Recruit, Respond, Retain!

A University Study on Efforts to **Recruit** African American Students, Successfully **Respond** to Their Campus Needs and **Retain** through Graduation

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Introduction

**Issue**
- African American students have the lowest graduation and retention rates
- One in five will graduate with a bachelor’s degree in 4 years

**Purpose of Study**
To provide an understanding of what experiences contribute to retention & graduation rates for African American students that subsequently increases their desire to persist through college. Additionally, it could broaden best university practices for students not involved in culturally specific programs and determine in what ways, and how, the university meets African American student cultural needs as well. This study yielded an analysis of how the university’s strategic initiatives respond to student needs in developing connections to campus and possibly increasing retention and graduation rates.

Research Questions
1. In what ways does the university address the specific needs of first-generation African American students to support their retention and graduation?
2. How does the university respond to African American students’ specific needs to make them feel more connected to campus and persistence?
3. What role does the university diversity plan and racial climate survey results play in addressing equity, access, and campus the climate?

The study provides an assessment of the university community’s knowledge of intentional efforts to address disparities.

Conceptual Approach
- Microaggressive Behavior Experiences
- Expectations (Low & High)
- Lack of Sensitivity to Needs

**Student Recommendations for University Administration**
- African American Centered Community Events, Activities & Space
- Increased African American Retention Programs & Faculty
- Acknowledgment, Understanding & Sensitivity

**Student Personal Background (Pre-College)**
- Experienced Difficult Circumstances
- Resilience/Life Skills Development to Proceed
- Influential Figures were Motivators to Succeed

**University**
- Cultural Sensitivity of Faculty & Staff
- Microaggressive Behavior Experiences
- Expectations (Low & High) Concerns
- Lack of Sensitivity to Needs

**Student Experience/Transition/Connectedness to Campus**
- Important to Retention
- Cultural Connection Significant

**Program/Organization Experiences & Impact**
- Important to Retention
- Cultural Connection Significant

**Conclusions, Implications & Recommendations**

The findings from the student interviews and surveys were consistent with university artifacts dictated based on how students perceived the campus climate. However, the application from those artifacts to address and improve upon student concerns did not correlate to what students saw as effective implementation. Nor did it seem that the implementation efforts were timely or intentional to address African American student needs. Although the climate survey indicated efforts, frustation was not evident to students to increase programs, staffing or space.

**Implications: Creating a Student-Ready University**
To determine the needs of first generation students, the study indicated that needs can be unique, as well as challenging, for African American students. Although it is difficult to generalize this sample of student experiences to an entire community, it is also impossible to predict the personal challenges and struggles prior to the start of college. However, it is evident that first generation students may not always walk into higher education as college-ready students. That being said, the university’s challenge is how to respond and prepare to receive students, in essence, how to make the university student-ready. Universitites will need to be poised to respond to the unique needs of students by creating opportunities for community connectedness and environments that are inclusive and welcoming of diversity.

**Recommendations:**
1. Development of culturally relevant programs,
2. Development of a campus-ready culture,
3. Faculty and staff professional development, and
4. Dedicated resources and space to support students

**References**

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**Table A. Survey response breakdown by first generation status.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interested</th>
<th>Surveyed</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
<th>Sample Percentage</th>
<th>2017 Campus Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Freshmen</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Conceptual theories about potential challenges for African American students:**

- **Cultural Capital**
  - Campus Connectedness
  - Parental Involvement
  - Cultural Centers
  - Faculty & Staff Connections

- **Critical Race Theory**
  - Cooperative Learning
  - Cultural Sensitivity
  - Microaggressions