that students believed they were more successful when faculty members facilitated interactive classrooms and listened to their concerns. This research also

emphasized the importance of peers in positively and negatively impacting students' academic success.

More recently, Wood and Hilton (2012) considered the student perspective by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 28 students in order to determine the students' perception on recommendation for improving the success of Black males. This study provided three recommendations for college personnel including (1) creating awareness of campus resources, (2) bringing role models to campus, and (3) establishing a Black Male academic success programs. Participants also recommended that Black male students should have the "right frame of mind" of both being committed to and engaged in academic work.

### **Institutional Factors**

According to Harper (2010), national interest on the plight of Black males has resulted in numerous conferences sessions, think tanks, journal articles, books, and editorials dedicated to exploring the intricate factors impacting this group. Navarez and Wood (2010) suggest that many community college leaders have contextualized challenges in educating Black males as part of a larger discourse on disparate success among minority men, which has resulted in campus and district-level initiatives designed to increase the entry and success (e.g., persistence or transfer) of men of color. As such, institutional factors to success are also prevalent throughout the research. For example, Hagedorn, Perrakis, and Maxwell (2007) used focus group interviews with students, faculty, and administrators at nine community colleges in Los Angeles to determine barriers to student success. In this study, poor and inconsistent counseling, lack of transfer support, inadequate career counseling, red tape, disconnectedness from faculty and campus culture, insufficient technological resources, lack of mathematics and basic English competences, a lack of support by part-time faculty, inadequate facilities for studying and

parking, and poor or non-existent course advising were described as the ten “negative commandments” or ten ways urban community colleges hinder student success. This study was conducted in response to Hagedorn, Perrakis, and Maxwell’s (2006) longitudinal and comprehensive study of the goals, success, and academic patterns of 5,000 community college students. As a result of this study, the ten “positive commandments” or best practices that appear to facilitate student success at community colleges were developed. The commandments are to recruit instructors who facilitate faculty-student interactions, offer affordable education with multiple forms of financial aid, offer flexible course offerings to suit student demand and convenience, maintain transfer centers, hire and retain faculty who are experts in their disciplines, develop students’ academic skills through learning resources campus-wide, provide student centered technology access that meets diverse scheduling demands, localize campus access to reduce student travel, centralize work-study options to optimize student work obligations and academics through one-stop services, and provide students diverse career opportunities through recruitment events and counseling efforts.

Wirth and Padilla (2008) developed an implementation model for student success that requires student service professionals and advisors to remain knowledgeable at all times about barriers to success that students face on their campus. In addition, student service personnel must be familiar with the knowledge that successful students have and the actions they take to overcome specific barriers. Advisors are considered the experts and promote students in the navigation through campus. Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, and Leinbach (2008) conducted a study to determine which institutional characteristics are correlated with positive community college outcomes for students who attend one or more colleges as measured by individual student probability of completing a certificate or degree or transferring to a baccalaureate



institution. Using an analysis of individual-level data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1998 (NELS:88) and institutional-level data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) including 2,196 students in 536 community colleges, these researchers found consistent results regarding a negative relationship between relatively large institution size, proportion of part-time faculty and minority students on the attainment of community college students.

Glenn (2003-2004) used qualitative case studies to examine the setting, policies, procedures, programs and culture on two campuses concerning their Black male retention rates. Several institutional practices leading to positive student persistence were identified, including identifying students who may be at risk of attrition before enrollment and monitoring their progress over time, mentoring students in need of guidance, requiring students to visit advisors, and mandating campus orientations, and targeting minority groups with specific retention plans. Wood and Ireland (2014) conducted a multilevel analysis of data derived from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) of 11,385 Black male respondents within 250 community colleges. The CCSSE is a large-scale assessment instrument used by community colleges to advance student learning and persistence (McClenny, 2007). Findings from this study highlight the importance of learning communities, study skills courses, and orientation on student success.

Wood (2011) suggests that more colleges need a centralized alert system for evaluating student performance throughout a semester that notifies faculty and staff at the first sign of problems. This effort does not have to be focused on Black males, rather it is an intervention that can be employed campus wide to impact all students. The purpose of the warning system is to prevent attrition by identifying students who are most at risk.

Bush (2004), Glenn (2003-2004), and Wood and Turner (2011) note that the institution is of central importance to success of students and can serve to mitigate external factors that have a negative impact on success. However, Bush and Bush (2010) note that both in practice and in the body of literature, the institution, as a focus, is likened to the elephant in the room that no one desires to engage.

Perhaps Bush and Bush's declaration prompted Harris and Wood (2013) to design the Community College Student Success Inventory (CCSSI) to assess institutional efforts and readiness to facilitate student success for men of color. Six overarching categories of institutional action and support needed for the success of men of color enrolled at community college were revealed in an extensive review of published literature and research on men of color in community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Glenn, 2003-2004; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Harris & Wood, 2013; Mason, 1998; Perrakis, 2008; Vasquez Urias, 2012; Wood, 2012; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012; Wood & Harris, 2013). The categories include financial aid, student support services, teaching and learning, institutional research, minority male initiatives and programs, and early alert systems.

The role of the institution is also addressed by Wood (2012) in a comparison of Black male collegians in 2-year colleges to their non-Black counterparts using data of 2,235 respondents derived from the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) to reveal reasons for leaving college. The study illustrated that Black males are less likely to leave college for program dissatisfaction, financial reasons, military reasons, or scheduling issues than their non-Black counterparts. However, Black males are more likely to leave due to family responsibilities. Recommendations for practice that emphasize the

role of the institution in supporting student persistence include a mandatory orientation, pre-entry counseling, formal and informal mentorships, and an early warning system.

Interestingly, Perrakis (2008) utilized a quasi-experimental design to test a relationship between campus representation of white and black male students as minority populations and academic success. This secondary analysis of data from Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students surveys of 4,333 students from nine colleges in California was utilized to determine the relationships. The study found that several factors alone and in combination predict the success of male students, regardless of race in the Los Angeles Community College District. Academic preparation was a more significant factor than race and gender as it pertained to academic success. The similarities between Black and White men highlight the importance of promoting retention for all male students regardless of race or ethnicity.

### **Institutional Initiatives**

**College student success courses.** Research indicates that integrating college student success courses during the student's first year of enrollment is an effective practice to improve student retention (Cho & Karp, 2012; Derby & Smith, 2004). Furthermore, Derby's (2007) study of 3,538 students at a Midwestern, rural community college, found graduation rates for orientation course participants were 72 times higher than nonparticipants. Research by Derby and Watson (2005) found an associative relationship between Hispanic student participation in an orientation course and degree completion in a community college environment. However, in a subsequent study of 144 Black community college students, Derby and Watson (2006) found inconclusive evidence of correlation of participation in orientation class and degree completion because so many students failed to enroll in the orientation course. These researchers

recommend collecting student goals during the admissions process and tracking those goals throughout their matriculation to assist with retention.

Many students enroll in community college without the heuristic knowledge of how to navigate college and utilize the available resources. Institutions implement interventions such as a student success course to help students overcome such barriers to success. Student success courses are designed for students with no previous college experience and provide critical information about the institution, college catalog, student handbook, assistance in academic and career planning, study skills, time management, student code of conduct, and financial literacy (Cho & Karp, 2013). According to O’Gara, Karp, and Hughes (2009), the goal of the course is to help direct students to the various services offered at the college, facilitate their adjustment to the college environment, and give them the tools they need to be successful at the institution.

A positive correlation is anticipated with participation in a college success course and academic outcomes (Pelkey, 2011). As such, in a study of students enrolled in a freshman seminar at a public four-year university, those that attended the seminar persisted at much greater rate than those who did not (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003). Similar findings are evident in Boudreau and Kromrey’s (1994) study of students enrolled in a freshman orientation course. In a more recent study of 28 Florida community colleges conducted by the Community College Research Center, Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007), found that students who enrolled in a Student Life Skills class were more likely than their nonenrolled peers to be successful over the given time period, as measured by credential completion, persistence in the college, and transfer to a four-year college in the Florida state university system.

Cho and Karp (2013) conducted a study of 23,822 student records from the Virginia Community College System. Analysis of the data indicates clear positive associations between

enrollment in a student success course in the first semester and the short-term outcomes of credit attainment and second-year persistence.

Throughout the North Carolina Community College System students are required to complete a college success course as part of their curriculum (NCCCS, 2014). Two variations of the college success course may be selected depending on the student's program selection in a technical program or college transfer. Both variations allow for students to learn about college resources and techniques for success. The college transfer variation also includes the development of an education plan for the community college and university of transfer.

**Developmental Education Initiative.** According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), one long standing function of community colleges is developmental or remedial education. In fact, 98% of two-year colleges in the United States provide students with developmental education courses while 80% of four-year colleges offer developmental education courses (Martorell & McFarlin, 2007). A recent study by Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2010) suggest approximately two thirds of incoming community college students are deemed academically underprepared for college, and are referred to developmental education courses designed to improve their readiness for college-level coursework. Many of those referred to developmental education never enroll (Bailey, 2009). Community colleges, because of their open-door policy, have provided students with the opportunity to overcome inadequate secondary education and poor academic preparation with skill-building or developmental courses in math, reading, and writing (McCabe, 2000). Almost all community college students are asked to complete skills test in math, reading, writing, and computer technology in order to determine if the student is "college-ready." If students do not score to the college standard, multiple levels of remediation may have to be navigated before enrollment in the first college level course. Hodara, Jaggars, and Karp (2012) suggest that by

community colleges limiting access to college-level courses while students complete their developmental requirements, institutional leaders believe they can support access while maintaining high academic standards in college-level courses. Bahr (2008) suggests that developmental education provides opportunities to rectify race, class, and gender disparities generated in primary and secondary schooling, to develop the minimum skills deemed necessary for functional participation in the economy and the democracy, and to acquire the prerequisite competencies that are crucial for negotiating college-level coursework. In the study of the 190,177 student records of California Community College students, Bahr found that if students remediated successfully in mathematics, then their academic attainment was comparable to students not requiring remediation.

Venezia and Hughes (2013), note that many educators, education leaders, and policymakers now view developmental education, as it has been traditionally organized and taught, as an obstacle to student success rather than as a support. This perspective is affirmed by students by discussing the years it can take to complete required developmental sequences (Venezia, Bracco, & Nodine, 2010). Bailey et al. (2010) notes that studies of student progression suggest that up to 15% of developmental students do not return to college for the next course in the required developmental sequence even though they were successful in every developmental course they attempted. As such, only a small proportion of these students successfully complete their developmental requirements and move on to enroll in college-level math and English (Bailey et al., 2010). For these reasons, Esch (2009), calls developmental education, “Higher Education’s Bermuda Triangle.”

**Community college response to the Developmental Education Initiative.** In response, community colleges nationally are diligently striving to improve remedial student outcomes with

developmental education initiatives that are accelerating the remedial sequence, allowing alternate placement approaches, integrating college-level courses, contextualizing content, modularizing content based upon skills needed, offering additional student supports such as mentoring and advising, increasing the use of technology, and providing professional development for instructors (Boiling, Morrissey, & Fouts, 2014; Boylan & Saxon, 2006; Perin, 2004; Schwartz & Jensen, 2007). Nodine, Dadgar, Venezia, and Bracco (2013) note several key principles of current acceleration programs including helping students avoid developmental education whenever possible, shortening the developmental education sequence, aligning developmental course-work with transfer-level and career technical coursework, and providing additional student supports that are integrated with the coursework.

In the California Community College System, only 6% of students that require three levels of developmental math go on to complete a college-level math course within three-years (Hern & Snell, 2014). These results particularly impact Black and Latino community college students, as more than half are placed three or more levels below college (Perry, Bahr, Rosin, & Woodward, 2010). In 2006, the California Community Colleges' Chancellor's Office started the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) via a grant focused on improving developmental education, or basic skills (Venezia & Hughes, 2013). The BSI has led to the development of the California Acceleration Project (CAP) which has shortened developmental sequences, reduced the number of "loss points" for students, and focused on the most essential skills and ways of thinking required in a college-level course (Venezia & Hughes, 2013). In as much, 42 independently governed community colleges of the 112 colleges in the California community college system, have implemented accelerated courses in developmental English and math in the last three years

(Hern & Snell, 2014) and thus, have increased students odds of completing college-level courses by 4.5 times (Hayward & Willet, 2014).

Hodara and Jaggars' (2014) research in the City University of New York community colleges suggest that accelerating students through developmental education in shorter sequences results in greater access to college-level coursework and long-term success but may have consequences for student performance in college-level coursework.

In Virginia, wholesale developmental education reform is occurring to include comprehensive change in assessment, placement, and coursework (Asera, 2011). Specifically, all colleges in the Virginia Community College System offer developmental modules, or one credit unit courses focused on specific content. This new structure replaces traditional semester-long courses. In addition, all colleges use a common placement exam in addition to a common diagnostic tool to determine whether students require developmental education, and if so, which concepts or modules they need to complete. Rather than requiring separate reading and writing developmental courses, developmental English integrates reading and composition and emphasize the inherent connection between academic reading and writing.

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) is taking the reform even further by integrating the Completion by Design (CBD) initiative that proposes intentional, systematic, and structural changes necessary for colleges to significantly improve graduation rates. For example, in addition to modularizing the content and utilizing common placement and diagnostic tools, the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges have approved system-wide policies that allow research-validated, alternative methods or “multiple measures of placement” for determining a student’s college readiness. In addition, students who place near college-ready are allowed to enroll in college courses along with a corequisite developmental



course or supplemental instruction, instead of requiring the developmental course or courses as a prerequisite (Boiling, Morrissey, & Fouts, 2014). In addition, the NCCCS provides budgetary incentives through performance funding based on students' progress and completion.

**Mentoring.** It has been noted that operational definitions of mentoring are often either absent, too vague, or not specific to the population of interest (Bordes & Arrendondo, 2005; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Healy (1997) provides one definition of mentoring as a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent, serving as the mentor, and a beginner or protégé aimed at promoting the career development of both. Additionally, Gailbraith and Maslin-Ostrowski (2000) state that mentoring is a process of intellectual, psychological, and affective development, whereas mentors accept personal responsibility as competent and trustworthy nonparental figures for the significant growth of other individuals. Parkay (1988) provides another variation of mentoring as an intensive, one-to-one form of teaching in which the wise and experienced mentor inducts the aspiring protégé into a particular, usually professional, way of life.

As mentoring relates to higher education, Blackwell (1989) suggests that mentoring is a process by which a person of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige, instructs, counsels, guides, and facilitates the intellectual and career development of persons identified as protégés. Lester and Johnson (1981) posit that mentoring is a function of educational institutions and can be defined as a one-to-one learning relationship between an older person and a younger person that is based on modeling behavior and extended dialogue between them. Another definition of mentoring is presented by Moore and Amey (1988) as a form of professional socialization whereby a more experienced, usually older, individual acts as a guide, role model,

teacher and patron of a less experienced, often younger protégé. The aim of the relationship is the further development and refinement of the protégé's skills, abilities, and understanding.

Yet another definition presented by Shandley (1989) suggests that mentoring is first an intentional process of interaction between at least two individuals and second, is a nurturing process that fosters the growth and development of the protégé. Third, mentoring is an insightful process in which the wisdom of the mentor is acquired and applied by the protégé. Fourth, mentoring is a supportive, often protective process. The mentor can serve as an important guide or reality checker in introducing the protégé to the environment he or she is preparing for. Finally, an essential component of serving as a mentor is role modeling.

Mentoring can be also described as the process by which a student or protégé is positively socialized by a faculty member or mentor into the institution and profession. The mentor often serves in multiple roles including role model, teacher, advisor, guide, and resource (Galbraith & James, 2004; Levinson, Darrow, Lein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978).

**Mentoring program benefits.** The literature suggests that many mentoring programs have been implemented in higher education in an effort to close the achievement gap between the percentages of minorities in the general population and those with college degree by assisting students with their adjustment to college, academic performance, and persistence decisions. (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Canton & James, 1997; Fowler & Muckert, 2004; Hicks, 2005; Pfleeger & Mertz, 1995; Santos, Reigadas, & Scott, 2000; Salinitri, 2005; Santos & Reigadas, 2004; Welch, 1997). The success of programs closing the achievement gap by recruiting and retaining minority students is also prevalent in the literature (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Canton & James, 1997; Salinitri, 2005). Those that were not successful are difficult to find.

Most minority mentoring programs are similar in that they match a minority protégé with a mentor. The mentor is often a faculty or staff member, but sometimes a member of the community. Usually, there is a recruiting period for mentors who want to help protégés who belong to some group that is considered “at risk.” Recruitment is followed by matchmaking by program personnel of mentors and protégés on one or more bases that seem to make intuitive sense in terms of sex, race, or academic interest. Then, for each matched pair, the mentor contacts the protégé for an initial meeting and meets with the entire group of mentors and protégés participating in the program. Following this introductory meeting, there is an expectation that mentor-protégé pairs will continue to meet periodically to interact, especially about the protégés academic progress and future career. From time to time there also may be group gatherings that are social, as well as professional. Often there is a central office or program director who requests feedback on how many times the mentor-protégé has met; any perceived successes, and any perceived problems.

When employed, mentoring has been found to have a positive impact on numerous student outcomes including student performance, intellectual and critical thinking skills, student self-confidence, student latent abilities, self-actualization, expectations and future aspirations, grade point average, and persistence rates (Astin, 1999; Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Freedman, 1999; Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005; Johnson, 1997; Kahveci, Southerland, & Gilmer, 2006; Mangold, Bean, Adams, Scwab, & Lynch, 2003; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2003; Roberts, 2000; Ross-Thomas & Bryant, 1994; Salinitri, 2005; Sorrentino, 2007). Brawer (1996) suggests that minority retention is improved when peer mentoring is utilized in order to develop social support networks among new students. Toward this same idea, Redmond (1990) discovered that effective mentoring increases a student’s sense

of integration and involvement by teaching interpersonal, social, intellectual, and communication skills. Attrition is thus avoided by students learning how to form positive relationships. By institutions providing a mentoring program, students get the impression that their college or university is a place where faculty, staff, and administrators care about them. Redmond continues by noting that students are often surprised and pleased with planned aggressive relationship-building efforts by faculty or mentoring program staff to help them persist to graduation.

Research also indicates that mentoring programs may have positive benefits for the mentor, as well as the protégé, in the form of increased satisfaction from assisting others and gaining respect from peers by assisting protégés in their early careers (Dutton, 2003; Patitu & Terrell, 1997). More specifically, Patitu and Terrell (1997) suggest the benefits of mentoring can lead to career goal enhancement from the mentors and those that supervise the mentors.

Despite the well-documented benefits of mentoring programs, Haring (1999) suggests that the collective impact of such mentoring programs has not yielded the significant increase that is desired in the percentage of minorities obtaining college degrees. In a review of mentoring programs conducted by Haring (1997), only a few mentoring programs are reported in higher education literature and there is a relative paucity of research on how mentors actually work with their protégés (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sanchez, 2006) and protégés at different developmental stages (Allen, Russel, & Maetzke, 1997). Furthermore, the program design of most mentoring programs is remarkably similar and thus leads Haring to propose analysis to determine programmatic weaknesses and suggest ways to strengthen mentoring programs. In addition, data specifically regarding the mentoring of Black students is limited

(Frierson, 1997; Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991) although studies have been conducted in the last few years (Crisp, 2010; Miranda, 2011; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007).

Community college systems in the United States have developed and implemented minority male programs. For example, the North Carolina Community College System (2014) established a Minority Male Mentoring Program (3MP) in 2003 with grant funding from the Governor's Crime Commission to improve the college success rate of minority males. This program initially focused on first-generation students with low grade point averages or a history of substance abuse. As the program evolved, it has been expanded to recognize that many barriers exist to increase retention and graduation of minority males. The program focus is on coaching and mentoring to increase minority male completion of developmental and curriculum coursework, persistence from semester-to-semester and year-to-year, degree attainment, and/or transfer to a four-year institution. Currently, in North Carolina, 46 of the state's 58 community colleges operate a 3MP (North Carolina Community College System, 2014).

### **Summary**

The population demographics of the United States indicate an increase in underrepresented minority enrollment in higher education. Unfortunately, this increase in enrollment has not led to a directly proportional increase in underrepresented minority persistence and success in higher education. Specifically, an achievement gap exists between ethnic minorities and ethnic majority students in the attainment of higher education degrees. The persistence and success of college students have been researched but not focused on the community college setting. Many scholars have investigated the barriers to student success and recommend institutional interventions to assist students in achieving their academic and career goals. In addition, community colleges have implemented initiatives designed to increase

persistence and student success. This literature gap is that no scholar has investigated how institutional initiatives increase minority male persistence and student success.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research methodology used to compare how minority males perceive community college initiatives contribute to persistence and success at two southeastern community colleges. This research will utilize an embedded comparative case study. Topics in this chapter include: (a) design of the study, (b) setting of the study, (c) selecting sites to study, (d) sites of the study, (e) sample selection, (f) data collection methods, (g) data analysis, (h) validity and reliability, and (i) limitations.

### **Design of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male student persistence and success in the community college setting. Therefore, an embedded comparative case study approach best fit the needs of the study. According to Yin (2003), a case study approach is appropriate when the researcher is asking “how” and “why” questions about contemporary events and has little or no control over behavior events. The overarching research question for this study is as follows: How do minority males perceive community college institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence and success?

### **Settings of the Study: North Carolina Community College System**

I selected the North Carolina Community College System because in fall 2010, the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges, working in association with leaders from the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents and the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees, endorsed a significant planning initiative, SuccessNC, designed to foster guiding goals that positively impact student success (SuccessNC, 2014). The goals of SuccessNC included sharing of best practices, development of statewide policies to foster student success while removing those that inhibit student success, and

development of performance-based student success measures by 2013. In addition, the North Carolina Community College System is one of only four states selected in 2011 to participate in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Completion by Design (CBD) initiative. CBD, the Developmental Education Initiative (DEI), and Minority Male Mentoring Programs (3MP) are the SuccessNC initiatives specifically examined in this study.

CBD innovative pathways target low income young adults and include, but are not limited to, the following: utilization of alternative methods for determining a student's college readiness instead of relying on a single placement test score; allowing colleges to enroll students who place near college-ready in college-level courses with corequisite developmental or supplemental instruction, instead of requiring developmental education as a prerequisite; revising the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement between the North Carolina Community College System and the University of North Carolina's 16 constituent institutions that identifies the most popular transfer majors and develop structured pathways that better track students into major pathways, ensure that all general education core courses transfer for course credit, ensure that students that complete the Associates degree enter the university BA/BS track within two years, and allow reverse transfer of credits from the university to the community college to complete the Associate's degree. These policy priorities redesign and create more prescriptive programs of study, reduce the number of students referred to developmental education and thus accelerate the movement of referred students. In addition, the Loss Momentum Framework that supports CBD recommends intentional redesign of student service practices and processes such as mandatory intrusive advising, implementation of early alert systems, incenting optimal attendance, aggressive financial aid application support, removing barriers to graduation such as fees and forms, applying professional credentials and work experience in field of study toward



career pathways, requiring new student orientation, not allowing late class registration, and mandatory enrollment in college success courses. One of the two colleges selected for this study has received funding to implement the CBD initiative.

Another initiative implemented in North Carolina Community Colleges is the DEI. This state policy initiative is implemented to redesign the NCCCS developmental education curricula, accelerate student completion, implement diagnostic assessments, increase the number of students who successfully complete developmental education and enroll in college-level courses, and implement supporting policies (NCCCS 2014). Both colleges in this study have implemented at least a portion of the DEI.

College success courses are recommended for new students at both colleges in this study. Mandatory enrollment only occurs at one of the colleges. The college success courses offered as part of the NCCCS college library are standardized with the same course description in the NCCCS Common Course Library. Mandatory enrollment in the first semester of attendance may provide students with insight into resources available for student success.

Both colleges receive state funding to support a Male Minority Mentoring Program. Student participants in this program receive faculty and staff mentoring or peer mentoring that is designed to increase student success. The programs at each college are not identical in their practices or implementation. It is anticipated that these variations may influence minority male persistence and success.

### **Selecting Sites to Study**

To narrow down the site selection for comparison, a table was created in order to determine which sites were best suited for study. The table enabled the researcher to select sites that were in different parts of North Carolina, as well as select community colleges that differed

based on institution size, rural vs urban, implementation of the CBD initiative, implementation in the DEI, and presence of a 3MP. These attributes were chosen because they require high levels of financial and human resources for each community college. Urban colleges are typically large with high enrollment and several external resources that enables systematic change. Rural colleges are typically small with lower enrollment and fewer external resources and thus rely upon discretionary funds for implementation of systematic change. Implementation of the CBD initiative, the DEI and presence of a 3MP all require financial resources and human resources. Specifically, CBD implementation requires systemic changes in policies, programs, and practices that are designed to strengthen pathways to completion for students. Participation in the DEI requires curriculum redesign, implementation of new diagnostic assessments, and altering instructional methodology. From these sources, two colleges were identified as case study sites. The criteria for selection were based on the following:

1. The North Carolina Community College System colleges were grouped based upon the implementation of DEI and support of a 3MP.
2. This list of colleges was then separated based upon population demographics and enrollment.
3. The list of colleges was then divided into groups based on the inclusion or absence of external funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the CBD initiative. Funding for the CBD initiative provides colleges with resources to provide initiatives that focus on the success of low income young adults seeking higher education. Colleges without such funding must incorporate similar initiatives within the annual state budget. Based upon the list of colleges that were participants in CBD, the college with the largest urban population and enrollment was selected.

4. A second college was selected based on the fact that it is rural, has implemented the DEI, supports a 3MP and does not participate in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation CBD.
5. The two colleges selected were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality information from participants that might not be as forthcoming if participants felt their participation could be detrimental to their institution. The two institutions are referred to as Western Urban Community College (WUCC) and Eastern Rural Community College (ERCC).

The selection of WUCC and ERCC allows for a cross-case analysis of how institutional initiatives contribute to persistence and success of minority males at two southeastern community colleges.

### **Sites of Study**

Two North Carolina Community Colleges, West Urban Community College (WUCC) and East Rural Community College (ERCC) are compared in this study. Six North Carolina community colleges, including WUCC, received Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funding to implement innovative pathways to increase student completion as part of CBD. ERCC did not receive funding to participate in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation CBD initiative.

WUCC is located in the 17<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States in total population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), WUCC enrolled over 20,100 curriculum students in fall 2013. The study body consists of 65% part-time and 35% full-time enrollment with 56% female and 44% male. In addition, 43% of the student body is White, 33% Black, and 9% Hispanic. Of the population served by WUCC, 40.3% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. This college is one of five pilot colleges to implement CBD innovative

pathways to increase student completion. WUCC also participates in the United States Department of Education TRIO – Student Support Services Program that provides eligible WUCC students with academic, social and personal support to prepare for, attend, persist in and graduate from WUCC and/or transfer to a university. WUCC has also implemented the DEI and does support a 3MP. The mission of WUCC is that this College is an innovative and comprehensive college that advances the life-long educational development of students consistent with their needs, interests and abilities while strengthening the economic, social and cultural life of its diverse communities. The College accomplishes this purpose by providing high-quality, flexible pre-baccalaureate and career-focused educational programs and services which are academically, geographically, and financially accessible. This purpose requires a fundamental commitment to student success through teaching and learning excellence within a supportive environment.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), ERCC serves a small city and enrolled 3,800 students in fall 2013. The student body consists of 53% part-time and 47% full-time enrollment with 60% female and 40% male. In addition, 59% of the student body is White, 27% Black, and 8% Hispanic. Of the population served by ERCC, 15.8% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. ERCC did not receive Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funding to implement CBD innovative pathways to increase student completion. ERCC participates in a United States Department of Education Title III grant designed to improve advising and counseling to increase student retention and graduation rates in developmental courses. ERCC has also implemented the DEI and had the first 3MP in the NCCCS. The mission of ERCC is to meet the educational, training, and cultural needs of the communities it serves.

## **Sample Selection**

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005), suggest that for researchers to utilize “information-rich” cases that yield pertinent information related to the research participants, purposeful sampling, as described by Patton (2001), must be utilized. The goal of purposeful sampling is to select individuals for case study who are likely to be “information-rich” with respect to the researcher’s perspective of understanding how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success in community colleges. Padilla’s (1991) expertise model of successful college students focuses on the knowledge that successful students possess and the actions they employ to overcome barriers. Harmon and King (1985) suggests that successful college students are “experts” at being successful as students at a specific college or university. This expertise is viewed as theoretical and heuristic knowledge (Harmon & King, 1985). Students gain theoretical knowledge through coursework and formal study whereas heuristic knowledge is typically locally defined and is acquired experientially and systematically. Student success often relies upon the acquisition and expansion of heuristic knowledge throughout the college years. This study seeks to assess the heuristic knowledge of minority males as it relates to their persistence and success. A random purposeful sampling strategy is used to select key informants that possess special knowledge (Gall et al., 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, at least five participants from each college were selected from a data base of students of the Minority Male Mentoring program. Although minority males of different races and ethnicities were part of the data base for selection, study participants were exclusively African American. In addition, each participant has persisted for at least two semesters and has participated in one or more institutional initiatives. The age range of participants was 19-34 years old. Participation in this study will be requested with the use of each college’s student email system.

## **Data Collection Methods**

This section identifies the data collection methods that were used in the study. Methods included (a) semi-structured interviews of students, (b) document analysis, and (c) direct observation.

Yin (2003) indicates that one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted in this study because this type of interview is flexible and fluid in structure, and contains a structured sequence of questions that are asked in the same way of all interviewees (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). The semi-structured interview protocol for this study can be found in Appendix A. The aim of semi-structured interviews is usually to ensure flexibility in how and in what sequence questions are asked, and in whether and how particular areas might be followed up and developed with different interviewees. According to Barribal and While (1994), semi-structured interviews are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for information and clarification of answers.

### **Documentation Collection**

Yin (2003) suggests that the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources. Both printed and electronic documents that relate to the institutional initiatives that contribute to minority male student persistence and success were collected. These documents included SuccessNC initiative policies and procedures, federal program grant proposals, Male Minority Mentoring grant proposals, initiative brochures, college student success course syllabi, and any other documents that pertained to the study.

## **Site Visits**

I visited each college to retrieve documentation and conduct semi-structured interviews with the students. The interviews were conducted over a one week period at ERCC and in one day at WUCC, due to travel restrictions. The opportunity for informal interaction with the students allowed the observation of the physical environment of the institutions and the participants in their natural setting (Yin, 2003). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note that observing in a setting is a special skill that requires addressing issues such as the potential deception of the people being interviewed, impression management, and the potential marginality of the researcher in a strange setting. An electronic field journal was used to document data collected during the site visits. Researcher comments were included to allow for a much richer analysis of the institutional initiatives. The researcher comments also included observations of the setting, observations of interaction between minority males and other students and among themselves, and written thoughts.

## **Data Analysis**

Permission to record the semi-structured interviews was obtained from each study participant. The interview recorded and transcribed for coding. The recording and transcripts were stored in a password protected computer. Manual coding and computer assisted qualitative data analysis software was utilized to collect, organize and analyze content from semi-structured interviews, and documents. The data from this study was analyzed as individual cases and as a cross-case synthesis. Yin (2003), suggests that a cross-case synthesis is especially relevant if a case study consists of at least two cases. In addition, the technique treats each individual case as a separate study and provides for a more complex study that covers broader issues.

## **Validity and Reliability**

Patton (2002) states that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing the results and judging the quality of the study. Merriam (2014) states that ensuring trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner.

Validity in qualitative research involves determining the degree to which researchers' claims about knowledge correspond to the reality being studied (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). The internal validity of this study is demonstrated with triangulation of the data with semi-structured interviews, document collection, and observation. The semi-structured interviews of participants that have experienced institutional initiatives ensures validity in this study. Merriam (2014) notes that triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from different people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people. Patton (2002) cautions that it is a common misconception that the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches; in fact, an understanding of inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminating. Finding such inconsistencies should not be viewed as weakening of the evidence, but as an opportunity to uncover deeper insight in the data (Patton, 1999).

According to Joppe (2000), reliability is the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study. If the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research is considered to be reliable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceptualize reliability in qualitative research as “dependability” or “consistency” meaning that rather than the ability to reproduce the same results, to obtain results



that make sense. Reliability of this study is demonstrated with the use of a protocol that can be replicated.

### **Limitations**

The limitations included in this study were researcher and participant bias and were based upon positionality. Specifically, researcher race and ethnicity variables could have interacted with participant variables and data collected (Springman, Wherry, & Notaro, 2006). According to Ramanathan (2005), the disclosure of researcher biases for motivations for the research may help the participant better understand the position of the researcher. This disclosure may enhance the participant's ability to make judgments about the researcher's trustworthiness. In addition, regardless of the researcher and participant race, cultural sensitivity of the researcher builds a stronger research relationship (Cox, 2004). In this study, biases were reduced by remaining sensitive to cultural differences and data triangulation conducted through the use of semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations.

I had extensive experience as a mentor for minority students. This experience included mentoring minority student participants in the North Carolina Transfer Assistance in the Biomedical Sciences grant initiative and student participants in a Minority Male Mentoring Program. Both of these initiatives were in a community college setting.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher explained the qualitative methods of study used to determine how minority males perceive community college institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence and success. The design of the study, settings of the study, method for selecting sites to study, sample selection, data collection methods and analysis, as well as the validity, reliability and limitations of this study were provided.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND EMERGENT THEMES**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to compare how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success at two southeastern community colleges. This chapter contains the major themes that emerged from the participants' lived experiences. I collected, coded, and analyzed data derived from semi-structured interviews, observations, and institutional documents. The interview questions focused on the institutional initiatives and how they contributed to each participant's persistence and success. All questions were designed to answer the overarching research question: How do minority males perceive that community college institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence and success?

This chapter begins with a description of each college, followed by a brief description of the African American male student participants in this study. The chapter then proceeds with a discussion of the significant themes that emerged from the data analysis and a cross-case comparison. Finally the chapter concludes with a brief summary.

### **Context and Demographics**

#### **Settings**

The settings for this study were the campuses of two community colleges in a Southeastern state in the United States. Both colleges are public, two-year institutions and have been assigned pseudonyms for the purpose of institutional anonymity. Eastern Rural Community College (ERCC) had an enrollment of 3,800 students representing a diverse student population that is 59% White, 27% Black, and 8% Hispanic. ERCC did not participate in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Completion by Design initiative. The mission of ERCC is to meet the educational, training, and cultural needs of the communities it serves.

Western Urban Community College (WUCC) had an enrollment of over 20,000 students and a student population that is 43% White, 33% Black, and 9% Hispanic. Located in the 17<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States, WUCC offers a greater variety of curriculum and continuing education programs than are available at ERCC. WUCC's mission is to be an innovative and comprehensive college that advances the life-long educational development of students consistent with their needs, interests and abilities while strengthening the economic, social and cultural life of its diverse communities. Both colleges support a Minority Male Mentoring Program initiative. ERCC's minority male initiative is the Minority Male Mentoring Program (3MP), and WUCC's initiative is the MAN UP Program. According to documents provided by the college, 3MP goals includes providing opportunities and enabling academic success for minority males. The program is led by the director of the Academic Skills Center and a professional tutor and includes 19 active members and 12 active mentors. Active membership entails participation in program meetings, community service events, and off-campus experiences such as university visits or cultural experiences. No designated facilities or spaces are provided for 3MP. Activities provided by 3MP include student development seminars, cultural experiences, university tours, and a state-wide leadership conference. The student development seminars include such topics as resume building, interview skills, appropriate dress for the workplace, table etiquette, and how to network with others. Cultural experiences include visits to museums, symphonic concerts, and dining at ethnic restaurants. All participants in this study attended weekly meetings and were participants in several activities of 3MP.

According to the program brochure, MAN UP provides comprehensive activities that promote the personal development, academic improvement, and other social and educational advancement needs of students of WUCC. MAN UP is prominent on the college's website and

has its own web page, mission statement, vision, list of program benefits, and activities. MAN UP is housed in a dedicated room with a white board, meeting table, and computers that can accommodate up to 20 students simultaneously. Adjacent to the room are the offices of a female, full-time MAN UP coordinator, two minority male mentors and two part-time academic coaches. The program is supported by several volunteers around the campus.

## **Participants**

There were ten total participants in this study, with five representing ERCC and five representing WUCC. All participants were African American male students enrolled in curriculum programs. In addition, all participants were considered “information rich” members of their respective minority male mentoring program by the director of the minority mentoring programs and thus purposefully selected for interview. In addition, each participant was asked who they would interview if they were conducting the study. Each participant named another minority male included in this study. Participant age ranged from 19-34. Each participant and college staff member in this study was given a pseudonym for the purpose of individual confidentiality. Table 1 provides a summary of the participant demographics.

## **Themes**

Six major themes and 12 subthemes emerged from the data of this study regarding how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success in a community college setting:

1. Minority male students’ accountability to their mentors and themselves
  - a. Student accountability to Minority Male Mentoring Program mentors
  - b. Minority male student personal accountability

Table 1

*Student Participants by Institution*

Participant Name	Age	Program of Study
Eastern Rural Community College		
Darius	24	Human Services
Andre	24	Medical Laboratory Technology
Quinn	24	Associate in Science
Devante	25	Industrial Systems Technology
Tyrie	34	Business Administration/Operations Management
Western Urban Community College		
Jayden	22	Associate in Arts
Jamir	21	Business Administration
Dion	19	Culinary Arts
Marcus	20	Culinary Arts
Nate	21	Associate in Arts

2. Minority male student relationships with mentors, students, and faculty
  - a. Students to mentor relationships
  - b. Mentors as family
  - c. Student-to-student relationships
  - d. Student-to-faculty relationships
3. College community
4. Student clubs and organizations
  - a. Exposure through engagement opportunities
  - b. Opportunities for service learning
  - c. Exposure to transfer universities
5. Campus resource knowledge
  - a. Resource availability and location
  - b. Financial aid solutions
  - c. Academic tutoring
6. Developmental Education Initiative

### **Minority Male Students' Accountability to Their Mentors and Themselves**

**Student accountability to minority male mentoring program mentors.** Several study participants indicated that their minority mentoring program mentors contributed to their persistence and success by holding them accountable to their academic goals. This is demonstrated by statements from two students from ERCC and two students from WUCC regarding their respective minority male mentoring program mentors. For example, at ERCC, Andre made the following statement regarding his mentors holding him accountable for his actions:

They never let anyone fall to the wayside. They always ask how your classes are going.

“Is there anything on campus or anything outside of campus that they can help you with?

Is there something going on that you need to talk about?” It was all about accountability with the Minority Male Mentoring Program mentors.

Likewise, Darius believed that his “accountability partners” made him feel like he “belonged” and thus he was more “inclined to continuing to go to school when he had someone to answer to.”

At WUCC, Marcus appreciated his mentor checking on his progress and offering his assistance. He stated that his mentor “makes sure I stay on my homework and emails me if there is anything that he needs to talk with me about.”

Dion attributed his persistence and success to the mentors of the MAN UP Program by recognizing that they were holding him accountable to attend class, complete his academic work, and remain updated on course announcements and opportunities on campus by checking his email. He stated that the Man Up Program is basically there to help the members achieve their goals, but also to help with anything that they need academic wise. He mentioned that the mentors also ensure that the members go to class on time, get their academic work completed, have a good relationship with their professors, and remind the members to check their emails. This constant affirmation that someone is keeping track of the student progress and providing a safety net for assistance made the students gain confidence in their abilities to succeed.

Another example of student accountability to mentors was witnessed while visiting WUCC. Between interviews, I observed a MAN UP participant talking with his mentor about his upcoming semester. The student mentioned that he had recently visited a faculty member’s office to deliver a paper. He described to his mentor that he had delivered the paper, but since

the faculty member was not in his office, he entered the office and placed the paper on the faculty member's desk. The MAN UP mentor let the student know that entering the office uninvited and adjusting anything on someone else's desk was inappropriate. The mentor immediately required the student to apologize in person for his actions. It was evident that this student did not realize that his actions were not appropriate.

**Student personal accountability.** At ERCC, Darius attributed his persistence and success to a sense of obligation to something larger than himself. His self-initiative was highlighted when he mentioned a desire to achieve, not only for himself, but also for a community of others, past and present. He made a conscious effort to reframe his experience to perform differently in college than he had in high school and to take advantage of his opportunity to pursue higher education.

Some people do not have the same opportunity that I have. Many of my ancestors, I look at their majestic struggle, and I can't just ignore it. I can't just be ungrateful for an opportunity that I do have. And so, I have to apply myself, even if not for my sake, for their sake. So I am thankful to stand on their shoulders and have this opportunity to not just go to school, but to perform well in school.

Darius also spoke of how he used "intrinsic motivation" to persist when he offered:

I couldn't give up on myself. I mean people have not given up on me in a long time, but the one person that I couldn't let give up on me was me. So I said I have to do this. I can do it. And I am not doing it for anyone else, I am doing it for myself.

Darius' sense of obligation was also demonstrated by his volunteerism in the cafeteria, where he filled the beverage machines with ice. He again connected to something larger than himself and leveraged his self-initiative. He explained:



I decided to make myself a part of the school. I volunteered for two years to put ice in the machines in the cafeteria. Sometimes when you don't feel like coming to school but knowing that you have a responsibility, and that you are going to let people down, you are a little less inclined to want to disappoint. I had to create ways for myself to feel more a part. That has helped me to come along and I thank the people here who allowed me to put myself in a place that I could help them. It has been a blessing just to help someone out. It has really been a help to me to be involved.

Another student participant at ERCC was accountable to himself. Tyrie stated that he was going to graduate because "he wanted it bad enough." He remembered that when he was growing up, his father told him that he could not help him with his homework because he was unable to complete high school math or English. Tyrie did not want to have the same conversation with his children. He wanted to be able to help his children with their homework, but did not share his goal with his family. In fact, Tyrie kept his attempt to complete his high school equivalency a secret from his wife. "She thought I was cheating on her because I was ashamed to tell anyone I was going back to school. I was going after work." He was determined to put the high school "diploma on the wall" and then finish his college degree because he wants to be able to show his 17-year-old son that it can be done.

Another example of a personal accountability was Nate, an Associates in Arts student at WUCC. After three years of working two jobs, Nate decided to go to college. He described that when he was working, he didn't have anything to show for his work. He said he was "sick and tired of being sick and tired." He remembered the specific night at work when he said "I can't do this anymore. I told myself that when I got into college, whatever I had to do to become great or leave a legacy and continue to move forward, I was going to do." Nate realized that there was

“something more to life and the only way out was college” and has taken advantage of his opportunity by serving in leadership positions in student clubs and excelling academically.

Dion spoke of overcoming his learning disability at WUCC. He described how high school and college counselors told him that he was not “college material.” However, he did not let that discourage him from “finding his niche” and “pushing himself” to achieve. Although his advisors guided him towards a “trade degree,” his goal was to obtain a four-year degree. He said that having a learning disability made him want to “fight even harder.” His goal was to show himself that his goals could be achieved and that he could be someone “that others could look up to” and see that learning disabilities do not have to hold anyone back.

### **Minority Male Student Relationships with Mentors, Students, and Faculty**

**Student-to-mentor relationships.** Participants at both institutions shared stories of their minority male program mentors contributing to their persistence and success through the mentoring relationships. All participants in the study stated that the minority male mentors were significant contributors to their persistence and success by establishing a relationship and developing a sense of trust and accountability. For example, at ERCC, Darius spoke about how he and his 3MP mentor developed a nurturing relationship:

Over a period of time, we developed a continuity and learned each other’s personalities.

I discovered what I wanted to do and that was to work with the minority males. He identified ways of helping me to develop the confidence and knowledge of getting to the pathways that I wanted to travel. Through time, he helped me to step outside of my shell and to do things that I was not accustomed to doing.

Darius also developed and valued a relationship with a minority male mentor who worked part-time as a tutor in the Academic Skills Center. Darius discussed how the mentor

held him accountable to be the best that he could be and made sure that he turned in his best work. The mentor tried to instill in Darius the professionalism necessary to become a valued employee in the workforce. Darius also mentioned his responsibility to “hold myself in a high esteem.”

Later in the interview, Darius discussed the impact of his interactions with his mentor. Prior to attending ERCC, Darius did not understand the importance of a college degree. As a first generation college student who had to overcome the mystery of college, academic unpreparedness, and extreme shyness, Darius needed someone to provide guidance, believe in him, and provide motivation to succeed. His mentor met these needs:

I think a lot of the relationships that I have built with the people out here (ERCC) could easily identify that my problem wasn't my inability to learn, but it was how I grew up. I didn't get an opportunity to really understand college and the importance of knowledge, and they saw it as an easy fix to sit down and encourage me. “Darius, you can do it. Continue, continue, continue.” I built up this tenacious attitude through people here that kept reminding me that I could do it. I think that is what I owe most of my thanks to is the meaningful relationships here, not just in the classroom.

In addition, Tyrie worked with several minority male mentors at ERCC who provided motivation and encouragement to help him persist and succeed. He mentioned Mr. Simpson, who also served as Darius' mentor, as a mentor who helped him develop his vocabulary by having a “word of the day” from the dictionary and convinced him to use the word in conversation during the day. Tyrie valued this relationship and sought out Mr. Simpson “at his table” for advice regarding college and everyday life situations. The “table” was where Mr. Simpson met with his minority male mentees on a daily basis. Another example was Tyrie's

relationship with one of the achievement coaches who also served as a minority male mentor. The achievement coaches were part of ERCC's United States Department of Education's Title III grant, designed to improve advising and counseling to increase student retention and graduation rates in developmental education courses. A significant portion of the grant was used to fund one full-time and one part-time achievement coach to meet with high risk students and help them through the advising/registration process, as well as monitor their progress and success. Tyrie was one of these students and continued his relationship with his achievement coach through his transition into curriculum courses. He spoke of the motivation provided by his achievement coach and mentor:

Anytime I needed to vent to someone, I would go to my achievement coaches. If I had to vent or if I had an issue or if I feel like I can't do this, they would say, "Oh man, come on. You know you can do this. This ain't nothing. You just have to step back and let it sit and simmer and then go back to it." I did exactly that and from that point on I would stop by and see them every day.

Tyrie was convinced that the achievement coaches provided him with services that helped him to succeed and thus he was willing to make the effort to frequently visit the coaches. Although he was 34 years old, he still required support and the reassurance that someone at the college was there to assist.

Comparatively, all five participants at WUCC shared similar stories regarding their relationships with mentors of the MAN UP Program. For example, Marcus described a time where he recognized he was not meeting his potential, and the MAN UP mentors reassured him of their supportive role. He described this situation:

Since I joined the Man Up program, I did slack at one point in time. But when I did slack, they came to me and were like “Hey, look, we are here to help you and if there is anything you need help with, let us know. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Don’t be afraid to let people know. Look, I am failing here. I need some help.”

Jayden compared the positive environment of MAN UP to what he experienced in high school:

In high school I never got as much motivation as the Man Up program gives me. I just love the fact that they constantly do it. It is never any negative environments or any negative issues. I appreciate being a part of the program.

Jayden described his interactions with mentors in the MAN UP room. This designated room, or “office” as Jayden called it, provided a space for students to complete academic assignments, socialize, and encourage each other. Jayden specifically valued the reinforcing encouragement and advice received from the mentors. He explained:

The MAN UP mentors constantly come into the office and ask how am I doing, how is school, how is home, what are the extracurricular activities. You just have a friendly conversation and they give me their own insight of when they were in college and I just learn from what they give me. They give good advice every day.

Jayden spoke of the constant motivation provided by the MAN UP mentors and noted that they provided a “constant reminder of how I need to be in school and what I need to do in school to stay successful.”

Finally, Marcus described his goal to enroll in the Culinary Arts program at a university and did not know how to apply. The manner in which his MAN UP mentor, Mr. Burrell, assisted Marcus gave him reassurance that he would be able to pursue his dream to become a chef.

Mr. Burrell also worked as the director of Communities in Colleges, a local agency that partners with the local Communities in Schools organizations that support middle school and high school students with resources for achievement. This program provided students with opportunities for service learning and leadership development. Marcus was encouraged by Mr. Burrell's recommendation to enroll him into Communities in College and suggestion that he "had a chance to be a leader." This encouragement seemed to instill a sense of confidence in Marcus.

**Mentors as family.** Throughout this study, participants referred to their mentors or peers as a family. Families usually provide support, encouragement, constructive criticism, and motivation to succeed. For example, Marcus compared his relationship with the MAN UP mentors to "another family" and specifically mentioned the role of the female MAN UP director providing advice regarding course registration and "keeping him on track to graduation." Similarly, Jamir described the need for older MAN UP mentors to serve a parental role, something participants may not have away from college:

Some people need an older person to tell them because they don't have parents to tell them about certain things they are doing and certain things they need to do. By them going there (MAN UP), it is basically everybody is together doing their work, getting everything done, making sure they are on top of things instead of under them.

Similarly, Dion referred to the mentors as serving the role of family members providing a supporting role:

If you have problems at home and it is affecting you at school, they are there to give you advice about what you can do. They are like our big brothers and uncles so it is really helpful for them to be around. They are really here for us.

Dion highlighted the relatability of the MAN UP mentors in terms of age and thus the possibility of them going through the same kinds of issues as he was experiencing outside of college. He stated that if someone as old as his parents were to give him advice, he may not listen because he may not think the older mentor understood his perspective as well as someone his age would understand. Dion valued the mentors that were of similar age and could relate to issues he may be facing:

But when you have younger people that are mentors that are around your age and are going through the same things, but are a little wiser than you, it helps out. In a situation that is out of your hands and you also have that young person that is wiser than you but can show you that “Hey, you know we go through the same exact thing. We are the same age. You shouldn’t be doing that.”

Dion preferred mentors of his age because mentors that are older than him would be “just trying to tell me what to do, like my parents.”

Families also listen. The Academic Chats provided by the MAN UP program afforded members an opportunity to talk with each other and with mentors about different topics selected by the membership. Participants valued this opportunity to express themselves in a confidential manner because, as Marcus stated, “Today’s society does not allow you to express yourself how you may want to express yourself.” At least two of the five participants at WUCC valued the ability of the members to talk with the mentors in Academic Chat sessions. Marcus described a recent chat:

Last week’s topic was “Is Racism Still Alive?” They gave us a chance to talk about how we feel about a certain topic or get anything off our chests that we feel is bothering us.

This helps me express myself because I believe that in certain cases you can’t express

yourself how you want to in today's society. It is important that you can express yourself and whatever you say in an academic chat is never repeated to anyone.

Dion also mentioned the significance of the Academic Chats to discuss things other than how to be successful in college and life, including societal issues. He specifically remembered discussing "do Black lives matter in America" and is looking forward to discussing "cop brutality."

**Student-to-student relationships.** Participants in this study indicated that relationships with other minority males, especially other members of the minority male mentoring programs, contributed to their persistence and success. The mention of "brotherhood" and "fraternity" references a strong connection between the members and suggests that they rely on each other for support and encouragement. The formal structure of the Minority Male Mentoring Program provides the cornerstones from which students build a network of support and encouragement as demonstrated by Devonte's remarks:

There is a strong brotherhood between us. We try to encourage each other to try to do better. If we are not succeeding in something, we most definitely will try to help out each other. I think everyone needs some help some times, and that is something I like about the 3MP program.

Dion continued the discussion of brotherhood and peer support he provided and received to overcome the struggles of going to college:

I think Man Up is more than a program, it is a brotherhood. Coming here to Man Up, it helps because you have positive people giving you advice. If you are going through a hard time, you have people here that can help you out, if you need it. It is little things



like that. It is more like a helping hand and a brotherhood. It is almost like a fraternity. That is what I think Man Up is for a community college, a fraternity.

Jayden emphasized how the members of the MAN UP Program contribute to minority male persistence and success through encouragement:

We (MAN UP members) continue to uplift students. We want them to finish college wherever they may go. Not just here, but finish at the four-year. Just constantly uplifting because I believe everybody needs some uplifting.

Dion brought up an interesting aspect of peer support when he mentioned the frequent request of students for food in the MAN UP room.

Some people go through a hard time and they can help you out. Some people come in and they have nothing to eat because they don't have the money to eat and you can come in and say "Hey, I am hungry" and someone will feed you.

**Student-to-faculty relationships.** Student relationships with faculty were evident in the interviews, especially at ERCC. For example, Tyrie spoke of his relationship with his economics instructor who also served as a minority male mentor. Tyrie's perspective of the value of the relationship showed through when he stated that his instructor is "just like a friend even though he is a professor and mentor." Tyrie stated that the instructor not only taught him aspects of the economy, but also taught him "the way you should appear and the way you should do things to better yourself."

Tyrie was very observant of the faculty interactions both in-class and out-of-class. For example, while enrolled in a developmental English course he noted that his instructor recognized that every student was different and that she "didn't teach everyone the same." He also recognized that this required extra effort on the instructor's behalf, but made a "major

impact on his success” and provided him the confidence to succeed in the curriculum level courses.

Tyrie was not completely positive about his observations of faculty. He suggested that not all instructors are as involved as they should be in the success of their students. He said that some instructors do not even know their students’ names and have very little interest in students outside of class. He believes that those instructors should take more interest in the needs of their students. He said that some students have issues that they are reluctant to share, but he suggests that if their instructors would simply ask how they are doing, it could be a “life changer.”

### **College Community**

Another subtheme that emerged under the relationship theme was the importance of the college community to minority male persistence and success. The college community includes employees who typically do not have formal interactions with students, but may informally interact every day and not be aware of the potential contribution to student persistence and success.

For example, at ERCC, Darius explained that housekeepers and switchboard operators contributed to his persistence by providing a friendly environment, addressing him by his first name, and encouraging his success. He stated:

The friendly environment provided by the housekeepers played an integral part in keeping me sane. It goes back to feeling involved and feeling that you have family and that you have support even down to the housekeeping. They address me by my first name. “Darius, how is class going? If there anything I can do to help, let me know.”

Darius also provided an example of the college switchboard operator who made a significant contribution to his success by providing him a computer to complete his online

assignments. Darius was unable to afford a computer on his own and prior to getting the computer, he was only able to complete online assignments in an on-campus computer lab. The employee overheard his conversation and provided him her used computer. This donation made Darius feel as if he was cared for by the employee and that someone thought he had potential. In return, he felt accountable to graduate and “would hate to face the people that supported him and tell them that I didn’t finish.”

Darius recognized that a student’s college experience is not just impacted by administrators, faculty, or student support staff. He suggested that everyone on campus can make a positive impact on student persistence and success:

I think that sometimes we do not recognize that the people that are playing an integral part do not have to be in a suit and tie but can be the people that are cleaning the school. They play a significant role.

Andre made similar observations with the staff of ERCC’s Academic Skills Center. He suggested that he felt a sense of belonging and a helpful, welcoming environment:

There was no judgment. There were open arms. They are here to help. They really took the time to understand what I needed and what they could do for me. There is not a day that goes by that I do not visit the Academic Skills Center even if I do not need help. The Academic Center staff provides a sense of community, a sense of home.

Because these college employees are not formal leaders at the institution, they may be overlooked as important contributors to student persistence and success, but as evidenced here, they can and often do make significant contributions by creating a welcoming environment and a sense of community that students want to be a part of.

Another example of the college community contributing to minority male success was provided by the cafeteria manager. The cafeteria manager would allow Darius to eat breakfast and lunch in exchange for his filling the beverage machines with ice. More than one participant in this study explained that a barrier to success is the need for nourishment; they were united in asserting that it is difficult to achieve academically if the basic human needs are not met. Students are sometimes put in the position of having to choose between working for wages to eat or studying in order to complete a degree. Although cafeteria services were provided on both campuses, no meal plan options, subsidized or otherwise, were available. Nor were food pantries available on either campus.

### **Student Clubs and Organizations**

**Exposure through engagement opportunities.** All participants in this study were members of at least one student club or organization, including MAN UP at WUCC or 3MP at ERCC. Several of the study participants cited the extra-curricular activities that were provided through clubs and organizations as contributors to their persistence and success.

For example, Phi Beta Lambda, ERCC's business club provided Andre the opportunity to travel to conferences and competitions that enabled him to network and gain confidence in his skill set. Andre said that "the club really encouraged me to go through with my Business Administration degree." Similarly, ERCC's Quinn attributed his growth as a student to participating in 3MP meetings with successful minority leaders in the community including "doctors, members of state boards, and instructors" who provided insight into achieving success.

Similarly, WUCC's Nate described how his membership in MAN UP, Mu Alpha Theta, and Phi Theta Kappa, where he served as president, helped him to develop self-confidence and provided exposure to resources that he enabled him to succeed. Membership in the clubs and

student organizations afforded Nate opportunities that other non-engaged students did not receive. For example, as a MAN UP member and Phi Theta Kappa president, Nate was selected to serve on an Achieving the Dream panel to tell his story of success. He was exposed to advisors, deans, and presidents of other colleges that gave him encouragement to continue to succeed.

Nate also linked his persistence and success to a leadership conference he attended with MAN UP. By attending the conference, he was able to gain knowledge of topics such as leadership and table etiquette. These experiences were unique to members of this organization.

Nate attributed his ability to dream about the future to the student clubs and organizations. He said that joining the clubs gave him “the insight to formulate a why.” He was referring to developing a reason to want to achieve. He gave the following examples of students’ “why”:

Your “why” may be that you are the first person to attend college and you are trying to show your family that you can be successful. My “why” may be that I am tired of my living arrangement. Another student’s “why” may be that they need the financial aid refund money because it is the only reason they can survive.

He stated that he was different than students who do not persist because he knows his “why” and that participation in student clubs and organizations places him in the company of others that also know their “why.” He states that he “surrounded himself with like-minded people” and that helped him to transition into college and enabled him to obtain the knowledge to become successful.

**Opportunities for service learning.** Student clubs and organizations at both colleges provided opportunities for service learning. Study participants suggested that participation in

service learning provided an avenue for engagement that linked participants with other students and helped participants feel needed. This participation created a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves. For example, Darius spoke of his experience on the ERCC Student Government Association (SGA):

The SGA gave me formal guidelines and community service projects which made me feel engaged. Through that engagement process, I began to feel a part of the school and it gave me a role of leadership.

ERCC's Devante suggested that giving back to the community through service learning projects provided a means of self-reflection to understand that the people receiving the benefit of the project, whether at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, could have been him. Devante also indicated that participation in service learning motivated him in college and in other areas of his life.

ERCC's Quinn specifically mentioned that service learning provided him the opportunity to "do good" and "keep my mind busy." Similarly, Dion at WUCC described how participation in service learning activities at the homeless shelter, Habitat for Humanity, or senior citizens' homes increased his awareness of social responsibility and helped him develop a greater sense of personal identity.

Jayden compared his work on WUCC's Communities in Colleges (CIC) program to MAN UP in regards to how it contributed to his persistence and success through "uplifting" activities. Nate gave the example of his service learning through WUCC's Mu Alpha Theta and assisting other students in need of math tutoring. He valued the opportunity because "it kind of felt good to give back." By participating in the service learning he stated that he was "not only making a difference, but hopefully helping someone else out."

**Exposure to transfer universities.** Both the 3MP at ERCC and the MAN UP Program at WUCC provided the opportunity for members to visit universities to prepare for transfer. Participants indicated that this exposure to universities would not have occurred without participating in these programs. Specifically, Quinn, a member of MAN UP, stated that he visited several universities through the MAN UP Program, including the University of North Carolina, East Carolina University, and North Carolina State University and a few Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He suggested that the university visits provided an opportunity to “step foot on a campus where he really wanted to be.” He also said that if he did not visit as a member of MAN UP, he “would not have visited until after acceptance.”

WUCC’s Dion also mentioned the university visits provided by MAN UP. He noted that “being able to walk on the campus and see the programs the university offered” allowed him to “understand the choices he could make,” if he was successful at the community college. This ability to see the possibility of attending a university was important for Dion to aspire to more than the community college.

At ERCC, minority male mentors planned trips to transfer universities that also included dining at different ethnic restaurants. Including travel time, each trip averaged six hours and allowed for the opportunity to develop relationships with mentors and members of 3MP. Tyrie mentioned that after going on the university trips, he “viewed ERCC and other people differently than before he was involved with 3MP.” Prior to his participation with 3MP at ERCC, he had a difficult time trusting others and allowing himself to be a part of something that he did not completely control. Because of his felony drug convictions and subsequent incarcerations, he did not predict that anyone would want to include him in any campus activities. He mentioned that he was very reluctant to join 3MP until he attended a few meetings and was surprised that

the members and mentors of 3MP “did not view his incarceration as a barrier to his success.”

Currently, he has a strong willingness to recruit students to the program because of the impact it made on his college experience.

### **Campus Resource Knowledge**

Participants in this study often noted the importance of learning about the availability and location of campus resources early in the academic journey. The institutional initiative that provided this information to the participants was the College Success Course. Both colleges offered ACA 111, College Student Success, as a one credit hour course, every semester. One learning outcome of this course was for students to become aware of resources and facilities on campus to help achieve academic goals.

**Resource availability and location.** ERCC’s Andre spoke about the importance of this course content that provided information regarding the availability and location of student success resources. Similarly, Nate stated “the main thing that I got was using your resources and showing where the resources were.” Devante also recognized the importance of students acquiring campus resources knowledge and stated “I feel like every student should take it (ACA) the first semester because you are going to have to know your way around college and exactly what kind of resources you have around campus.” WUCC’s Marcus specifically mentioned and valued the close proximity and availability of computer labs near his classes and the easy access to technology to assist with his assignments.

**Financial Aid solutions.** In this study, several participants described the necessity of financial aid to persist and succeed in college. The same participants acknowledged that not knowing how and when to apply for financial aid was a barrier to enrollment. To assist students with overcoming this barrier, institutional initiatives provided assistance in obtaining the



knowledge of financial aid solutions for enrollment. For example, Andre noted that ERCC's College Success Class provided information regarding financial aid and the ERCC Foundation as a funding source for tuition and fees. Andre stated the importance of the College Success Class:

It was an information class about the college. Financial aid – how do we apply for it? What type of financial aid there is? I only thought there was, like, three, but there are actually more than three types. If you can't get financial aid, go to the Foundation. I didn't know there were more options.

Tyrie lacked an understanding of financial aid when he first enrolled at ERCC, but subsequently learned about financial aid solutions, including the procedures to fill out the online FAFSA application from ERCC's Financial Aid Department.

**Academic tutoring.** Institutional resources were used at ERCC to fund the Academic Skills Center as an educational support service that provided a formal environment for students to receive academic tutoring from professional staff and peer tutors, free of charge. Participants in this study suggested that the availability of this center provided them with the academic assistance to persist and succeed. Not only did the Academic Skills Center provide free tutorial services, but it also provided a place for students to receive encouragement and a space for them to feel as if they belonged.

ERCC's facility and its employees seemed to provide students with a desire to return for assistance. Devante overcame his initial belief that "anyone using the Academic Skills Center was slow and stupid" and described his experience as one that "helped me to be a better student."

Similarly, Tyrie described how he used the resource for tutorial assistance. He stated that the staff "actually help you figure out the answer or a better way to figure out the answer." Tyrie

continued by describing the “major impact” it had on his success and that he was “going to continue to use the Academic Skills Center it until he graduates.”

WUCC participants mentioned the academic tutorial services provided by the Academic Learning Center as an important resource for their success. For example, Jayden affirmed that he used WUCC’s Academic Learning Center, but only for grammar issues on writing assignments. All other WUCC participants, including Jamir, Dion, Marcus, and Nate, utilized the Academic Learning Center for the computer availability and tutorial assistance and valued the availability of the resource.

### **Developmental Education Initiative**

WUCC incorporated a developmental math redesign that uses eight DMA (developmental math) courses requiring four weeks each, so that it is feasible to move from the lowest level developmental math to college level math in two semesters. This developmental realignment for math replaced three, semester length developmental math courses. The transition to the new DMA courses had occurred at both institutions. In addition, a new diagnostic test was used to place students into only the DMA courses they require to gain mastery and prepare for college level math. Students in the DMA courses were graded on the Pass/Retake system, rather than the traditional A through F grading system.

Dion and Jayden were the only participants to have completed DMA courses from WUCC in this study and were taught using the math emporium model. This model included computerized instruction in a room equipped with over 250 computers, each with a math instructional program that included videos and homework assignments that students work through and test at the end of the four week course. Both students appreciated the goal of acceleration to curriculum math and described how it contributed to their persistence and success. Dion stated:

I like the DMA because it is quicker. Math classes like 060 were a bit longer and stretched out. I like the DMA because you get in and you get out. You are not wasting any time because I feel like when you take the Math 060 classes, it was longer. It was months and you are like, ok, we are wasting time here and I want to get to my program of study.

Jayden thought that the developmental courses were necessary and that if he “had jumped straight into college algebra, he would have been totally unprepared.” He questioned the placement test and said that he only thought two of the four courses he had completed were necessary. This is interesting in that recently the implementation of new placement tests was questioned state-wide by chief academic officers and as a result, the North Carolina Community College System has authorized validation studies to be conducted in the near future. Jayden continued by noting that the courses were taught online and that although the videos on the online course are helpful, he preferred the instructional model that allows for the instructor to “demonstrate the math problems on the board by writing it down and showing how to figure out the problem.” He did appreciate the availability of math tutors in the math emporium model.

Student participants at ERCC found the developmental courses essential to provide the foundation of understanding necessary for curriculum level courses. For example, Darius stated that because he took a couple years off between high school and college, the developmental courses were needed and contributed to his understanding. He was grateful that he completed the developmental math courses prior to the redesign and noted that in conversations with students currently enrolled in DMA courses, it is his understanding the redesign incorporates “less time with teachers teaching and more time with students teaching themselves.” He preferred “more involvement with teachers” as opposed to “computers teaching math.” Tyrie

had completed five DMA courses and valued the opportunity to “brush up and revise what I already knew and was better prepared for a curriculum math course.” He noted that he could not attribute his persistence and success to the DMA courses because “the class moves so fast you only had time to try to pass the course and could not determine if it contributed to your success.”

Quinn was a unique student in that he took developmental math courses prior to the redesign and after the redesign. He stated that he preferred the classroom setting of developmental courses prior to the math redesign as opposed to where “you have to learn on your own” in the redesigned DMA courses. Quinn has progressed all the way to calculus and differential equations, the highest math offered in North Carolina community colleges.

### **Cross-Case Comparison**

In order to gain insight into how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success in a community college setting, the case studies were analyzed, compared, and contrasted. Cross-case comparison highlights the similarities and differences of the various initiatives implemented on both college campuses and the themes that emerged from the study.

### **Minority Male Students’ Accountability to Their Mentors and Themselves**

Accountability was one of the six major themes from the study and included accountability from the mentors and self-accountability. Participants at WUCC seemed to have a much stronger sense of accountability to their mentors, as compared to participants at ERCC. WUCC participants noted various aspects of accountability, including attendance, grades, and relationships with faculty. Although two participants at ERCC mentioned accountability to their mentors, neither provided the same specificity as WUCC participants. Self-accountability was strong for the participants at both institutions. One student was determined to succeed because

his ancestors had struggled for his right to pursue higher education, and he was doing everything possible to overcome his own struggles for their sake. He did not want their efforts to be wasted. Another ERCC student was determined to complete his high school and college education to demonstrate to his son that it could be done. At WUCC, students held themselves accountable to “become great” and overcome a learning disability.

### **Minority Male Student Relationships with Mentors, Students, and Faculty**

The theme of relationships was very prominent in this study. Students at ERCC developed nurturing relationships with mentors in informal settings through the Title III achievement coaches, Academic Skills Center tutors, and 3MP mentors. The presence of achievement coaches demonstrated that ERCC recognized the need to serve underprepared students and minority males, and grant evaluations obtained from the ERCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness reported improvements in student retention and completion rates over the last three years. At WUCC, the Bill and Melinda Gates Completion by Design initiative incorporated similar aspects but had not been implemented long enough to demonstrate significant results.

In regards to student relationships with Academic Skills Center tutors at ERCC, several participants spoke specifically about one tutor who also served as a mentor. This person was a retired African American male, employed on a part-time basis to tutor students in English. This employee was better known by the study participants as someone who had taken on the role of mentor and provided guidance and motivation for their success. He had a designated table in the middle of the Academic Skills Center that served a similar function as the MAN UP room at WUCC. Minority Male Mentoring Program students would sit at the table for discussions with him regarding academic assignments or to receive advice about their future. The mentor referred

to his location as the “rectangle table” at which he would challenge students to succeed. During the observation, he spoke with a sense of pride regarding the achievements of his protégés. Students would drop by between classes for academic assistance or to just have conversations with the mentor. The mentor provided a sense of caring that students valued.

Study participants at both institutions portrayed a sense of self-confidence that seemed to be a result of positive, supporting, and encouraging relationships with their mentors. From my observations over several years of working with students at a community college, this sense of self-confidence is not common and should not be overlooked. The relationships with mentors have instilled a notion that the students are not worried about completing their degrees but are anticipating reaching their potential and obtaining employment. Instead of being told what they could not achieve, they were persuaded to dream and achieve more than they could have imagined. Statements of affirmation by mentors such as “we are here to help” and “he has a chance to be a leader” are significant in the life of minority male students. Perhaps students had not experienced this before enrolling in college.

The relationships between WUCC students and their mentors seemed to be very closely linked with the MAN UP Program. I think this is because of the formal meeting location the MAN UP room provided for the WUCC students. As mentioned in the results section, this room was located adjacent to the MAN UP mentor offices and allowed students to freely visit their mentors several times a day, if needed. Mentors also visited the MAN UP room to check on the students and make sure their needs were met. This space also provided a safety net for students to know that someone was always available, and it was a location for perpetual encouragement. In comparison, 3MP did not have the designated space for their program and thus the relationships were with mentors who served additional roles on campus. This may also be due to

the fact that WUCC was more creative with its grants and was able to combine duties of grant-funded employees to include serving as a designated mentor in the program. In comparison, all mentors at ERCC were volunteers.

Study participants at both institutions compared their relationships with mentors and other students to that of a family. This was more evident at WUCC, where students were able to spend time with each other in the MAN UP room. The significance of this space does not need to be understated as it may represent a “home” for the students of MAN UP. Not only did the mentors spend time in the room to check on the students, but students also provided support and encouragement to each other in this space. The variation in gender and age of the mentors was also significant and could be analogous to a family. For example, two mentors were over 50 years of age, possibly serving the role of a father or uncle and two mentors were in their early 20’s, possibly serving the role of a brother. The director of the MAN UP program was female and may serve the mother role. Study participants did not demonstrate a unanimous preference, as some students preferred younger mentors that could relate to the younger generation, whereas some students preferred older mentors who could “give advice like a parent.” This suggests that minority male mentoring programs needed a diverse group of mentors in both gender and age.

WUCC provided opportunities for students to confidentially discuss social issues in their Academic Chats. These discussions represented conversations that a family may have and allowed for students to “express yourself how you may want to express yourself.” ERCC did not provide this opportunity.

The sense of brotherhood was mentioned by members at both institutions, but seemed to be more integral to the WUCC student participants. The encouragement and “helping hand” provided by members of MAN UP was significant in the persistence and success of other

minority male students. In particular, the willingness of MAN UP members to share nourishment with each other suggests a sense of caring for each other. The fact that hunger was mentioned suggests that hunger may be a barrier that minority males must overcome to persist and succeed.

Although no WUCC study participants mentioned faculty in their interviews, study participants at ERCC suggested their relationships with faculty contributed to their persistence and success. This is significant in that faculty were not part of any interview question, but were discussed as integral parts of the institutional initiatives. In particular, observations regarding faculty taking more interest in students outside of class brought to light the importance of faculty to minority male student persistence and success and the need for faculty to engage with students in and out of the classroom. In 2015, a community college instructor position involves much more than delivering subject matter and grading assignments. Community college faculty must advise, engage, and nurture students. Such faculty interactions are particularly important for community colleges with the reduced budget allocations and increased performance incentives focused on student retention, progress, and completion.

### **College Community**

Another significant aspect of ERCC's contributions to minority male student persistence and success was the college community that included a housekeeper, switchboard operator, and Academic Skills Center tutors. Study participants gave examples of how these individuals went above their normal job duties to encourage and motivate their success. In comparison, only formal leaders were mentioned at WUCC.



## **Student Clubs and Organizations**

Both colleges made considerable efforts to provide opportunities for students to engage in student clubs and organizations, with 19 clubs offered at ERCC and 58 clubs offered at WUCC. All participants in this study were members of their respective minority male mentoring program, and seven of ten were involved in at least one other student club or organization. At both institutions, the minority male mentoring programs were discussed at length by all study participants. The focus of the discussions was that the programs provided exposure to resources that non-members could not receive. Furthermore, both ERCC and WUCC study participants valued program meetings and traveling to leadership conferences that gave them a greater likelihood to encounter successful leaders. Service learning also allowed study participants to engage with their community and feel needed. Several students mentioned that they could see themselves in the people they were helping, and that provided a motivation to succeed. Another aspect of the student clubs and organization theme was the exposure to transfer universities. Students were motivated to graduate and transfer by visiting the university campuses and learning more about their future academic journey. Interestingly, if it were not for the university visits provided by the minority male mentoring programs, students from both institutions would have transferred to the universities without ever stepping on the university campus. At ERCC, the program leaders incorporated dining and cultural experiences into the university visits that allowed students to spend time together and develop relationships that continued when they returned. Not only did the field trips to the universities expose students to their future, but also helped to develop a network of support on campus.

## **Campus Resource Knowledge**

Campus resource knowledge was another theme that emerged from interviews of study participants at both institutions. The importance of the College Success Course was emphasized by several study participants in regards to providing students with information related to the availability and location of resources to help achieve their academic goals. The close proximity of computer labs to each academic program was also noted at WUCC.

The knowledge of financial aid solutions, specifically how and when to apply, was also important to the study participants. The College Success Course at ERCC was the primary information resource for financial aid solutions. ERCC participants demonstrated an appreciation for financial aid by recommending to another student to not just attend until the financial aid refund disbursement was made, but to complete the requirements for a degree. WUCC students described a level of frustration encountered by students with no prior knowledge of financial aid and recommended additional support for first year students to complete this process.

Both institutions supported the academic tutoring initiative with an academic skills or learning center. Academic tutoring was the focus of both centers, but the Academic Skills Center at ERCC provided much more. Students spoke of the encouragement provided and a space on campus where they felt they belonged. The welcoming environment was an important aspect to help students return for academic assistance semester after semester. WUCC study participants valued the academic assistance and computer availability provided at the Academic Learning Center but did not highlight any other aspect of its utility.

## **Developmental Education Initiative**

Study participants from both institutions focused on developmental math when discussing the Developmental Education Initiative and understood the need for developmental courses to prepare them for curriculum courses. WUCC students appreciated the acceleration to curriculum math courses by not wasting time in developmental courses but questioned the placement test that determined how many courses and at what level the students would need to master prior to enrolling in the curriculum level courses. Students who were aware of the instructional method utilized prior to the transition to DMA courses preferred the didactic model over the computer-based instructional model utilized in the math emporium. However, the presence of math tutors in the math emporium was helpful to students.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Themes and subthemes emerged from this data that were presented using passages from each interview in order to emphasize the experiences of each study participant. A cross-case comparison was also provided. Chapter five will provide a summary, conclusions, theoretical and practical implications, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The purpose of this study was to compare how minority males perceive community college initiatives contribute to their persistence and success at two Southeastern community colleges. This study was necessary for four reasons. First, according to data from the Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (2009), Black males have the lowest retention and graduation rates among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups (Harper, 2006). Second, although Black males are underrepresented in postsecondary education, those who enroll are more likely to attend a community college with 49% of all Black undergraduates enrolled at community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood 2012). Third, although the literature on student persistence is extensive, researchers continue to request additional persistence research/theory specific to community college students (Barnette, 2011; Nakijama, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012; Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998). Finally, most of the published research on minority males in community colleges is quantitative. Findings of this study contributed to the scarcity of research examining how institutional initiatives at the community college contribute to minority male persistence and success. The voices of minority males provide the complex details and in-depth understanding of initiatives that require financial and human resources, as well as a better understanding of how such initiatives should be implemented in community colleges.

### **Summary of the Study**

This was a qualitative comparative case study of two Southeastern community colleges. Ten students participated in the study. Five participants at each college were selected from a data base of students of the respective Minority Male Mentoring programs. All participants were selected based upon their participation in one or more institutional initiatives, had persisted for at least two semesters, and were recommended as “information rich” students by their minority

male mentor program directors. All participants were African American and ranged in age from 19 to 34. The college settings were selected based upon their geographical location (rural vs urban), variation in enrollment (medium vs large), participation in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant funded Completion by Design (CBD) initiative, and implementation of institutional initiatives designed to increase student persistence and success.

Data were collected utilizing the in-depth semi-structured interview method, document analysis, and direct observation. All interviews were conducted on the participant's respective community college campus and lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with specific attention to the confidentiality requirements of the study. Observations on each campus allowed for informal interactions with the students and staff, as well as of the physical environment of the institutions and study participants in their natural settings. Both printed and electronic documents that relate to the institutional initiatives that contribute to minority male student persistence and success were collected.

From this study, six major themes and 12 subthemes emerged from the data regarding how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success in a community college setting:

1. Minority male students' accountability to their mentors and themselves
  - a. Student accountability to Minority Male Mentoring Program mentors
  - b. Student personal accountability
2. Minority male student relationships with mentors, students, and faculty
  - a. Students to mentor relationships
  - b. Mentors as family
  - c. Student-to-student relationships

- d. Student-to-faculty relationships
- 3. College community
- 4. Student clubs and organizations
  - a. Exposure through engagement opportunities
  - b. Opportunities for service learning
  - c. Exposure to transfer universities
- 5. Campus resource knowledge
  - a. Resource availability and location
  - b. Financial aid solutions
  - c. Academic tutoring
- 6. Developmental Education Initiative

### **Findings**

Three major findings were derived from the analysis of the individual cases and the cross-case comparison of how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success in a community college setting. The findings were: (1) Meaningful interactions with minority male mentors and college staff contribute to minority male persistence and success; (2) College student success courses contribute to minority male student persistence and success by assisting students to become aware of campus resources; (3) Student clubs and organizations, especially minority male mentoring programs, contribute to minority male persistence and success through engaging activities and peer support. All conclusions regarding how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success support Padilla's local model of successful minority students (LMSMS) (1997), the theoretical framework for this study. The LMSMS was used to identify knowledge of barriers and actions necessary to

overcome barriers including discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resources that prevent minority male persistence and success during their college experience. Discontinuity barriers often refer to a student's ability to adapt to a new environment by fitting in. The student must learn to prioritize between immediate employment and the benefit of obtaining an education. The lack of nurturing barrier refers to the absence of role models, the negative perceptions of students by faculty and staff members, and very little or no family support. The lack of presence barriers refers to the exposure to racial isolation, cultural isolation, lack of minority role models, inadequate minority concerns in the curriculum, and not enough support programs for minorities. Finally, the resource barrier refers to the well-known fact that many students do not have enough money or sufficient knowledge about financial aid in the institution's financial aid system. Students that have knowledge of these particular barriers are often able to take the necessary steps to succeed (Padilla, 1998). Padilla (1998) acknowledged the importance of the involvement of the student and the institution in order to achieve student success. This study emphasized that both institutions were making attempts to overcome the lack of nurturing barrier and demonstrated that support for minority males can come from all employees, not just those formally involved with the institutional initiatives. In addition, this study brought to light the barrier of hunger for student achievement and the efforts of peers to help each other overcome this barrier.

### **Meaningful Interactions with Minority Male Mentors and College Staff Contribute to Minority Male Persistence and Success**

Research has shown that effective programs within higher education institutions that influence persistence are those programs in which faculty and staff reach out to their students in efforts to make contact and personal connections to ensure the social and intellectual

development of the program's student members (Achieving the Dream Community Colleges Count, 2009). The data in this study clearly supported this research. Study participants at ERCC and WUCC referenced the meaningful interactions with minority male mentors through course work, achievement coaches, academic assistance, Minority Male Mentoring Programs, and student clubs and organizations. Data from this study suggests that African American male students need to establish personal connections with faculty and staff for encouragement, motivation, and to be held accountable for their actions. This supports the LMSMS discontinuity, nurturing, and presence barriers.

Both the 3MP at ERCC and the MAN UP Program at WUCC provided mentors who have positively influenced the journey of study participants. WUCC provided a physical location to stimulate this influence by placing the MAN UP room adjacent to their mentor offices. The room also provided a location where mentors could frequently check with students about their coursework, club activities, home life, or any other issue the students would like to discuss. This supported Myers' (2003) assertion that the institutional environment is important in retention. Because of the location of the room, mentees of MAN UP would find it difficult to actively participate in the program without interacting with their mentors. Conversely, ERCC did not formally provide this physical location and mentors and mentees were required to set up appointments to meet in mentor offices. Members of 3MP informally created their own campus location by meeting in the Academic Skills Center. Students may have created this space based on their need for academic tutoring and that the 3MP directors were employed as the Academic Skills Director and a professional tutor. Several participants referred to the Academic Skills Center as a "sense of community." Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1998) indicated that an inclusive and welcoming institutional environment and the connection of



students to that environment are linked to persistence. Carey (2004) and Pascarella (1996) suggested that students of color perceive the college environment to be less supportive and are thus less likely to persist to graduation. Data from this study support the arguments that both institutions provided environments that were supportive and inclusive with such initiatives as the minority male mentoring program.

Research by Bean (2005) and Tinto (1993) suggested a strong correlation of satisfaction with student retention. More specifically, students who interact frequently with faculty and other university personnel are more satisfied with college than those who do not connect with faculty (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977). The same is reported for Black college students (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Every participant in this study demonstrated high regard for the college and their experience at the college. Much of this satisfaction is due to the interactions with faculty and staff, especially those who served as mentors. Both institutions provided a formal method of linking minority males to faculty and staff mentors; however, several study participants, especially those enrolled at ERCC, mentioned the positive contribution to persistence and success provided by staff members who do not have a formal role as a mentor. This demonstrated that all college personnel can influence persistence and success, whether they realize it or not. In this study, a tutor in the Academic Skills Center, while not the formal mentor for 3MP students, provided guidance and inspirations for everyone he interacted with. Furthermore, cafeteria personnel, custodians, and switchboard operators contributed positively to the persistence and success of minority male students by taking interest in the students. These interactions were not typically included in the job description for any of these positions, but as demonstrated in this study, significantly contributed to minority male persistence and success.

Another way in which meaningful interactions contributed to minority male persistence and success in this study was discussed by at least two students at WUCC. The Academic Chats provided participants of the MAN UP Program weekly opportunities to talk with each other and mentors about different topics selected by the membership. The ability to confidentially talk about sensitive societal issues such as racism and police brutality was valued by study participants. Retention rates for students of color can be improved by offering effective ways such as these to deal with racism and develop social networks (Sedlacek, 1996).

### **College Student Success Courses Contribute to Minority Male Student Persistence and Success by Assisting Students to Become Aware of Campus Resources for Success**

Research suggests that institutions that are able to provide students with effective support services are more likely to increase retention and persistence rates (Kuh et al., 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005). One challenge facing institutions is how to assist students to become aware of the resources and effectively utilize the resources. Both colleges in this study addressed this challenge by including a College Success Course, necessary for graduation, in every program of study. This course provided critical information about the availability of resources, college catalog, college policies that directly impact students, academic and career planning, study skills, time management, and financial aid. The majority of participants of this study enrolled in this course early in their academic career and advocated for the course because it provided them with information regarding the existence, location, and how to access resources for success. Student participants in this study reinforced Pelkey's (2011) assertion of a positive correlation in enrollment in a college success course and achieving academic outcomes. In addition, Cho and Karp's (2013) conclusions of clear, positive associations with enrollment in a student success course in the first semester and the short-term

outcomes of credit attainment and second-year persistence are supported. Several participants recommend this course be offered in the first semester of enrollment.

Padilla (1998) suggests that many students do not have enough money or sufficient knowledge about financial aid in the institution's financial aid system to succeed. This research was consistent with the findings of Padilla's study, as all participants required financial aid including federal grants, state grants, or foundation scholarships, at their respective colleges. Few study participants knew about financial aid or how to access it early in their academic journey. Several participants specifically described their struggle to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and recommended assistance in this task early in their academic career. The Nelnet Payment Plan was implemented at both institution and was specifically mentioned as a means to reduce the financial burden by allowing students to make tuition payments throughout the semester. Interestingly, both institutions discontinued participation in the William Ford Direct Loan program due to increased student loan debt and the possibility of Department of Education sanctions for high student loan default rates. Providing financial aid literacy to all potential students, especially minority males, will help students overcome Padilla's (1997) LMSMS nurturing barrier by assisting students to overcome the financial barrier of tuition and fees necessary for higher education.

### **Student Clubs and Organizations, Especially Minority Male Mentoring Programs, Contribute to Minority Male Persistence and Success through Engaging Activities and Peer Support**

All participants in this study were members of their respective minority male mentoring program, and seven of ten were involved in at least one other student club or organization. According to the participants of this study, encouraging relationships developed through

engaging activities outside of the classroom helped students understand their potential and ability to persist and succeed. Participants mentioned activities supported by 3MP at ERCC and MAN UP at WUCC including attending conferences and visiting universities. In addition, participants were involved as leaders in student government, other clubs and participated in service learning. This level of engagement helped minority males overcome the discontinuity barrier of Padilla's (1997) LMSMS and concurred with other literature regarding the importance of student engagement and student involvement. Tinto's (1993) model of student departure suggests that the level of involvement in the formal and informal academic and social systems of an institution accounts for his or her decision to continue or leave college. Similarly, Kuh (1995) suggests student engagement and student involvement are important factors in retaining students, and Bonous-Hammarth (2000) asserts that students who engage on campus are more likely to take advantage of more opportunities to secure academic membership and increase their chances of persistence. Several students recognized that their involvement in these clubs allows for exposure to things that may not have otherwise have experienced, like representing the college as a guest speaker, learning from local administrators, or learning table etiquette. Institutions, such as ERCC and WUCC, which provided a diverse option of student clubs and organizations are responsive to the academic, social, and cultural needs of their students.

Furthermore, ERCC and WUCC student clubs and organizations, especially the minority male mentoring program, support Sedlacek's (1996) assertion that persistence of students of color increases when the institution helps students develop self-esteem and self-confidence, offer leadership experience and experience in dealing effectively with racism, and encourage them to develop social and academic support networks. Participants of this study often referenced the peer support received from other students participating in student clubs and organizations. The

brotherhood, advice, encouragement, and nourishment provided by other students, especially in the minority male mentoring programs contributed to minority male persistence and success. These data support research by Brawer (1996) that suggests that minority retention is improved when peer mentoring is utilized in order to develop social support networks among new students.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

The findings of this study offer several implications for theory and practice from the African American male community college student perspective regarding how institutional initiatives contribute to their persistence and success. Relative to theory, implications for Padilla's local model of successful minority students are provided. From a practical perspective, implications are provided for community college administrators, faculty, and staff regarding institutional initiative implementation and contribution to minority male persistence and success.

The findings of this study indicated that African American male students at both institutions were impacted by institutional initiatives designed to increase persistence and success. Student engagement in these initiatives fostered a support network of peers that formed a sense of brotherhood and thus provided accountability, advice, and encouragement to each other.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical framework that guided this study was Padilla's local model of successful minority students (LMSMS). This model is used to identify knowledge of barriers and actions necessary to overcome barriers that prevent minority male persistence and success during their college experience. The barriers include discontinuity, lack of nurturing, lack of presence, and lack of resources. Peer support is not included in any of the barriers described by Padilla. This study demonstrated that peer support is vital to minority male persistence and success and thus

should be included when considering the lack of nurturing barrier of the LMSMS. In addition, although Padilla's lack of resources barrier includes lack of money and financial aid, this study demonstrated that lack of nourishment could also be included. The amount of financial aid that students receive may only be enough to pay for tuition, fees, textbooks, and possibly housing. Students in this study suggest that the ability to simply obtain food was a barrier to their success.

### **Practical Implications**

Understanding how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success is important to institutions that are designing and implementing the initiatives. Several practical implications of this study were provided and focused on improving institutional initiatives to increase minority male persistence and success. These implications were derived from the individual cases, as well as the comparative case analysis and are presented in the following section.

As institutions are monetarily incented by the NCCCS for performance measures and forced to implement initiatives designed for student success, student perspectives can play an integral role in strategic implementations. According to the Completion by Design initiative, aggressive financial aid application assistance is one strategy to assist student completion. Although WUCC is a CBD funded participant, neither WUCC nor ERCC provided aggressive financial aid application assistance. As a result, several student participants and I recommend aggressive financial aid assistance be employed to help minority males pursue a degree without the burden of financial stress. In addition, if colleges are included in cadre of colleges expected to implement all strategies, all strategies should be fully implemented. Nationwide, colleges are looking to those colleges to demonstrate that the strategies can be implemented and will have the intended impact of student completion.

This study provided evidence that minority males frequently utilize campus resources to achieve success but have little knowledge of the resources prior to enrolling in the College Success Course. A practical implication that emerged from this conclusion involves mandatory enrollment in College Success Courses as an implementation strategy. In this study, both institutions only required the course for graduation with recommendation that it be taken early in the academic journey. Greater impact on minority male campus resource knowledge and likelihood of degree completion could be made if students were required to enroll in the College Success Course in the first semester of study. Student participants in this study and I recommend mandatory enrollment in the first semester of study.

Based upon the fact that study participants at both colleges described food as a barrier to their success, it is recommended that food pantries be implemented at both institutions. Food pantries could be developed as a service learning initiative and maintained by students in the clubs that take on the initiative. The formal structure of the food pantries may also lead to funding by community partnerships to aid in keeping institutional investment to a minimum. In addition, a meal program funded through Foundation scholarships or financial aid could be implemented for the community college students.

Another practical implication involved New Student Orientation and the frequency of providing this service. In this study, New Student Orientation was provided face-to-face daily at WUCC, but only twice a semester at ERCC. Furthermore, new student orientation was offered online at ERCC, but not at WUCC. Administrators should support an online New Student Orientation at WUCC and offer more frequent, face-to-face New Student Orientation sessions throughout the semester at ERCC. Both institutions should also consider making the orientation mandatory for all new students.

Another practical implication involved student club and organization funding. In this study, both colleges supported student clubs and organizations, but not with the same commitment. ERCC clubs received a set rate of money at the beginning of the semester that has not increased in over 10 years. This funding does not include enough resources to limit the need for fund raising necessary for the club to provide engaging activities for its members. It is recommended that clubs and student organizations receive enough funds to reduce the need for fund raising activities and thus incent engagement in service learning.

WUCC study participants noted the importance of the dedicated facility resources to support the MAN UP Program. The location provided a sense of ownership and way for mentors to efficiently locate and assist students on a daily basis. Students were also able to interact with each other, foster a brotherhood, as well as encourage and motivate each other. Although a limited number of participants were included in this study, it is recommended that ERCC consider the same dedication of facility resources as WUCC to support its minority male mentoring program. The designation of a space may encourage greater peer support and a centralized location for mentors to interact with students.

Also, because minority males in this study valued their membership in the minority male mentoring program, it was recommended that institutional recruiting specialists incorporate minority male members of this program for campus visits and high school recruiting visits. Representatives from the minority male mentoring programs can share their experiences in an attempt to demonstrate the support from mentors and peers received by minority males on the community college campus and possibly increase the number of high school students enrolling in college.



Both minority male mentoring programs in this study were supported by designated state funding as part of their institutional budget. It is recommended that if this funding were to dissipate, both institutions reallocate other funding resources to support the minority male mentoring program to at least the current level of funding. Because of the obvious and emerging benefits of minority male mentoring programs at these institutions, allowing the programs to disappear should not be an option.

Minority male mentoring programs like MAN UP and 3MP have established their benefit, if only for a small percentage of the minority males at their respective colleges. If community colleges are truly examining ways to reduce the achievement gaps of minority males, initiatives like these must become scalable. Why should only a small percentage of African American males benefit from mentors, coaches, peer support, and a place to feel safe? Ways to reach more students need to be examined and implemented.

In response to the peer support demonstrated in this study, community colleges should implement African American male learning communities and cohorts. In addition, peer mentoring programs should be implemented that pair African American male second and third year students with incoming first-time students. Both recommendations would facilitate peer support and enable the sharing of heuristic knowledge.

Finally, based upon finding in this study that employees other than those formally involved with institutional initiatives can positively impact student success, it is recommended that community colleges provide professional development for staff and faculty regarding the importance of meaningful student interaction on student persistence and success. This training should be provided for all current employees and all new employees during new employee orientations. Specifically, it is important for staff and faculty that have attended the university to

be aware of the obstacles community college students and minority students in particular, have to overcome to pursue higher education.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Many of the findings in this study are consistent with the scholarly literature on minority male persistence and success in community colleges; however, several opportunities for future research exist.

The first recommendation is further qualitative research that increases the purposeful sample to include a larger number of students, staff, administrators, and colleges that have experienced the CBD initiative and specifically implemented the Developmental Education Initiative. Although this research involved several institutional initiatives, not enough students had fully participated in the CBD initiative or the Developmental Education Initiative to fully understand their contribution to minority male persistence and success.

The second recommendation is a future study that determines how female minority students are impacted by institutional initiatives designed to contribute to their persistence and success. The methodology of the proposed study would mirror the current study and allow for a comparative analysis of how institutional initiatives contribute to male versus female persistence and success.

Finally, I would recommend a study of all community colleges that support a Minority Male Mentoring program to utilize the Community College Student Success Inventory to assess institutional efforts and readiness to facilitate success for minority males. This study would provide recommendations for all participants to consider.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter included a restatement of the purpose of the study, setting, methodology, and emergent themes. Also included were the conclusions, theoretical implications, practical implications, and recommendations for future research. The conclusions of this study were: (1) Meaningful interactions with minority male mentors and college staff contribute to minority male persistence and success; (2) College student success courses contribute to minority male student persistence and success by assisting students to become aware of campus resources for success; (3) Student clubs and organizations, especially minority male mentoring programs, contribute to minority male persistence and success through engaging activities and peer support.

Theoretical implications and practical implications emerged from the findings and conclusions. The theoretical implications includes including peer support and hunger in Padilla's local model of successful minority students lack of nurturing barrier. Finally, the practical implications of this study include the following: (1) implement aggressive financial aid assistance; (2) if selected and funded for initiative implementation, put into practice all strategies of the initiative so that other colleges could benefit, (3) require enrollment in a College Success Course during the first semester of enrollment; (4) create food pantries and meal plans for community colleges; (5) offer new student orientation sessions more frequently via face-to-face modalities at ERCC and via online instruction at WUCC; (6) fund campus clubs and organizations to reduce fund raisers and increase student service learning; (7) dedicate facility resources for the minority male mentoring programs; (8) incorporate minority male students in recruiting efforts to increase enrollment of minority males by demonstrating a welcoming, nurturing, peer supported environment; (9) reallocated institutional funds to support minority male mentoring programs if state funding dissipates; (10) implement minority male learning

communities and cohorts; (11) scale up minority male mentoring programs at both campuses to impact a larger percentage of students; and (12) provide professional development for staff and faculty regarding the importance of meaningful student interactions and the barriers minority students have to overcome to pursue higher education.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that minority male students are impacted in many different ways by institutional initiatives. It is important for administrators, faculty, and staff to become aware that these initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success and then examine ways to enhance their contribution. This work may be difficult. However, those institutions truly committed to minority student success will provide the resources, support, and guidance students need to achieve success.

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## **APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Project (Creswell, 2009): Understanding how institutional initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success in a community college setting: A comparative case study

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Description of the Project: This dissertation is designed to understand how community college initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success from the perception of minority male students.

Questions:

1. How long have you been enrolled at WUCC/ERCC? What is your program of study? What is your career goal?
2. Describe how WUCC/ERCC has contributed to your persistence and success at WUCC/ERCC Community College.
3. Describe how the Completion by Design initiative has contributed to your persistence and success at WUCC/ERCC.
4. Describe how the Developmental Education Initiative has contributed to your persistence and success at WUCC/ERCC.
5. Describe how the Minority Male Mentoring Program has contributed to your persistence and success at WUCC/ERCC.
6. From your perception, what other institutional initiatives have contributed to your persistence and success at WUCC/ERCC? These initiatives could include new student orientation, college success course, tutorial services, career advising services, academic advising, etc.
7. How have these initiatives contributed to your persistence and success at WUCC/ERCC?
8. Who should I talk with to learn more about how WUCC/ERCC initiatives contribute to minority male persistence and success?

Thank the individual for participating in the interview. Assure him of confidentiality of responses and follow-up for interview confirmation transcript.

## APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office**  
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

### Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

**From:** Social/Behavioral IRB  
**To:** Lannis Smith  
**CC:** David Siegel  
**Date:** 2/25/2015  
**Re:** UMCIRB 14-002401  
Understanding How Institutional Initiatives Contribute to Minority Male Student Persistence and Success In a Community College Setting: A Comparative Case Study

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 2/25/2015 to 2/24/2016. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Consent Form	Consent Forms
Email Campaign	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Interview Protocol	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Smith Dissertation Proposal	Study Protocol or Grant Application

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

