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"Diamond in the rough:" The impact of a remedial program on college access and opportunity for Black males at an historically Black institution

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"DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH": THE IMPACT OF A REMEDIAL PROGRAM ON COLLEGE ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR BLACK MALES AT AN HISTORICALLY BLACK INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Researchers, policymakers, and administrations have shown great concern over the efficacy of college remediation, which has prompted some states to eliminate remedial programs from public 4-year institutions. However, research suggests that eliminating these programs may have unintended consequences on college access and opportunity for underrepresented minority students, particularly African Americans. This study explores the impact of a remedial program on 11 African-American male students at a public 4-year historically Black institution. Findings illuminate the importance of college remediation in promoting college access and opportunity for underprepared Black male students, and how remedial programs increase academic and social integration for these students.

Frederick Douglass' quote, "if there is no struggle, there is no progress," epitomizes the journey of many students, particularly minority students, who desire a college education, but find it difficult to matriculate into a 4-year postsecondary institution because of their high school grade point averages (GPA) or scores on standardized college admission exams. Many underprepared students demonstrate

their determination to pursue higher education by participating in remedial pro-grams, which offer them an opportunity to improve their academic deficiencies, thereby increasing their likelihood of successfully earning a baccalaureate degree (Garcia, 1991).

The level of underpreparedness and subsequent need for postsecondary remediation is most apparent among Black[1] male students given the types and range of educational barriers they encounter (Harvey, 2008; Jackson & Moore, 2006, 2008). According to Garibaldi (1992), "academic failure for African American males starts early . . . during the K-12 schooling experiences" (p. 126). Research has shown that African-American males are disproportionately disci-plined, more likely to be expelled, and suspended longer and more frequently than White students (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Polite & Davis, 1999). Furthermore, African-American males are overwhelmingly concentrated in special education and are disproportionately tracked into low academic ability classrooms while children from majority groups are placed in advanced science and math courses that prepare them for college at highly selective institutions (Green, 2008; Jones, 2002; Smith, 2006). Blake and Darling (1994) speculated that some African-American men are allowed to reach 10th grade or even graduate from high school without sufficient literacy skills. In her book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, hooks (2004) noted:

> [Literacy] skills are not taught to [African American] males. Educational systems fail to impart or inspire learning in African American males of all ages. . . . Many African American males graduate from high schools reading and writing on a third or fourth grade level. (pp. 40-41)

Research has also shown that educators and counselors are more likely to discourage African-American males from attending college compared to their White male counterparts (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Another central problem that places limits on African-American male success in education revolves around their academic achievement—that is, they are reported to have the lowest high school GPA and score poorly on standardized tests (Harvey, 2008). Gordon, Gordon, and Nembhard (1994) write that "many Black male students have negative attitudes about their educational experiences, experience higher levels of conflict in school, exhibit antiauthoritarian behavior, and expressed racialized attitudes—all of which negatively affect their academic achievement" (p. 520). In short, early academic failure for African-American men cripples their ability to complete high school (Davis, 2003), and negatively impacts their literacy abilities (Majors & Billson, 1992). Consequently, African-American male high school graduates have difficulties finding employment and accessing higher education (Green, 2008; Smith, 2006).

[1] The terms "African American" and "Black" are used interchangeably in this article.

In the context of higher education, numerous researchers have documented the rate at which Black males enroll and persist. Harper (2006a) noted that Black men comprised only 4.3% of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education in 2002, the same as in 1976. Furthermore, data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2007) indicated that while females comprise more than half of postsecondary enrollment across all racial and ethnic groups when compared to their same-peers, this gender gap is most pronounced between Black males and females, and it continues to widen. Other researchers have noted a similar trend (Cuyjet, 2006; Polite & Davis, 1999; Ross, 1998). Of the African-American men enrolling in college, many encounter significant challenges attaining their degrees. In fact, both Cuyjet (2006) and Harper (2006a) documented that two-thirds of Black men in college do not complete their degrees within 6 years, which is the worse college attrition rates among all race and gender backgrounds.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

While the college enrollment and completion gaps are well-documented, researchers, policymakers, and administrators are interested in what colleges and universities can do to reverse these rates. Most of the recent empirical research on Black male college success has focused on the gains associated with active involvement and leadership in campus activities (Brown, 2006; Harper, 2006b), the role of social support systems and social capital (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008), peer support (Harper, 2006c), and the relationship between non-cognitive variables and academic success for African-American males (Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008). However, recent attention has not been paid to academic programs and policies that impact college access and opportunity for Black male students, particularly for the disproportionate number of such students who come to campus academically underprepared. Thus, this article seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring the impact of a remedial program on the success of African-American male collegians at an historically Black college and university (HBCU). Such research is well warranted given that some research has suggested that college remediation facilitates college access and success for underrepresented minority students (Bettinger & Long, 2007; Boylan, 1999; Boylan, Bonham, & Tafari, 2005; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006), while others have suggested skepticism over the effectiveness of remedial education. This disagreement in the literature has encouraged states to reduce or eliminate remedial courses in public 4-year colleges or shift the onus for providing remedial education to community colleges (Adelman, 2004; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). In fact, Parker (2007) noted that 22 states have reduced or eliminated remedial coursework from their 4-year public institutions. Given the debate over the efficacy of remedial education, it is important to understand more clearly how remedial programs impact college access and opportunity

for students, particularly Black males, given the alarming attrition problem facing this population (Cuyjet, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2006, 2008; Palmer et al., 2009).

To fully understand the ways in which college remedial programs influence the aforementioned outcomes, a review of the relevant literature on college remediation is necessary to inform our investigation. Specifically, we will review the nature of remediation followed by a discussion on its evolution and address the contemporary debates over remediation. Subsequently, we will discuss the methodology, findings, and implications.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON
REMEDIAL EDUCATION

Remedial programs are implemented in a variety of ways, depending on the mission and type of institution (NCES, 2003). Engle and O'Brien (2007) posit that colleges and universities disguise remedial programs under different names given the growing state- and system-wide bans on these programs. As such, remedial programs are also coined as developmental programs, summer bridge programs, college transitional programs, and other similarly-related titles. A broad range of services define college remediation. Remedial programs generally begin with an assessment and subsequent placement of students in remedial courses and are oftentimes supplemented with study skills seminars, time management workshops, campus and community resource exposure, academic support services, career advising, and student-faculty as well as peer-to-peer interactions (Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, & Keller-Wolff, 1999). Similar to their predominately White institutional (PWI) peers, Kimbrough and Harper (2006) assert that many remedial programs at HBCUs include developmental centers, reading laboratories, and expanded tutorial and counseling services to accommodate the special needs of educationally disadvantaged students.

According to the NCES (2004), approximately 28% of freshmen who entered postsecondary education (community colleges and 4 year institutions) in the fall of 2000 required remedial coursework in one or more courses. Boylan (1999) estimated that of the 12 million undergraduates, about 2.5 million of them participate in remedial education in a given year. Remedial education is not limited to minority students. White students comprise the majority of remedial program participants; however, underrepresented minorities are disproportionately represented in remedial programs (Attewell et al., 2006; Boylan, 1999). More specifically, data from the NCES (2002) show that African Americans are most likely to enroll in remedial courses during their college career compared to students from all other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

The Evolution of College Remediation

The early colleges in America functioned to prepare ministers (Boylan & White, 1987; Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). However, by the 19th century, fewer students were attending colleges for ministry preparation. Subsequently, colleges expanded their role to train engineers, agricultural, business, and military specialists to promote access to postsecondary education for a wider populace (Boylan & White, 1987). As the federal government intervened through various legislations and initiatives (e.g., *The Civil Rights Act of 1964; Higher Education Act of 1965; Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*), making a college education available to more people, the number of students needing remedial education grew exponentially (Stephens, 2003).

In addition, as colleges and universities became more egalitarian, first-generation college students began to enroll in higher education in far greater numbers than in previous years (Boylan, 1998). Many of these students performed poorly on academic assessments, but were eager to seek higher education because of its linkage to upward mobility (Stephens, 2003). Consequently, remedial programs became a means to address both of these dilemmas. Generally, public community colleges offered remedial courses to academically underprepared students. Today, similar to the proportion of students in remedial education 2 years ago, about 47% of undergraduates enroll in remedial courses at 4-year colleges and about half (49%) complete their degree, which is quite similar to national college completion rates (Adelman, 2006a; Attewell et al., 2006; Parker, 2007; Seidman, 2005).

Debates Over College Remediation

Some opponents call for the elimination of developmental programs because they divert human and financial capital from other academic priorities; these opponents also question the prudence of investing in remediation, arguing that students are taught skills in college they should have acquired in high school (Kozeracki, 2002). Others argue that remedial education is not appropriate for 4-year institutions and that the academic needs of underprepared students might be best served by 2-year colleges (Kozeracki, 2002; McCabe, 2000; Phelan, 2000; Soliday, 2002; Spann, 2000). Furthermore, while opponents contend that there is a lack of documentation evaluating the efficacy of remedial education (Attewell et al., 2006; Mertisotis & Phipps, 2000), others dismiss the effectiveness of remedial education on collegiate success (Adelman, 2004).

Proponents of remedial programs contend that shifting developmental education solely to the community college could further compound their overwhelmed financial and human resources and create revenue problems for traditional colleges grappling with enrollment losses (Roueche & Roueche, 1999). Furthermore, proponents argue that there is insufficient data assessing

the effectiveness of remediation programs in community colleges. Others suggest that students who are denied access to 4-year institutions and are required to enroll in remedial courses at 2-year colleges will not likely transfer to 4-year institutions once remedial coursework is complete (Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Melguizo, Hagedorn, & Cypers, 2008; Parker, 2007; Parker & Richardson, 2005).

Additionally, proponents support the saliency of remedial programs by noting that students participating in college remediation are equally successful in college as their similarly-qualified students (Attewell et al., 2006). More specifically, Bettinger and Long (2007) used longitudinal information from college transcripts, college applications, and standardized tests to examine remediation in Ohio, the fifth largest public higher education system in the country. After controlling for the test scores and background characteristics of 28,000 students placed in remedial English and mathematics, Bettinger and Long (2007) found that students who enrolled in college remedial courses were more likely to complete a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, research has demonstrated about half of remedial students complete their degrees (Attewell et al., 2006), which is quite similar to national college completion rates (Seidman, 2005). In fact, many assessments of remedial programs over the years seem to show successful outcomes in remedial education, enabling underprepared students to successfully progress through the college curriculum and complete their degrees at the same rate of their peers (Bahr, 2008; Boylan, Bonham, & Bliss, 1992; Fullilove & Treisman, 1990; Kreysa, 2006-2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Remedial programs have been found to be particularly helpful for African-American students (Attewell et al., 2006; Bahr, 2008; Boylan et al., 2005; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2001-2002; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). Using the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88), Attewell and colleagues (2006) found that 61% of African-American students enrolled in remedial courses and 50% completed their degree. They concluded that "If those students were deemed unsuited for college and denied entry to 4-year institutions, a large proportion of minority graduates in the high school class of 1992 would never have received degrees" (p. 915). Thus, Attewell and colleagues note that dismantling developmental education in four-year public institutions would stymie access to postsecondary education for historically oppressed groups. Kimbrough and Harper (2006) also echo a similar sentiment. Specifically, they note:

> in spite of the demonstrated success of remedial programs, many state systems, including those with HBCUs have restricted access to four year institutions by students who [needing] . . . remedial programs. This policy shift has had negative effects on African American men . . . who previously relied upon developmental studies programs as a one chance opportunity for admission to postsecondary institutions. (p. 192)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

While there has been much contention over the efficacy of remedial programs, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of a remedial program on college access and opportunity for Black male students at an HBCU. This study makes a unique contribution to the literature because most of the scholarship on remedial programs tends to rely on quantitative analyses, leaving the voices of academically underprepared students unheard. Another gap in the literature is that most empirical studies focus on PWIs, but never HBCUs specifically. Studying remedial programs in the HBCU context was of interest to us given that students enrolled in HBCUs are more likely to receive remedial services compared to students who enroll in PWIs (Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007). The context of an HBCU is also important given the unique and historic mission of these institutions to provide access to higher education for African Americans (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Brown, Bertrand, & Donahoo, 2001; Fleming, 1984; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman 2008). Brown and Davis (2001, p. 44) argue that the mission of HBCUs enables them to provide ". . . academic remediation, environmental support, and cultural relevance that appears to minimize the effect of differential pre-college preparation." Furthermore, Davis (1998) wrote:

> The compensatory and remediation model focuses on the role of HBCUs' effectiveness with African American students who have relatively poor high school backgrounds and college preparation. Here, much evidence exists to show that early in students' college careers, HBCUs are able to provide effective remedial instruction that enables students to persist in college, obtain degrees, and eventually form attachment to the labor market. (p. 147)

Kimbrough and Harper also (2006) argue that, given such a unique mission coupled with poor participation rates, more outreach is needed to create opportunity for larger numbers of Black male students to attend and succeed in college. As such, given the current contention over the relevance of remedial programs coupled with the college remediation being a core component in HBCUs, studying the impact of remedial programs at these institutions seems important. The following research question guided this study: what role does participating in a remedial program play in the retention and persistence of Black male college students at an HBCU.

METHODOLOGY

Institutional Context and Methodology

The geographical location of this study was situated in an urban, metropolitan city. Specifically, we conducted this study at a public, doctoral research HBCU in a mid-Atlantic state. According to the Office of Institutional Research (OIR)

at this university, approximately 6,000 undergraduates were enrolled when data were collected. Approximately 91% of the students were African American, and their White, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American counterparts comprised 2.5%, 0.9%, 0.7%, 0.2% of the undergraduate student population, respectively. Consistent with recent research on HBCUs (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer et al., 2009; Roach, 2001), the number of African-American men graduating in 6 years have consistently lagged behind African-American women at this university where the study took place. For example, data from the OIR at this university indicated that just 46.7% of the African-American males admitted in 1998 persisted to their fourth year and only 35.1% graduated in 6 years. On the other hand, 57.5% of African-American females admitted in 1998 persisted to their fourth year and 49.4% graduated in 6 year, which is more consistent with national retention averages (Harper, 2006a).

Using in-depth interviews complemented by responses to a short open-ended questionnaire, we sought to explore the academic and social experiences of a particular group of students situated in a particular context (Lincoln, 2002). Thus, the study's epistemological approach was anchored in the constructivist tradition to construct knowledge, understanding, and meaning through human interactions (Lincoln, 2002). To a large extent, grounded theory strategies were incorporated into the research process. These strategies were not bounded to the interview process, but occurred throughout the entire research process and included continuously asking questions, utilizing research notes, and exploring hunches (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Participants

The participants were purposefully selected for this study (Creswell, 2003). The sample for this study consisted of 11 African-American male juniors and seniors who entered a public HBCU by participating in its summer remedial program and persisted to graduation. Data were collected during the fall semester of 2006. At that time, nine of eleven students were seniors (90-plus earned credits). Although two students were juniors, one was one credit short (89 credit hours) and the other was two credits short (88 credit hours) of senior status. We kept in contact with the participants to see how they fared at the university. All participants graduated in the spring semester of 2007. During the study's data collection, all participants were traditional-aged college students and their average grade point average was a 2.7. Table 1 provides details about the participants.

Remedial programs serve as an intervention for academically underprepared students who do not meet traditional academic standards (i.e., GPA, SAT scores, and ACT scores) for admission into the higher education. Students in the remedial program on which this study is based engage in three non-credit courses to enhance their background in English, mathematics, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development for 6 weeks. The program typically accepts 300 students

Table 1. Description of Sample

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Classification	Major	GPA
James	20	Senior	Business	2.9
Anderson	21	Junior	Theater	2.5
Simmons	21	Senior	Business	3.1
Omar	21	Senior	Business	3.5
Lawrence	21	Senior	Sociology	3.0
Samuel	21	Senior	Sociology	2.7
Wilson	21	Senior	Physical therapy	2.6
Douglass	20	Senior	Business	2.5
Howard	22	Senior	Business	2.9
Chris	21	Junior	Industrial engineering	2.7
Walter	22	Senior	Business	2.5

each summer. Classes are held Monday through Friday between 9:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. Additional supplemental instruction as well as academic, personal, and leadership seminars are held in the evenings. Participants must attend all classes and events as well as complete all academic assignments. Furthermore, they must pass all courses with at least a grade of "C" or better in order to matriculate into the university.

Data Collection

We conducted one face-to-face, in-depth interview, which ranged from 90 to 110 minutes with each participant. As an incentive and recruitment method, all participants received a $20 gift certificate for their participation. Prior to beginning these interviews, participants signed two consent forms and completed a brief demographic form. One consent form allowed participants to engage in the study and the other allowed researchers to contact the director of the remedial program, who tracked the participants' academic progress since their matriculation into the university, to get information about their overall academic performance and cumulative GPA. We collected this information separately after interviewing each participant. Before the interview, participants completed an open-ended survey questionnaire that contained questions identical to the questions asked during the interview. These questions were asked to establish context and depth and to help participants think more critically about factors germane to their academic success.

During interviews, we engaged participants about their experience in the remedial program at the institution. Many of the questions were open-ended. Some examples of questions asked were: (a) Describe your experience in the remedial program? (b) How did you feel about participating in the program? (c) What ways did the program benefit you? and (d) What impact did the remedial program have on your success? We recorded observations regarding the ways in which participants responded to questions and their willingness to engage in the interview.

We also conducted follow-up phone interviews with participants. Specifically, we conducted separate phone interviews with five participants, which ranged from 10 to 15 minutes. Follow-up phone interviews were completed during the data collection phase of the study after consulting field notes and listening to participants' audiotapes. We conducted these interviews to ask participants to elaborate on themes discussed or clarify issues that emerged during the interviews.

Data Analyses

We used constant comparative analysis on research notes, observations, and interview transcripts to identify recurring or unique topics (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006), constant comparative analysis engages the researcher in a process of collecting and analyzing the data simultaneously at "all stages of the data collection and interpretation process, and results in the identification of codes" (p. 44). Specifically, as we collected and transcribed the data, we read through our research notes and made self-reflective notes in the margins to help form initial themes. These notes included questions and speculations about the data and themes that emerged. As the data became increasingly voluminous, we used ATLAS-ti (5.0), a qualitative data management software program, to organize, manage, and code the data. We used open coding, which involved analyzing the data line-by-line, to identify themes. The line-by-line coding allowed for themes to emerge from the data and become aggregated into response patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process continued until the data reached a point of saturation—which is when the data becomes redundant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Furthermore, memo writing allowed us to not only refine the categories, but also to understand the relationships among them. In discussing the findings, we present excerpts from the participants' responses verbatim to preserve the essence of the participants' voices. We used pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of each participant.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

We employed several techniques presented by Merriam (1998) to ensure credibility of the study. For example, we provided thick description so others interested can draw their own conclusions from the data. Moreover, providing

thick description enables the reader to vicariously experience the participants' social reality at the institution.

To ensure the data's trustworthiness, we also conducted member checks by returning the transcribed interviews to all participants so they could check for accuracy and clarity following the interviews (Jones et al., 2006). Lastly, we used feedback from three peer-debriefers, who were well versed in in-depth interview methods and active researchers on African-American males and HBCUs, to ensure credibility. Debriefers were provided with raw transcripts from each participant. These debriefers engaged the researchers in a series of ongoing discussions regarding the tentative meanings made of the participants' experiences throughout the research process (Jones et al., 2006).

FINDINGS

Two themes emerged from this study. The first theme discusses how the remedial program provided college access and opportunity to the 11 participants by providing them with a chance to enroll in postsecondary education and subsequently exposing them to college success skills, which aided their retention and persistence. Though participants did not relish the idea of sacrificing their summers to engage in the remedial program at the university, many explained that the program gave them an opportunity to attain a college education. The second theme explains how the remedial program increased the participants' academic preparedness, and helped ease their transition to college by facilitating their academic and social integration, exposing them to support agents (e.g., faculty and staff) and university resources. Consequently, many participants explained that they had an advantage over freshmen who did not participate in the program. In the following section, we delineated both themes and present quotes from participants to preserve the essential aspects of their experiences.

Sacrificing Today for a Better Tomorrow: Remedial Programs and College Access

Many participants revealed they were not enthusiastic about sacrificing their summers to engage remedial coursework. For example, James, a 20-year-old business major from the suburbs reflected, "I was not happy about [participating in the remedial program] because [after] I graduated, a week later I came [to the university]." While Omar, a 21-year-old business major from a small town, expressed a similar sentiment, he seemed dubious as to why he had to engage remedial coursework to enter the university. Like many of his college-going peers, James would have preferred to work during the summer to save money for his first year of college. Specifically he indicated:

> Once I graduated [from high school] I was suppose to go to a school that
> was around my neighborhood, and I didn't want to really go there, so in a

> way I was kind of happy to get away from home. Yes, in a way I was
> happy, but in a way, I was like "why I got to do this?" I could probably
> be working over the summer, making money and stuff.

James' desire to work over the summer to save money for college is typical of high school graduates transiting to college. For James, and the other participants, sacrificing their summers to invest in their future is a testament to their motivation to enhance their academic skills so they could successfully complete their undergraduate education.

While participants explained that they were initially reluctant to participate in the remedial program because of wanting to work over the summer, Anderson, a 21-year-old theater major from the suburbs, was reluctant to participate in the program because of the stigma that people who are intellectually challenged only participate in remedial programs. However, he later realized that by participating in the remedial program, he was embarking upon an opportunity to earn a college education. He indicated:

> [When] my mom told me I had to go [to the remedial program], the first
> thing I said was I don't want to go, "I'm not dumb." [My performance in]
> high school didn't matter, momma, I just didn't do my work like I should
> have. I was kind of apprehensive about going to the program. Of course,
> I didn't have a choice, if you don't go, you don't get accepted to school.
> After reflecting [however, I realized] you're just putting yourself ahead.
> After I started thinking of it like that, I felt better.

Though Anderson noted not taking high school seriously, he realized that by participating in the remedial program, he was given an opportunity to earn a college degree. Wilson, a 21-year-old physical therapy major from the suburbs, noted a similar perspective about his experience in the program. Specifically, Wilson explained "[the remedial program] gave me a chance to prove myself that I'm worthy of a position here at [the university], because even though I had low test scores, I could still prove to them I could do the work. I'm just a bad tester." Omar revealed a similar perspective about how the remedial program provided an entry into college when other doors were not available. Specifically, Omar stated, "at first I was like, 'what do I have to prove to the [university]?' Just accept me! But once I saw that this was my only way in [to college], I jumped at it." Other participants expressed sentiments tantamount to that of Anderson and Wilson. The participants' voices indicated the remedial program served as a conduit through which students, though academically underprepared, possessed the tenacity and diligence to achieve success in college.

Though many participants were hesitant to sacrifice their summers when many of their college-going peers were going on trips and working over the summer to save money for school, the majority of the participants realized that they were making an investment in their futures. Despite initial regret, in

retrospect many participants realized that the program benefited them significantly, as they graduated with a relatively strong GPA.

While some participants' noted that the remedial program helped them to access higher education, others noted that remediation enhanced their academic preparedness for college. Undoubtedly, this is the primary purpose of remedial education—to help students acquire the academic preparedness to achieve success in college. For internal or external reasons, students, particularly many minority students attending urban schools, do not receive or engage in the appropriate curricula necessary for collegiate success. Remedial programs give these students an opportunity to attain a college degree. If these programs were not implemented, it would further limit the options for academically underprepared students to not only strengthen their academic preparedness, but also gain access to traditional public postsecondary institutions. In fact, Anderson offered that the program helped enhance his math skills. Specifically, he described:

> [In retrospect], I needed that program because I was weak in those subjects, not all of them, but math I was a little weaker in math than I should've been. It's just things that you should've known. If you don't know them, you learn them. [In this sense], the program was a blessing in disguise.

Lawrence, a 21-year-old sociology major from the suburbs, also explained that the program increased his academic skills, which helped to increase his likelihood of earning a baccalaureate degree. He explained "academically I learned a lot of stuff that I didn't know before, which helped me to get ready for college work." Samuel, a 21-year-old sociology major from the city, agreed with Anderson and Lawrence's comments about the impact the remedial program had on his academic preparedness. He stated "the few courses that I took um, prepared me for when the regular semester started . . . so that was definitely good." Howard, a 22-year-old business major from the city, shared how the remedial program benefited him academically. He noted:

> It [remediation] helped me; I had a writing class, which helped me write better. I had a math class, I mean, I've always been good at math, you know, it helped me okay, and I had a reading class. All the classes, um, helped me grow.

Finally, Omar reflected on the impact that the remedial program had on his academic preparedness. He broached: "[the remedial program] it was a learning experience. It helped me get ready for college."

Structuring College Opportunity: Remedial Programs and Academic and Social Integration

Participants also indicated that the remedial program provided them with the opportunity to become academically and socially integrated into the college environment. This experience hastened their acquaintance with faculty and staff.

As such, when they arrived on campus along with freshmen who did not participate in the program, they had a strong familiarity with the campus while others had to work hard to become familiar with the campus in a short time. James explained, "When I came to [the university] for the first day of school I did not feel like a freshman, I knew where to go."

While supporting James' assertion, Anderson's comments provided more depth about how the remedial program aided his knowledge of the campus community. Specifically, he said:

> I knew the environment for one. I knew where to go, let's say to get my schedule done. Say I wasn't feeling good, I knew [the location of] the infirmary. I had a problem with housing, I knew [the location of] the resident life. I knew where my teacher's offices were, maybe not the exact office, but the buildings. . . . I knew [that information] [compared to] most freshmen. . . .

Furthermore, Anderson continued that his experience in the remedial program enabled him to become academically integrated into the university by connecting him to university personnel. Specifically, he noted, "I got to you know, meet other students, administration, faculty staff. So it was to the point where school had started I was a freshmen, but I wasn't, because I knew some of [the university]."

Omar expressed a sentiment tantamount to Anderson's about how the remedial program facilitated his connection to the campus community. He noted:

> The personal attention, I got, you know, with teachers during [the remedial program] helped me. I mean, [the university] is not a super huge school, it's a small school . . . actually one of the things I never forgot is how one of the faculty members actually sat down with a group of us and showed us how to apply for our classes. And it really, like helped me out . . . and also I remember we had some courses on time management. . . . I had some good personal time with my teachers so I could connect with them when I entered the university.

Similar to the statements by Anderson and Omar, Wilson also reflected on how the remedial program helped him to establish relationships with faculty.

> We had an assignment we had to write a essay talking about something that happened in the past, and um, I wrote a essay about, I don't even remember what the essay was about, but the professor came to me after class and was like, "Oh, XYZ, you know I went through the same thing or you know if you have any problems, you can call me." She gave me her phone number, her email address, um, I was able to call her if I had problems with homework or if I needed help with the assignment… um, she has been supportive even until now.

Simmons, a 21-year-old football player and business major, expressed an idea similar to the sentiments of James and Anderson in terms of how the remedial program enhanced his cognizance of campus, thereby enhancing his academic and social integration. He explained:

> When the semester started, the people didn't [participate in the remedial program], they didn't know [anything] at all, but the people that were here knew everything . . . like let's say you had a class in [Bridge Hall] and your professor's office was in [Penn Hall] you might walk to Bridge Hall looking for your professor's office. Now a regular student that didn't [participate in the remedial program] wouldn't have known that, but since we [participated] we knew where everything was, so it made it really easy for us to go talk to our teachers or our tutors and stuff.

Simmons continued by explaining that the program facilitated his academic integration by giving him a preview of how to negotiate the academic and social demands of college as well as learn important study skills. This experience improved his time management skills, which proved to be invaluable to his academic success. He noted:

> The [remedial] program gave me the opportunity to see good study habits . . . we had to study for the classes while peers were around and that's what college is all about, how to manage your academic life and your social life. And it gave me that advantage. Otherwise I wouldn't have had. I would have had to use a semester to get to know how to do that, with so many other different challenges. [During the fall] you got ten times as many people on campus. You have sporting events going on you just have so much going on, versus the [remedial] program, which gives you that exposure to college.

Omar also echoed Simmons' comments that the remedial program facilitated his ability to manage his time more prudently. He noted:

> It [the remedial program] eased you into the normal semester, it's like it helped you with your time, mean managing your time . . . it's like the whole day we had something to do. [During the remedial program] the only free time we had was probably around 6 o'clock . . . so that helped me prepare for the regular semester.

James also noted that his experience in the remedial program also allowed him to understand the importance of focusing on his academics despite the social events occurring on campus when he matriculated into the university. Specifically, he broached:

> Academically, the fact that we had curfews [during the program], we had to be in by midnight. So I think looking back—at the time it was just like—all this is terrible, but it makes sense because you know you come to college, and you know, some people, its real easy to get distracted and to become unfocused, so I think that experience kind of helped me to stay focused.

Aside from helping students understand the necessity of effective time management, some participants discussed that the remedial program helped them to become socially integrated by establishing a viable social network of peers, which proved to be a significant factor to their success. For example, Omar noted

that he found a supportive group of friends who helped him maintain his desire for academic prominence by participating in the remedial program.

> "I found two of my best friends through the pre-college program . . . we forged a friendship, and we just encourage each other, like don't give up. I mean, it's the good support system that Black men need." He added, "Some of [my] buddies . . . really challenged me to not be discouraged [when some of my friends] are graduating early [and I'm] still stuck in that one class."

Lawrence agreed with Omar's viewpoint about how his participation in the remedial program helped him to develop a supportive network, which played a key role in his motivation to perform well academically. He stated, "through the remedial program, I forged supportive and encouraging relationships. I'm very appreciative of my best friends, they have encouraged me through those times when I wanted to just out drop out of [the university]."

The remedial program facilitated a head start for students because they gained exposure to the location of offices, faculty, staff, and resources. Some respondents, such as Anderson, Omar, Simmons, and Wilson specifically mentioned that they not only knew the location of offices on campus but, also, they established contact with faculty and staff, which assisted them in their transition from high school to college. Moreover, participants indicated that their involvement in the remedial program helped cultivate critical time management skills and the establishment of social networks, which proved essential to their academic success. Without a doubt, programs of these types are great contributors to promoting access to higher education for those students who might be academically underprepared, but are motivated to succeed.

DISCUSSION

Research has shown that remedial programs promote academic and social integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stephens, 2003; Tinto, 1993). In his Theory of Student Departure, Tinto explained that social and academic integration is important for student retention and persistence. Other researchers (Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998; Reason, 2003; Schwartz & Washington, 2002) support Tinto's emphasis on academic and social integration and its influence on persistence. This study found that the students' participation in the remedial program facilitated their academic and social inclusion into the university. Academically, they established relationships with faculty and increased their familiarity with the location of academic support services. Socially, the participants established meaningful relationships with peers, which eased their anxieties about entering college as freshmen.

While there has been some ambivalence about the effectiveness of remedial programs, many studies (Good et al., 2001-2002; Harper, 2006b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003) have shown that these programs

help to facilitate success for academically underprepared students. This study adds to the burgeoning body of research supporting the positive impact of remedial education on the success of students, particularly for Black males attending similar institutions in which this study was conducted. This study found that not only does remedial education enhance social and academic integration, but it also helps supplement academic deficiencies. Furthermore, this study also concurs with studies (Attewell et al., 2006; Bettinger & Long, 2007; Boylan, 1999; Boylan et al., 2005; Knopp, 1996) that explain that remedial education serves as a conduit through which minority students access 4-year post-secondary education. Finally, this study agrees with research indicating that dismantling remedial education will have negative consequences on college access for African Americans. Martinez and Snider (2003) underscores this by noting that "eliminating remedial programs could make receiving a college education . . . impossible for [minority] students, thereby reducing the number of highly skilled workers available . . . and diminishing the employment options available to individuals in this group" (p. 21).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

This study supports the impact that a remedial program had on the access and success of African-American males at an HBCU, thereby helping to justify the continued importance of remedial programs. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) purport that investments in remedial programs will decrease crime by providing access to higher education for diverse students and facilitate their academic preparedness to engage the collegiate curriculum. As such, students will be more likely to attain a college degree, enabling them to participate in the knowledge-based economy. Furthermore, the benefits of college enrollment, particularly for African-American males, aid the public as a whole. Increased tax revenues, greater productivity, reduced crime rates, increased quality of civic life all are benefits of instituting polices that provide college opportunity (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007).

This study offers two recommendations that may be of interest to states, policymakers, and educational researchers. First, since there is conflicting evidence about the impact of remedial programs on helping to equip students with the skills necessary to succeed in college, states should engage in varied measures of assessment (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods) to have a clear understanding of how remedial programs are (or are not) working. In fact, Adelman (2006b) supports the need for multiple measures of assessment to examine the efficacy of remedial programs by asserting even when data is collected, policy decisions are often made based on unexamined numbers—that is, little triangulation or cross-examination among multiple sources of data are completed. Harper and Museus (2007) advocate for more qualitative approaches

in programmatic assessment to inform the policy decision-making process. They argue that such an approach has the propensity for unlocking the door to "treasures long . . . available but infrequently accessed by professionals engaged in assessment work" (p. 1).

Furthermore, if states continue reducing or eliminating remedial programs, there needs to be collaboration between and among state (higher education and K-12) systems to ensure students are properly prepared for college before graduating from high school (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Such collaboration should include: (a) aligning high school requirements and course content with college competency expectations; (b) offering early intervention and financial aid program that target K-12 students; and (c) improving teacher preparation that is of quality and culturally-relevant. In fact, Harvey (2008) supports such collaboration, explaining "university-based intervention programs that work with pre-college populations to emphasize high academic achievement and positive goal orientation have the potential of increasing the numbers of African American males who graduate from high school [and attend college]" (p. 974). Perhaps colleges and high schools as well as other entities involved in this collaborative approach should use the TRIO and GEAR UP programs, federally-funded college opportunity interventions, which aids college academic and social readiness, as a model. The basic premise of these programs is to help young students prepare for and succeed in higher education.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. First, this study was conducted at one public, HBCU with 11 participants. Nevertheless, we provided thick descriptions so others can decide the transferability of this study to their institutions. Given the number of the participants, we are unable to compare the experiences of the participants to other African-American males with similar profiles at other institutional types. Moreover, interviews may not be an effective way to collect reliable information when the questions pertain to matters the participants perceive as personally sensitive; thus, a degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting these findings. Another limitation is that participants were asked to reflect on experiences that occurred shortly before their freshmen year; thus, the participants' accuracy of their experiences maybe somewhat skewed. Finally, the accuracy of the findings is contingent upon how well we analyzed the data, although this is true for all research studies.

CONCLUSION

Despite the multitude of barriers Black males encounter throughout their schooling, many are highly capable to succeed in college if given the opportunity and necessary support systems. However, a disproportionate number of Black

males remain untapped and ultimately lose out on an opportunity to narrow the college participation and persistence gaps. Such students are frequently overlooked and can be characterized as a "diamond in the rough"—that is, students who hold the academic promise to complete a college degree, but lack the opportunity and support structures to make such a dream become a reality.

Although skepticism remains regarding the impact of remediation programs on enhancing student preparedness for higher education, this study adds to the growing body of literature that supports the relevancy of remedial programs on promoting college access and opportunity for students, particularly for Black males at HBCUs. In particular, this study found that a college remedial program facilitated the participants' academic preparedness by means of academic integration and enhanced their ability to navigate the campus and establish critical relationships with administrators, staff, and faculty. Thus, participants gained confidence in their academic skills and their ability to seek out important support services. As such, it certainly would be a travesty if these programs continued to be removed from public 4-year institutions. While the number of Black male students enrolling in college is considerably lower than their counterparts, the continued elimination of remedial programs would only exacerbate this trend. Research has proven the attainment of a postsecondary education has many benefits not only to the person, but to society as well. Instead of terminating remedial education from public 4-year postsecondary institutions, it seems pragmatic that alternatives should be explored to keep these programs functional.

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