Advancing the Success of Men of Color in the Community College: Special Issue on the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM)

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Efforts to improve the success of historically underrepresented and underserved men (particularly men of color) in the community college have proliferated in recent years (Harris & Wood, 2013, 2014). These efforts are driven by student outcomes data that demonstrate clear disparities between men of color and their majority peers. By every conceivable marker (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer), men of color do not benefit from the same experiences and outcomes as their peers. Data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) Longitudinal Study (2003-2009) are instructive of outcome gaps. For example, only 17.1% of Black and 15.4% of Latino men who enter the community college will have earned a certificate, degree, or transferred to a four-year college or university within 150% of normal time (three years). In contrast, 27% of White men will have attained their goals in this same time frame (BPS, 2009a).

Moreover, outcomes data by time status indicates further nuances. Approximately 50 to 60% of the BPS sample of men attended community college full-time. Among these students, Latino men had the lowest attainment rate at 20.3%, followed by Black men at 26.1% and White men at 38.6%. Notwithstanding, the noticeable gaps between men of color and their White peers are even more stark for those men who demonstrated mixed (part-time and full-time) enrollment. For these men, only 15% of Black and 15.2% of Latino men attained their goals in three years. These rates are doubled by that of their White peers at 29.7% (BPS, 2009b). These outcomes are especially concerning considering that a quarter to a third of men are mixed enrollment students (see Figure 1). Given these data, institutional-level initiatives designed to improve success for men of color, especially Black, Latino, Native American, and Southeast Asian men, have become widespread (Wood & Harris, 2014). To inform these efforts, many campuses have turned to institutional records to inform programming, policies, and practices designed to advance the outcomes of these men. Unfortunately, institutional records are often more useful for informing community college leaders of equity gaps, than for providing insight on the rationales.
for identified gaps. In 2011, the Minority Male Community College Collaborative (M2C3) was launched at San Diego State University (SDSU) with the purpose of providing leaders of such efforts with inquiry-driven tools to inform strategic interventions.

The flagship tool for M2C3 is the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM). The CCSM is an institutional-level needs assessment tool designed to examine factors that influence student success outcomes for historically underrepresented and underserved men. The instrument is informed by the extant research on men of color in community colleges, racial identity development, college men and masculinities, and community college student success. To date, the CCSM has been employed at over 40 community colleges in eight states, with more than 7,000 male participants. This sample has allowed for in-depth institutional-level assessments, as well as provided a data source to support ongoing research on men of color in community colleges (Wood & Harris, 2013).

The theoretical framework undergirding the CCSM is the Community College – Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model (CC-SEO) model. The SEO model is comprised of seven key constructs including input factors, socio-ecological domains, and student success outcomes. Input factors include background/defining variables (e.g., age, time status, veteran status, primary language) and societal factors (e.g., stereotypes, prejudice, economic conditions). These input factors provide a framework by which to understand the differential realities of men of color during college. The core of the SEO model is focused on the influence of four socio-ecological domains (e.g., non-cognitive, academic, environmental, campus-ethos) on student success. The non-cognitive domain is encompasses intrapersonal and identity factors. Intrapersonal factors are inclusive of psychosocial outcomes shaped by on-campus and off-campus experiences. Examples of intrapersonal factors include: a) self-efficacy – students’ confidence in their ability to perform academic endeavors; b) locus of control – students’

Figure 1. Attainment rates for community college men at 150% of normal time, by time status and race/ethnicity
perceptions of control over their academic futures; c) degree utility – the perceived worthwhileness of students’ collegiate endeavors; d) intrinsic interest – students’ authentic interest in academic learning and content; and e) action control – students’ directed attention or focus placed on academic matters. Also situated within the non-cognitive domain are identity factors relevant to students’ racial/ethnic, masculine, sexual, and spiritual identities. While there are other salient identities that can inform the way that students engage and interpret their college experiences, these identities are hypothesized as being central to academic outcomes.

The academic domain includes considerations such as faculty-student interaction and academic service use. These factors are most typically conceptualized as being relevant to students’ engagement in college. The environmental domain includes factors that occur outside of college that influence student outcomes inside of college. Examples of environmental factors include commitments (e.g., family responsibilities, employment), stressful life events, and mediators (e.g., external validation, financial aid, transportation). The campus-ethos domain includes factors relevant to the campus culture and climate. Campus ethos factors are conceptualized as having an effect on student success by influencing outcomes detailed in the academic and non-cognitive domains. There are numerous campus ethos factors that influence student success, such as: internal validation, sense of belonging, welcomingness to engage with faculty, and campus resources. Altogether, the socio-ecological domains are conceptualized as having an effect on student success measures (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer, and goal accomplishment).

Figure 2. Community College – Socio-Ecological Outcomes (CC-SEO) Model. Printed with permission from the Minority Male Community College Collaborative.
The articles presented in this special issue feature data derived from the CCSM. As such, many of the articles included in this issue are either explicitly or implicitly informed by the SEO model. Taken together, articles featured herein explored topics and populations rarely investigated in the wider body of research on college men and community college students. As a result, this special issue represents an integral addition to the scholarly literature, helping to advance new knowledge on populations that community colleges have historically struggled to serve.

In “Black Male Students in the Community College and Faculty Student Engagement”, John Harrison and Angelica Palacios used CCSM data to explore differential levels of faculty-student engagement based on students’ perceptions of faculty members’ welcomeness to engage and imbuement of belonging. Their findings demonstrate the importance of supporting and affirming campus environments. In “Do Community Colleges’ Military-Friendly Designations Make A Difference?” Judie Heineman, employed CCSM data to determine the effectiveness of community colleges that are registered as military friendly on campus ethos outcomes. Specifically, Heineman investigated if there were differences between students (non-veteran and veteran) and colleges’ designation (registered or not-registered as military-friendly) on students’ perceptions of validation, welcomeness, and belonging from faculty in the community college. Her findings revealed that community college professionals must work to better assist student-veterans in their academic success.

In “Black Male Community College Students and Faculty-Student Engagement”, Kara Bauer examined whether or not there was a difference in faculty student engagement for Black male students experiencing validation by faculty, time status and the interaction of these factors. Interestingly, her findings from the CCSM demonstrated that full time Black male students were not more likely to engage with faculty than part time students. However, Bauer found that Black male students who reported feeling higher levels of faculty validation have higher levels of faculty student engagement. Taken together, findings from Harrison and Palacios as well as Bauer extol the importance of campus environments fostered by faculty on student success.

In “Perceptions of Degree Utility among Men of Color”, Angelica Palacios extended current understandings of the influence of degree utility on student success. Palacios employed CCSM data to determine if there were differences in degree utility based on men's race, experiences with faculty validation, and stressful life events. Her findings suggest that considerable amounts of faculty validation, even when given to men that are experiencing high stress levels, are associated with greater levels of degree utility. Also expanding upon the importance of non-cognitive outcomes, Rafael Alvarez examined additional measures of healthy psychosocial dispositions. In “Men of Color in STEM in the Community College from a Non-Cognitive Perspective”, Alvarez sought to determine whether differences existed in students’ non-cognitive make-up based on race/ethnicity and generational status, while controlling for the effects of GPA. He examined an array of non-cognitive, intrapersonal factors including self-efficacy, locus of control, degree utility, action control and intrinsic interest. Among other results, Alvarez found that Black and Latino men had higher levels of locus of control than White students. These findings challenge common notions around population differences that present men of color in a deficit fashion.

Finally, in “Life Stressors and Non-Cognitive Outcomes in Community College Mexican/Mexican American Men”, Art Guaracha Jr set out to determine the effect of life stressors on non-cognitive outcomes (e.g., locus of control, self-efficacy, degree utility) for Mexicano men. After controlling for a litany of potentially extraneous variables (e.g., age,
income, dependents, high school grade point average, and time status), Guaracha found that that life stressors had a significant effect on locus of control, self-efficacy, and degree utility for Mexicano men.

The aforementioned synopses of each article represent a surface view of the in-depth analyses and critiques levied by the emerging scholars in this special issue. The rigorous use of ANOVA based procedures in this compendium demonstrate the authors’ use of quantitative methodologies to engage in critical inquiries of current and emerging issues in community colleges. Given the vast challenges facing many community colleges in supporting male of color success, the recommendations for practice extended in this volume (as informed by research and theory) represent promising practices for Advancing the Success of Men of Color in the Community College.

References


