Mastering one’s own Fate: Non-cognitive factors associated with the success of African American males at an HBCU

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Mastering One’s Own Fate: Non-cognitive Factors Associated with the Success of African American Males at an HBCU

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While many studies have examined the academic achievement of African Americans attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) compared to their experiences at Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), researchers have neglected to thoroughly examine academic achievement in the context of Black colleges for African American males. To this end, this article presents a qualitative study of 11 African American men who entered a historically Black college and university (HBCU) academically unprepared but who persisted to graduation. Findings provide compelling evidence that non-cognitive factors, coupled with institutional support, were significant variables in students’ retention and persistence.

African Americans have demonstrated a strong propensity for education since slavery. Though many slaves, such as Frederick Douglass, Denmark Vesey, David Walker, and Nat Turner, never received formal education, they had a passion for education because they felt that it had the ability to liberate them from the bondage of servitude (Perry, 2003). Research has shown that African Americans continue to demonstrate a desire for education. For example, according to the Twenty-Second Annual Status Report of Minorities in Higher Education from the American Council on Education (ACE, 2006), college enrollment among African Americans increased 43% between 1993 and 2003.
While these data may trigger a sense of euphoria, the vexing news is there is a growing disparity between the participation rates of Black men and women in higher education. Though the numbers of African American men entering college increased substantially during the late 1960s and again during the 1980s and 1990s, women are increasingly dominating college campuses. This gender disparity is not endemic to African Americans. Surprisingly, however, gender disparities are most pronounced among Blacks (Cross & Slater, 2000; Cuyjet, 1997, 2006; Hale, 2001; Polite & Davis, 1994, 1999; Roach, 2001; Ross, 1998) with Black women outnumbering their male counterparts by 2:1.

Currently, African American men account for 4.3% of the total enrollment at four-year higher education institutions in the United States (Harper, 2006; Horn, Berger, & Carroll, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008-b). While some progress has occurred in college participation rates among Black men (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), many Black males encounter significant challenges attaining their degrees (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). In fact, Harper (2006) reported, “more than two thirds (67.6%) of black men who start college do not graduate within six years . . .” (p. vii). As such, the issue that burdens educational institutions is not so much getting them to college, but it is helping them persist to graduation. Undoubtedly, the state of Black men in higher education has caused concern among scholars, administrators, policy makers, and academicians (Jackson & Moore, 2006). To comply with Allen’s (1992) suggestion that research provides insight into factors buoying Black students’ personal and academic success, this paper identifies the importance of non-cognitive variables and their impact on the success of academically unprepared African American males, who entered a historically Black college through its remedial program, and persisted to graduation.

Background of Black Males in the Educational Pipeline

Many studies have characterized Black males as an endangered species (Cuyjet, 1997; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Strayhorn, 2008b). Research suggests this characterization has emerged for several reasons. First, in elementary and secondary education, teachers and counselors are more likely to discourage Black males from attending college compared with their White counterparts (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Strayhorn, 2008b). Second, Black males are disproportionately disciplined in school, more likely to face expulsions, and suspended more frequently and for longer periods of time than White students (Polite & Davis, 1999). Third, Black males are also overwhelmingly concentrated in special education classes and low academic ability classrooms (Epps, 1995). Lastly, another central problem with Black males succeeding in education revolves around their academic achievement—that is, they are reported to have the lowest high school grade point average (GPA) of all race-gender subgroups.
and score poorly on standardized tests (Hale, 2001).

Academic failure for African American men begins early, impinging upon the likelihood that they will graduate high school (Davis, 2003; Garibaldi, 1992). Failing to finish high school has a direct impact on their literacy and employment ability (Majors & Billson, 1992). Blake and Darling (1994) speculated that some African American men are allowed to reach tenth grade or even graduate from high school without sufficient literacy skills. These researchers argue that African American men are disinclined to invest in education because they are less likely to yield a favorable return on their investment compared to White men. Kunjufu (2001) supported this in arguing that African American men with bachelor's degrees will earn 72% of what White men with comparable education earn. The lack of Black men participating and persisting in education results in rampant unemployment (Gadsden & Smith, 1994) and significant labor market disparities (Strayhorn, 2008a).

The Purpose of the Study

Numerous researchers (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Strayhorn, 2008a) have investigated the experiences of African Americans attending traditionally White institutions (TWIs) in comparison to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). And some researchers (Astin, 1982, 1993; Cokley, 2003; Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998; Jones 2001; Lang, 1988; Moore, 2001; Nettles, 1998; Rice & Alford, 1989; Rowser 1997; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003, Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985) have found that non-cognitive variables are predictive of success for African Americans at TWIs. O’Callaghan and Bryant (1990) found that positive self-concept and a student’s ability to deal with racism were of particular importance to the academic success for Black students at TWIs. Similarly, Trippi and Stewart (1989) found that self-appraisal variables were useful for predicting the success of Black freshmen at a White college. In fact, Moore (2001) argues “success in college has less to do with aptitude in cognitive measures . . . than non-cognitive measures such as self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, and persistence” (p. 77).

However, many of the aforementioned studies neglect to disaggregate the experiences of African Americans by gender and achievement patterns (Harper & Davis, 2006). As such, the current literature is limited (e.g., Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Ross, 1998) in its applicability to the experiences of African American men at HBCUs, particularly those students who enter higher education academically unprepared and persist to graduation (Palmer, in press). Therefore, the research upon which this paper is based sought to alleviate the dearth of knowledge about African American males’ experiences, particularly those who are academically unprepared, at HBCUs.
Drawing on data from a naturalistic study, we make several conclusions to augment and shift the way in which African American male achievement is understood. We discuss the results of a qualitative study of 11 academically unprepared African American men who entered a public, urban HBCU and were able to graduate in spite of their disadvantaged status. One major theme that emerged from this study is the impact of non-cognitive variables on students’ academic success. Researchers (Astin, 1982, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Braxton & McClendon, 2002; Cokley, 2003; Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998; Kennedy, Sheekley, & Kehrhaen, 2000; Jones, 2001; Lang, 1988; Mangold et al., 2003; Moore, 2001; Nettles, 1998; O’Brien & Shedd, 2001; Rice & Alford, 1989; Rowser 1997; Strayhorn, in press; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985) have shown that non-cognitive variables are predictive of success for African Americans at TWIs. However, there has been little discussion about the kind of non-cognitive variables facilitating success for African American men at HBCUs (Ross, 1998).

Findings from this study not only affirm researchers’ suppositions that non-cognitive variables are significantly related to Black students’ academic achievement, but they also identify the kinds of non-cognitive variables that are relevant to the academic success of academically unprepared African American men attending a public HBCU.

Methodology and Data Collection

We conducted this study at a public, doctoral research intensive HBCU in a mid-Atlantic state. According to the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) at this university, approximately 6,000 undergraduate and 400 graduate students were enrolled when data were collected. With regard to the freshmen class, the average high school grade point average (GPA) was 3.00. Twenty-four percent of new students scored over 500 on the SAT verbal exam, and 25% scored over 500 on the SAT math exam.

Naturalistic inquiry guided this study because we sought to understand the social experiences of African American men in a particular context. Specifically, we employed in-depth interviews complemented by responses to a short, open-ended questionnaire. As such, the study’s epistemological approach was anchored in the constructivist tradition to construct knowledge, understanding and meaning through human interactions (Jones, Toress, & Armino, 2006).

Participants for this study consisted of African American male juniors and seniors who entered a public HBCU through its pre-college program and persisted to graduation. The pre-college program serves as an intervention for academically unprepared students who do not meet traditional academic standards (i.e., GPA, SAT scores, and ACT scores) for admission to the university. Students in this study participated in
this six-week intensive summer preparatory program to strengthen their academic skills for college. To complete the program successfully, students must earn at least a grade of “C” in all pre-college courses, complete all assignments, and attend all scheduled events.

Procedures and Participants

The university’s OIR provided us with a list of 111 African American male students who entered the university through its pre-college program during the summers of 2000 through 2003. Of the 111 students, we contacted only 73 students given that 38 had graduated. We e-mailed the 73 potential participants a poster about the study and asked them to contact the lead author if they were interested in participating. We later followed the e-mail with a letter to their on-campus and home residences. As an incentive, we offered participants a $20 gift certificate. We also sought the help of staff members at the university whom we believed knew students who matriculated to the university through the pre-college program (Creswell, 2003). The staff members identified and contacted students who met the sampling criteria for the study, which also enabled us to gain the trust and confidence of our participants (Creswell, 2003). We recruited additional participants through snowball sampling (i.e., asking those who joined the study to recommend others who might meet our criteria).

Although 73 students were contacted, few displayed an interest in participating in the study. With snowball sampling and help from university administrators, we recruited 11 African American men to participate in interviews. Work obligations and time constraints prevented many students from participating in the study. The average student involved was 21 years of age, majored in business, had earned 93 credits and a GPA of 2.7. Seven participants provided information on their fathers’ occupations. Their fathers’ jobs included: teacher, lawyer, police officer, minister, and maintenance worker. Additionally, their father’s educational attainment ranged from a GED to professional and graduate degree. Two participants indicated that their fathers were retired. Eight participants provided information on their mothers’ occupations. Their mothers’ jobs and roles included: salesperson, pediatrician, minister, congressional representative, daycare worker, United States Postal Service worker, nurse, and a full-time college student. Participants’ mothers’ educational attainment ranged from high school to first professional degree (i.e., medical degree). Seven participants were raised in the suburbs, three were raised in a large city, and one was raised in a small city. Many of the participants came from a two-parent household. Most of the participants planned to further their education beyond their baccalaureate degrees. Specifically, four participants planned to obtain doctoral degrees, six planned to obtain master’s degrees, and one
participant did not have plans to further his education.

We conducted one-on-one, face-to-face, in-depth interviews with each participant. All interviews were completed within six weeks. Prior to beginning the interviews, participants signed a consent form and completed a brief demographic form and a short open-ended questionnaire to help us understand factors germane to their academic success. With the participants’ consent, we also obtained information about their grades and GPA from the director of the pre-college program, who had tracked the participants’ academic progress since their matriculation into the University. During these interviews, we engaged participants about their academic and social experiences at the University. We placed particular emphasis on understanding their pre-college experiences and investigating key factors to their success.

Many of the questions were open-ended, which enabled participants to talk in-depth about their experiences, highlighting those factors that they perceived as critical to their success in college. We recorded our observations regarding how the participants responded to each question and their willingness to engage in the interview. We also conducted follow-up phone interviews with participants to clarify issues that emerged. We audiotaped and transcribed all of the interviews.

Data Analyses and Reporting

We used constant comparative analysis on field notes, observations, and interview transcripts. According to Jones et al. (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). We used ATLASTi, a qualitative data management software program, to organize, manage, and code the data. We used open coding to identify themes, analyzed the interview data obtained from each participant independently, and included cross-case analysis as well (Yin, 2006). In discussing the findings, we present quotes verbatim to paint a picture of the participants’ voices. We used pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of each participant. In addition, we excluded information that would compromise the confidentiality of the participants, institution, and university personnel.

Credibility

We employed several techniques presented by Merriam (1998) to ensure credibility of the study. For example, we provided rich, thick description in the article so that others interested can draw their own conclusions from the data. Moreover, providing thick description enables the reader to vicariously experience the participants’ challenges at the University and the strategies they employed to surmount them.

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To ensure trustworthiness of data, we also returned the transcribed interviews to all participants so they could check for accuracy and clarity (e.g., member checking). Lastly, we used feedback from three peer debriefers who were well versed in the topic of exploration and case study methods. These debriefers provided their own interpretations of the themes from the data to ensure creditability (Jones et al., 2006).

Limitations

Despite these steps to enhance accuracy of data and credibility of findings, a number of limitations should be noted. One limitation of qualitative research is that the findings can only be generalized to other cases similar to the case of focus, if at all. Moreover, interviews may not be an effective way to collect reliable information when the questions pertain to matters the participants perceive as personally sensitive.

We proceeded with the qualitative methodology because we were interested in investigating the social experiences of academically unprepared African American men at HBCUs, and we remained sensitive to the nature of questions asked during interview sessions. We specifically focused on African American men at a Black institution because of the scarcity of research on retention and persistence for African American men attending Black colleges and universities.

Findings

Four themes emerged from this study. First, many participants discussed taking personal responsibility for their success. They did not put their academic success in the hands of faculty, staff, or administrators. By the students’ realization that the ability to succeed was under their control, they felt empowered and motivated to achieve. Second, respondents indicated that maintaining a sense of focus and direction was important to their success. In addition, students commented on the importance of prudently managing their time as essential to their success. Finally, participants indicated that developing and displaying an affinity for a major was another salient aspect to their success.

Mastering One’s Own Fate

Many participants felt personally responsible for their education, which was a vital factor in their academic success. They realized that they had to go to class; seek support from others; interact with faculty; form relationships with peers, staff, administrators, and faculty; get involved on campus; and manage their time, if they desired success in college. This sense of self-responsibility for learning became apparent when several participants commented on the strong relationship between
non-cognitive variables (e.g., motivation, persistence, developing a passion for a major, and ability to seek support) and academic success. For example, James indicated that his success was “in the palm of [his] hands.” He realized that the University could only do so much to encourage his retention and persistence. He saw other students, some of whom were his best friends, over-indulge in the social aspects of college life. Instead, James held steadfast to his academic goals. Consider his comments:

I think the only thing that deadens me academically was myself. It is what you make it… I feel that people who don’t do well in class are the same ones standing on the bridge everyday. They don’t go to class . . . the university can’t do anything . . . it’s just for you to make it the best of what you can, and to realize that you’re in college to learn, not to socialize.

Anderson indicated that internalized motivation is a salient factor to success. His comment was indicative of comments from many of the participants. Interestingly, participants’ comments seem to indicate that success in college may be a joint responsibility between the University and students. While the University must do its part to ensure student success by providing the necessary resources, students must motivate themselves to use campus resources and engage in appropriate activities to excel academically. More specifically, Anderson stated:

I think the most important leadership skills you can have goes to yourself. To get yourself up in the morning, and say, ‘I’m not going to sleep the day away, I’m going to get up and do something productive today. To say I’m not going to pick up that bottle and drink, knowing I should be studying.’ Before you can lead anybody, you got to be a leader to yourself, you know and I think people might not want to admit it, but as an actor, I talk to myself all the time. ‘Anderson did you learn this line’ and sometimes I do a self-analysis: ‘Did you do what you’re supposed to do today? Did you really?’ Damn I should not have done it! You have to become a leader in yourself.

While Wilson supported the importance of taking responsibility for success, he indicated that self-discipline is a vital component to success. He explained that it is extremely important for students to be conscious of their visions and aspirations, stay focused, and work diligently to bring them to fruition. Specifically, Wilson noted:

Self-discipline… you should always know yourself and know what you want in life, and not go by what this person or that person may say. What motivates me to do my best is that I understand the importance of knowing what I want and what I need. What drives me is what I want and what I need—I have to do it myself. Looking into the future, if I want to get to a certain point; I must get myself
there. So my drive toward success is trying to be better, trying to do all I can to get higher.

Howard used the analogy of a basketball player who wants to become a great athlete. Howard expressed the opinion that the athlete must practice and practice in order to become good at his craft. Similarly, Howard explained that a successful student must practice, set goals, display determination to be successful academically.

Let’s say you’re determined to be the world’s best say basketball player, you have to start at ground zero. You have to determine at a young age, you say, ‘I want to be the best basketball player of all time,’ and you have to keep practicing every single day, keep practicing, and once you get older, once you become real successful, you become like the amazing basketball star. So, you have to start at ground zero. You have to set rules and foundations; you have to set goals.

These students were proactive and resolute to succeed academically. They were personally invested in their success and took personal responsibility for their persistence at the University. Interestingly, while these participants were classified as academically unprepared upon their matriculation, they displayed an unwavering sense of determination and maturity, which proved to be key determinants in their academic success.

“Keeping One’s Eyes on the Prize”: Maintaining Focus and Academic Achievement

Participants also explained that the ability to maintain focus aided their academic success. A number of participants, particularly during the first year of college, reported having enormous difficulty “keeping their eyes on the prize” because of social events held on and off campus. James, one respondent, explained that his ability to stay focused on attaining his degree stems from society’s emphasis on attaining a bachelor’s degree to get a respected and well paying job. Because everyone seems to have a bachelor’s degree, James is motivated to attain his credential to increase his employability. As such, James emphasized that it is important for students to realize that their purpose for being in college is not to socialize, but graduate. Specifically, he stated:

You know, stay focused because now in the workforce getting a bachelor’s degree is like a high school diploma, so why would I be out here without that. So, just learned that [to] have fun and you know, go to the game, go party sometimes, yes that’s all fine, but at the end of the day you know that this isn’t high school.
He added:

You came here for a certain reason. So take all the experiences that you could only get here, take them, learn from them and grow with it. But, still once again like I would say just stay focused on your academics cause, it's what we're here for.

Chris also mentioned that staying focused would enhance academic success. He indicated, “I would say you know, focusing on school work . . . . Basically having a strong mind and knowing what that individual wants. I would say that leads to success.”

Anderson is another participant who realized the linchpin between focus and academic achievement. However, he explained that many students become transfixed by the social aspect of college (i.e., parties, social organizations) and lose sight of their goals. Anderson stated:

They [students] come to college for the social aspect. I don’t think they’re really focused and really realize the long term effects of everything they’re doing, and you know it’s, I just think that they’re not focused, and not really taking the time out to maybe go talk to your teachers, go to their office.

Douglas supported Anderson’s position that students tend to be more concerned with the social aspects of college than the academic realm. Douglass attributed the cause of some students’ inability to focus on students’ parents, who demonstrate love and support for their children by advocating that they attend college. But, in actuality, these students have no interest in pursuing higher education. Therefore, while physically present by attending classes, mentally they are not there. For example:

I think sometimes they lose focus, understand I know you’re here to have fun, but your primary purpose is to get an education. Sometimes people lose focus [when they have a] little too much fun. They may fail a class here and there. Sometimes people go to college because their parents tell them to do so, and as you go along, sometimes college is not for everybody, and I think some get inside... and they realize, I'm not doing well, this is not for me, they just might just drop out.

**Balancing One's Time: Time Management Facilitates Academic Achievement**

Participants indicated that time management has positively impacted their academic success. Douglas noted that time management is imperative to his academic success. For instance, he said: “Time management... I stress that hugely because I know one semester, I didn’t have a job. I had like Tuesdays and Thursdays off... and I just didn’t manage my time.” Samuel explained that although managing one’s time is simple, it
is related to success. He explained, “But it's just like the simple things like time management. Managing your time... just being prepared for the little things like studying for your exams, studying for your finals, not waiting until the last minute.”

Walter commented how defeating procrastination aided his success. “Not being a procrastinator. You know you have an essay due at mid-term, don’t wait till the week before, you know, start working on it, so don’t be a procrastinator, is a good leader, in other words, planning in how you’re going to do this, so good leadership skills.” Chris noted the importance of time management to academic achievement. “Depending on the classes you have per day, you have to look at what you have time to do in the morning? What do you have time for to do in the evenings? What do you have time for at night time?” Walter supported this assertion by stating, “By not preparing yourself for all activities such as tests or quizzes, or even social events, if you’re not prepared to tackle them on, you’ll be in such a chaos, I should say.”

While many participants stressed the importance of time management to academic success, Simmons indicated that playing sports enhanced his time management skills. He explained that sports forced him to better allocate his time among involvement in football, academics, and social events. In this sense, he learned to be more structured and wiser about how he used his time as a result of his sport involvement. Consider his words:

Sometimes I would wake up early in the morning and come outside and see people standing out there talking. And they look like they’d been there ever since yesterday. If I did not have football, I don’t think I would have matured like I have. Having your time taken from you to do something productive is very good.

Developing Passion for One’s Academic Major and Achievement

Several participants noted a relationship between a fondness for a major and academic success. For example, Marcus talked about the importance of finding a major and its implication for success. Marcus professed that if students were able to develop a passion for a major they would invest more of themselves in the learning process. Their passion would be so strong, he explained, that it would take something drastic to deter them from their major.

I guess it's like family. If you love your mom, you love your dad, no matter what happens nothing is going to pull you away from it, and if you’re passionate about something, maybe not that passionate to compare it to that, but it’s going to take you something very drastic to pull you away from that goal, you know.

Marcus’ comment is interesting because many students choose majors
that they are not passionate about. Instead, they major in fields that are financially rewarding. This can be a major impediment to success because while students may be encouraged to pursue engineering or business, they may not have the skills for those curriculums (Clark, 1960). As such, it is important that students learn to critically reflect on their career goals and academic strengths and weaknesses before deciding on a major.

Douglas also commented on the importance of finding a passion: I know I like working with money; so I know I kind of did a little bit of accounting in high school, and I didn't really like it too much. So there was a new thing called Finance. As I got further into it, I realized that I love accounting. Accounting, of course, is the basis of it, and accounting's fine but it's not much interaction with finance, you find yourself doing more with one than the other. To me it's more interesting work, you can play with money a little bit more, you can do more with it, accounting is more proof work, it's like finding a passion.

Walter agreed with the significance of having a passion. He explained it is important to have a purpose to everything you do. He said:

So if you want to do it for your family, you want to be uh, financially independent for your family. Constantly remind yourself of why you're doing it, and everyday you should be alright, fine. Simmons noted that concentrating his efforts on one project fostered success. Just do one [thing] at a time. Do one thing first—focus on that with all your heart, then when you feel like you're ready, take time off to do the next thing, and give that all your heart.

**Discussion**

This study identified non-cognitive variables (e.g., personal initiative for success or internal locus of control, persistence or hard work, focus, time management, and developing a cool passion for a major) as significant facilitators of academic success among African American male students. Indeed, our findings are consistent with earlier research (Astin, 1982, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Braxton & McClendon, 2002; Cokley, 2003; Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998; Kennedy, Sheckley, & Kehrhahn, 2000; Jones 2001; Lang, 1988; Mangold et al., 2003; Moore, 2001; Nettles, 1998; O’Brien & Shedd, 2001; Rice & Alford, 1989; Rowser 1997; Strayhorn, 2008b; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985).

Similar to Pace's (1990) Quality of Student Effort scale, findings presented here seem to indicate that student effort plays an important role in the success of African American males at HBCUs. For instance, Pace postulates that the onus is on the institutions to provide resources for students' success. However, the onus also is on students to invest

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energy (e.g., hard work) into using the resources available in order to succeed academically. Though it may be apparent from previous research (e.g., Strayhorn, 2008b), it’s important to note that participants also identified institutional agents (i.e., faculty, administrators, mentors and role models) as well as family and peers, in data not presented in this article, as contributors to their success. To this end, while students bear a large responsibility for their academic achievements, members of the institutional community must support and encourage students to maximize their potential and talents to aid in successful completion of their baccalaureate degrees.

Universities should encourage the development of students’ non-cognitive skills to enhance their chances to excel. For instance, colleges and universities would do well to provide training workshops and seminars on “how to study” and “how to maximize one’s time.” Many students struggle with balancing the academic and social demands of college life, especially first-year students. Such workshops may prove useful in teaching students about the importance of calendars, deadlines, note-taking, and goal-setting. While many colleges and universities may already employ such tactics, they might develop innovative ideas and strategies to foster student engagement in such workshops and programs.

For instance, to nurture students’ academic skills while fostering their non-cognitive abilities (e.g., taking initiative for one’s success), college student educators might employ reflective activities and journaling exercises in academic skills workshop to put learning in the “hands” of students. In addition, universities also should consider Stanford’s concept of challenge and support to foster student independence and facilitate the development of non-cognitive variables. Helping students cultivate non-cognitive variables would also impact cognitive maturation, which may result in better decision making regarding academic or social issues in- or outside of the collegiate environment.

Conclusion

Though more Blacks are entering colleges, there is a burgeoning disparity between the numbers of African American females compared to their male counterparts in higher education. Moreover, colleges and universities struggle with retaining African American males. The voices of these young men illustrate that success in college is an attainable goal. Like many Black students in higher education, the odds were against them. Their academic performance in high school coupled with their SAT scores made them ineligible for regular admission to college, necessitating a secondary option for them to attain a baccalaureate
degree by participating in a pre-college program. Nevertheless, these
determined students set a common goal—to earn a college degree.
Relying on their fortitude, taking personal responsibility for their
success in college, focusing on their academics, developing a passion
for their major, and managing their time appropriately, these students
earned good grades and persisted to graduation. They proved that with
determination and hard work, success is possible.

This study illustrates the importance of non-cognitive variables on
promoting retention and persistence for African American men. At a
time when researchers and practitioners are increasingly interested in
developing innovative programs and tactics to promote retention and
persistence among African Americans, particularly African American
males, more emphasis needs to be placed on developing and enhancing
students' non-cognitive skills. Placing a greater emphasis on helping
students develop and strengthen their non-cognitive skills may positively
impact their leadership skills on- and off-campus; this may be a crucial
asset to students in their future career or educational ambitions.

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African American Men and Non-Cognitive Variables

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instance, James Wingate presents data in his chapter titled “The Role of Black Colleges in Promoting Self-Concept and Student Centeredness Among Students.” Other chapters present data about the influence of HBCUs. In Talbert O. Shaw’s chapter (“Character Education”), he tells us that “HBCUs graduate 79 percent of those Blacks who later earn Ph.D.s; 46 percent of Black business executives; 50 percent of Black engineers; 80 percent of Black federal judges; 85 percent of Black physicians; 50 percent of Black attorneys; and 75 percent of Black military officers” (p. 91). These numbers underscore the tremendous influence HBCUs have had on preparing Black leaders and scholars.

Such statistics also represent the incredible influence that HBCUs have had on both the academy and our society as a whole. Thus, it is not surprising to find chapters within this work that explore faculty development and academic excellence. Such chapters include Orlando Taylor and Terrolyn Carter’s chapter on “Future Faculty for the Nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Challenges and a Model for Intervention.” This thought provoking piece points out that “the data on faculty diversity at HBCUs suggest[s] that faculty of any race can facilitate academic success of African American students if they have high expectations and if they commit themselves to mentoring and enhancing student learning” (p. 130). Although the authors later express their concern over the “declining presence of African American faculty members on HBCU campuses” (p. 131), a fact that is indeed troubling; they should be commended for pointing out that these institutions have been on the forefront of diverse faculty inclusion long before other institutions even conceptualized it as an issue.

An additional strength of this work is that besides identifying the struggles HBCUs have experienced in the past (and continue to overcome today), many chapters also provide recommendations that may benefit all types of institutions. For instance, one such chapter, written by Anne Pruitt-Logan, directly identifies one model for success. She points to five “rules of engagement,” which she outlines as: “[1] appointing African American faculty; [2] recruiting and admitting African American graduate students; [3] preparing graduate students to teach diverse students; [4] developing cultural sensitivity among faculty; and [5] administrative leadership, or taking charge” (p. 193). Such recommendations, when considered in combination with the content included in other chapters, makes this work valuable for a wide and diverse audience that may include graduate students, administrators, faculty members and anyone interested in learning more about the rich tradition of HBCUs.

One final commendation for this piece rests in the inclusion of brief biographical sketches for each of the authors prior to their respective chapters. This unique feature lends credibility to their voices and allows the reader to “see” the author and his/her background. That is, this feature highlights the tremendous contributions of each author, whose
service to higher education in general, and Black colleges in particular, may go unnoticed or unrecognized—much like the institutions about which the book was written. Taking all this into consideration, *How Black Colleges Empower Black Students* exemplifies what HBCUs, their faculty members and administrators have done to advance higher education and society as a whole by empowering Black students during not only the worst moments in our history, but also well into what will hopefully be the greatest moments of our future.

## References

The National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASAP) Journal invites articles for this special issue on Culturally Relevant Practices in the 21st Century: Strengthening the Student Affairs Profession. The demographics of students, administrators, faculty, and staff on college and university campuses has changed drastically since the founding of America’s first institution approximately 370 years ago. The evolution of diversity and its meaning with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, class, nation, religion, sexual orientation, and other intersecting identities demands a more culturally relevant response for theory-to-practice initiatives on college campuses. Moreover, traditional obstacles such as student suicide, alcoholism, hate crimes, sexual assaults, and the historic battle of race-relations on campus continue to plague academia across the nation.

This special issue will inform readers about the importance of understanding the contemporary culture of student affairs consumers and stakeholders (students, faculty, administrators, and staff) and address how to serve them more effectively. Empirical and practical manuscripts on effective culturally relevant practices are welcomed on the following topics, but others related to the subject area will be considered:

Potential Topics and Goals:

- Reconstructing the culture between student and academic affairs – to debunk the mores of historic separatism between student and academic affairs and encourage and/or reinforce the establishment of co-curricular partnerships to provide holistic services to students through coalition building.

- Empowering students through culturally relevant practices – to examine cultural issues that students from diverse populations face (e.g., immigration, limitations of ADA services, discriminatory practices, etc.) that impact the quality of their collegiate experiences.

- Understanding the impact of changing student demographics on student affairs – to inform student affairs practitioners about changing student demographics; to provide culturally relevant strategies that will prepare students to be viewed as more than consumers, but also as academic and social change agents (e.g., activists, service learners, and community stakeholders).
• Establishing culturally relevant policy that informs student affairs practices – to assess the historic and contemporary culture of institutional program and evaluation efforts (e.g., accreditation, assessment of program effectiveness, ethical issues, etc.), and to enhance accountability for more culturally relevant student affairs practices.

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The NASAP Journal follows the guidelines highlighted in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th Edition) such as the style, quality (how well the article is written), and reference list style, except when noted otherwise below. Please follow these guidelines in preparing your contribution. The NASAP Journal reserves the right to return manuscripts if they do not conform to the following requirements.

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Always keep electronic backup copies of your files for your own protection. Submissions should be addressed to Dr. Lemuel W. Watson. Electronic submissions as an e-mail attachment in Microsoft Word format are encouraged; otherwise, a hard copy of the manuscript and a copy in Microsoft Word format saved on a CD should be submitted by mail. An email message and/or acknowledgment letter confirming receipt of the submitted article will be sent to the primary contact person. When a manuscript is accepted for publication, the author(s) will receive two (2) copies of the *NASAP Journal* in which the article appears. Additional copies can be purchased for $21.00 per journal (including shipping). The deadline for submissions is Monday, December 1, 2008.

Articles for consideration should be submitted to the following address:

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For book review submissions, contact the *NASAP Journal* Associate Editor, Dr. Lemuel W. Watson, to receive a topic assignment or to submit a manuscript for consideration. The selection must reflect the focus of this issue and must be of interest to student affairs professionals. Reviews should be 500-750 words in length (2-3 pages). Include quotes and their page numbers in your review using APA format. Also, include the following information about the book in the heading: (a) title, (b) author(s), (c) publisher, (d) date, (e) number of pages, and (f) price. Indicate your name and complete contact information (including professional title, university affiliation, mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address). Electronic submissions as an e-mail attachment in Microsoft Word format are encouraged; otherwise, a hard copy of the book review and a copy in Microsoft Word format saved on a CD should be submitted by mail. When a book review is accepted for publication, the reviewer will receive one (1) copy of the *NASAP Journal* in which the book review appears. Additional copies can be purchased for $21.00 per journal (including shipping).

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