CHAPTER ELEVEN

MEETING THE CHALLENGES TO AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Myron L. Pope, University of Central Oklahoma

For just over one hundred years the community college has provided American citizens, especially minority students, with an opportunity to gain a postsecondary education. For many African American men, the community college serves as the sole opportunity for access to higher education. However, despite its original mission of preparing students to transfer to senior colleges and universities, the community college has decreased its emphasis on the transfer function in the last thirty to fifty years. Critics have stressed that this mission shift will limit African American men, and others in this system, to modest jobs with moderate economic returns and no opportunity to advance toward baccalaureate and other advanced degrees. This chapter analyzes the relationship of African American men and their matriculation in two-year colleges.

BRIEF HISTORY

The American community college system had its impetus in a variety of social factors, including the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890, which provided for publicly supported universities, and the suggestion of many higher education leaders that a system be developed to relieve the university of lower-division preparation so that it could focus more on research and professional development. The latter stimulus led to the opening of Joliet College in 1901. This institution's goal was to provide freshman- and sophomore-level coursework, in addition to counseling and guidance, to prepare students for the transition to the four-year institution—the transfer function. The focus on the transfer function was the goal of these institutions, recognized as "junior colleges," as they gradually grew around the country before the turn of the twentieth century (Vaughan, 2000).

The community college system experienced a tremendous increase in number during the latter part of that century due in part to the country's leadership. In 1947, the publication of Higher Education for American Democracy by the President's Commission on Higher Education, or the Truman Commission as it is more commonly called, emphasized the need for a system of community colleges that would be affordable, serve as community centers, provide a variety of curricular offerings with a focus on civic duties, and provide service to the communities in which they were established (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2002). This report on community colleges—as well as the G.I. Bill and federal and state support for educational access to all citizens through legislation, executive orders, and legal proceedings—contributed to a substantial amount of enrollment growth for the system from the 1950s to the present (Dienes, 1994). Additionally, the community college system has expanded beyond its original mission of preparing students for transfer to a four-year institution to include a myriad of other functions, including community service, remediation, vocational and technical education, and continuing education (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

The system has grown to a total of approximately 1,600 institutions, with a presence in each of the fifty states. Each state has a goal of providing access to all of its citizens; thus many have built community colleges within a thirty-mile commute of all of its citizens, offering education at a cost that is substantially less than the fees of the four-year counterparts. The average cost of attendance, consisting of tuition and fees, at a public community college in 2003–04 was $2,076, compared with an average of $9,400 at a public four-year institution (College Board, 2004). Even more significant to the issue of access is the community college's open-door policy, which
essentially provides enrollment to any individual who presents the institution with a high school diploma or the equivalent. The policy, though initially revolutionary and inclusive, has presented the community college with many challenges, including the task of remediation of unprepared students. Community colleges also have emphasized their mission of providing smaller classes with instructors who focus primarily on instruction and providing a nurturing environment for students, a mission different from that of most of their four-year institutional counterparts.

**Student Demographics**

The demographics of the community college have changed significantly during the last fifty years. With the number of community colleges built during this period, in addition to the affordability and emphasis on access, the community college system has reached an enrollment of about 5.5 million students, or 38 percent of the total number of students in higher education (Phillippe & Patton, 2000). Phillippe and Patton compared this with the 1965 enrollment figure of only about 1.2 million students. This number does not account for the approximately five million students who take courses through community colleges as noncredit students in community and continuing education capacities.

Additionally, the number of minorities in the system has increased, coinciding with the overall increase in the number of minorities in this country (see Table 11.1). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2002) reported that 41.2 percent of African Americans in higher education are in the community college system, along with 50 percent of the American Indian and 55.8 percent of the Hispanic enrollment in higher education.

The background characteristics of community college students are also quite distinct from those of students attending four-year institutions. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in its analysis of postsecondary students, found that 26 percent of the students attending community colleges are older than twenty-four years of age, compared with only 5 percent of the students at public four-year institutions (NCES, 1996). The overall average age for community college students is twenty-nine (AACC, 2002). Also, these students tended to receive less support from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All Institutions</th>
<th>Four-Year Institutions</th>
<th>All Minorities</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Two-Year Institutions</th>
<th>All Minorities</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>2,399,814</td>
<td>5,428</td>
<td>1,292,791</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1,107,519</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1,396,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,683</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1,648,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Enrollment in Higher Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2000 (as cited in Wills, 2001).
their parents—65 percent do, compared with over 90 percent of their public four-year counterparts. Both of these factors are significant in that they indicate that many of the students in the community college system are part-time students who are working at least part-time; some are financially independent. These factors, in addition to four others—having delayed entry into college after high school, having dependents, being a single parent, and having no high school diploma—are considered risk factors that are detrimental to the success of college students (Coley, 2000). In the NCES (1996) research, community college students were significantly more likely than their four-year institutional peers to have each of these six factors. These statistics indicate that 24 percent of community college students had four or more of these factors compared with only 4 percent of their four-year counterparts (Coley, 2000).

Two other significant demographic characteristics of community college students are their family backgrounds and their level of involvement upon entering college. Dougherty (1994) points out that many community college students come from families with lower incomes and are typically first-generation college students. As community colleges are less expensive and are within commuting distance, they are the only options for postsecondary education for these students. Even though these factors are instrumental in enabling college attendance, they may also be detrimental in the long run because these students are unable to become as socially and academically integrated as their peers who are attending four-year residential institutions.

**Economic Benefits**

Achieving access to higher education has been particularly significant to African American males because it has increased their opportunities to enhance their economic standing. The American Society for Training and Development projected that by the end of the year 2000, 55 percent of all jobs in this country would require some education beyond high school (Myran, Zeiss, & Howdysell, 1995). Additionally, compared with individuals with high school diplomas only, individuals with associate’s degrees or who complete some college earn more money (Grubb, 1999). Those who completed their associate’s degree were expected to earn approximately $26,235 in 1997 compared with $22,895 for individuals who only completed high school. Those individuals who completed their associate’s degree, transferred to a four-year institution, and completed their bachelor’s degree (Phillippe & Patton, 2000) were expected to earn even more. This phenomenon is particularly true for African American males, but despite the significant increases in numbers of these students in the community college system because of access and the potential to enhance their social mobility, there have not been corresponding increases in the number of associate and baccalaureate degrees awarded to them.

**The Diminishing Transfer Function**

One significant reason why the number of community college students achieving their baccalaureate degree has not increased is that many of them are not transferring. Since the 1960s, many researchers have identified the shift of the focus in the community college from one that offered four-year college preparation to one that has strived to meet other needs of the people (Clark, 1960; Monroe, 1977; Pincus, 1980). Rendon and Nora (1994) suggest some of the main factors that have contributed to the decline in transfer students: (1) more emphasis and enrollment in vocational and technical programs; (2) the growth of remedial education; (3) the addition of the adult, continuing, and community education functions of the community college; (4) an increase in the number of part-time students in the system; and (5) increased competition from four-year institutions for students who in the past saw the community college as their only option. As a result, the number of students enrolled in the transfer tracks fell from approximately 45 percent in 1973 to about 30 percent in 1985 and finally to about 15 to 20 percent in the late 1990s (Friedlander, 1980; Dougherty, 1994; Nora & Rendon, 1998; Tinto, 1998). Considering that roughly half of the minority students enrolled in higher education during the last three decades are in the community college system, it is important to take into account the associate’s degree completion and transfer rates for these populations. The NCES (2002) indicated that even though White students made up only 64 percent of community college enrollment, they were completing 72.3 percent of the associate’s degrees. Conversely, African
Americans, who made up 12 percent of the enrollment, earned only 10.7 percent of the associate's degrees awarded, and Hispanic students, who represented 14 percent of the enrollment, earned only 9.1 percent of the degrees.

Critics of the community colleges have suggested that during the last half century, since the enrollment booms, the system has neglected its minority students and turned the open door into a “revolving door” — referring to the ability of students to easily enroll in and drop out of community colleges (Moore, 1981; Ignash, 1995). One prominent criticism is directed at the community colleges’ increased efforts to provide remedial education to their increasingly diverse students. The same era in which open access produced multitudes of new community colleges also caused an influx of academically underprepared students. The community college expanded its mission from the transfer function to one that increasingly incorporated services to address poverty and societal class differences, during a period when students from disadvantaged backgrounds needed remediation of their deficiencies through “appropriate educational technology” (McGrath & Spear, 1991). Regrettably, community colleges were not providing the proper curricula, student services, and pedagogy to create a productive environment for these nontraditional students. Thus, as Rouche (1968) reported, as many as 90 percent of the students admitted into community college and assigned to the remedial education programs of the time never completed the programs. It was not until the 1970s that community colleges began to develop distinct programs to address the needs of these students (Rouche & Kirk, 1973). Despite these improvements, students who began their academic careers in remedial courses have continued to have high attrition rates and often failed to graduate (Dougherty, 1994). This is of particular importance in regard to those African American males who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and take remedial courses.

Another criticism of the community college stems from the perception that community colleges are tracking and sorting African American males, as well as other minority students. One study suggested that minority students experience a “cooling out” effect when they enroll in community colleges (Clark, 1960, 1994). “Cooling out” refers to the perception that community college officials are encouraging minority students to pursue vocational and remedial tracks rather than transfer programs. If this perception is true, many African American males are preparing to enter occupations that relegate them to lower-middle- to middle-class jobs with little opportunity for advancement beyond that level from a socioeconomic perspective.

There are several factors in play in the community college system that impede African American males’ efforts to successfully complete the transfer to a four-year institution and graduate. Many students of color find the transfer process particularly difficult in that they lose credit and experience either transfer shock or a decrease in academic performance upon entering the four-year institution (Townsend, 1999). Additionally, research has shown that mentoring plays a significant role in retaining students (Stromer, 2000). Mentors are instrumental in helping these students deal with problems they may encounter in the college environment, which is especially important for those students who are first-generation and have no family members to whom they can relate about the college experience. Finally, the campus climate must be welcoming and compatible to African American men to enhance their opportunities for success in transfer. Community colleges can achieve this, in part, by providing programs and services that focus on creating a diverse campus climate. Such programs and activities include creating diverse orientation programs, providing monies for minority student group and club operations, and including diversity in the curriculum (Clements, 2000).

There have been many efforts to enhance the transfer function since Brint and Karabel’s (1989) critical analysis of the community college system. One such effort, conducted during summer 2001, was a conference entitled “Transfer: The Forgotten Function of Community Colleges” (Johnson County Community College, 2001). The conference, focused exclusively on the diminishing mission of transfer in community colleges, was hosted by Johnson County Community College and Oakton Community College and endorsed by the AACC and the League for Innovation in the Community College. The purpose of the conference was to explore the realities of community college transfer programs, the transfer patterns of community college students, statewide transfer initiatives and policies, and the curricular and support services that facilitate transfer.
MEETING THE CHALLENGES TO AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Table 11.2. Comparisons of Community College Enrollment for African American Males, Females, and All Students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>African-American Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>194,765</td>
<td>179,568</td>
<td>231,188</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>100,095</td>
<td>83,075</td>
<td>91,935</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>94,670</td>
<td>96,493</td>
<td>139,248</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>African-American Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>229,548</td>
<td>274,598</td>
<td>392,710</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>111,274</td>
<td>115,445</td>
<td>154,131</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>109,274</td>
<td>159,255</td>
<td>238,579</td>
<td>118.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Enrollment</td>
<td>3,743,480</td>
<td>4,467,849</td>
<td>5,454,020</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>1,582,984</td>
<td>1,633,724</td>
<td>1,984,141</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>2,160,496</td>
<td>2,834,125</td>
<td>3,469,879</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the years between 1976–77 and 1999–2000, the total graduation of African American males from community colleges with associate’s degrees has increased, but it has not been comparable with their female counterparts. NCES (2001) reported that between the 1976–77 and 1999–2000 academic years, African American women students’ associate’s degree completion increased by 120 percent, from 17,829 to 39,230. Conversely, during that same time period, African American men only increased their completion rates by 86.7 percent, from 15,350 to 29,951 (see Table 11.3). Even though the completion of this degree by community college students is not a guarantee that they will graduate from a four-year institution, it is one of the factors that has been shown to be conducive to achieving this academic success, as it provides career opportunity and social mobility (Laanan, 2001).

African American Males’ Enrollment and Academic Success

Many are concerned about the educational plight of the African American male population in community colleges, particularly their declining enrollment, retention, and graduation numbers (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Cross & Slater, 2000). Critics addressing this population’s lack of academic success have particularly focused on the community college system, pointing out the inability of these institutions to reconcile open admissions with academic standards.

In 1996, there were 231,183 African American males enrolled in community colleges (see Table 11.2). Even though this was an 18.7 percent increase over the 194,765 population of 1976, it was far less than the 45.7 percent overall increase in population that community colleges experienced during the same time span from 1976 to 1996. It’s also significant that in 1976, more African American men were enrolled in community colleges as full-time students (100,095) than as part-time students (94,670), but by 1996 these enrollment statuses had reversed: more African American men were enrolled in community colleges as part-time students (139,248) than as full-time students (91,935) (AACC, 2002). Clearly, this population is in jeopardy of not achieving academic success in community colleges, because being enrolled part-time is considered to be a risk factor that Coley (2000) suggests is detrimental to this success.
Another consequence of African American males not maintaining enrollment and graduating from the community college is the detrimental effect that this has on their possibility of advancing to higher degrees. Research has shown that at the end of the twentieth century, as in the completion of associate's degrees, African American men were earning fewer master's, doctorate, and professional degrees than men in other demographic groups (Cross & Slater, 2000). This has a significant impact on the progress of this group toward racial, economic, and social equality. Based on both the increase over the last twenty years and the expected near-future increase in the number of African American males in community colleges, these students need to be given ample opportunity and support to succeed so that they will ultimately have a chance to achieve an associate's degree and progress toward advanced degrees.

Within the African American population is a special subpopulation: student athletes. In the twenty years between 1983 and 2003, starting with its initiation of Proposition 48, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has attempted to increase the academic standards for admission to their member institutions, while also increasing the graduation rates of those who are admitted. Under Proposition 48, student athletes are required to have a minimum SAT score of 700, or an ACT score of 17, and a minimum GPA of 2.0 in at least eleven courses in core classes in order to compete for Division I colleges (http://www.hardnewscafe.usu.edu/archive/june2002/0606_ncaa.html). The former initiative has resulted in policies—especially the recommendations of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (Knight Commission, 1991, 1992, 1993, 2001)—that have resulted in more African American male students beginning their academic careers in the community college system and later transferring to a four-year institution. Research in this area has neglected this population thus far, but in the future it is important that these results be chronicled to address the specific needs and success rates of African American males who matriculate first at community colleges as athletes. Those African American males who participate in athletics in the community college system may possess the motivation to succeed and advance to a four-year institution. The success of these African American athletes would be a significant finding in terms of the success of African American males in the community college, because research has consistently shown that those students in the community college who are unsure of their ultimate academic and career goals typically do not succeed. This finding also would be significant to community colleges' efforts to recruit more African American males to participate in athletics on their campuses rather than at a four-year institution.

As anti-affirmative action legislation is enacted and/or court rulings—such as California's Proposition 209, Washington's Initiative 200, and Hopwood v. State of Texas—are decided to discontinue the use of race in consideration for admission to public higher education institutions, the community college and its open-door policy may become the primary opportunity for African American males to enter higher education (Kaufman, 2000). The community college, which is more accessible and affordable overall compared to HBCUs, may be the principal portal of entry into higher education for African American men. Thus it is important that community college leaders be proactive in developing diverse learning communities that emphasize retention and educational achievement. Many such efforts are presently in place, but it is important to evaluate them to assess whether they are producing the intended results.

**A Research Study**

In the fall of 2001, the author developed an instrument to assess minority student perceptions of campus diversity. The instrument
requested that the students assess several environmental factors related to diversity on their campuses through six sections and forty-one questions. The study was distributed to fifteen community colleges throughout the country. From this study, data were analyzed from three of the sections of the survey for several groups, including African American male respondents. For this chapter, only the responses of these African American male students are analyzed. The three sections of the survey analyzed focus on student perceptions of campus diversity, mentoring, and college leadership.

**Methodology**

In spring 2002, 375 surveys were sent to student affairs representatives at fifteen community colleges around the country. These institutions varied in size from a total head count of approximately eight hundred students to ten thousand students. The representative at each institution distributed these instruments to twenty-five racial minority students, including African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and Native American, on the campus or campuses. The students were asked to complete the survey and return it in a sealed envelope to the representative, who returned the collected instruments to the researcher. Through the first distribution, the researcher received 250 instruments, for a return rate of 66.67 percent. Of those instruments returned and used in this study, seventy-four were from African American male respondents. The respondents represented all fifteen of the community colleges that were originally solicited to participate in this study.

**Results**

The first section that was analyzed focused on minority student perception of campus diversity. The students rated their responses on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “I do not agree with this statement,” 5 being “I do not agree or disagree with this statement,” and 5, “I agree with this statement.” All of the responses were rated just at a moderate level, indicating that the respondents were not in total agreement or disagreement with the statements (see Table 11.4). Of the seven statements, the one that rated the lowest was “All students are receptive and supportive of diversity,” which had a mean of 3.41. The statement that rated the highest (M = 4.08) indicated whether students felt the college’s resources were considerate of students from diverse backgrounds.

These students seemed to be fairly comfortable on their campuses, thanks to the support that they received from faculty and their colleges’ conscious effort to provide resources that respect diversity. However, the students seemed to have some concerns regarding fellow students’ support of them on campus and about the curricula not reflecting diversity. Both of these issues reflect the literature on campus climate regarding reasons why minority students do not persist in the community college.

The second section of the survey to which the students responded consisted of two-part questions. The first part was similar to the first section in that students indicated their level of agreement with the statement. The second part asked whether they perceived that particular aspect of mentoring to be important; respondents answered yes or no. As with the first section, the level of agreement in the responses was relatively marginal overall for each of the statements (see Table 11.5). The highest-rated statement related to the students’ perception of mentoring being a key
to success at the institution (M = 4.11). The lowest-rated statement related to whether the student mentored other students (M = 3.35). In each case except one, the positive (yes) responses concerning the importance of each of the statements produced overall ratings of 70 percent or higher. The one exception—again, concerning the respondent's mentoring other students—received a lower overall positive response percentage (62.2 percent).

African American men in this study recognized the importance of mentoring to their success at their respective community colleges. However, the problem seems to be that many of these students are not encountering many administrators and faculty of color to mentor them. Also, it seems that many of these students do not have peer mentors, nor do they mentor other students. This indicates a need for programs to encourage students who are succeeding to assist new and struggling students. Additionally, in the face of the apparent perception that peer mentoring is not important, it is important for administrators to emphasize the need for successful students to participate in such programs. This task will undoubtedly be a major development challenge because many of these students are nontraditional students, and they have little time to participate in such activities either as mentors or as individuals being mentored.

The final section analyzed focused on perceptions of the community college leadership's support of diversity. The students rated the statements based on the same Likert scale mentioned previously. Each of the statements was rated by the respondents, on average, at 3.19 or slightly higher; compared to the original 1 to 5 Likert scale this is marginal (see Table 11.6). The highest-rated statement related to the college leadership making a positive difference in the lives of diverse student populations on the respondents' campuses (M = 3.73). The lowest response was related to the college president's visibly valuing diversity (M = 3.19).

### Table 11.5. African American Male Student Perceptions of Campus Mentoring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Mentoring Is Important</th>
<th>Number of Responses (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are persons of color in administrative roles at this institution.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are persons of color in faculty roles at this institution.</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are peer-mentors who can advise me.</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution supports student-to-faculty interaction.</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty serve as mentors for all students.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff mentor students.</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mentor other students.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring is important for success at this institution.</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 74.

### Table 11.6. African American Male Student Perceptions of College Leadership Diversity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The college's leadership values diversity and promotes it on campus.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college president visibly values diversity.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College leadership is visible to diverse student populations.</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college's administration actively promotes diversity.</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional leadership interacts frequently with diverse students and their activities on this campus.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a multicultural environment is a priority for the college.</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College leadership makes a positive difference in the lives of diverse student populations.</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 74.
As many of the responses of the latter section were marginal at best, it is apparent that African American students in the community college do not have a very high regard for the administration's leadership in institutional diversity efforts. The administration must be visible to diverse students not only through participation in their activities and programs, but also in providing positive leadership in promoting diversity to the campus and community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenge of improving African American male academic success in higher education has been supported, to a degree, through this research study. Many of the respondents emphasized the need for a campus climate that is conducive to their success. This includes hiring of more administrators and faculty of color, efforts to mentor effectively, and participation and promotion of diversity by community college administrators. However, these are only some of the recommendations that will enhance the academic success of this group of students in the community college. These factors are twofold in that they focus on specific retention-related issues (Martens, Lara, Cordova, & Harris, 1995; Hackett, 2002), and also transfer-related issues (Rendon & Nora, 1994).

RETENTION STRATEGIES

Since the community colleges are the matriculation venue for large numbers of African American male students, helping them to stay in school and to obtain associate's degrees must be a priority for those who wish to see more African American men receive post-secondary education. The road to degree completion may not be a smooth one. These students may encounter a campus climate that is not conducive to their success, or they may not have the tools or support necessary to succeed. Thus, it is important to attempt to create a climate that is beneficial to African American men at community colleges. This following set of recommendations are interventions designed to keep African American male students in community colleges engaged and motivated during their quest to successfully complete their program of study there.

Academic and social integration. Community colleges must make a conscious effort to ensure that African American male students integrate completely into the fabric of the institution. This process should include faculty, staff, and present students, who provide these students with a sense of community. It is important also that these individuals serve as mentors and role models to help African American male students navigate through community colleges.

Eliminate racism and promote diversity. Diversity consciousness refers to an individual or organization becoming fully aware of and accepting diversity (Buchner, 2000). Institutional leaders must strive to achieve this diversity consciousness by providing proactive leadership in the development of curriculum, their hiring practices, and their support of diversity-based programs and services. Additionally, it is important that these individuals encourage the members of their institutional community, including staff, faculty, and students, to become more diversity conscious also.

Assist students in overcoming triple consciousness. In his novel The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. DuBois used the term dual consciousness to refer to the dual roles that African Americans face in American society as people of African descent, who were once physically enslaved, and as Americans. I would like to submit a third consciousness, that of these individuals as students in higher education. As previously mentioned, many of the students are first-generation college attendees and are from adverse backgrounds. Thus, it is important that community colleges provide sufficient support services to assist them in striking a balance among these three roles. These should focus on study skills enhancement, goal setting, effective counseling (academic, personal, and family), and career development.

Enhance counseling. As many of these students are nontraditional, with multiple responsibilities beyond attending college, it is important to provide services that will assist these students with assistance in balancing these competing demands. This assistance should include job counseling and placement. Job counseling services will particularly benefit African American males who are unsure of their future career goals and are blindly taking courses.

Provide effective orientation programming. As many of these students are not sure of their expectations of college, it is necessary to ensure that they understand what to expect from college and likewise what college expects from them. Many institutions have summer bridge programs specifically designed to provide those students who may be underprepared with an opportunity to attend
college immediately after high school. There they can develop the necessary skills to succeed while simultaneously gaining an orientation to college. Unfortunately, as many of these students in the community college are nontraditional students, it may be difficult for them to attend such programs. Administrators must gain a sense of times and information that would be pertinent to these students to ensure that they are enticed to participate in such programs. Thus it is important that institutional leadership create mandatory orientation programs or courses that address similar issues.

**Evaluate program effectiveness.** The importance of monitoring program success to determine institutional effectiveness cannot be overstated. Administrators must analyze programs and services and determine the impact that these efforts have on student retention, grades, transfer and graduation rates, and service usage. These assessments are important in eliminating programs, policies, and practices that inhibit African American male student success and promoting those that positively influence their academic success.

**Hire more African American administrators, faculty, staff, and students.** It is important that African American males see individuals "like themselves" in various positions during their matriculation at community colleges. The presence of African Americans in these positions provides encouragement to African American men, as they feel that they can be successful also. Thus institutions must strive to be intentional and diligent in their efforts to hire African Americans at various levels of the community college. Additionally, these individuals can serve as mentors to African American males—relationships that African American male students perceive to be more positive than cross-racial or cross-gender mentoring (Pope, 2002).

**Create ethnic, cultural, and social support groups.** In her assessment of such programs for African American women, Hackett (2002) notes that such programs provide support to participants as they relate to important ethnic, family, and social values and experiences. Such organizations can be instrumental for African American men also. The Brother-to-Brother program at St. Petersburg College is just such a program: it encourages its participants to focus on the academic and social factors that contribute to their being at risk of not succeeding in college (Leach, 2001). This particular program encourages academic success by promoting high levels of campus involvement and through positive encounters with faculty and staff. It also serves as an impetus for connecting the African American male participants with their local community, through attendance at concerts, films, and luncheons that present positive images of African Americans.

**Create programs that connect with African American males’ communities.** The connection of community colleges with community organizations that are prominent in the lives of African American males can also help promote the success of these students. The Alliance for Excellence is an example of such a relationship (Darr, 1995). This organization, created in 1986, is founded on the notion that the Black church continues to be a significant and effective factor in African American communities, as it has been historically in terms of leadership and influence (for more on this factor, see Chapter Six). Due to the lack of higher-education attainment of African Americans in south central Virginia, five community colleges (originally four) have worked with local communities to provide programming such as motivational seminars, conferences on African American males, awards programs, and youth rallies, with the ultimate goal of enhancing opportunities for African American success in higher education.

**Transfer Success Strategies**

As the community college is the primary portal to higher education for many African American males, it is important that these institutions not only promote the success of these students on their campuses, but also encourage them to consider their transition to four-year institutions of higher education and support them in that effort. Several strategies may be conducive to promoting this success. These are efforts that would be conducive to the success of all community college populations, but it is important that community college leaders promote these efforts through programs in which African American males participate.

**Improve external articulation agreements.** Even though many states have articulation agreements that broadly define the process among the institutions within it, it is critical that individual systems and institutions provide the framework to implement these initiatives. Community colleges must make a valiant effort to enhance
communication with four-year institutions. They must be able to cooperate with these institutions to create a common course-numbering system, general education core, and identifiable course equivalencies, so that students can transfer easily with or without an associate's degree.

*Improve internal articulation agreements.* The 2+2 program has been particularly effective at quelling much of the criticism regarding the “glass ceiling” that many students encounter on earning a vocational or technical degree. Through curriculum reform, community colleges have developed programs like this on their campus so that while the students complete the technical-based coursework, they also complete transferable general education coursework. This ensures these students an opportunity to matriculate at a four-year institution without running into the roadblock of not having their coursework transfer and having to completely start over to attain a bachelor’s degree.

*Create transfer centers and hire transfer counselors.* The transfer process can be intimidating for community college students. The transfer center and counselors can provide the information and assistance that these students need to navigate successfully this complicated process. These resources are significant in providing print and on-line copies to explain the college matriculation process and also providing visits to four-year colleges, assistance in application completion, and so on.

*Connect African American males with mentors at four-year institutions.* As previously mentioned, it is imperative that African American males have mentors as they matriculate through the community college system. It is also important that these students continue to receive this support as they transition to four-year institutions. Thus, deliberate efforts to connect African American males with potential mentors at four-year institutions before they transfer are paramount. Special luncheons or formal “matching” programs where the connection is made between these two groups should be promoted as African American males declare their intention to transfer to a particular institution. These matches will serve as the bridge for African American males as they make visits to these four-year institutions, and as they formally begin their matriculation at these institutions.

**Conclusion**

For the last fifty years community colleges have provided African American males with a significant opportunity to gain access to postsecondary education. Given this opportunity, these individuals have had a chance to potentially increase their socioeconomic status by completing associate’s degrees and possibly more advanced degrees if they enroll in transfer-based programs. However, for African American male students in the community college system, this has not always been a natural transition. As the focus of the community college has diversified so much, this and other factors have adversely affected this population’s record of retention and graduation. Additionally, many are critical of the community college and its dealings with African American male students because they perceive the system as merely providing job preparation for these students that relegates them to a lifetime of lower-level positions with minimal opportunities for advancement and low pay. The community college can play a critical role in salvaging African American male students’ opportunities to achieve bachelor’s degrees by revitalizing the transfer function.

Community colleges can benefit African American men in their collegiate experience in many additional ways. Because the community college student population is more diverse than those of most institutions of higher education, the campus climate is typically more conducive for African American male success. However, institutional personnel must work to ensure that this campus climate is monitored and diverse student interaction is promoted, as well as community college interaction with these students, faculty, and other institutional personnel. By manipulating the campus climate in this way and promoting success mechanisms such as mentoring and advising, the potential of African American men in community colleges will become more equal to that of their counterparts who attend four-year institutions.

Community colleges should also consider their hiring practices when thinking about improving the campus climate for African American men. As many of these students may rarely encounter individuals “like them” in administrative and faculty roles, it is important that institutional leaders encourage minorities and more
specifically African American males to apply for vacant positions. These new individuals will greatly benefit the campus in general in that students can see minorities in leadership roles and also gain the opportunity for formal mentoring relationships.

Overall minority student success in the community college is increasing, as demonstrated by the increased number of degrees received in recent years. However, despite these increases, the graduation rates for African American men lag behind other race and gender groups, especially African American women. Even though this issue exists at all levels of education, community colleges should evaluate the success of those African American males who graduate, as well as those who do not, to determine what attributes of the community college contributed or were detrimental to the success of this group. The community college has been criticized in the past for failing to adjust fully to the diversity of its student populations, so these colleges may be overlooking some specific needs that may be conducive to the success of African American males.

Even though the enrollment of African American men in community colleges does not constitute the majority of their enrollment in higher education, as is true for other minorities, the community college still provides a primary entry point into post-secondary education for a significant number of these students. Despite this, the number of African American men enrolled in community colleges and completing associate's degrees—a factor significant in transfer student success in completing bachelor's degrees—is behind those of other groups. Thus it is imperative that administrators in the community college system provide adequate resources and services to ensure the retention and graduation of these students. Part of that solution lies in making the community college environment a more welcoming one for African American male students.

References


Helping African American Men Matriculate
Ideas and Suggestions
Michael J. Cuyjet, University of Louisville

This book is based on a premise that African American men on college and university campuses have some particular issues, concerns, and needs that make them notably different from African American women, from other collegiate men, and from most other populations of undergraduate students. Consequently, the issues to be addressed, the programmatic offerings established to meet these various special needs, and the probable solutions to the problems identified as particular to African American men may be somewhat different from those for the broader student population—or indeed completely unlike them. Even those issues that African American men share with other campus populations (such as adjusting to the campus environment, maintaining satisfactory academic achievement, or developing positive relationships with others in the campus community) may require that the interventions used to help African American men address these situations successfully be particular to the characteristics and needs of Black men. This is why we have chosen to examine the status of African American men in a variety of circumstances and to offer some suggestions for how to assist these men to succeed in their college matriculation.

This chapter attempts to summarize some of the more salient ideas presented in the preceding chapters of the book and to offer