How to Support Students of Color at a Predominantly White Institution: Recommendations from the Students Themselves

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1. Provide evidence of the racial disparity that exists in the rates of persistence and degree attainment in higher education

2. Describe the qualitative study that was conducted at one public, regional PWI (predominantly White institution)

3. Explore the suggestions offered by the participants of the study
Overview of Racial Diversity in Higher Education

17th-18th Century
American higher education developed for and by White men (Cohen & Kisker, 2010)

1830s
Oberlin College began admitting Black students (Corey, 2003)

1862
1st Morrill Act allocated federal land for public universities (Thelin, 2011).

1890
2nd Morrill Act required states to allow Black students or establish separate institutions (Cohen & Kisker, 2010)

1954
Brown v. Board of Education decision overturned “separate but equal” (Kaplin & Lee, 2014)

21st Century
Campuses remain hostile to minority students (Gusa, 2010)
History of Academic Advising in Higher Education

- Originally conducted by *clergy faculty* members (Lucas, 2006)
- *In loco parentis* generally obsolete in the mid-1900s (Cohen & Kisker, 2010)
- Five distinct *steps of advising*: (1) life goals, (2) vocational goals, (3) degree, (4) courses, and (5) scheduling; theoretically by various university personnel (O’Banion, 1972, 1994, 2009)
- *Prescriptive vs. developmental advisement* (Crookston, 1972)
- *Developmental advisement* most commonly used model (Schreiner & Anderson, 2005), and most preferred among students (Hale, Graham, & Johnson, 2009)
- Developmental advising is time-intensive and *requires faculty buy-in* to be effective (Crookston, 1972)
Evidence of Racial Disparity

- **National racial disparity** in higher education
  - Black and Hispanic students are less likely than White students to enroll in college (Snyder et al., 2016) and earn a Bachelor degree (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016)

- **Disparity in degree completion** at the study institution
  - Graduation rate 37% for White students, but 31% for Hispanic and 16% for Black students (IPEDS, 2017)

- A negative **campus racial climate** could threaten the academic persistence of students of color (Gusa, 2010; McClain & Perry, 2017; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).
Why is this disparity significant?

- Educational attainment affects individuals and society
  - Lifetime earnings (Carnevale, Rose, & Ban, 2011) and physical health (NCES, 2017; Zimmerman & Woolf, 2014)
  - Civic engagement and income tax revenue (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013); incarceration rates (Museus & Ravello, 2010)

- Racial disparity threatens colleges and universities, even in perception
  - Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race (Kaplin & Lee, 2014)
  - Student attrition damages the institution’s revenue, reputation, and ability to recruit (Stillman, 2009)
Purpose of the Research

- To explore the perceptions and experiences of students of color related to faculty academic advisors at a PWI
- To better understand how faculty advisors’ actions support or hinder students’ persistence at the PWI
- To gather what participants identify as best practices for supporting students of color at this type of institution
This study suggests how PWIs can better support the academic persistence of students of color.

- Academic advising supports student retention (Cannon, 2013; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Drake, 2011; Floyd-Peoples, 2016; McFarlane, 2013; Montag et al., 2012).

- Much research focuses on full-time, professional advisors

- A faculty-only advising approach is used by only 18% of institutions (NACADA, 2011).

- The study can inform advising practices by augmenting the limited existing research on faculty advising to support the persistence of students of color at a PWI.
Conceptual Framework

- Harper's (2010) *anti-deficit achievement framework*

  - Focus on how “some students of color have managed to succeed” (p. 68) as opposed to empirical studies which amplify minority student failures and deficits

  - “Instead of Queries” (p. 68):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deficit-Oriented Questions</th>
<th>Anti-Deficit Reframing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do so few Black male students enroll in college?</td>
<td>How were college aspirations cultivated among Black male undergraduates who are currently enrolled?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Appropriate due to focus on what students of color perceive to have led to their academic *successes* as opposed to failures
Research Methodology

- Data was collected from:
  - Semi-structured interviews, Institutional documents, Field notes, Reflexive journaling, and the Lens of the researcher

- Data was analyzed using:
  - Constant comparison method: compared each new interview or document to what was previously collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
  - Open coding (Merriam, 2009) and Axial coding (Saldaña, 2009)
  - Interpretation of findings to establish meaning of the results (Creswell, 2014)
Participant Selection

Inclusion Criteria:

(1) students who were Black or Hispanic AND
(2) students who had 60 or more credit hours earned at the time of the study

Fall of 2017:

5,458 students enrolled
341 individuals met the inclusion criteria (142 Black students, 199 Hispanic students) and were emailed an invitation to participate in the study
Context of the Study

- Public, regional university located in the southern region of the U.S.
- Substantially diminished State funding
- Retention and graduation rates below the national averages
- Predominantly White Institution
- Percentage of student body identifying as White- 63%, Black- 4%, Hispanic- 10% in 2017 (Fact book, 2018)
- Two largest minority student populations are Black and Hispanic
- Faculty-only advising model
- Fewer than 3% of advisors were Black or Hispanic at time of study
Context of the Researcher

- From Southern California
- High-achieving 1st generation student, stumbled in college
- Encouraged by a professor to pursue graduate school
- Earned Master’s of Education degree at study institution
- Have worked at the study institution for 13 years in victim advocacy, then academic advising
- Earned doctorate in Higher Education Administration
- Currently responsible for coordinating academic advising and retention efforts at a public, regional
## Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Gender</th>
<th>Academic Standing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hispanic female</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Black and Hispanic female</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darius</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lainey</td>
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<td>Hispanic female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orlando</td>
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<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Black female</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trey</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings: Research Question #1

Advising Impact on Persistence

- Advisor effects on student persistence may be limited
  - 6 participants reported academic advising did not affect their persistence

  Hayden: “I could say… [faculty advising] really doesn’t [affect my persistence], for real.”

- There are differences between an assigned advisor and a campus mentor
  - All participants identified another institutional representative they perceived as a mentor

  Orlando: “I’m around [my coaches] the most and they always try to tell you right from wrong in the real world and in school.”
Findings

Advising Impact on Persistence

- Reluctance to disclose personal information to an advisor
  - 10 participants shared that they did not discuss anything outside of classes with their advisor.
  - 4 participants stated that they did not discuss any personal information with their faculty advisor; another 3 shared they only discussed academic issues.

- A reliance on self
  - 8 participants identified one of their own qualities that led to their academic persistence.
    
    Raquel: “I wanted to finish [college]”, [being placed on probation] made [me] want to finish more.”
    Trey: “Just not giving up. Just to have that attitude, that mentality, that once you start something, you have to finish.”
Discussion

Advising Impact on Persistence

- Much of the literature advancing the notion of academic advising as supportive of student retention addresses academic advising without specifically focusing on advising students of color at a PWI (e.g., Drake, 2011; McFarlane, 2013; Montag, et al., 2012)

- It is possible that students of color have unique needs that must be addressed before they perceive they are being academically supported by their advisors.

- Barker (2011) and Strayhorn (2008) emphasized the importance of advisors understanding the experiences of students of color

- Students of color who feel validated in the campus community are more likely to succeed there (Rendón, 1994)
Implications for Higher Education

Advising Impact on Persistence

- Academic advising identified in literature as a tool to increase student retention (e.g., Drake, 2011; McFarlane, 2013; Montag, Campo, Weissman, Walmsley, & Snell, 2012)

- Faculty academic advising may not be as supportive of the academic persistence of students of color at a PWI as research suggests of the overall student population.

  - PWIs may benefit from fostering mentor opportunities instead of relying on faculty advisors to be adequately supportive of students of color
Findings: Research Question #2

Advising Interactions

- Poor advising experiences may lead to major changes
  - Examples of poor advising included racial microaggressions, ignorance of institutional policy, and failure to explore students' prior experiences or academic goals

Paige: “I guess [my advisor] was frustrated that I couldn’t succeed in math or something? I don’t know. And she turned to me when we were picking my course schedule and she was like, ‘Why don’t you just major in Spanish? You know Spanish, right?’ And I was so mad I couldn’t even lie. I was like, ‘Yeah, I know Spanish.’”

Darius: “I trusted [my advisor’s] opinion that [the academic major] was gonna be hard. But then again, I had two teammates who just graduated [with that major] and that played football, so I kind of feel like I could have did it because they did it.”
Findings

Advising Interactions

- Desirable advisor qualities include being knowledgeable and approachable
  - Participants referenced understanding athletic eligibility and institutional policy
  - Desirable advisor qualities included being open, developing trust, and fostering respect

Hayden: “[my new advisor] set me up so I can pass and, you know, get the [classes] that I need [as a student-athlete]… but my first advisor, he actually kinda-- messed my credits up.”

Cynthia: “I go to her a lot because I always have questions about [my academic major] but she’s always ready to help you. If you have any questions, like, which classes to take and so forth. And so, thanks to her, I have, like, my next three years planned out already.”
Discussion

Advising Interactions

- Students prefer a developmental advising relationship in which they are advised holistically (Smith, 2002)
- Participants described mostly transactional advising interactions
- A faculty advising model may detract from the benefits of student-faculty interaction
Implications for Higher Education

Advising Interactions

- Participants valued **accuracy of information and accessibility or friendliness** when interacting with a faculty advisor.
  
  - Giving students accurate information is of paramount importance in the academic advising process (Allen & Smith, 2008)
  
  - Primary responsibilities of faculty advisors are teaching and research (Allen & Smith, 2008; Self, 2013)
Findings: Research Question #3

Student Recommendations

- Faculty advisors need to build relationships with their advisees outside of classes

Trey: “Like, just let the students know that [the advisor is] there besides academics, like whether they want to talk about academics or not, just letting them know that you’re there.”

Cynthia: “having a personal relationship [advisor and advisee], conversations with students, sort of, like, joking around with them”

Anna: “actually really getting to know [advisees] and not just meeting with them every once in a while. Even though I can enroll myself, I still go to [my advisor] because I trust her opinion and want to know if I’m on the right track.”
Findings

Student Recommendations

- Students need to take at least one course with their advisor
  - 11 of the 12 participants had taken a class with their faculty advisor as the instructor

Anna: “That’s how I really got to know my advisor.”
Frank: “It’s hard to describe, but [after having had my advisor as an instructor in class] yeah, he knows me.”
Trey: “We had the same relationship when we were in his office [as we did in class]. We joke around a lot.”
Discussion

Student Recommendations

- Faculty advisors need to *build relationships* with advisees outside of classes.
  - Importance of building relationships between advisors and advisees (Crocker, Kahla, & Allen, 2014; Drake, 2011)
  - To build relationships with students of color, campus personnel should attend campus events (Harding, 2012).

- Students need to *take at least one course* with their advisor.
  - Interacting with faculty in and outside of the classroom is beneficial for student persistence (Tinto’s, 1975).
  - Student-faculty interaction contributes to student retention (e.g., Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lambert, Rocconi, Ribera, Miller, & Dong, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Tinto, 1987; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).
Findings

Student Recommendations

- Institutions should *offer and promote cultural events and student organizations* for students of color
  - 8 participants recommended campus events for Black and Hispanic students or specific student groups for students of color
  - Campus documents indicated a Black student organization was active from 1991-2015 and a Hispanic student organization was created in 2017

Trey: “when you walk around campus …all you see is just, like, you know, the campus is predominantly White. That is what you see. So, maybe if [the study institution] just had more stuff organized for, like, minorities, for them to get together.”

Anna: “Maybe celebrate not just like regular events, but also Hispanic events or African American events.”
Findings

Student Recommendations

- Students of color need to be pragmatic when selecting an institution
  - 7 participants chose the institution due to a scholarship, another 2 for affordability
  
  Hayden: “The opportunity was there. I mean, a lot of schools didn’t give me the opportunity because of grades or whatever.”

- Financial factors outweighed any concerns about attending a PWI

  Paige: “Honestly, I didn’t really think much about [attending a PWI], just because I knew that, regardless of the college I went to, I was gonna be a minority there.”
Discussion

Student Recommendations

Institutions should offer and promote cultural events and organizations.

- Students are more likely to be retained if they integrate into the campus community academically and socially (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983) and become involved in their academic experience (Astin, 1984).

Students of color need to be pragmatic when selecting an institution.

- Adds to the research of Contreras et al. (2018) who asserted that access, outreach, diversity, and campus racial climate each affect the institutional selection of Black undergraduate students.
Implications for Higher Education

Student Recommendations

- Participants want more opportunities to foster community with other students of color at the predominantly White study institution.
  
  - The theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984) suggests that participation in academic and extra-curricular activities is largely indicative of continued enrollment in college.
  
  - Black students are “less likely to perceive the institution as being supportive and less likely to persist,” despite an initial commitment to the institution (Berger & Milem, 1999, p. 657).
Implications for Higher Education

Student Recommendations

- When students of color consider attending a PWI, *affordability is an important factor*.
  
  - Tuition costs may be a barrier for all students, but additional barriers may exist for a student of color attending a PWI.
  
  - Supporting Harper’s (2010) research, participants overcame barriers to achieve academic persistence
Researcher Recommendations

1. Discuss with incoming students at the initial advisement meeting the importance of academic advising and its role in a student’s larger college experience

   - Advisors teach by instructing students about their entire college curriculum the way an instructor would teach the curriculum of one course (Lowenstein, 2005)

   - In 2010, between 26% and 31% of institutions were using advising syllabi (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2010)

   - Advising syllabi may include a definition of advising and a delineation of advising responsibilities (Trabant, 2006)
2. **Provide mentorship opportunities for students of color at PWIs**

- The study institution employed only one Black faculty member and five Hispanic faculty members out of the 201 total faculty in Fall 2017 (Institutional Research Specialist, personal communication, August 22, 2018)

- Gusa (2010) and Harding (2012) posit the importance of students of color having faculty of color as role models on campus.

- A dual advising model can be effective for students of color (DiMaria, 2015; Fernandez, Davis, & Jenkins, 2017)
3. **Expand required training** for academic advisors to include cultural competency

- Diversity training is beneficial for students as well as employees (Hurtado, 2007)
- Barker (2011) and Strayhorn (2008) emphasized importance of advisors understanding the experiences of students of color
Researcher Recommendations

4. Create a *Center for Diversity and Inclusion* on campus

- Establish a physical space on campus is important for students of color in navigating a PWI (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016)

- Center could provide cultural competency training and administer perception surveys to gather feedback from students of color for continuous improvement
5. **Diversify scholarship offers for students of color**

- Broaden recruitment of students of color who do not qualify for athletic or academic scholarships
- Make financial assistance information available to students and families on a bilingual webpage (Montalvo, 2013)
Recommendations for Future Research

- A case study including semi-structured interviews of students of color at Hispanic serving institutions and historically Black colleges and universities

- A comparative case study with students of color at a PWI that uses an advising model with full-time advising personnel

- A mixed-methods study in which the persistence and graduation rates of students of color are examined following the implementation of new support initiatives

- A re-creation of the collective case study with a person of color conducting the semi-structured interviews to gather participant perceptions

- A collective case study to identify how a mentor program might influence the persistence of students of color at a PWI
Conclusion

- Participants for this study were generally not dissatisfied with the academic advising they had received, nor with the campus racial climate, because they had already learned to navigate in predominantly White spaces before coming to college.

- To better support racial pluralism on campus, faculty advisors should aspire to be knowledgeable and approachable while institutions should work toward fostering an inclusive campus climate through training, cultural events, and diverse scholarship options.
Final Thoughts and Discussion

- How would you implement these recommendations on your campuses?
  - What barriers might you encounter?

- What other support methods for students of color have you seen met with success?

- What is one thing you could implement on your campus TODAY to better support the persistence of students of color?
References


References (continued)


