

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS THAT SHAPE OUTCOMES FOR AFRICAN
AMERICAN MALE STUDENT ATHLETES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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By

Dorothy Sherman Smith

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The dissertation of Dorothy Sherman Smith is approved:

William De La Torre, Ph. D

Date

Mr. Richard Wells

Date

Nathan Durdella, Ph. D, Chair

Date

California State University, Northridge

Dedication

First, I would like to honor God for the beautiful life and family with which he has blessed me. I dedicate this dissertation to the long line of hard-working African American men in my family who did not have the opportunities and successes of formal education, but who survived the school of hard knocks with extraordinary resiliency, industriousness and tenacity. I was blessed to have been surrounded by such great men. It is because of the strong spirit of these men that I have been able to indulge in such a study as this.

To my maternal grandfather, Frank Crosby of Greenville, South Carolina, a famous rock layer who built bridges and walls that are still standing today, with his name on them; and who settled in Nichol town, buying enough land for each of his 7 children to build their homes, I will forever be thankful to him for setting an example for many to emulate and for his perseverance in attaining unimaginable goals. It was his hard work and resiliency that influenced my mother, Bernice Crosby Sherman, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, a housewife and homemaker, to teach her children the importance of independence, a strong work ethic, value of education, prudence, wisdom, generosity and the worth of standing on one's own merits.

I am also blessed to still have my 103-year-old father, Roy Lee Sherman, Sr., as a vital role model in my life. Also of Greenville, South Carolina, my father, a strong, self-made man who experienced the real Jim Crowe South and who had to travel with guns and rifles in his truck to protect him from lynch mobs, became a recognized brick layer, and eventually started his own construction business with his brothers and friends.

Through the trades, my father educated himself and others, including my brother, in the field of construction. The skills and knowledge that these men acquired helped them to make an honest living and lead productive lives.

A star football player in high school and a tremendous lover of the game, my brother, Roy Lee Sherman, Jr., named after my father, inspired this dissertation topic and is responsible for instilling the love of sports into the lives of his siblings.

Last, but not least, my profound gratitude goes to my husband, Lon Edward Smith, my life partner, for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this dissertation.

And to the African American athletes who participated in this study, who are trying to succeed in their lives and help to improve the quality of life for themselves and for their families, I want to thank you for your honest dialogue and for your strength in responding to society's expectations of you, on your own terms. Thanks to my family—including my sisters and brother—for supporting me spiritually throughout the research and writing of this dissertation and for their support in my life in general.

Due to first-hand knowledge of the impact of a dream deferred on the families and future of African American men and the effects of inadequate access to academic and student support services, I have been granted the privilege to work with students of all abilities in the area of literacy and motivation.

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Abstract

An Examination of Factors That Shape Outcomes for African American Male Student Athletes in Community Colleges

by

Dorothy Sherman Smith

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African American male student athletes enrolled in community colleges have not been adequately investigated in the empirical literature for factors related to academic experiences, success, and departure. This research study extends the literature on African American male student athletes by examines factors that influence academic success. Specifically, this study explores factors that shape the educational experiences and outcomes of African-American male student athletes from a community college in an institutional environment setting where African American male student athletes constitute a significant population. In this study, I evaluate the following research questions: What are the experiences of African American male student athletes in a large urban public community college? What factors influence educational outcomes, including persistence and completion, for the African American male student athletes in a large urban public community college? The data source for the study is African American male student athletes who attend a California community college in Southern California. The data collection procedure consisted of interviews with African American

male student athletes. Data analysis consisted of the following steps: transcription of interviews from the digital audio recordings, code transcript interviews and the identification of patterns in coded data for thematic analysis. Results indicated that for a majority of the African American male students, whom I interviewed, specialized academic and cultural programs, family and mentor support, and a desire to improve the lives of their family members were the principal reasons for persisting. By contrast, results that emerged from interviews with staff members showed a concern about factors that affect African American male student retention, the lack of social integration skills, and existing cultural barriers, all of which negatively affected the persistence of African American athletes at the community college.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

President Obama set a goal of doubling the number of college certificates and degrees earned by 2020, which would make America first in the world in degree completion. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) reported in 2012 that the U.S. ranked 12th in the world in terms of college degrees earned, outpaced by countries such as Japan, South Korea and Australia. Robert Gibbs, the White House Press secretary, stated that in an increasingly competitive world economy, America's economic strength depends upon the education and skills of its workers. In the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience (Gibbs, 2009, para. 7). If these trends continue, those individuals without an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree will find themselves on the outside looking in when competing for good-paying jobs that are the prerequisite for a successful career. But for some students, especially those students attending a community college, persisting to obtain a degree can be a real challenge.

Despite the grim statistics on college completion, some African American men strive to earn their certificates and degrees (Harper, 2012a; Strayhorn, 2012). The literature on the persistence and retention of African American male community college students tends to highlight one or two factors that may predict departure or retention. In lower socioeconomic status communities, many African American students believe that academic excellence is the purview of white people, which underscores the theoretical link associating racial identity with academic performance. Some researchers hypothesize that many African American students are weary of displaying scholastic success, for fear

of being accused of embracing characteristics supposedly distinctive to white culture, and what researchers describe as academic “dis-identification” (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Similarly, Steele (1992) and Osborne (1997, 1999) contend that students of color act in ways to minimize the risk of attempting something at which their group is not known to excel as well.

Another factor linked with the persistence of African American students is the retention construct of a “sense of belonging” (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), a feeling of acceptance from and connectedness with people within their surrounding campus community. Research indicates that African American students perceive their college environment to be less supportive than white students, and are thus less likely to progress towards graduation (Carey, 2004; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986). At a time when African American men are more likely to be in prison than in college courses (Hart Research Associates, 2011), it is especially important that those who make it to a college feel that sense of belonging that may positively impact their academic future. Even when African American men make it to campus, degree completions are low (Bush & Bush, 2010; Derby & Watson, 2006; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Harper, 2012b; Palmer & Young, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012) so while it is important to get them to school, it is equally important to help them to stay in school to achieve the goals that they set out to complete.

Degree completion rates for African American males are also of concern. Esters and Mosby (2007) analyzed associate degree graduation rates among male students in the community college using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Their findings indicate that Black males have the lowest graduation rate among all males in every racial ethnic category with only 16% of these students graduating in a three-year

time span. African American male academic success rates (i.e., grade point averages [GPAs]) are alarming (Perrakis, 2008). Data indicate that African American males have the lowest mean grade point average (GPA) among male students in the community college. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006), African American males have an average GPA of 2.64. In contrast, the average GPAs of their male counterpart are as follows: White males 2.90, Hispanic=Latino males 2.75, and Asian American males 2.84 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Graduation rates are also of concern. Esters and Mosby (2007) analyzed associate degree graduation rates among male students in the community college using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Their findings indicate that African American males have the lowest graduation rate among all males in every racial-ethnic category with only 16% of these students graduating in a three-year time span.

For African American male athletes at community colleges, educational outcomes like term-to-term and fall-to-fall persistence rates, first- to second-year retention rates, and program completion represent dismal numbers of student success. However, for these student athletes, a possible incentive is the commencement of the sport season begins at the end of the fall semester and continues into the spring, which may motivate students to persist and complete their programs of study. But, according to the Commission on Athletes (2009), in order to compete in a second year of athletics, the Commission requires that students have completed 24 semester units of coursework, have a cumulative grade point average of 2.0, and have a comprehensive educational plan.

While this is intended to promote student achievement, very little research has been done to examine the degree to which these rules and regulations affect the persistence and retention of student-athletes attending California's community college system.

In general, college athletes have five years to play college sports and should spend no more than two years at the community college level. But for many students, specifically African American, there are distractions and extenuating circumstances that affect their academic pursuits, and consequently, many of them do not ever realize their dream of playing a college sport. Zea et al. (1997) found that academic and social integration is of equal importance in the retention of ethnic minority groups. Rickinson and Rutherford (1995) believe that academic and emotional preparedness for college along with academic, financial and family support will increase retention.

Research Problem

The research problem that this study addresses is the need to explore educational outcomes of African American male student athletes at community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2010; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001). Studies related to African American male student athletes often espouse a deficit perspective related to factors that shape completion (Harper, 2012b; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Noble, 2011). The literature on why African American male student athletes depart is still developing and only a small amount of research related to these students in community college exists. This study will contribute to understanding why so many African American male student athletes stop out at the community college level by allowing a facilitating voice for this population to share and catalog their experiences.

While current studies are a helpful starting point, there has not been enough general research conducted that focuses on specific factors that shape college experiences and outcomes most salient for African American male student athletes. Accordingly, more research is needed to investigate African American male students who succeed in order to determine how the field of higher education can increase graduation rates for this

specific population. The best settings for the study are community college campuses because the majority of students are of color, including African American men, and these students begin their college experience at community colleges (Mullin, 2012). Because the percentage of the student body comprised of students of color is increasing each year (Mullin, 2012), this problem must be addressed now.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the African American male student athletes' experiences in a community college and the factors that shape educational outcomes. The goal of this study is to support African American male student athletes' path to success in college. Accordingly, I will explore (1) the factors that shape the experiences of African American male student athletes at two-year public community colleges in the Western United States and (2) the factors that impact or influence African American male student athletes' decision to continue or withdraw from pursuit of postsecondary education based on these experiences.

This study provides insight on key factors that may influence successful completion for African American college students; but fundamentally the study will focus on what can be done to mitigate the circumstances that affect the departure rates of African American male athletes from community colleges. This study can also contribute to the research on why African American male athletes depart community colleges. Furthermore, not only will this research help explain why African American male athletes perform poorly in academics but the discourse for meaningful approaches to reverse that trend perhaps can have their genesis from studies such as this.

There are several factors that play a major role in supporting African American men to succeed in college, but their success rates are still dismal. For example, peers are

critical in fostering a sense of belonging and providing feedback (White and Cones, 1999). Another factor that plays a role in retention is academic support. Florida State -- with a 37 percent graduation rate among its African American football players, decided to hire tutors and academic advisors for athletes while doubling the amount of money in academic support programs. Wood, Hilton, and Lewis (2011) researched the effect of employment on retention. The results of this study suggests that when a student becomes employed, they most likely will exit the academic environment, and that having a job supports the family, which provides a pathway for the student a route out of poverty.

Research Questions

This study explores factors that shape the experiences and outcomes of African American male student athletes in large, urban, public community college settings. I will employ purposeful sampling to select information-rich cases for this in-depth study. Two primary research questions will direct this study:

1. What are the experiences of African-American male student athletes in large, urban public community colleges?
2. What factors influence educational outcomes, including persistence and completion, for the African-American male student athletes in large, urban public community colleges?

These questions will help guide my study to understand African American male athletes' experiences and factors that influence their persistence in community college. For the purposes of this study, the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably. The study uses the term African American, which is the more inclusive term that encompasses all those with darker skin, including those who are American, who are immigrants, and/or who do not consider themselves African.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Mason's (1998) theory that addressed the nuances that are particular to African American men at community colleges. Mason's theoretical approach, along with the many others that are relevant and implemented in this study, untangles the web of poor completion rates of African American male student athletes with stunning validity and clarity. Mason (1978) theorized that a psychological factor that could help African American male students persist and complete was a belief that a degree from a community college could advance their desire for a better life. In that regard, Mason believed that community college administrators could play a big role in motivating African American male students by providing encouragement and making them feel as valued members of the school. Mason's study focused on students who attend community college with the goal of obtaining a degree or transferring to a four year university. However, the overriding goal of Mason's model related to psychological and environmental factors that hindered persistence, retention, and student involvement.

Overview of Methodology

In this study, I conducted interviews with 11 African American male student athletes, with a semi-structured approach, using both open and closed-ended questions. This research tradition provided me the ability to gain insight into the students' perceptions of issues indicated in the research questions. A "standardized open-ended interview consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (Patton, 2002, p. 342). This approach "allows entrance into the other person's perspective" (p. 341). Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was digitally recorded.

The participants were purposefully selected from those who responded and met the following criteria:

1. African American male athlete attending Sunny Cal Community College.
(CCC)
2. A graduate from high school within the last five years.

Once I completed interviews, I transferred digital recordings of all interviews to other files onto the researcher's computer and then played and transcribed. I manually input questions and responses into the database of ATLAS.ti, a data analysis tool.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the challenge in mitigating factors that may contribute to first-year student persistence and student learning style (Bush & Bush, 2010; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001). First-year persistence is closely aligned with students' success in their prior educational experience and specifically with their success in basic reading, writing, and math classes. As a result, some students will be more academically prepared than others. In addition, students have preferred learning styles that may lead to particular academic gains or impediments. Based on persistence theory and the way we have identified learning styles, this research study will not emphasize or speak to this particular dynamic; but it is a cause for later discussion. In addition, students often lack access to, are not informed of, or are discouraged from taking advanced level courses in high school, especially in math and science (Harper & Griffin, 2011; Rowan-Kenyon, et al., 2008; Strayhorn, 2009), which contributes to the under-preparedness of African American males as being under or unprepared to handle for college level coursework. This initial setback, which is not a primary concern of this research project, puts students at an initial disadvantage when starting college. By no

means does this research study focus on the many nuances that are presented in the literature, but it would be advantageous for future study.

Another limitation is the unique characteristics of instruction, including the quality of instruction and the academic rigor of courses. They often lack access to, are not informed of, and/or discouraged from taking advanced level courses in high school, especially in math and science. Frequent negative encounters can cause African American men to internalize such stereotypes that result in regression and apathy toward the educational system (Steele, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). This internalization manifests in “self-defeating” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 359) and “self-threatening behavior” (Steele, 1997, p. 614), which negatively impacts their ability to persist. How students learn and their style of learning is a major concern because how they learn may have an impact on their persistence, of which the author has no control.

A final limitation is the location of the campus and facilities that currently house the basketball team. The basketball facility is outdated without any front entrance signage, there is no indication that the building houses the basketball court. Once you have entered the front of the building you are met by a lady sitting at a small wood rectangular table with a chair asking for the admission price of \$3.00. Bleachers are located on one side of the facility; both basketball nets are worn with missing threads. The arrangement of scoring tables act as dividers for the home team and the opponents; the arrangement of the facility gives the gym a retro appearance. The college does not have a dedicated athletic counselor to provide students with consistent and up-to-date enrollment information and this sometimes has not given athletes the opportunity to enroll in classes needed to transfer in a timely manner. By not having this information,

African American athletes may be less likely to enroll in courses necessary for degree completion, and be unaware of their academic status.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study include a research design based on a small number of participants, which will only provide a glimpse into the world of this subgroup. However, the information will be important, because it will reflect how the students socialize, their enthusiasm in work, creative expression and how they display their commitments on the playing fields (Harrison et al., 2002). A second delimitation of this study is that non-African American male student athletes are not being used as part of the research. Given that the study focuses on the experiences of African American male athletes at a community college, there is no context to be gained by interviewing or collecting data on non-African American athletes. Economic and social status differences between non-African American male athletes and African American male athletes invalidate any direct comparison between these two groups. African American males' low completion rates are particularly troublesome when compared to the proportionate representation in the community college sector compared to white students (Laden, 2004, p 13). Though many institutions have implemented retention programs and strategies, there still exists a need for significant improvements to minority student retention. Little research has been conducted on the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of African American students related to their persistence in the pursuit of a post-secondary education.

Organization of the Study

This study addressed factors that influence educational outcomes, including persistence and completion, for the African American male student athletes in large,

urban public community colleges experiences. A description of the content of each chapter is given below. Chapter 1 introduces the study, which begins with the purpose, problem to be analyzed, study background, and the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework introduces the model development process that has been used to explain the retention and attrition behavior of college students. The researcher's working model that is the basis of this study is included in this section. The chapter continues with a statement of the two research questions, significance of the study, delimitations and limitations.

Chapter 2, the literature review, sets the foundation for the study. The literature describes the experiences of the African American male athlete and highlights background information with much emphasis being placed on the retention of African American male student athletes in an urban community college. The theoretical framework presents the model development process that will be used to explain the retention/attrition influences of African American male college athletes. This chapter incorporates the advancement of theoretical models which describe how attrition of athletes and how the effectiveness of particular variables are used in the model of this study. The simple subject of this review is to generate a conceptual model designed to explain, and highlight student persistence respectively, when trying to adjust academically, and socially.

Chapter 3 introduced in depth the methodology of the research. The methodology addressed the research design used, the setting in which the study is being conducted, information about the sample and data sources, the instruments used, how the data is collected and analyzed, and my role as a researcher in this study. Chapter 4 introduced

the qualitative results of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 interpreted the results and made recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to 1965, due to legal, institutional and racist policies of segregation and exclusion, minority students were not allowed to enroll in many colleges and universities, primarily in the southern United States (Robinson-Neal, 2009). But even as far back as the beginning of the Civil Rights era, researchers were already suggesting that community colleges had a responsibility to become more inclusive of African Americans and other ethnic minorities. Carroll Miller's (1962) study concluded that community colleges will need to involve all segments of their institutions, and that 14% of all community college students were African Americans. In addition, 44% of all African American undergraduate students were enrolled at a community college as of fall 2009 (AACC, 2012).

More recently, as part of an effort to build a stronger foundation to allow Americans to lead in the global economy, President Obama announced an historic initiative to strengthen our nation's community colleges, and called for five million additional graduates by 2020 (Brandon, 2009). Currently, in the state of California, roughly one out of two African American students successfully completes a course, and this trend has lasted for more than a decade (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010).

Next, the subsequent review of the literature will explore the implications of the social and interpersonal factors on African American student athletes' persistence and educational success. The chapter includes the following five sections: African American college student experiences and outcomes, interpersonal factors that shape African

American male experiences, factors that impact persistence of African American males, African American male student athletes and Academic Achievement, and social integration and African American students.

Educational Outcomes of African American College Students

In comparison to their enrollment in the two-year college sector, African American students are underrepresented in completion rates versus white students earning an associate degree. As the proportional representation of African American students among traditional-age students continues to grow, the disparity in Associate degree completion rates between racial ethnic groups will become increasingly important for two-year colleges (Ginder, 2010; Lee, 1991; Opp, 2002; Pascarella & Terezini, 1980). And African American men were not the only student group that was losing the retention race. Saenz & Ponjuan (2009) declared that Latino men were “vanishing” from the nation’s educational pipeline, and articulated socio-cultural factors that fostered this trend. Moreover, researchers have shown that the profile of men who attend community college differs significantly from their 4-year counterparts, thus limiting the utility of research findings and models across institutional contexts (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2013).

African American student attrition presents a serious, long-term challenge for college administrators (Carter, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) indicates of all two-year institutions, 26.1% of African American students, in comparison to 31.5% of white students, graduated from their cohort starting in the year 2000. The 2007 starting cohort saw a minimal but negative shift, with 25.3% of African American students graduating, compared to 29.5% of white Students. In addition, individuals with associate’s degrees earn over a quarter of a million dollars more than individuals with just

a high school diploma. Day & Newburger (2002) indicate the average annual salary for full-time, year-round workers with an associate's degree is \$38k in comparison to \$30k for the same workers without a degree. The academic skills of student athletes and the number of student athletes who fail to demonstrate scholastic achievement have generated concern at the national, state, and local levels (Gerdy, 2002). Graduation rates among student-athletes in American higher education are low (Emma, 2008; Hyatt, 2003; Mangold, Bean, & Adams, 2003). Purdy, Eitzen, and Hoofnagle (1982,) followed more than 2,000 athletes over 10 years at a major western university and found that athletes were less prepared for college and achieved at lower rates academically in college than the general student population. Not surprisingly, Purdy et al. found that African Americans in the major revenue-producing sports of football and basketball had the poorest academic potential and performance therefore degree attainment has a direct impact on the socioeconomic status of individuals, specifically African Americans.

This study addresses the need to explore the limited body of literature related to the retention and persistence of African American male student athletes at community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2010; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001). Generally speaking, the literature on undergraduate African American males often espouses a deficit perspective on why enrollment and completion rates are low (Harper, 2012b; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Noble, 2011). This case study embraces a strengths-based approach, and seeks to understand how African American male athletes persist to graduation at Sunny Cal Community College, the pseudonym for a large community college in the United States. The best settings for the much-needed research studies are community college campuses. These settings are preferable because the majority of students of color begin their college experience at community colleges (Mullin, 2012). And because the

percentage of students of color is increasing each year, this problem must be addressed now (Mullin 2012). While these studies are helpful starting points, there has not been enough research conducted to determine which specific factors are most salient for the African American male student athlete.

Additionally, African American students are still behind in their graduation rates when compared to white students. Important factors influencing attrition include the sense of belonging, both socially and academically, financial concerns, lack of institutional and faculty support, and being underprepared (Alford, 2000). Educational institutions have greater challenges ahead to eliminate these barriers to retention. They present administrators with unique challenges that require practical and innovative solutions.

Interpersonal Factors that Shape African American Male Experiences

In addition to low graduation rates and the lack of retention of African American student athletes, are interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal and communication skills tend to be important characteristics for community college students and aspiring community college athletes. Students who participate in sports must communicate effectively with participating teammates. According to Patricia A. Sullivan (Sullivan, 1976) of George Washington University, mentors and coaches must implement a series of interpersonal communication exercises with their teams to gain a primary perspective on the effectiveness of communication skills training to enhance an athlete's interpersonal skills.

Although these skills are essential for the academic success of college athletes, this is not always the case as some athletes lack such skills. This not only impacts the student's overall college experience, but also a student's chances of graduating. Due to a

student's academic upbringing, and the student's athletic prowess, some African American athletes are ill-prepared academically, yet adequately equipped to participate in the college's athletic program rather than the academic component of the campus. To make an accurate judgment in terms of these interpersonal skill deficiencies we have to consider the grading policies of the community colleges. After the 1960s, a few conservative commentators suggested when the number of African American students in attendance at top colleges increased, some instructors adjusted their grading policy to accommodate under-prepared African American students, resulting in sharp grade inflation (Mansfield, 2001). Therefore, when these students transfer to a university where the grading system is more challenging, they are not equipped to adapt academically.

Historically, African American people are aware that educational opportunities are not as freely available to them as to whites. According to Ho and Reardon (2014,) after 1980, the poor grew poorer, the middle stagnated, and the top continued to excel. Disparities widened between those living in poor localities and those living in rich suburbs — or rich enough to send their kids to private schools. A result was a widening gap in educational performance — the achievement gap between rich and poor kids born in 2001 was 30 to 40 percent larger than it was for those born 25 years earlier. Therefore, the withdrawal from pursuit of postsecondary education is a phenomenon with which African American students have in-depth knowledge, and they can often recognize what barriers contribute to their decision to withdraw. Although, a student is retained when he enrolls in consecutive terms at the same institution (Tinto, 2012). Harper (2006) noted that in 2002, African American men represented 4.3% of all students enrolled in postsecondary education—the same as they did in 1976. Similarly, Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) declared that Latino men were “vanishing” from the nation's educational pipeline

and articulated socio-cultural factors that fostered this trend. The persistence theory has been discussed for the review of all relevant journal articles and dissertations. Persistence theory is concerned with why students leave college and/or why they stay to earn degrees

Factors that Impact Persistence of African American Males

African American male student athletes face many challenges that impact their decisions to complete their postsecondary education. First, athletes create bonds and establish individual and group identities (Hanson & Kraus, 1998). Hanks & Eckland (1976) also stated, "Involvement in sports connects students to other students who plan to attend college and to coaches and faculty who pay special attention to athletics" (Hanson & Kraus, 1998, p. 95). According to Richards and Aries (1999), "Athletes at small institutions are kept in harmony with the educational purposes of the institution and where student-athletes are more representative of the student body as a whole" (p. 212). In general, student-athletes in today's higher education share many of the same concerns, such as how to balance the rigors of their sport with their academic requirements. But the lure of playing sports can't be underestimated. Bredemeier and Shields (1984) state that "sports is a unique context sometimes characterized as a 'world within a world'" (p. 7). Likewise, Taylor (1995) states, "On one hand, the student-athlete may experience the glory and privileges of involvement in a popular and highly visible activity in our society."

Overall, we do not know which specific factors are most salient for the African American male athletes. The term "retention" is interwoven within persistence literature and can be defined as when students enroll in consecutive terms at the same institution (Tinto, 2012). "Attrition" is another term used within the literature regarding persistence.

Attrition is the rate of loss of students at a given college. Harper (2006) noted that in 2002, African American men represented 4.3% of all students enrolled in post-secondary education—virtually no change in the representation rate since 1976.

The body of literature encompassing the retention and persistence of African American male students at community colleges is limited (Bush & Bush, 2010; Hagerdorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001). Educational institutions have incorporated programs that add to student engagement, which equates to student involvement and efforts to limit student departure. Retention programs at colleges and universities have increased nationwide, but those programs lack the comprehensive focus necessary to achieve the goal of significantly improving African American student retention rates (Tinto, 1987).

One of the factors that do not receive enough attention is the degree to which an institution's academic support structure affects retention. Students are given opportunities to receive tutoring and other academic support functions but that does not mean they show up for the assistance. Another factor that must be taken into account is the differing experiences of African American students and white students on college campuses, and how the particular fears of African American students entering an institution of higher learning can affect their chances of academic success. In a campus culture that is becoming increasingly polarized along racial lines, the extent to which African American students feel less welcome, less empowered, and less valued at universities throughout the country. These hostile campus racial dynamics may also play a role in the retention of Black males, especially Black male athletes who may perceive themselves as commodities rather than human beings whose primary role at this time in their lives is undergraduate student. In fact, Thompson and Fretz (2004) advanced the congruence

theory as a tool that helped predict the success of college students based on incoming attitudes, goals, and expectations versus the environment, which included factors such as faculty support and campus culture. Based on that model, they found that African American students who attended universities with a majority white population were less likely to integrate, more apt to experience racial animus, and more likely to feel isolated and dissatisfied with their college experience.

Although, Bean (1980) asserts a unique perspective on personal experience as a key to academic success, he also spoke about students being immersed and engaged in the college experience, which included ongoing academic support. Specifically, Bean theorized that interactions with an institution's academic and social systems will influence a student's attitude. Academic institutions have innovated and implemented a number of strategies to address low African American student retention rates. Student involvement in the classroom is critical to student retention, and students' participation in community programs are a successful strategy that influence the likelihood of students to persist to the second academic year.

The impact of remedial coursework on student persistence is intricate and mixed; however, one-third of students entering into postsecondary institutions need to take remedial coursework. Both Bean and Metzner (1985) two of the most important thinkers on the subject of academic success, created a model that reflects the attitude of students from the non-traditional perspective. This model, for instance include parameters of age, commuter, enrolled part-time and how these circumstances greatly impact poor study habits, absenteeism, low grade point averages and negative psychological outcomes. Of the factors explored, the team concluded that environmental factor, finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer,

had the strongest impact on students' dropout decisions. Bean researched factors that are part of the link between identity and academic performance. The main points and findings would be in addition to advising, the use of active learning practices by faculty members, directly and indirectly that impacts a student's decision to persist in college to complete. His paper contributes to the desired level of student engagement, which is based on higher education institutions' ability to fully immerse students in the college experience, which includes ongoing academic support.

Another factor related to why African American Athletes complete at lower rates than their white and Asian counterparts. Persistence is based on academic stressors and anxiety that African American students develop because of differential racial experiences. Osborne (1999) explained that a stereotype threat can cause academic misidentification; through misidentification self-protective identity development emerge. Self-perception has also played a critical role in the African American male college experience.

Due to the lack of self-confidence, African American male student athletes do not persist in completing their post-secondary education. The student is subjected to a crowded consciousness of failure but still has a desire to excel, all the while attempting to ignore the stereotypes and lowered expectations that have been erroneously created and unjustly attached to their culture. From the moment the African American student arrives on campus they are reminded that this arena has challenged others before them and they failed to complete their mission and left without attaining their educational goal. Wyatt's research found that academically and psychologically many minority students are inadequately prepared to successfully complete coursework at the college level (Wyatt, 2011).

Additionally we address other important factors for students because they are more likely to achieve success in a nurturing and friendly environment that makes them feel valued. In fact, Strayhorn (2012) studied how student satisfaction with the college experience and social integration on campus related to retention. Dustin C. Derby and Lemuel W. Watson (2006) examined the impact of orientation courses. Sutherland (2011) explored how the relationships built on campus and off which he referred to as social networks supported the transfer process from community college to universities. Wood, Hilton, and Lewis (2011) researched the effect of employment.

Furthermore, Weatherspoon (2007) argues that the athletes owe it to themselves and ancestors to chase the American dream. He cites that sports are just one way to give back to the community. Statistics support the fact that very few African American athletes go on to play professional ball, which is why African American males must take their education seriously. Taking advantage of education is not only important for the future of African American male athletes, but it also honors the sacrifice many African Americans made to secure civil and educational freedoms. This work challenges other works because it speaks to how an education allows African American males to be free from bondage.

The term “bondage” in this context refers to the way in which many black college athletes are treated on campuses throughout the United States. The primary service these athletes offer the university is not generally related to their intellect, personality, or achievement, but rather on their individual playing statistics and the number of wins they are responsible for during their time on campus. Many Black athletes are exploited by coaches, athletic directors, and university presidents for their natural-born skills and talent, but are never thought of as anything more than machines built to confer status and

money through their ability to win games. And for all the millions of revenue these athletes generate for the university, they are not allowed by NCAA rules to profit in any way from their likeness, ability, or popularity. There is no stronger definition of “exploitation” than this example—demonstrating the extreme importance of degree attainment for Black athletes. The dream to play sports may not come true, but an education is the key to fulfilling most dreams.

One of the strongest examples of Black athletes fighting back against this system of bondage is the ongoing legal battle between former UCLA and NBA player Ed O’Bannon and the NCAA. In 2009, O’Bannon filed a class action antitrust lawsuit against the NCAA, accusing the organization of unfairly profiting over the likewise and athletic accomplishments of its athletes without providing financial compensation. O’Bannon’s contention was that as an organization dedicated to ‘amateur’ athletics, the NCAA should not be allowed to sell jersey, T-shirts and other accessories with the names and images of amateur athletes for profit. In effect, O’Bannon is challenging the hypocrisy of a system that tells athletes – a majority of them Black – that while they cannot receive a stipend or any kind of monetary contribution other than what is stipulated in their scholarship, it is perfectly reasonable for the NCAA to make millions of dollars off the popularity of these athletes. O’Bannon’s suit was specifically targeted at a video game that featured his likeness that was used without his consent. The game generated millions in revenue for the NCAA and the company that designed the game, but O’Bannon’s lawsuit speaks directly to the problem facing many universities where Black athletes dominate the sports cycle, but are unable to take advantages of their fame because of what many critics feel is the NCAA’s antiquated ideas about amateur athletics and the right to compensation. For decades, Black athletes have lived with this type of

economic exploitation, comforting themselves with the hope that their skills and talent would be enough to merit a professional career. Therefore, it is reasonable for O'Bannon to seek redress of this grievance by asking why the NCAA can take economic advantage of Black athletes, and yet prohibit them from sharing in the revenue. Profiting off the labor and talent of an entire group of people is the very definition of exploitation and the O'Bannon case is a stark reminder of the systemic bondage that continues to hamper the economic progress of many Black athletes.

African American Male Student Athletes and Academic Achievement

According to Alford, (2000) African American students are still behind in their graduation rates when compared to white students. Important factors influencing attrition include the sense of belonging, both socially and academically, financial concerns, lack of institutional and faculty support, and under preparedness. Athletes' encounter more obstacles than their non-athlete peers do as they work towards academic achievement. They devote as many as 25 hours per week towards athletics, when their sport is in season, miss numerous classes for athletic competitions, and deal with fatigue and injuries. The American Institutes for Research (1989) confirmed: "These factors detract from the realistic likelihood of academic success, which in turn affects academic motivation to succeed" (Covington, et. al., 1999, p.151). These requirements create the need for academic support programs that may focus on mandated study halls or tutoring services. Athletic participation can detract from their ability to manage their academics.

According to Smith and Herman (1996), attempts to improve the academic success of college athletes should be part of the college student success programs ingrained on many college campuses. Most student athletes are completely committed to athletics, have minimal motivation and determination, and little or no desire to complete

classroom assignments. Though this may account for low academic results, faculty and administrators must continue to demand that student athletes be held to the same standard as students who do not play sports. The problem is that student athletes are perceived as only being in school in furtherance of their athletic career, and that education is a mere afterthought. However, there is one aspect that affects academic success which is often overlooked, and that is the eligibility requirements for student athletes enrolled at community colleges. Many Black athletes are not aware or do not take the initiative to learn the various eligibility requirements that govern whether they will be allowed to play their chosen sport. In Chapters 4 and 5, there is a detailed discussion about the cultural barriers that may prevent male Black athletes entering community college from fully understanding the academic requirements and academic resources that can aid in persistence. But as an example, many Black athletes are not aware that they must be enrolled in a minimum of 12 units during a semester, and achieve a minimum G.P.A. of 2.0 in order to retain their athletic eligibility. In addition, most community colleges in California require that a student athlete develop an individual education plan and file that plan with the college admissions office. Many Black athletes are also unaware that participating in any athletic event during the season, even if it is for just a few seconds, is considered playing one season at the community college, even if those few seconds are the only time in which the athlete played during the entire season. While there requirements may seem basic to non-athlete students whose focus is solely on academics, many Black athletes are more concerned about getting along with the coach of their team, and fighting for playing time, than they are about monitoring the requirements that will determine their athletic eligibility. This disconnect can have a deleterious effect on a

Black athlete's opportunity to earn a two-year degree, and transfer to a four-year university for a chance at performing well enough to play in a professional sports league.

Covington contributes some interesting conceptual dialogue on the internalized climate of the plight of students' athletes, et al. (1999). He says: "the common belief among faculty and students is that student-athletes are really just athletes and not serious students" (p. 159). Adler brings up a fascinating explication of student athlete's experiences (1987) Adler and Simons et al. (1983) suggest that, "student-athletes often decide in favor of athletics when dealing with conflicts between the demands of athletics and academics. Again, Covington, et al. (1999) believed, "the student athlete may tend to blame the commitment to athletics for their academic failures rather than their own lack of academic effort" (p. 159). Conversely, (Snyder 1998) "Observed that athletes are often pressured to keep their grades up to maintain their eligibility" (Hanson & Kraus, 1998, p. 95).

Academic performance is another important factor to which African American athletes view their own limited chances of success given the dim view society holds about their level of intelligence. In fact, Davis (2009) focuses on the relationship between racial identity, motivation, and the academic performance of African American students at a private white institution (PWI). In fact, she examined racial identity and academic performance of African Americans as well as other factors, including self-esteem. She concludes that there is an obvious underperformance of African Americans in academics due to social and peer pressure (Fordham & Ogbu). In recognizing the importance of African American students' sense of belonging, research attempts to seek and understand why some African Americans students feel a sense of belonging. The focus of the study is about racial identity and its effect on academic performance.

Lastly, the two-year community college system claims to be genuine educational institution that promises to prepare students for the first two years of a four-year education but data suggest otherwise. (Robinson-Neal, 2009). The community college's mission of preparing students for a four-year education has been scrutinized because 44% of community college students transferred to a four-year institution (Brint & Karabel, 1989). In addition, increased scrutiny came as critics questioned how these institutions could claim their mission was to provide gateway access to higher education for those who were previously denied, while having a seemingly opposing mission of offering terminal degrees which means it is the highest academic degree in a given field of study (Frye, 1993). Further scrutiny comes from scholars who believe that minorities were hindered by community colleges because of these institutions' push for vocational education rather than degree completion and transfer (Cohen, 1990). However, as twoyear colleges become as eclectic as the communities in which they reside, these institutions' reputation as the college for the community increased (Robinson-Neal, 2009).

Perceptions about African American male student achievement can also color the way in which these students perform academically. Osborne (1999) explained that stereotype threat can cause academic misidentification, as a —self-protective identity development and self-perception have also played a critical role in the college experiences of African American men. Due to the lack of self-confidence African American male student athletes do not persist in completing their post-secondary education. The student is subjected to a crowded conscious of failure but still has a desire to excel, all the while attempting to ignore the stereotypes and lowered expectations that have been erroneously created and unjustly attached to their culture. From the moment

the African American student arrives on campus, they are reminded that this arena has challenged others before them and they failed to complete their mission and left without attaining their educational goal. Wyatt's research found that academically and psychologically many minority students are inadequately prepared to successfully complete coursework at the college level (2011).

Generally speaking, many factors hindering the persistence of African American students are extremely similar, but the African American athlete, specifically, faces a different yet equally troubling issue. Having a unique talent to perform above average in a particular sporting arena makes the African American athlete a coveted commodity to most elite college programs. This has created another factor that challenges a student's persistence, as some coaches are so determined to recruit the athlete, they neglect the whole person in the process by decreasing the difficulty an athlete experiences academically, which in turn allows the athletes to focus solely on improving as a sportsman. This is a contradiction to the promise of higher education written in every college campus' mission statement.

However, lower academic expectations are complicated by economic realities. Mendoza, Mendez, and Malcolm (2009) believe that socioeconomic status has greater impact on students. In other words, opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education often becomes a function of economic setbacks as opposed to willful detachment from academic success. This author speaks to why colleges have a responsibility to provide students with a quality educational experience, and students have a responsibility to commit themselves to self-engagement in the academic environment to improve their learning experience. According to Martin (2006) as these students continue to further their education, under these special circumstances, academic competence takes a backseat

to athletic superiority. Instead of aiding students, and holding them accountable for reaching their full potential, a shortcut is created that all but eliminates academic diligence and does not promote persistence in athletics. This sends a message to African American students, as well as other ethnic groups, that African American students are more valuable as athletes, than they are as scholars; reinforcing the stereotypes.

Even though Martin and Harris (2006) stated that highly successful African American male Student Athletes (AAMSAs) were found to have a different view of masculinity than did their less academically successful peers. This line of research suggests that values and actions were different in high achieving AAMSAs as compared to their non-high achieving AAMSA peers; high achieving AAMSAs interviewed for Martin and Harris's study wanted to be recognized for academic accomplishments. They also thought it was masculine to mentor and support others, to give back, and be good role models. Their conclusions challenge other research in this way: If there is a link between male identity and academic performance, this is an area that AAAs could learn more about in order to expand the services provided to best meet the needs of the African American male Student Athlete population. They found that AAMSAs that wanted to succeed academically as well as athletically hold very different views than of AAMSA or any other kinds of athletes, who are motivated to gain "athletically" rather than "academically."

In many poor African American communities a high level of education is often associated with an identification with white culture and contributes towards a disconnect between students and their African American roots. This dominant stigma, in addition to other factors, may negatively affect the success of African American students. Steele asserts that African American graduation rates lag behind the average undergraduate rates

of athletes. According to Steele, academic dis-identification, the lack of a relationship between academic achievement and self-esteem (Steele, 1992), may lead to African American risking devaluation for a particular incompetence, such as a failed test or a flubbed pronunciation. But they further risk that such performances will confirm the broader, racial inferiority they are suspected of. Thus, from the first grade through graduate school, African Americans have the extra fear that in the eyes of those around them their full humanity could fail with a poor answer or a mistaken stroke of the pen. Steele's research contributes to other studies that indicate that African American students have some of the same fears as other students; and that the fear of making a mistake is a result of the lack of confidence or low self-esteem in succeeding in post-secondary school.

Racial identity and its link to academic performance in African American males are split into two groups. Chavous states, "One perspective relates group identification and awareness of racial barriers to educational risk, and the [sic] perspective views that these facilitate a positive academic development" (Chavous et al., 2003, p. 1077). Chavous et al. (2003) found no evidence of academic misidentification in their study rather they asserted that their results reflect the protective, motivational perspective on group identification (p. 1086). However, they acknowledged that both risk and protective implications of racial identity are possible. While some researchers believe both positive and negative implications of racial identity are possible, research on college students has mixed results with regard to a link between racial identity and academic performance. Cokley's (2001) results indicated no relationship.

Yet Cokley's work which integrates an often overlooked dilemma among Black people which involves the climate of one's immediate family, challenges other works

because it explains how an African American male student athlete's success is determined somewhat by the amount of familial support given. Both, Bonner and Bailey (2006) and Wilson and Constantine (1999) say that family plays a key role in academic success but they slightly differ in the drawn conclusions. Bonner and Bailey say that family supports is linked to racial identity along with academic support. On the other hand, Wilson and Constantine went much deeper than that. With the help of a survey of 94 students, they found that, for many African American students attending a PWI, family support is especially important in developing a constructive racial identity, which is crucial in African American men's abilities to find their personal power and place on a college campus.

The family climate is vital to the success of an African-American athlete, because many of these students come from backgrounds in which the traditional family structure has been compromised. Based on a number of research studies, approximately 70 percent of African-American children in the U.S. are raised in a single-parent household, with that parent typically being a mother. African-American male athletes who arrive on campus from a single-parent household may be doing so under the duress of poverty, a lack of a strong high school educational foundation, and the pressures of becoming the sole breadwinner for the rest of the family. As an example, a 20 year-old AfricanAmerican athlete who comes from a single-mother household with four siblings and a lower middle class lifestyle may experience a lower level of familial support than a 20 year-old white athlete who comes from a two-parent household with four siblings and a solid middle-class lifestyle. The intensity of familial support for white athletes will likely be greater than for that of African-American athletes simply because there are more

reallife concerns for Black families than for white families. Thus, identifying family environment experiences can help identify a major factor in the retention of African American students at community colleges.

Equally important is the role of academic support personnel. Threat-Smith (1997), addresses men in the Immersion-Emersion stage, which need to interact with supportive staff of other races and be given time to dialogue with other men to process offered similar advice for each stage of development, specific to the classroom environment. The goal of the research is to identify ways in which African American Athletic programs can better support African American male Student Athletes on their academic journey. Dawson-Threat's (1997) recommendation is that student affairs professionals educate faculty on student development. This topic seems relevant to the discussion. One example of the way African American Athletes could work with faculty in this area is to model a program hosted by the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at DePaul University. Several years ago, using a Department of Education grant, CSD provided training to faculty and staff across campus on the unique needs of students with learning disabilities and provided tips on how to best serve this population. Dawson-Threat is another researcher who uses Cross's Nigrescence model (1971) to support her findings.

A report by *The Center for the Study of Race and Equity Education* has some very interesting notions. College Graduation rate lags behind the average undergraduate rates of athletes. Florida State -- with a 37 percent graduation rate among its African American football players, decided to hire tutors and academic advisors for athletes while doubling the amount of money in academic support programs. The contribution this research provided was the area of admitting unprepared students. To support the student the University hired tutors along with academic advisors and enhanced the offerings of other

support services to student-athletes. This assistance helped to ensure that student athletes were integrated with the broader university community and created an understanding that they would be given full participation in the undergraduate life at the university. This work challenged other work because it spoke of how an education allowed African American males to be free from bondage.

Social Integration and African-American Students

There are many factors that contribute to persistence, and exploring all of these factors extends beyond the scope of this study, but an issue worthy of mention is the concept of social integration. Perna (2000) focused on understanding the ways that social structures, educational practices, and public policies enable and restrict college access and success, particularly for racial/ethnic minorities and individuals of lower socioeconomic status. As described by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) the first stage is the, Pre-encounter stage, in which the individual's worldview is still largely Eurocentric. The second stage, Encounter, signifies some crisis or event that causes the person to question the "place of Blacks in the world" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 26). The third stage, Immersion-Emersion, is an in-between stage where individuals are searching for a new understanding of what it means to be Black. Then according to Cross, they move on to the fourth stage, Internalization, in which a new world view emerges. The fifth and final stage is, Internalization-Commitment, where the person reaches a selfactualization of Blackness and sees their racial identity as positive (Bonner and Bailey). Perna concluded that African American students should be enrolling in college at a higher rate than White students, as they accrue greater educational benefits. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) asserted that for the past 40 years, a college degree had a greater

impact on earnings for African Americans than their White counterparts. This article spoke to restricting success; which is partly why some students depart.

Furthermore, Helms contributes to research by pointing out that if the current research finds a connection between racial identity and academic performance, knowledge in this area of student development would be one more tool African American Athletes could use to best support the African American male Student Athlete population. Additionally, it is an area about which African American Athletes could educate coaches and athletic administrators. Uncovered were important factors that influence attrition include, a sense of belonging socially and academically, financial concerns, lack of institutional and faculty support, and underprepared students (Alford, 2000). These barriers to retention present administrators with unique challenges that require practical and innovative solutions.

Parham asserts that the racial identity development process is cyclical, not linear, and repetitive, not a one-time process. Parham defined the underlying premise for those in late adolescence/early adulthood as involvement and activism. Parham contributed to other research because he took readers through the stages of Cross “model from the viewpoint of a college age student.” Cross (1971), Vandiver (2000), Worrell (2000), and Fhagen-Smith (2000) confirmed the legitimacy of the Cross Racial Identity Scale, through two studies using African American college students. Parham (1993) used Cross’s study but delved deeper by specifically using the point of view of college aged students as stated earlier. Their research indicates there are a variety of causes to the African American retention problem, and currently no one model exists to resolve the issue (Siegel, 2011).

Interestingly, Howard-Hamilton (1997) examined knowledge of a student's level of racial identity and how it can be helpful in providing the right type of support to meet a student where he is developmentally. This kind of support requires that African American Athletes be knowledgeable about identity development and places the responsibility on advisors to reach out to students appropriately given their level of development. It requires African American Athletes to be multicultural competent educators.

HowardHamilton (1997) contributed to other research because she made recommendations for higher education professionals working with men at each stage. She used Cross's (1971) Nigrescence model as the foundation of her findings. This goes back to racial identity, how it is exhibited through stages, and how to utilize this research to further progress AAMSA as well as African American students in general to succeed academically.

That said, Cokely (2001) and Davis (2009) discussed the topic of racial identity. Cokely (2001) gravitated towards the topic of racial identity itself. He discussed a new scale to measure the revised nigrescence model (Cross, 1971). The ideas discussed in Cokley's article center around the identity clusters that make up the nigrescence theory that are measured in the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS; Vandiver et al. 2000). This is exhibited through stages. In the section dealing with the Pre-Encounter identity clusters discusses the two former aspects of Black identity: pro-White and anti-Black. He focuses on African Americans and how their identity is perceived through a series of data.

Theoretical Framework

In general, theoretical frameworks tend to overlook explanations of the root causes of African American male student athletes' experiences and outcomes in college.

The persistence theories that have been discussed in the literature tend to start with Vincent Tinto's (1993) model which is based on the experiences of all students, particularly traditional students those entering postsecondary institutions and have set the goal of obtaining a degree, in traditional settings also known as college campuses. This theory is insufficient because this study speaks to all students enrolled in postsecondary education and does not address the achievement gap and the unique issues, such as race, socioeconomic status, and culture, facing African American male students. The exploitation of college athletes, particularly African American athletes has been a persistent topic to discuss the exploitation of African American male college athletes. The primary purpose of Tinto's study was to measure the relative level of resentment by college athletes towards their university and their perception of being exploited for their athletic abilities and potential. Out of all of the theoretical perspectives that have the most transcending impact on this research project, none carry the weightiness of Harold Mason. He is well known and respected in the field of African American males and has devoted compelling dialogue that has shaped the reasoning behind this project's emphasis in the community college setting. For whatever reason there is much oversight on the daily activities in that environment that explains some of the concerns this research investigates.

However, some of the competing theories regarding African-American college athletes share some conceptual similarities to what Mason has theorized, but are not as well-connected to my study. For example, Tinto (1975) addresses the hostility or resentment that amateur athletes may harbor toward their school for using their skills without proper compensation. And while this is a relevant theory to pursue, it fails to narrow the scope of the theory to African American athletes, who have additional

circumstances and societal pressures not faced by white athletes. Tinto's theory also presupposed that resentment by itself is sufficient to determine the rate of retention of college athletes, which is a flawed theory. While resentment may contribute to the rate of retention, it is only one of many factors that can push an athlete toward dropping out. And statistics don't bear out the theory that athletes would leave school because they resent their inability to profit off their own skills and talents. In fact, the opposite is probably true for African American male athletes, many of whom are forced to remain enrolled to pursue their dream of playing professional sports.

Generally speaking, the persistence factors of African American non-athlete students have barriers similar to the African American athlete; but the Black athlete faces a different, yet equally troubling issue. Having a unique talent to perform above average in a particular sporting arena makes the African American athlete a coveted commodity to most elite college programs. According to Hawkins (2010), the associate professor of kinesiology at the University of Georgia, and author of *The New Plantation: African American Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions*, published earlier this year by Palgrave Macmillan, states and I quote, "If you look at the relationship initiated by a slave owner, it's purely economic". When we look at an institution's relationship with African American student-athletes, and more specifically African American male athletes in the sports of football and basketball, it too is purely economic." Indeed, he continues: "They are generally selected or migrate from communities that are socially and culturally different, and placed into this environment that is somewhat of a culture shock to them. No political power, whatsoever, when you talk about making decisions - even choosing a major." When the talent and skill of

athletes are commodified, they are subject to the chilly and often unethical realm of business manipulation.

Another factor that challenges a student's persistence is that some coaches are so determined to recruit the athlete, they neglect the whole person in the process by decreasing the difficulty an athlete experiences academically, which in turn allows the athletes to focus solely on improving as an athlete. The following is a conversation between Hawkins and a basketball player from a team that had advanced to this year's Elite Eight. "I asked him what his major was, and he said, 'You know, they put me in sociology, but I didn't want to major in that.' He wanted to major in business," says Hawkins, who once served as assistant retention coordinator for the University of Iowa athletic department. "There are cases of athletes being put in less rigorous programs in order to not only maintain their eligibility but in most cases graduate." When asked if he helped keep at-risk athletes eligible at Iowa, Hawkins laughs and says, "I like to think that I was trying to motivate them to graduate."

The experiences of African American college athletes reflect their homes, families, communities, churches, and school. In contrast to the other frameworks, Mason's (1998) theory addresses the nuances that are particular to African American men at community colleges. According to Bean, (1980), student participation in groups on campus such as student organizations, study groups, fraternities or sports teams tend to be where African American men find their niche or place to belong (Bonner and Bailey, 2006; Harper and Harris, 2006). Accordingly, Cones, (1999) treated many college students who along with their families migrated from their cultural homes while finally arriving at the university with a backpack of their family's dreams to reconcile years of sacrifice. She assisted clients to deepen their lived experience by exploring the impact of

past challenges and critiquing current ways of coping in order to facilitate a recovery that allows access to previous dormant sources of energy and creativity. The focus of her literature was on African American men in college and the effect of educational attainment that included economic benefits such as income and health insurance coverage as well as non-economic benefits. There should be no question why it is important for African American male athletes to graduate from college. Aside from the ethical (exploitation) and compliance (NCAA eligibility) considerations, it is clear that earning a college degree is crucial.

Even though African American male student athletes receive considerable attention in the media and popular literature, research on African American studentathletes is sparse (Steinfeldt, Reed, & Steinfeldt, 2010, p. 20). Therefore, whenever possible, the literature included in this chapter relates specifically to the population of interest, but more often than not, the studies selected for inclusion focus on the larger population of African American male athletes. For this study, Mason's theory of persistence will be utilized and will include several factors: academic, psychological and environmental ones that affect the persistence of African American males in community college.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore the African American male student athletes from interpersonal relationship that contribute to their dissatisfaction, and eventual withdrawal from a community college, in a demographic setting where African American male student athletes have a noted student population. Collaboration of available research and resources is of paramount importance and must be fundamental if we are to put the athlete on a more lighted path to success in college,

and in life. In 2012, Strayhorn studied how student satisfaction with the college experience and social integration on campus related to retention. Dustin C. Derby and Lemuel W. Watson (2006) examined the impact of orientation courses. Joanne A. Sutherland (2011) explored how the relationships built on campus and off which he referred to as social networks supported the transfer process from community college to universities.

The impetus was the need to examine and present this scholarship in an effort to 1) leverage educational policies and practices directed toward facilitating student success for men of color in community colleges and 2) inform future research in this area by highlighting key findings and gaps in the literature. The article, “Persistence Factors for African American males in the Community College: An Examination of Background, Academic, Social, and Environmental Variables” began with a brief discussion of the method used to identify this scholarship. Notable literature gaps warrant consideration in future inquiries on men of color in community colleges. Gaps discussed in this article focused on the fact that African American men in community colleges are more likely to be older, married, low-income, have dependents (e.g., children), and to have delayed their enrollment in higher education. Further, they have significantly lower academic preparation in foreign language, mathematics, and science than their four-year counterparts (Wood, 2011b).

As much as community college student athletes are challenged, the African American male athlete continue to face greater challenges than any other racial group. They have been marginalized, criticized, made fun of, and dismissed as not worthy. Society has turned its back on their struggle as they attempt to assimilate and gain respect. Coming to America, land of the free, fighting side by side and dying for what

they consider one more step toward gaining acceptance in a society that fear their mere existence. The legacy of racism and discrimination continues to outweigh any attempts to provide pathways of success.

Finally, exploring the factors that shape the departure of the African American male student athletes from two-year public community colleges in the Western United States, and addressing how the experiences of African American male student athletes impact or influence their decisions to withdraw may provide insight on successful completion rates for African American college students enrolled in community college. The main focus was on the factors that lead to the departure of African American male athletes from community colleges. I hope this research sheds some light and reflect on what needs to be done academically to help repair generations of neglect of the African American male. They should no longer be the outcast in society, in educational rooms and in places where their excellence can be seen, appreciated and molded into greatness.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

This study explored factors affecting the departure of African American male student athletes from community college. The study provided insight on key factors that influenced successful completion. The following research questions directed this study:

1. What are the experiences of African American male student athletes in large, urban public community colleges?
2. What factors influence educational outcomes, including persistence and completion for the African American male student athletes in large, urban public community colleges?

The research methodology presented in this chapter includes research questions, the design of the study, the sample selection technique, the instrumentation, the data collection procedure, and analysis.

Research Tradition

The goal of this qualitative case study was to explore key factors that may influence successful completion of African American college students. Specifically, this qualitative case study explored the factors that shaped the experiences and outcomes—including program completion and institutional departure—of African American male student collegiate athlete in community college. I used a case study approach, a qualitative strategy in which the researcher explores a general, abstract theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the view of participants in a study to analyze the importance of family, social, and financial dynamics. Additionally, the study attempted to capture the perceptions of African American male student athletes. One anticipated result of this study was the identification of methods to address factors of student's departure.

The qualitative case study approach that I used in this study explored research questions and identified emerging themes based on student factors that shaped the experiences, program completion and institutional departure from community college. According to Creswell (2009), “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to within a social or human problem” (p.2). Here, African American male student athletes will describe their experiences at Sunny Cal Community College, and offer a perspective to existing research. In fact, Creswell states that the researcher can “identify the essence of the human experience about the phenomena as described by the participants and understand the lived experiences” (p.11).

The intent of this study was to identify key factors, elements, and support systems that lead to academic student success. According to Patton (2002), “methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon; how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, and talk about it to others, one must undertake in-depth interviews” (p. 104). Therefore the research design was comprised of in-depth interviews. A qualitative research design provided a focused in-depth and comprehensive analysis of data. After the data was gathered, a comprehensive analysis of the one-on-one interview examined the students’ perceptions of what support systems served successful completion of their academic goal while attending Sunny Cal Community College.

Research Setting and Context

The research site for this study was Sunny Cal Community College founded in 1925 as the Daniel Green Trade School; Sunny Cal Community College is the oldest of the nine, public two-year colleges in the Sunny Cal Community College. At Sunny Cal Community College, students and community are provided high-quality academic, technical, and professional educational opportunities that help them meet their career development and academic goals, foster a climate of life-long learning, prepare students to participate effectively in society, and generate economic development with educational, governmental, community and business partners.

I selected the site because of the adult population (ages 18-34) within SCCCD’s service area is ethnically diverse and largely immigrant. Nearly all of the population is ethnic minority. SCCCD has the second highest percentage of adult population with less than a 9th grade education in the WBCCD. In addition, 28% of incoming students who

attend SCCC do not possess a high school diploma or equivalency. Black or African American students comprised most of the entire Credit Student population. Asian, Caucasian and Hispanic comprised the remainder of the Credit Student population. The most current student demographic information can be found on the Website of Sunny Cal Community College. Nearly half of all Sunny Cal students work more than 30 hours per week and indicate that they are attending the college for job preparation. The West Bay Community College District is a total of 882 square miles.

Sunny Cal Community College Foundation and Accreditation

The Sunny Cal Community College Foundation was incorporated under the laws of the State of California to promote and assist the educational programs of Sunny Cal Community College. The organization was established as a nonprofit public benefit corporation. A ten-member Board of Directors governs the activities of the foundation and provides leadership for the college's fundraising efforts. The board membership consists of business and community leaders and members of the college staff. All board members volunteer their time and serve without compensation.

Sunny Cal Community College is accredited by a number of foundations and facilities such as ACCJC and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The college is also fully approved under the regulations of the California State Department of Education, Veterans Administration, United States Office of Education, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the American Culinary Federation and Educational Institute.

Site Description

Sunny Cal Community College supports the athletic program and school officials are surprised by the institution's success despite limited resources and facilities. As

leaders steeped in tradition and integrity, the campus strives for the highest studentathlete transfer rate amongst all the colleges throughout the state, and continues to provide educational and athletic opportunities for the local community. The building that houses the basketball team is old with bleachers on one side of the court. The gym basketball nets are whole and the basketball-scoring table still functions. As class offerings dwindle, it is becoming increasingly difficult for students to graduate in two years. However, the positive impact is that athletics continues to be a successful department. However, the school does not have a dedicated Athletic Counselor to provide students the opportunity to enroll in classes needed to transfer, and to write educational plans containing current up to date transfer information. Athletics represents many aspects of the labor market. Athletes are required to display characteristics through competitions that are valued within the work force such as commitment, dedication, hard work, and the ability to work with others in a diverse setting, communication skills and teamwork. According to Cal Community College Data on Demand, ARCC 2014 Scorecard, 2007-2008 Cohort, SCCC had the second highest percentage of immigrants entering the U.S. between 1980 and 1990. Moreover, a majority of the population is nonnative English speaking and a small number are limited or non-English speaking. SCCC has the highest percentage of limited/non-English speaking population in the WBCCD.

Access and Relationship to the Site

I worked with the Office of Institutional Research on the campus of Sunny Cal Community College for data. Coaches, faculty, staff and athletes are all important to this study, as well as data sources from which I gathered information. My interest was the African American male student-athlete attending a two-year community college. The

relevant site was the men's basketball team at Sunny Cal Community College. Using pseudonyms, key figures were Department Chair, Mr. Noe Sutcliff, Basketball Coach, Mr. Gerhard Bells; Track and Field Coach, Dr. Dimitri Congo, Title IX; and Institutional Researcher, Dr. Laura Bond and eleven basketball players.

Balancing Roles

African American male athletes encounter more obstacles than their non-athlete peers do as they work towards academic achievement. They are required to devote as many as 25 hours per week towards athletics when their sport is in season, miss many classes for athletic competitions, and deal with fatigue and injuries. According to Smith and Herman (1996), any attempt to improve the academic success of college athletes should focus on academic support groups located on campus. Lower academic performance has a direct correlation with the following: complete commitment to athletics, minimal inner motivation, less confidence in the classroom, and personal excuses. A factor in this low academic standard is that athletic participation is physically strenuous, leading to fatigue during study time. The continuance of educational drive and accomplishment becomes more difficult due to institutional demands. The American Institutes for Research (as cited in Covington, Simons & Van Rheenen, 1999) confirmed: "These factors detract from the realistic likelihood of academic success, which in turn affects academic motivation to succeed; notwithstanding, the common belief among faculty and students that student-athletes are really just athletes and not serious students" (p.40).

Data Sources and Research Sample

The population for this study was 11 African American male student athletes who attended a large, urban community college. In addition, I interviewed four support staff

for their insights into the African American male student athlete experience. The target population was African American student athletes who responded to a written request for their participation. The goal was to recruit athletes over the age of 18 from Sunny Cal Community College. The focus of this study was on African American students who engage in a sport. A snowball sample was selected from prospective participants who responded to either an email letter and/or flyers distributed by the researcher's colleagues at the aforementioned college site and on social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

I used a combination of criterion and snowball sampling strategies to identify African American male athletes, coaches, instructors, and support staff. According to Creswell (2009), "purposeful sampling is used so that individuals are selected because they will experience the central phenomenon." There are a number of different types of purposeful sampling. First, I will use a criterion sampling strategy in which the participants will have been purposefully selected from those who responded and met the following criteria: African American male athlete that attends a California Community College (CCC).

In addition, this study used a snowball sampling technique. According to Creswell (2008), "qualitative snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling" (p. 217) in which "the researcher asks participants to identify others to become members of the sample." The email and flyer explained the purpose of the research study and asked willing participants to contact the researcher via email or phone. In order to secure five participants, letters were sent to possible successful students who had self-identified and expressed interest in volunteering for the study. The selected participants were used because they spoke to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009) and the researcher verified through documentation that the selected sample fit the participant criteria.

Data Collection Instruments

I used a research invitation to invite participants, and an informed consent form. This consent notice summarized some information from the Consent to Participate in Research and communicated the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for participants. I utilized general interview procedures such as demographic background and open-ended questions. In total, I used four instruments to protect and collect research data in order to answer my research questions. The first instrument that I used was the research invitation, followed by the adult or adolescent informed consent form and, when applicable, a parent consent form. Additionally, I used a personal parent and student interview protocol, and student observation guide.

Description of Instruments

Invitation letter. An invitation letter was used in order to recruit eligible potential participants for the study. Potential participants received an invitation letter. The invitation included information about myself, the purpose of the study, participant time commitment, how the study would be conducted, and confidentiality and withdrawal from the study. The invitation was personally delivered to students in case they had questions about the study participation; and they could promote the study and invite others who may have been interested in participating. The research invitation provided general information and requirements for the notice, potential benefits to participants, payment to participants' for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research participants. The invitation letter can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F, which are available in English.

Consent form. Informed consent forms were used in order to inform participants whether there were any physical or emotional risks (Glesne, 2011). Those students

interested in participating in the study were given an adult consent form. If the student was younger than eighteen, then they received an adolescent consent form and parent consent form. The adult consent form provided information on the study that was being conducted, their rights as a participant, and how their information would be kept safe and confidential. It also informed potential participants of uncomfortable questions and how the study would benefit society.

Lastly, contact information was provided if the participants had questions or concerns. If the participant was younger than eighteen, then the participants were required to sign an adolescent form, which provided information about the project, what would happen during the study, the benefit to the participants and society, and contact information. In addition, parents were required to sign a parent consent form that provided information on the study that was being conducted, their rights as a participant, and how their information would be kept safe and confidential. In addition, the consent form detailed the possibility of discomfort when answering questions and how the study would benefit society. Lastly, contact information was provided if the participants had questions or concerns. The adult, adolescent and parental consent forms were given in order to provide detailed information about the study, confidentiality, storage and protection of data, discomfort and benefits, compensation, and voluntary participation. This allowed participants to know what they would be involved in and their rights in case they had any questions about the process. The consent forms can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, which are available in English and Spanish.

Student interview protocol. According to Glesne (2011), interview protocols help create a “formal and orderly process” (p. 103) when trying to capture a cultural group’s experiences. The interview protocol was composed of semi-structured interview

questions that were asked in order (Bernard, 1994). The semi-structured interview approach allowed me to ask probing questions in order to gather clarifying information from the participant (Bernard, 1994). The interview protocol assisted in explaining African American male athletes academic and social support experiences during college. Next, open-ended questions that were based on school, grades, tutoring, and counseling were sequential, consistent and easy to follow. Other questions about sensitive topics, such as income, family was asked near the end.

Further, I used hypothetical questions that were scenario-based. Scenario's provided me with how the respondent viewed himself if given options that required determining specific outcomes. I was very interested in their educational journey, as well as how much they valued their education. The college student transition interview protocol provided an introduction about the purpose of the study. It also provided information that the study was voluntary and confidentiality. The college student interview protocol asked questions about African American male college athletes, high school academic preparedness and peer support experiences.

In addition, I asked questions that addressed their social and family relationships, which are a vital aspect of African American male athletes' experiences in college. African American male athletes are perceived in a unique way—increasingly being constructed as attending college merely to play sports, instead of playing sports as a byproduct of obtaining an education. Accordingly, the college student interview protocol aimed to discover to what and how extent familial support and social interaction in their peer group influenced their decision to remain enrolled or to seek an alternative means of achieving their dreams. Participants who come from families that are financially limited may make decisions based not on their future educational goals but on contributing to the

economic betterment of their family, which often involves sacrificing class work in order to play sports with an eye toward a professional career. Lastly, I provided a question that allowed participants to ask questions. The interview protocols served as guides that helped gather social experiences and family support data. The student interview protocol can be found in Appendix C. The parent interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

Faculty/staff interview protocol. This final instrument that I used was a faculty/staff interview protocol. This document described the purpose of the interview, which was to ascertain any barriers or obstacles that may prevent African American male student athletes from remaining enrolled at the community college. It also included questions related to language and cultural barriers, academic preparation, social integration skills, athlete expectations and goals, financial and academic resources, and the importance of minority role models.

Data Collection Procedures

The college basketball roster, on average, consists of no more than fifteen (15) players, and I conducted interviews with 11 African American male student athletes, which were semi-structured using both open- and closed-ended questions to give me the ability to gain insight into the students' perceptions of issues indicated in the research questions. The setting and questioning style was intended to establish a calm, nonthreatening environment that encouraged honest and introspective responses. The recurrence of questions was crafted to ensure consistency in the student athletes' responses. However, Patton says that a "standardized open-ended interview consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions

with essentially the same words” (Patton, 2002, p. 342); this approach “allows entrance into the other person’s perspective” (p. 341).

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded on a recorder to provide a detailed record of the interview; I also took brief field notes during the interview. From the possible participants, 11 were purposefully selected from the snowball sampling based on the research criteria. Scheduling and coordination of participants took place over a three-month period to accommodate the participants’ availability.

Interview procedures were sent for all interviews, although follow-up conversations differed. I asked questions in the same order, allowing for clarifying questions and open-ended dialogue to fully gather the participants’ perceptions of their experience while attending a California Community College. I printed out the interview questionnaire, and gave it out 15 minutes prior to the interview for each participant to read, and to allow the participant time to formulate meaningful answers and to reflect on their experiences at Sunny California Community College. I digitally recorded all interviews and manually entered the information.

Before the interview, I informed the participants of the purpose of the study, and assured them of their anonymity and confidentiality if they chose to participate. The participants were given an opportunity to select a pseudonym to protect their identity and provide anonymity. The participants were also informed they had the right to refuse participation at any point in the research process, and terminate their participation at any time. I used unbiased language that was free of jargon in all my communication with colleagues from the community colleges and participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

Preliminary Data Analysis

The accumulation of the data helped shape the trajectory of the overall premise of this study. The interviews, for instance, clarified the far-reaching issues of turbulent relations that are routinely experienced by African American male athletes. This qualitative research method allowed me to be critical of their experiences and upon gathering this data, I surmised, with great accuracy, that the experiences of African American male athletes factor quite prominently in their poor retention and completion results at the community college, and perhaps would be a microcosm of this problem all the way up to the university level.

Thematic Data Analysis

The larger picture that this research project captured was that there remain, despite much effort on the part of many people in U.S. academic institutions, a glaring flaw in the availability, opportunity, and practicality of higher education among the poor, in particular African American male athletes. This research evoked a sense that the missing link, as far as completion and retention of minority students through the United States is concerned, is as difficult to tackle as is the race problem in America. In other words, as long as there are baffling dynamics that inhibit this nation from eradicating racism, so to shall it be difficult to alter the dismal climate for the poor citizens with respect to the realization of an effective academic milieu. More importantly, the thematic data analysis spoke to the notion of unfairness and unfinished business to level the playing field, at least in academics, for all Americans.

Interpretation

Each piece of the data was treated as micro images to a macro photograph. The data are links upon links of evidence that lead to solid conclusions that are unique to the subject matter in this study. African American male athletes encounter a variety of institutional setbacks that are not only complex but appear immune to any meaningful discourse to dismantle these transgressions at least at the community college setting.

According to Creswell (2009), “data analysis will involve collecting open-ended data; this will be based on asking general questions and developing an analysis for the information supplied by participants” (p. 184). First, the data was prepared for analysis. In preparation for the data analysis, I took the following steps: (1) read through the responses from the field notes for all interviews, (2) analyzed unofficial college transcript from all participants, (3) listened and transcribed the interviews from the digital audio recordings, and (4) entered the data into the document. Upon completion of these steps, eight to ten files were created for each participant that consisted of the demographic questionnaire, the unofficial college transcript and the interview transcription. I will keep all files under lock and key in the researcher’s private library.

I reviewed interview transcripts to engage the participant in validating the data. Interview protocol was established and followed through, then I collected information based on field notes, and followed through by a coding process. To establish reliability, a review of the transcripts and recordings was conducted by the researcher to assist in accuracy and provide feedback and clarification opportunities in any follow-up conversations. The verbatim digital recording supported the reliability of the transcription. Triangulation of the data through digital recording and written notes aided the researcher’s accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009). Through triangulation I gained

the ability to confirm the hypothesis by gathering proofs from many sources or experiments or utilizing many processes. The information from each source, experiment, or process reinforced the hypothesis from a slightly varied viewpoint.

This process offered an opportunity to deal with bias and beliefs through rigorous field procedures and protocols. The ultimate goal was to present data as it actually exists, not as one perceives it to exist, but truthfully through the eyes and voice of the participants (Patton, 2002). A rigorous data collection process illuminates findings and eliminates any bias or preconceptions that might influence the interpretation of the data.

Researcher Roles

First, I conducted personal interviews in order to collect data and gather information by interviewing athletes. This qualitative research method allowed me to learn directly from athletes the factors that influenced their departure from community colleges. As a researcher using qualitative method, I believe that another human being is the only instrument that is sufficiently complex to comprehend and learn about human existence. My research demonstrated that conversation is the common technique used to learn about this phenomenon in the sports world. I perfected this technique as I performed field research based on interaction between me (researcher) and the individuals studied (athletes).

Next, I used personal interview data and information that I collected from African American male student athletes enrolled at the community college. I chose a community college because I am employed as a Dean in the Student Services division at a community college. I have a significant amount of experience in conducting objective, data-seeking interviews, as well as abiding by policy and procedure based on established Community College District rules and regulations. As principal investigator, I performed the tasks of a study designer, data collector, interpreter and documentarian. I minimized

my role as a colleague to avoid misunderstanding and confusion; I did not want my researcher role to affect my potential or diminish the integrity of my data. I also minimized participant reactivity and undesirable researcher influence.

Finally, since I was collecting in-depth information, I believed that I only needed a limited number of respondents. In fact, a large number of respondents would have hindered my ability to go “in-depth,” and to gain an understanding of each respondent. The exact number of respondents depended on the subjects investigated and codes formulated. The purpose of interviewing was to learn the feelings, thoughts and intentions of each participant, as these are things that cannot be observed. My role was to obtain rich descriptions of participants' experiences, and how those experiences have influenced major decisions that negatively impacted them.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach that was used by the researcher. The research design, researcher biases, data collections, and analyses were discussed. These components provided an in-depth understanding that contributed to African American male athletes leading to their departure from community colleges. Unfortunately inequality in America is impossible to avoid. Inequality is omnipresent and one would have to go to enormous lengths to find a component of life that is absent of unfairness and injustice. Education has come a very long way from some of its transgressions with respect to equality or the lack thereof; however, there is much work to be done. Despite these favorable conditions, the problem of student attrition remains a major concern for community colleges.

The demand for accountability applies more pressure to provide evidence of student success. A 2009 report by Public Agenda: “With Their Whole Lives Ahead of

Them: Myths and Realities about Why so Many Students Fail to Finish College,' explored student completion and found students enrolled work more than 45% more than 20 hours a week, 25% attend a residential college, 23% have dependent children. Findings related to my dissertation topic are derived from many studies and sources, and underscore the many challenges African American male student athletes face, along with how those challenges impact their decisions to complete, or withdraw from completion, of their post-secondary education. First, athletes create bonds and establish individual and group identities (Hanson & Kraus, 1998). Hanks & Eckland (year) also stated, "Involvement in sports connects students to other students who plan to attend college and to coaches and faculty who pay special attention to athletics" (Hanson & Kraus, 1998, p. 95).

According to Richards & Aries (1999) "Athletes at small institutions are kept in harmony with the educational purposes of the institution and where student-athletes are more representative of the student body as a whole" (p. 212). In general, student-athletes in today's higher education share many of the same concerns. Bredemeier & Shields (1984) "Sports is a unique context sometimes characterized as a 'world within a world'" (p. 7). For example, the typical concerns and moral restraints, such as inflicting pain on an opponent, are temporarily set aside. Because student athlete participation creates opportunities for individuals, it also allows for abuse of the educational system (Chartrand & Lent, 1987."

In summary, diversity of students served, unique regions, diverse goals and needs of communities make it difficult to assess and evaluate the impact of community colleges; but, the community college is still perhaps best prepared and equipped to respond to present challenges and the nations call to action.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS

I analyzed the factors that impact the retention of African American male athletes at Sunny Cal Community College, the pseudonym for a large community college in Southern California. I also examined the extent to which academic support, tutoring, and peer involvement affected the retention of black male athletes. The primary goal of this study was to identify the obstacles that prevented black male athletes at the community college level from persisting in college and to explore factors that mitigated these obstacles—for example, counseling services, retention programs, and greater faculty contact. Gaining an understanding of the issue of retention among black male athletes, and the experiences that lead to them departing or remaining in college can help academic leaders develop new retention programs and help strengthen existing programs by addressing areas of improvement.

I culled the information in this chapter from structured interviews with 11 black male athletes at the community college and four members of the school faculty, for a total of 15 participants. I required each athlete participant to be enrolled at the community college at the time of the interview and playing basketball for the college. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 26, and several student participants had previously attended either a community college or a four-year university. In addition to the black male athletes, I interviewed four members of the faculty and administration, all of whom at the time of the study were employed by the community college.

This chapter is organized into four sections: participant profiles that provide a personal background of the athletes I interviewed, emerging themes based on the athlete

interviews, emerging themes based on the staff member interviews, and themes culled from both sets of interviews, which provides a collective understanding of African American male student athletes at the community college.

Participant Profiles

Frank was a 26-year-old man who had previously attended several community colleges in Southern California, as well as, Penny University, a pseudonym for a large and popular four-year university where he was a business major. When asked about his current occupation, he responded “basketball player,” which revealed his ambition. Frank had no idea what level of education his mother had achieved, but said that his father had obtained a high school diploma. Frank also said that he had some prior collegiate experience, but he did not elaborate about that experience.

Frank’s primary goal was to achieve basketball success as a professional, but he also understood that obtaining an education was important. He was majoring in welding, but was also enrolled in an English class, calculus class, and a health class. His GPA was 2.9, and though he felt good about that status, he said, “I have to go higher, though,” clearly aware that academic success was a necessary corollary to any athletic success that he would achieve. He admitted that his prior academic failure was directly related to the fact that he had three children, but that he had taken advantage of programs such as EOPS to stay enrolled in community college. Although he hoped to make it as a professional basketball player, Frank also had plans to become a welder to provide a secondary position in the event that he was unable to play professional basketball. In contrast to Frank, Malik was a 19-year-old student without children who was attending community college primarily to fulfill his professional basketball aspirations, but was also learning

automotive technology. Malik said that his mother had attended college but she had not earned a degree, but he had no idea about the educational background of his father.

Malik was undecided about which major to pursue, and made it clear that playing basketball was his main priority. However, he also indicated that he was interested in automotive technology, a passion he had developed when he and his father spent Sundays together repairing vehicles. A friend had drawn him to the community college from high school that was enrolled at the campus and had recommended the college as a place where Malik could pursue his athletic and academic dreams. Malik cited his mother as a strong academic influence, especially because she was currently enrolled at the same community college that he attended. He cited the Umoja and EOPS programs as vital to the success of black males on campus.

Preston was a 23 year-old majoring in business. He cited his current occupation as being a student majoring in business and said that he had been enrolled for six semesters, which is the equivalent of three academic years. Both his mother and father had completed high school, but neither had pursued an advanced degree. Preston had previously attended SM College, a pseudonym for a city college with a large student population but did not have a positive experience, because he found the campus too big and impersonal: "It was too crowded, so there wasn't any individual attention," he responded, when asked about his previous college. But his experience at his current community college was a good one, and what especially stood out for him was the effort of instructors to provide specialized attention and encouragement to overcome obstacles that he faced such as financial hardship, housing issues, and even the death of those closest to him. Unlike other interviewees who cited their parents or a counselor as a corollary to their academic success, Preston indicated that he was self-motivated and was

driven by the need to become the first person in his family to graduate from college.

A 20-year-old student-athlete, Peter said the comfort level he felt drew him to the community college by its proximity to his home and on campus, especially the diversity of the student population. He was undecided about his major but was leaning toward focusing on kinesiology or communications. His mother had completed high school, but Peter had no information about what level of education his father had attained.

Interestingly, he cited the physical layout and beauty of the community college campus as one of the reasons he felt so comfortable at the school: “I just feel comfortable here honestly. My mom likes it as well. It has nice clean scenery. You can see everything here.” This is interesting because Peter placed a premium on how the campus’ design contributed to his level of comfort, which could also provide a boost to his retention, as many studies have linked a student’s comfort at an educational institution with a higher probability of academic success. Peter also indicated that classes such as sociology helped him connect to his own culture by enabling him to engage in class discussion.

One factor that set Peter apart was his admission that he had been part of the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), which was established to provide specialized instruction to students in primary school and secondary with identified disabilities. Although he did not reveal his specific disability, he did say that once he was engaged in a subject, he caught on quickly and was able to do well. Peter was driven by a need to become a role model for younger black children, especially since he grew up without a father. Given the hardships experienced by his mother and younger brother, his primary goal was to earn a Division I basketball scholarship that would lead to a professional career and provide security for the entire family. Peter was raised primarily by his mother and grandmother, and he mentioned that he, his mother, and his brother had been forced

to sleep in their car after being evicted prior to his enrollment at the community college. It was clear that circumstances had positioned him as the future “breadwinner” of the family, and he felt both pride and pressure to ensure the financial future of his family despite the long odds of making a professional living as a basketball player.

At 22, KJ was a communications major with whom I had a particularly good rapport, because we shared the same major. When asked if he enjoyed speaking in front of a group of people, KJ said that had been forced to adjust to public speaking but that once he learned how to listen closely to his communications class instructor, things became much easier. He mentioned that connecting with people was a major aspect of building character, and he clearly articulated his personal theory of communication: “I think the bigger thought is that people focus too much on trying to be a more sophisticated speaker,” he said. “Trying to speak in a way that they are not comfortable with, or trying to use new words. You can stick to something simple and keep it rolling.” This statement showed a remarkable understanding of the purpose of communication, which is to communicate information, knowledge, and opinions in a clear way that is easy to understand. KJ seemed to draw inspiration from his parents. His mother had obtained her AA degree, and his father had attended the same community college where KJ was enrolled, but had not completed his degree program. KJ had previously attended Los Angeles West College in 2012, a pseudonym for a large community college in the city, where he had also played on the college’s basketball team. KJ was forced to leave school due to financial issues and emotional problems at home. KJ admitted that he had struggled with prioritizing academics over basketball, and that as a freshman at the Los Angeles West College, he had expected that success and achievement would be given to him whether he worked hard or not, because he was a member of the basketball team. In

his own words, he was “slapped by reality,” and as his problems mounted, he was forced to leave the basketball team and leave college. After two and a half years of working to earn a living and helping out his mother with the bills, he finally found stability at his current community college. Another admission KJ made during the interview was his trepidation at attending the campus because of its location in the downtown section of the city where he feared he would run into a lot of the people from high school who had been rivals on the basketball court and on the street. But he said those fears were assuaged when he arrived on campus and marveled at the beauty of the campus and the academic possibilities offered by the various trade courses.

Jessie 25 was a 20-year-old athlete who was interested in obtaining a degree in sports psychology but was primarily focused on transferring to a major university to play basketball and catch the attention of professional scouts. Jessie 25 said that his mother had obtained a high school diploma and completed some college courses, and that his father was a high school graduate. Jessie 25 had played varsity basketball in high school, but during his freshman year, he earned three failing grades which compromised his ability to apply to a major university. He also said that he had previously attended a large community college, but that a car accident and a resulting injury forced him to leave. He then learned about his current community college from a neighborhood friend. More intensely than any other participant, Jessie 25 viewed community college as a way station for his return to a major university, where he felt certain he could excel at Division I basketball. Unlike a majority of the other participants, Jessie 25 chose not to turn to college counselors or mentors when he faced challenges, preferring to work out his problems by playing basketball.

Sarge, a 23-year-old athlete was a sign graphics major who was also an Army Reservist. His mother had attended community college, though Sarge did not indicate whether she had obtained an AA degree. However, Sarge said that his father had completed coursework at a community college and was pursuing a bachelor's degree. After high school, his mother had given him an ultimatum: get a full-time job or join the military. Growing up in a tough neighborhood, Sarge said that he avoided the gang-life by attending church and staying clean. The military appealed to him because it was an opportunity to get out of the dangerous circumstances where he lived. Moreover, Sarge said that he had been unable to find a good job, so he felt as if the military was a place where he could find structure. He enlisted in the Navy in 2010, and as of the time of the interview, he was classified as an Army reservist, even though he had begun his military life in the Navy.

Sarge emphasized that there had been tremendous pressure on him growing up to join a gang, but that church offered a sanctuary that helped him avoid making bad choices. He also said that military life was an extension of the values and discipline that his parents had instilled in him, so that appealed to him in terms of maintaining focus on his goals. A major factor for Sarge in deciding to attend his current community college was that his mother had pursued a cosmetology course at the campus and enjoyed the experience. Sarge's tuition and books were being paid for by the military, which he cited as a major reason for staying in school. He also indicated that the family environment on campus made him feel welcomed and accepted.

Paul, 19, a criminal justice major was the only participant with a parent that had earned a Master's degree. He expressed a strong desire to earn his AA degree and complete his criminal justice degree at a four-year university, and it was clear to me that

his goal was driven in part by the standards set by his parents. Paul's strong educational ambitions set him apart from the other athletes in that he seemed to understand that academic success was more important than athletic success. "School is important," he said. "Without school, I can't play basketball. My mom pushes me to do better. She wants the best for me." Paul also said that his family and two of his instructors were instrumental in his pursuit of academic success.

Paul was an example of a student who had received support, encouragement, and expectations from his family that were based on educational goals instead of athletic goals. It was clear to me in speaking to him that Paul understood that prioritizing education over basketball would provide him the best chance for future success. Another factor that worked in his favor was that Paul was involved with the Umoja and EOPS programs, which he said aided him with grants for books, tutoring and counseling. He expressed enthusiasm for an upcoming class in African American studies that he felt would help bring him closer to his culture.

Jonathan, 23, was a business major who previously attended another large community college before settling in at his current campus. Similar to Paul, Jonathan's parents had obtained degrees from four-year universities. What was notable about Jonathan was that he immediately expressed a goal of becoming a professional barber when asked why he was enrolled at the community college. Jonathan had spent his formative years in a barbershop and had developed a love and appreciation for barbering as a career. He did not elaborate further about his experiences growing up in a barbershop, but his ambition to cut people's hair for a living demonstrated how that cultural experience had impacted his adult life. But in choosing a business major, it was clear that he wanted not just to become a barber but also to own his own shop. I believe

that Paul's family background had inculcated him with the importance of education. It was evident in the way he spoke about his future, and especially when he said, "The first thing I did was see a counselor," he said. "Then I went to financial aid to make sure everything was ready for class." He also said he had used many of the retention programs the community college offered, including the use of academic counselors and networking. He felt welcomed on campus, mainly because he found other students were friendly and approachable.

Tone was a 20-year-old student who had chosen to major in English. His mother had obtained an associates degree, but his father had only completed middle school. Tone made it clear that he had chosen the community college primarily for the basketball opportunities that the campus offered and cited the coach of the team as someone who could get him noticed at the junior college level. When asked about prioritizing his academic goals, Tone was honest and said that in the first few months of his enrollment he had neglected his studies, which he admitted was a flaw that had also complicated his high school tenure. He also said that had he given academics more attention in high school, he would likely be playing basketball for a major university and the way he said it expressed regret.

What I found especially interesting about Tone was that he didn't just view basketball as a ticket to fame and fortune, but also as a means by which he could expand his social circle, and develop new relationships. He said, "Basketball is a national world thing, it is a ticket to better relationships with different types of people. Networking and stuff like that. Providing me to either showcase my talent playing professional or even training professional. Just knowing people in the basketball world." Tone also indicated that his mother was a guiding force in his academic success, and that her encouragement

had a made a big difference in his retention, especially during times when he wanted to drop out.

Lendale was the last athlete whom I interviewed. He was a 21-year-old student who was majoring in liberal arts but was considering a change to counseling and communications. Lendale came from a family in which his mother had attended college for a few years but had not obtained a degree. Lendale's father had dropped out of high school as a junior, but Lendale had obtained his high school diploma. Lendale said that his driving motivation in attending community college was to improve his chances of future success, but what I found more intriguing was that his secondary motivation was being one of the first members of his extended family to obtain a college degree. He indicated that the only people whom he knew who were actively pursuing a college degree in his family was himself, two cousins, and his younger brother, and he felt a strong sense of responsibility to blaze a path that his other siblings could follow. Lendale relished being a role model for his family and embraced the pressure of upholding a standard of academic success that the rest of them would want to emulate. I could sense Lendale's passion for achieving his educational goals, a passion that would likely be a major factor to his retention, especially in overcoming challenges and obstacles. When asked if his family was instrumental in his academic success, Lendale said that the coach of this basketball team, his uncle, and his cousin were the ones who provided the most encourage for him to remain enrolled in college. Lendale added that because his uncle and cousin had attended the community college, he used them as role models for his own education. Lendale said that his uncle had spent time in prison, and then he said, "...It is just as easy for an African American male to walk on this campus to take classes, than it is to be locked up and to be incarcerated." This belief showed a keen insight on Lendale's

part to recognize that the opportunity presented by community college, and a willingness to maximize that opportunity.

One of the first community college staff members I interviewed was Marcus, a male, full-time academic counselor who had extensive experience dealing with African American athletes, especially those who played on the basketball team. Marcus, who is an African American male, did not disclose his age, but I knew from first-hand knowledge that he had been at the college for quite some time. More of his interview is detailed below, but the thing that struck me the most was his statement that most athletes have no course plan when they first enroll at the community college.

Carla was a 46-year-old woman who was the admissions and records evaluator at the community college. Similar to Marcus, Carla had extensive experience dealing with African American athletes, and what I found most surprising about her comments was her assertion that out-of-state athletes were most likely to seek academic assistance. This was due to the fact that they had more to lose being out of their comfort zone, far away from family, and more fearful of losing their financial aid, because their cost of living was higher than those who could fall back on living with family members if the need arose.

The full range of Carla's insightful comments are found below:

Perhaps most relevant to my study was the participation of Yancey, a 54-year-old office assistant and adjunct counselor for the Athletic Department at the community college. Yancey gave valuable insight into the mentality of athletes who sought help for academic and financial aid issues, citing cultural issues such as incoming athletes' unfamiliarity with the college atmosphere, and lack of information about academic resources, as two of the defining factors for retention.

Karina was a 29-year-old woman who worked as a student services specialist and adjunct counselor for the Counseling Department at the community college. As the youngest of the staff members that I interviewed, she probably had a more Millennial view of the athletes, meaning that because she was in the same generation as the athlete participants and likely had a different perspective on retention than some of the other longer-termed staff members. In fact, when I asked Karina if the African-American male athletes only come to see her when they are in crisis, and she was the only staff member to say that was not her experience. Her comments are detailed in the staff member section toward the end of the chapter.

Emerging Themes: Student Participants

Five major themes emerged from the interviews with the African-American male athletes: the importance of programs such as Umoja and EOPS, the importance of counselors and mentors, whether familial or at the collegiate level, the benefits of an education irrespective of future professional athletic success, the varying intensity with which the male athletes were pursuing a career as a professional basketball player, and the comfort level offered at the community college campus, which seemed to be a defining factor in how the athlete viewed his academic experience. Below, I have catalogued these themes individually for analysis and direct commentary by the participants. In order, the themes are: 1. The importance of programs such as Umoja and EOPS to retention, 2. The vital support provided by counselors and mentors, 3. The educational benefits of retention, 4. The intensity with which some of the athletes pursued a professional career, and 5. The relationship between level of comfort on campus and retention.

Umoja and EOPS: Programs Vital To Student Retention

At least half the male athletes indicated that the Umoja and EOPS programs were vital to their retention, and some said that without these programs, they would not have been able to remain enrolled at the community college. Although Umoja is specifically targeted at black male students, both programs offer academic counseling, mentoring, and the development of an educational plan that conforms to each student's goals. Umoja, however, adds cultural activities, field trips, and a learning community that offers students classes related by a common theme, which is the importance of black males learning about the African diaspora, and studying African American intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, Ida B. Wells, and Frederick Douglass

For some of the athletes, programs such as Umoja and EOPS were one of the main reasons that they had chosen to attend that particular community college. For example, Paul indicated that Umoja was one of the reasons he felt welcomed and valued at the college. "We learn a lot in the meetings," he said. "They offer tutoring if you need help with any of your classes. There is a large network of people involved. It just feels like a big family." He also referenced EOPS: "They help you with book grants and things like that for students with limited income," he said. "They also offer tutoring as well as counseling."

For Preston, burdened with having to raise three children, EOPS was especially beneficial. "They help with money also for books and things," he said. "And I'm a volunteer for the student aid. They have a lot of programs here that's good for people if they put their mind to it." Jonathan echoed this sentiment, saying, "I am in Umoja and EOPS. They help financially and with books and supplies. They also help a lot with network and meeting different people." Peter went even further in his appreciation for

Umoja. “I am a part of the Umoja program and I really like it. I don’t know how to explain it, but really their focus is on helping us black men succeed. It is really heartwarming. It really feels good to know that someone is really worried about you and trying to help you succeed. You know because out in this world it is really crazy for us. So, it really feels good to know that someone genuinely cares to see us succeed.”

It was evident that these athletes relied on Umoja and EOPS to help them buy books, supplies, and to help them network with other students with similar academic goals. The support structure of Umoja in particular was designed to imbue African American male students with a solid educational foundation. Umoja is based on 10 practices: counseling; ‘the Porch,’ which is an unstructured learning environment in which students are encouraged to be brutally honest; live learning, which is a spontaneous way of teaching that does away with a class syllabus; the importance of written and spoken language; studying the intellectual and artistic African Americans that have influenced black culture; studying the African diaspora; community-building intelligence; accelerated courses in English, math, ESL and counseling; mentoring; and a dedicated study space on campus that encourages African American male students to take their education seriously.

The Academic and Personal Support Provided By Counselors and Mentors

Nearly every male athlete whom I interviewed cited an academic counselor, teacher, or mentor as vital to their academic success. Whether that mentor was a parent, uncle, other family member, or the coach of the basketball team, that individual contributed meaningfully not only to the academic progress of the athlete but provided the necessary encouragement to help the athlete overcome financial, emotional, and environmental challenges that could have resulted in leaving college. For example, Tone

talked about how his mother was the key to his academic success. “I can’t deny her any type of credit,” he said. “Even when I felt like giving up, which has happened a couple of times, she helped me with giving me options if I do quit. And even if I do quit, she will still be there for me. Not only do I deserve more, but she deserves more. My mother made it definitely clear by her tone and words that supported whether I failed or succeeded and that had the effect of motivating me not to disappoint her. By providing a safety net in which failure did not represent the end of his academic journey, Tone’s mother had given her son the type of validation and assurance necessary for him to succeed in class and on the basketball court.

In much the same way, Frank talked about how the mentorship of his basketball coach had helped him in ways that went beyond the classroom and the court. “Coach Harris helped me out every chance he got. He bettered me to being a better basketball player, a better man, and a better father to my children.” Frank attributed his academic success to his coach’s strong influence, and that influence was even more important for him, because as a father of three children, he faced additional pressures to succeed. One aspect of mentorship that became evident in interviewing Malik was the effectiveness of having a person of influence who was also attending the community college. When asked how he prioritized his academic goals, Malik said, “School first. How I did it was that I would go home and my mom would ask me if I had schoolwork. My mom, she is enrolled here. We had class together. She was on top of my schoolwork. She helps me get into the other programs. I am in EOPS and Umoja.”

Instructors were also cited as mentors. For example, when asked about his academic success, Jonathan said, “The teachers. Certain teachers at this school, especially, they break down the subjects. They teach you in different types of ways so

you can understand. In order to do that, they have to be open.” Jonathan was clear in his assertion that his retention was largely influenced by the way his teachers got involved in teaching and ensuring that he understood the material. But it was equally important to him that his teachers were open to adopting new styles of instruction to facilitate his understanding of the subject matter. Multiple studies have linked strong faculty engagement to student success in the classroom, and it seems clear to me that for African American male athletes who already had huge demands on their time, teachers who understood how to tailor their instruction for clarity could provide the motivation for these athletes to perform well academically.

For some, “success” wasn’t simply measured in class grades but in remaining enrolled with the ultimate goal of earning an AA degree. One notable example of this trend was Jessie 25’s poignant answer when I asked him what were the major factors that were contributing to his academic success? “My mom and my sister,” he said. “My mom, she has a second job as a teacher. She was doing that and going to school at the same time, but she stopped when my sister passed away.” Jessie 25 had experienced a traumatic life event that could have derailed his athletic and academic goals, but he understood that giving up and dropping out because of his difficult circumstances would not have honored his sister’s memory, or his mother’s sacrifices on his behalf. Family had become one of the main reasons that Jessie 25 wanted to remain in school and achieve his goals.

In much the same way as Jessie 25, Sarge wanted to obtain his degree to conform to his mother’s belief that education was vital to his success. Sarge explained how he went about achieving his academic goals on a daily basis, saying:

“I prioritize. I actually see how my schedule is and I work around it. The first semester I had class from 7 am to 12 pm. And then I had a body conditioning class from 1:30 to 2:30. After that we have practice at 4. Between those classes I go the library and work on my assignments or sometimes I would event stay after class and use the computers there. I actually have a lot of time after practice. After practice it would be like 6 or 7 p.m.”

It was also clear that mentorship was vital to retention not just because it provided a bulwark against despair, doubt, and low self-esteem, but because it was a necessary palliative to challenges such as navigating dangerous neighborhoods, and finding the means to get to the campus every day. Many of the participants lived in areas of the city that were known for drug use and gang violence, and some directly referred to the challenges this posed to attending classes. Sarge spoke about the lure of gang life in his neighborhood, and how church and a strong family ethic had saved him from pursuing a life of crime. The pull of gangs and crime cannot be overstated for many of these participants whose formative years had been spent in an environment that encouraged expressions of violent masculinity that were in direct contrast to achievement through athletic or academic prowess. Multiple studies have identified the collective envy of those living in poor urban neighborhoods towards individuals who demonstrate the talent to escape the confines of their economic disadvantages through sports. This envy, while not always violent, presents a formidable challenge in that the Black athlete who possesses exceptional talent is often pressured to remain ‘one of the boys,’ which is a coded way of killing that individual’s dream, because it represents a viable means of economic escape that the group cannot share with the talented individual.

Educational and Career Benefits of Degree Attainment at the Community College

The majority of athletes were aware that earning an AA degree would provide some measure of security in the event that they were unable to achieve their goal of playing professional basketball. I sensed that many of the athlete participants felt pride at working toward an academic goal, irrespective of their basketball success. In some cases, this pride was due to the fact that the athlete represented the first person in the family to obtain a college degree. In other cases, the value of a degree and how it could further their financial success was the main attraction.

I sensed that this pride was rooted in the belief by many of these athletes that the majority of the world viewed them as just athletically gifted men who could do little beyond the basketball court. In other words, these were young African American males who were keenly aware of the stereotype that the only reason they were attending college was to advance their athletic ambitions, rather than to obtain an education at the same time. So for many of these athletes, an AA degree would provide a loud response to those who questioned why they were truly at the community college, and in more than one case, that AA degree would merely be the beginning of their educational journey, with the ultimate goal being a degree from a major four-year university.

Many of the participants understood the importance of an education, regardless of their professional basketball ambitions. The cliché of the black male athlete who merely uses school as a means of advancing his athletic agenda was not borne out in this study. In fact, each of the black male athletes expressed some desire to obtain a degree as a viable means of earning a living. This was the case for Preston, who said, “I feel like I am a self-motivator. Really, I am going to be the first to graduate from my family. That is really my motivation. And my teachers have really been an inspiration. They really push

me.” He also talked about his level of commitment to studying for his courses when I asked how many hours he studied during the week. “It depends on the material,” he said. “My cousin said that is why he doesn’t want to go to school. Sometimes my cousin sees me studying at two and three in the morning. In contrast, Tone talked about how the community college was impacting him as a human being. “This community college was the best academic decision I made in a long time,” he said. “It will not only better me as a student, but as a person.”

KJ focused more on the growth benefits that his education was providing. “I took chemistry,” he said. “I took science classes, and even though you are supposed to organize it around science, teachers always make sure they take from the lesson and put it forth into basically everyday life. They might tell you something within the lesson and they might apply it to everyday life. How you can go about your future. Some of the professors were really great.” What I found remarkable about KJ is that the bulk of his interview was about how he wanted to achieve success as a basketball pro, but despite his stated goal of attending the community college for basketball, KJ still was able to view his academics as an important aspect of his personal growth, which showed an understanding that education would ultimately be more important for his future, given the small likelihood that he could actually make a living as a professional basketball player.

Other athletes had more tangible goals that did not involve basketball. For example, Jonathan had mentioned that owning a barbershop was the primary reason for his attending the community college. He also felt that the college gave students every opportunity to succeed through its retention programs. “When I first got here,” he said, “I always saw most programs hosting fundraisers, and other activities on campus. It gives people time to open up and ask questions.” Jonathan had great incentives to achieve his

academic goals, because both his parents had bachelor's degrees, and he understood that without his own degree, his business dreams would not be possible. Despite the fact that he was on the basketball team, he never mentioned a desire to pursue a professional basketball career. Jonathan knew that his financial success was dependent more on his academic performance than on the skills he displayed on the basketball court, a knowledge that was no doubt influenced by the example of two parents with advanced degrees.

Similar to Jonathan, Paul made it clear from the beginning of the interview that his primary goal was to obtain an education and that basketball was a secondary pursuit. When asked why he was attending the community college, he answered, "To further my education and reach my goals." When asked about those goals, he said, "To graduate and to stay on course for my education. I want to get an AA degree here and transfer and get my Criminal Justice degree at a university." Paul was actively involved in Umoja and in EOPS, which he relied on for tutoring and networking, but he understood that ultimately, it was his responsibility to succeed. "School is important," he said. "Without school, I can't play basketball."

Pursuit of Professional Basketball Career

With a few exceptions, most of the athlete participants expressed a desire to play professional basketball, but as mentioned in the education benefits section, there were noticeable differences in the intensity with which this goal was pursued. Some of the athletes believed that community college attendance was simply one stop on their journey toward Division I college basketball and, presumably, the NBA or another professional league. A smaller number of the male athletes placed academic achievement above their

desire to play professional basketball, recognizing that educational success was a safer bet than the extremely small likelihood that they could make it to the NBA.

For athletes such as Peter, basketball was more than just a passion, it was the only way he could conceive of transforming the destiny of his family. Here is what he said: Whatever I am going through outside of the court, when I am on the court it is a surreal feeling because I am out there doing what I love to do. I am out there competing alongside my brother. I am trying to make a better living for my mother and my little brother. I just fell in love with the sport. I know I can win a scholarship. That is my main goal. I don't want my mom have to pay for

anything. I really want to get my AA degree then transfer playing basketball. I'm just going to be honest. I love basketball. It is my passion.

In Peter's case, basketball represented the Holy Grail. It was the crown jewel that he was trying to obtain, something he had dreamed about since he was a child. And now that he was in community college and playing basketball that dream no longer seem far-fetched or impossible, rather, it felt tangible, something he could actually achieve. He perceived that his talent was enough to provide all the financial means he needed to ensure his and his family's future economic stability.

Given the challenges he had faced, I didn't find it surprising that Peter's entire notion of retention was seeded in the idea of maintaining his eligibility for basketball, rather than remaining enrolled for academic success. He catalogued his struggles in this way: "Because I didn't grow up with my dad I grew up with my mom and my grandma. My grandma she always tells me, 'If you want something you have to work hard.' I have a little brother too, and I just really want to make them proud. All the stuff that we went through, I used to sleep in cars with my mom; she had got kicked out the house one time.

I used to stay with my aunt sometimes, me and sometimes, me and sometimes we didn't know if our mom was coming back. It was a lot of stuff going on, but by the grace of God, [we] stuck through."

For some participants, the pursuit of a professional basketball career had been short-circuited by bad grades in high school, which made the dream of playing in the NBA that much more challenging. Jessie 25, however, had a similar passion to defy the odds, and achieve his dream of playing professional basketball. When asked why he was attending community college, he responded: "Honestly, I intend to transfer to a university, and see if I can take my athletic abilities further." He also expressed dissatisfaction with having to attend a community college that would lessen his exposure to professional scouts, but acknowledged that it was his fault. "I kind of messed up my freshman year. I got three Ds so that messed me up for university. That kind of stopped universities. I later got into a car accident where I got hurt and it stopped me from working out."

Eventually, Jessie 25 had found a home at his current community college, but viewed it more as a steppingstone for his greater ambitions. "Yeah, but now I want to get to university," he said. "I feel like I should be there. I would really like to be playing there, but if not okay." Jessie 25 had identified the University of Memphis as a school that had a sports psychology major, which he was interested in, as well as a thriving Division I basketball program, which NBA stars such as Derrick Rose of the Chicago Bulls, and Tyreke Evans of the New Orleans Pelicans had attended. Jessie 25's focus on a future professional basketball career was evident in the fact that he did not participate in any organizations or activities on campus, and did not make use of academic counseling to help him overcome challenges at school. Instead, he retreated to the basketball court to

help him work out personal issues, which showed the extent to which he had committed himself not only to using basketball as a means of economic advancement, but as a means of stabilizing his emotions in times of duress.

What is notable about Peter and Jessie 25 is that their aggressive pursuit of NBA stardom was in the minority respective to the other athlete participants. While every male athlete interviewed expressed passion for basketball, a majority of them realized that their playing days were finite. Undoubtedly, the fact that basketball at the community college level doesn't carry the same prestige and access to the NBA and other professional league as Division I basketball skewed the results. In other words, Black male athletes at traditional NCAA powerhouses such as North Carolina, Georgetown and UCLA, would likely have expressed a higher level of ambition toward pursuing basketball as a career.

The Relationship Between Comfort Level and Retention

I was especially interested in hearing how the male athletes perceived their level of comfort at the community college, because the extent to which a student is made to feel welcome can have a positive effect on retention. Perhaps the strongest theme that emerged from the interviews was the unanimity among the black athletes related to the comfort they felt at the community college. Every participant indicated that the community college environment was welcoming and that the degree to which they felt comfortable at school contributed positively to their academic success. Each athlete said that he felt a sense of belonging, which was driven in part by the variety of academic and social programs designed to help new students assimilate. Though this study only represents a small sample size of the larger population of black male students, it is important to recognize that the feeling of acceptance that these participants experienced was not by accident. The community college offered special programs and activities that

were designed to elevate the academic and social experience on campus. And from the interviews, it is clear that the athletes, who availed themselves of these programs, felt a higher level of satisfaction at school.

The community college for this study is located in a downtown section of a city, but the administrators have made an effort to beautify the campus and make people feel as if they are in an oasis. Although the surroundings are fraught with crime and poverty, the community college is well maintained, with manicured grass, hedges, and clear views of the downtown skyscrapers. I've often noticed that students who stop by my office will remark that they feel as if they are in another world when they arrive on campus, a place where they feel safe, secure and empowered to learn. 'Comfort' is a catchall term that has many connotations, but I quickly discovered that every athlete I interviewed understood the context in which I asked the question. No one asked me to clarify what I meant by feeling welcomed at the campus, and in fact, the most striking aspect of this question was the fact that not one of the male athletes expressed any level of discomfort about how they were perceived on campus. No participant made a reference to any type of racial animus, which was surprising, given the race-based controversies that are embroiling many colleges throughout the country. Granted, the sample size was small, but none of the athletes brought up any feelings of hostility regarding their experience at the community college, which may be attributable to the efforts of the school's administrators to create an atmosphere where every student felt validated.

Sarge, who had a greater life experience than some of the other athletes because of his background in the military spoke about this sense of belonging. "Just the way we walk around and the people treat you. We don't treat you like just because we don't know you we are not going to speak to you. Here, they don't treat you like an outsider. And we

are family oriented. As you walk past somebody they say, ‘good morning, how are you doing? Or have a great day.’ It puts a smile on your face.” Tone followed up on that sentiment when asked if he felt welcome at the community college. “Without a doubt, I believe it is more so the staff members. They look for opportunities to help people in our culture.” By ‘culture,’ Tone was clearly referencing African American students, and was likely speaking specifically about Black athletes on campus, which is the demographic for which he had most experience. For Preston, the sense of belonging was a strong aspect of his experience at the community college, but he added something more when he spoke about the school. “I believe they all could feel like they belong here by the things that are opportune to them,” he said. “Like they just want to feel like they are important.” When I pressed him to define ‘importance,’ he said, “Like doing something like being able to help someone on the team or swim team or whatever it is. Or if they need help with work and all of that, you can help them; they can feel that they’re home. I can see myself at [this school] until I transfer from here. When I first came here, I didn’t think it was going to be like this either.”

Preston’s response when asked whether or not African American students felt a sense of belonging on campus was unique because he referenced the efforts of those who had come before him: “Yes we do. I just wish everyone will stop taking it for granted. We shouldn’t waste it. People fought for us to get this free education. Why take it for granted? I recommend all people to come here because we have really great programs.” Preston had tapped into something that I felt was an undercurrent in all my conversations with the athletes, mainly, the notion that the freedom to display their athletic talent and to achieve academic success was predicated on the struggles that had taken place during the Civil Rights era. Whether or not these black men consciously understood it, their very

presence at the community college spoke volumes about the advancement that black males had made in terms of social viability, i.e., being accepted not just because they had athletic gifts that were exploitable, but also because the old tropes about black men succeeding on their physical prowess alone had been vanquished. Preston's response was instructive, because it framed retention not just in terms of athletic or academic success, but in the larger context of taking advantage of the opportunities that were available solely because people had bled and died for the civil and educational freedoms that had been so long denied by the power structure in 1960s America.

To be sure, the fact that I only interviewed African American male athletes who were currently enrolled likely skewed the results. Had I broadened the interview participants to include those who had recently dropped out, I may have heard a different set of responses regarding the welcoming aspect of the community college. I'm left to wonder if those who had failed to remain at the community college would have had the same positive feelings about how they perceived their level of comfort while at the school. In and of itself, the level of comfort may not have been the deciding factor for those who had dropped out of the community college, but even those who had felt welcomed at the school may have cited discomfort on campus as a reason for their lack of retention, even if that wasn't the case when they first arrived on campus. In other words, negative views of how athletes perceive their comfort level may be retroactive when combined with other factors such as lack of family support, lack of financial aid, and subpar academic performance.

Emerging Themes: Faculty/Staff Participants

Three major themes emerged from my interviews with the four staff members at the community college: 1. The belief that African American male athletes only seek

academic counseling during times of crisis, 2. The cultural and language barriers that make retention a challenge to many black male athletes, and 3. The lack of social integration skills in African American male athletes. The staff member participants detail these major themes below with direct commentary.

How Academic Crises Affect Retention

Three of the four staff members said that most African American male athletes only visited them when they were in academic crisis. The danger of this type of behavior, as catalogued by the staff members, was that the athletes were often so far gone into their academic crisis that their eligibility was at risk. Marcus, the full-time counselor at the community college provided some keen insight into how African American male athletes get into academic trouble, which directly affects their retention. When asked if he felt that black male student athletes only visit him during times of crisis, this was his response: Yes. They come in at a time of crisis to find ways to try to keep a good GPA, maybe a 2.0 or they have questions about meeting the transferability requirement to the four-year colleges and/or universities. So the student would come in and say something like, I need to graduate this semester or this June coming up, then it's like you this is your first time coming in to see a counselor to develop some kind of roadmap that the student should have been following in the first place. Then they want to know, what are the required courses I need to take to receive this scholarship? Really the athlete should come in the very first semester or second semester to be given proper guidance. A lot of athletes sometimes wait until their last semester to start asking questions.

Marcus said that the problem with many of the athletes was that they didn't realize that coming into to see him at the beginning of the semester should have been their first priority. Because without laying out an academic plan, many athletes are setting

themselves up for failure, according to Marcus. He also said that another major obstacle is an athlete not understanding the transfer requirements when they want to attend a four-year university, typically to advance their basketball ambitions. Marcus felt that the key to the retention of African American athletes at his community college was engaging coaches and counselors to stress the importance of having an academic roadmap that was easy for the athlete to follow. Because for many of these athletes who are coming out of high school, dealing with classes, credits, and what is needed to graduate or to transfer to a university is unfamiliar. In high school, counselors handled much of this, but at the community college level, the athlete is expected to know what coursework will lead to graduation or transfer, and if that athlete isn't conscientious about taking the right classes, eligibility and retention becomes an issue.

But it was not just the counselor at the community college who had dealt with athletes seeking help during an academic crisis. Patricia, an admissions and records evaluator, responsible for admissions, registration and graduation of all students at the community college, had her share of similar experiences. Her primary function was to liaison with students, staff, faculty and the community to provide information relevant to academic success. She was also in charge of ensuring that student grades were accurate, preparing official and unofficial transcripts, handling students who were on academic probation or subject to academic disqualification, and dealing with administrative matters related to change of name, address and course major. When asked if the African American male athletes at the school only came to her when they were in a crisis, Patricia said:

I find that out-of-state athletes are more prone to seek assistance than at the point of a crisis, because first, they are away from home, then being out-of-state, and if

they are not meeting the requirements to maintain their financial aid eligibility to participate in the sport that they came to the school to play, or as well as possibly impacting housing and being an out-of-state student, those kinds of moments of crisis, then yes, athletes do come to us during high anxiety crisis to seek help.

They also come to us to help with their education in times of crisis. They need tutoring and they are trying to stay in their classes, because some of them are not trying to fail their courses. When it comes down to it, they want to pass their classes and most of them don't want to fail their classes.

But she did acknowledge that retention was often affected by the pressures many of these athletes placed on themselves to make it to a professional league, such as the NBA, or one of the European leagues. In her own words:

If the African American male athlete is coming to the school to play a sport, of course, nine times out of ten, in the back of their mind is the hope of going to the professional leagues, to make the money and in terms, that money would in term finally finance their children and also their parents who are in need. They want to take care of their mother and father, who have been around to support them, all of their lives. Then comes their dreams, homes, cars, and whatever else they deem to enjoy. They want to do these things, and in their minds, if they don't, they are letting down a lot of people and this is a lot of pressure for one person. They want to do these things and meet these marks because they don't want to let people down. This in itself is pressure and lends itself to many crisis.

When I spoke to Yancey, a 53 year-old office assistant and athletic department adjunct counselor, she also stated that she had seen plenty of athletes come and go from the community college, and she echoed Marcus and Pat's opinion that most of the

African American male student athletes that she dealt with, only came to see her when a crisis arose. When I asked why this was such a persistent problem, she said, “First, I don’t believe that they know that there are resources available to them, such as, right now a counselor in the athletic department. In researching some of our athletes many of them have never met with a counselor since they have been here on campus. No one tells them, and I just believe it is a lack of information.”

By contrast, Karina, a student services specialist and adjunct counselor for the counseling department, had a different take than the rest of her colleagues when I asked her whether the African American male athletes only visited her when they were in academic trouble:

When I took on the role of being one of the athletic counselors in the fall of 2015 this past academic semester,” she said, “I started to create an environment where students could drop in at any time for anything. So in my experience students don’t come only in a crisis, but they do come in to talk about different things that may be affecting their academic progress with different questions or just trying to find a balance between their class schedules, classes, games, and how they are going to complete all of those tasks in a single semester.

She did acknowledge, however, that not all the African American male athletes at the college were conscientious about keeping up with their academic goals and progress, which could lead to some challenges later in the semester. But it’s clear that for three of the four staff members, the fact that many of the African American athletes on campus often waited until they were in deep academic trouble before seeking counseling, was a major obstacle to retention.

Cultural Barriers That Negatively Affect Retention

Another major theme that emerged from my conversation with the staff members was the cultural barriers that existed, which prevented many of the African American male student athletes from understanding how to go about handling their academic progress. For Marcus, part of the problem was that too many young black men arriving on campus had prioritized the wrong thing. Marcus said that many athletes lost focus on their class work to concentrate on improving their basketball skills. When I asked him if part of the issue was cultural, Marcus had this to say:

Yes, sometimes the cultural barriers can work against them. They are not as polished as we want them to be. Many of the athletes look for the coaches to help pull them through their college years. Athletes are looking for mentors in counselors, teachers, and coaches. I have seen coaches encourage athletes, through English, Math and other academic obstacles.

Yancey agreed with Marcus about these barriers, but placed much of the blame on the fact that incoming freshmen had no way of understanding how different things were going to be in community college versus high school. She said:

Some of our athletes are freshman, coming right out of high school and they are not use to being in a community college atmosphere, so it's a little cultural shock when they get here because now they are responsible for their classes, registration, getting their grades and communicating with their instructors and that's a cultural shock for many of them.

Although some of the athletes I had interviewed had talked about seeing counselors or their involvement with EOPS and Umoja, not one of them had brought up any difficulty with monitoring their coursework and credits. But from this vantage point,

it is clear that the staff of the community college, working with a much larger group of athletes had identified the transition from high school to college as an obstacle for black male athletes in terms of understanding how to keep up with grades, required courses and credits. And this lack of understanding was clearly a factor in retention, as many of the black students Yancey had dealt with, had dropped out because they had failed a class, or had not taken the courses necessary to maintain their eligibility.

Despite her belief that many of the athletes she dealt with were actively engaged in their own academic progress, Karina did agree that existing cultural barriers could pose challenges for African American male athletes. She stated:

I think if we are talking about the academic language that's an area where there could be barriers because they haven't been exposed to the higher education system and what all of the information means, and the cultural barriers if they are first semester college students, again the experiences are all new to them. That is definitely a barrier and I've been trying to figure out what we can do here on this campus in Student Services to break down those barriers because this is something that is really important and it is something that I work with on a day-to-day basis. The majority of our students are at the Math 105 and Math 112 level and the lower level English classes. The reason why that probably happens is that they probably were student athletes in high school and perhaps the high school that they attend did not provide tutoring services or any kind of helpful services to prepare them to be college ready because they were so focused on them being athletes.

So for Karina, the lack of academic preparation was an immediate challenge to retention, because many of the male athletes she encountered at the registration process were not equipped to understand how to navigate their way through their coursework.

How the Lack of Social Integration Skills Affects Retention

The third theme that emerged from interviews with faculty and staff was the view that many of the black athletes who arrived at the community college did so without having acquired the proper social integration skills to become successful at their chosen sport and in their coursework. For example, Yancey talked about the lack of these social integration skills being a factor in student retention. But she spoke of social integration in terms of how readily African American male athletes at the community college formed a team mentality. She stated:

Some of the African Americans guys, when it comes to social integration, they are not socially ready to even be on a team, let alone being in a college setting. And it is really sad that they are coming from a high school atmosphere where there was really no socialization taught to them at that level, so once they get here to the community college they don't know how to be a team player, they don't know how to be part of a group.

I have seen few studies that delve into the issue of social integration among African American male student athletes—especially in community college context—and how the lack of that integration plays a key role in whether those students persist in or experience institutional departure due to an inability to grasp the concept of teamwork and unselfishness. But it does seem like a subject worthy of further exploration, as male African American student athletes who cannot integrate themselves into a team philosophy seem

less likely to succeed at their chosen sport, which has a direct effect on whether they persist at the community college level.

As a corollary to this idea of social integration, Yancey talked about peer interaction, and the cliques formed by athletes in general on a campus, but particularly African American male athletes. While she felt such social cliques could potentially become a positive aspect of retention, because they encouraged a sense of teamwork and belonging, she also found that African American males' peer interaction at the community college could also have some negative consequences. She said: Our athletes get along well with themselves, but people outside of their little clique, they have negative interactions with them from time to time. And that is something that I plan to address with the athletes in the fall because I find that there is a tendency for them to kind of stand around in a group and look at other students that are not athletes. We have to remind them that other students are here as well as them to get their education. Just because a person is not an athlete, don't have a negative interaction or reaction to other students here on campus that goes for both male and female students.

Looking back at this response, I would have liked to followed up and ask Yancey how she reconciled the largely positive feelings of comfort and welcome expressed by the group of athletes I interviewed, with her perception of the male athletes as forming social groups that excluded all non-athletes. It would also be interesting to know how non-athlete students at the community college viewed the African American male athletes as a group—for example, did they have positive feelings about their presence? Also, were they deemed to be friendly and open to people not in their clique? Finally, were non-athlete students comfortable around the African American male athletes?

Given these three challenges to retention, the staff members proposed some remedies that could help African American male athletes persist at the community college. Patricia said that retention programs such as EOPS and Umoja were vital to the success of the black athlete, because they provided a safety net. “A lot of these departments want to keep all of their students together,” she said. “They want to make sure that students with the same majors succeed. Ultimately, I believe athletes need more resources apart from what they are receiving. But she also felt that conveying to black athletes their importance as role models was equally important for retention. “I think that’s when they get that “aha” moment or epiphany about, now I understand my role here at the college,” she said. “They are made aware of, you are not only representing you, and you are representing the campus and are part of the college community. And herein lies conduct codes and not only that you are representing your family back home too. Regardless of whether you have a mother that just got out of jail, your mother is looking at you like handle your business.”

Karina felt that the key to the retention of African American student athletes on campus was a strong tutoring program. Because she is active during the orientation process that all athletes have to go through, Karina recounted one experience with a basketball player who requested specialized tutoring that only catered to the athletes on campus. “He said tutoring should be geared toward athletes, because he felt that would be an environment where they wouldn’t feel judged, and that if all of the athletes had access to one tutor, and they were all together, and they weren’t part of the general student population, they wouldn’t feel neglected.” This statement contradicted what the athletes had told me about feeling comfortable and welcomed on campus. But it’s also believable that some athletes would feel as if only those within their own program could understand

their struggles and the pressures they faced. Perhaps a tutoring program that was restricted to athletes at the community college would help with retention, as the athletes would feel even more validated and supported by a program that they knew was geared to their specific set of challenges and obstacles. Karina agreed that this was something that could help athletes persist. “A lot of them have to stay and practice,” she said, “and they don’t have a lot of time to study, and this is where the tutoring comes in. I would absolutely state that they need more help than others.”

Themes Across Participants: A Collective Understanding of African American Male Student Athletes in Community Colleges

Overall, the interviews revealed that for this small group of African American male student athletes at the community college, their retention was tied directly to the level of academic and financial support they received, coupled with their own commitment to succeed. Many of the athlete participants said that their family circumstances were a major factor in their drive to persist at the community college, and either earn an AA degree, or transfer to a four-year university where they could pursue their basketball goals, or obtain a bachelor’s degree. Whether that family circumstance was a desire to take care of their parents, siblings or extended family that circumstance served not only as motivation, but also in some cases as added pressure to succeed, because failure meant that a cycle of poverty would continue.

Nearly all the male athletes whom I interviewed cited Umoja and EOPS as vital to their retention, as many would not have been able to afford tuition, books and supplies without these programs. More than half the athlete participants said that counselors and mentors had played a major role in their retention, and several of the athletes indicated that mentorship was the only reason they had managed to remain at the community

college. Every athlete had positive feelings about the comfort level at the campus, although as I wrote above, it would have been interesting to see how non-athletes at the community college felt about the African American male athletes.

The staff members at the community college saw things from a different vantage point. The four people I interviewed cited lack of information about coursework, credits and classes required for retention as a major factor related to African American male student athletes persisting or dropping out. But I also found it instructive to hear these staff members reference the cultural barriers that existed when an athlete made the transition from high school to college. Staff members said that many incoming African American male student athletes did not possess the requisite social skills and understanding to keep on top of their classes, grades and the courses they needed to maintain eligibility. In addition, the idea of social integration, the process by which the athletes stopped thinking as individuals, and committed to a team concept, was cited as another factor in retention. Neither of these two factors was mentioned by any of the student athletes I interviewed, but that isn't surprising. It is difficult for young black men to own up to their own lack of understanding about grades, credits and coursework, as for many of them any admission of not having the proper knowledge is also a tacit admission of weakness.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this final chapter, I will interpret the results from Chapter 4 and arrive at some tentative conclusions based on what I learned from the participant interviews. I will also make a set of actionable recommendations for practice and further study into the problem of the lack of persistence by African American male athletes at the community college level.

Summary

This study was conducted to explore factors that affect the retention of African American male student athletes at Sunny Cal Community College, a pseudonym for a large community college in Southern California. The study is vital to understanding why a lower number of black student athletes relative to white male student athletes are matriculating at two-year and four-year colleges, and what factors are preventing them from persisting. Esters and Mosby (2007) have detailed how African American males at community colleges in the U.S. are lagging far behind all other ethnic groups, with a graduation rate of 16%. Without understanding these factors, it is impossible to develop programs that can stem the tide of black male athletes who are dropping out of community colleges, ill-equipped to find success in a global economy that requires an educated labor force.

Methodology

I used a qualitative case study approach to determine what factors affected the retention of African American male athletes at Sunny Cal Community College. This enabled both the male athlete participants and the staff members to provide their own

direct commentary about what they perceived to be the challenges facing black athletes at the college that could result in them departing. By utilizing a two-pronged approach—interviewing athletes and staff members—I was able to get a more comprehensive view of the issues facing black male athletes at the community college, the relationship between them and the school’s faculty and staff, and the ways in which academic progress was affected by both institutional and personal challenges.

Research Questions

I formulated my two main research questions to be broad enough to explore the experiences of black student athletes at a community college and the factors that influenced their educational outcomes. My two main questions were:

1. What are the experiences of African American male student athletes in large, urban public community colleges?
2. What factors influence educational outcomes, including persistence and completion, for the African American male student athletes in large, urban public community colleges?

Under these two main questions, I developed interview questions with the intent of obtaining responses that would not merely address the challenges and obstacles that African American male student athletes at the community college faced but also the surrounding factors such as family background, prior collegiate experience, and level of comfort at the campus that could also have an impact on persistence and retention. In order for my concluding analysis to be placed in the proper context, it’s important to provide the questions that I asked the male participant athletes and the staff members of the community college.

Discussion

The research questions elicited a variety of responses that I catalogued in Chapter 4, but in reviewing the results, I have identified several recurring themes, the most relevant of which is that the academic and cultural programs in combination with financial aid at the community college were the primary reason that most if not all the athletes whom I interviewed were able to persist. Every athlete referenced financial aid as a lifeline that facilitated their continued enrollment to pursue both athletic and academic goals. In fact, I think it's fair to say that without financial aid and the programs such as Umoja and EOPS, a majority of the male athletes I interviewed would have been forced to drop out. Financial aid, however, is not sufficient if not combined with other programs that provide cultural and academic assistance that is necessary for the student athlete to overcome the challenges that inevitably crop up during the course of a semester. In that respect, a program such as Umoja, which specifically targets African American students, and offers networking, help with books and supplies, and counseling, is a progressive and effective means of preventing black athletes from dropping out. The flipside of these programs, however, is what Wood, Hilton, and Lewis (2001) referred to as the effect of employment on retention. African American student athletes who are able to find jobs outside of school may find that the steady income is more important to their well-being than persisting in college to pursue their academic goals. And for those African American student athletes who are focused solely on a professional career, gainful employment is a more important factor than remaining in school, because there are options for them to try out for professional teams as free agents without having to be enrolled at a college or university.

A second pattern that I discovered was the extent to which many of the athletes felt pressure to become the “champion” of their families in terms of economic advancement and economic viability in the future. Nearly every student athlete participant referenced a family member or family members who he wanted to take care of financially, whether it was through playing professional basketball or by succeeding in a chosen profession. For some student participants, a career in the NBA was more than just a dream or a goal; it was the only way in which they could conceive of ‘paying back’ mothers, fathers, siblings and uncles who had sacrificed on their behalf. In that sense, persistence became less about fulfilling personal goals, and more about the communal idea of giving back to those who were in dire economic straits. But as much as this sense of responsibility to family members could provide motivation to do well academically and athletically, it was also something of a Sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of these male athletes, because any mistake or failed class could mean the loss of eligibility for those who had made a professional basketball career a priority. But what I found most intriguing was the fact that the male athletes’ desire for success was not confined to making it in the NBA, but was broad enough to encompass success in the civilian world. Jonathan was the best example of that, having expressed a strong desire to run his own barbershop, a goal that he had cultivated from the time he was young and spent time at barbershops.

More than half the athlete participants were actively engaged in pursuing a career other than playing basketball as a profession, which was clear evidence that they had developed a dual-track mentality, one focused on advancing their basketball skills with the hope of earning a spot on an NBA roster, and a second focused on a dependable profession that could provide them and their family members with financial security.

Perhaps community colleges would best be served by adopting that same dual-track mentality, and providing athletes with a roadmap for a pathway to the NBA, and a roadmap for obtaining an AA degree, then a degree from a four-year university. By offering dual-track resources, the community college administration could keep both academic and athletic dreams as viable in the minds of the athletes, which could go a long way in helping those athletes persist.

The third pattern that I discovered was the large disconnect between what the staff members of the community college thought were the factors that affected retention, and the factors that the athlete participants cited as most challenging to them remaining in school. The four staff members all felt that there were three major factors that affected the retention of African American male athletes: cultural barriers that were present when athletes moved from high school to college, a lack of social integration skills, and a lack of understanding of the importance of faculty interaction. These factors are all part of what Rickinson and Rutherford (1995) called the “academic and emotional preparedness” for college that was vital to the retention of minorities at the collegiate level.

It is possible that the staff members are identifying the results of deficit thinking experienced by some African American athletes in high school. Deficit thinking occurs when a group of students – typically minorities – is held to a lower standard by an educator based on that educator’s belief that the background and experiences of those students makes it nearly impossible for those students to achieve academic success. Deficit thinking is an insidious practice that often goes undetected, because those who practice it fail to recognize their own bias, even as their behavior creates a double standard of teaching for minority students and white students. Male African American high school student athletes subjected to deficit thinking are more likely to arrive at a

community college lacking some of the social integration skills and academic awareness necessary to ensure that they understand the eligibility requirements of their chosen field of study. As a result, these athletes may struggle to persist at the community college, unless provided with academic resources and one-on-one peer and faculty interaction. But very few of the male athletes whom I interviewed mentioned cultural barriers, lack of social integration, or lack of faculty interaction, as a major factors or challenges in their community college experience, in fact, many of them cited the academic and counseling programs as a major reason why they were still enrolled at the college. So what explains this disconnect between the athletes' experience, and the staff members' experience? I think there are two explanations for this disconnect: one, staff members deal with a larger group of male athletes than I interviewed, and two, the athletes I interviewed may have been less willing to admit to some personal deficiencies related to their maturity or to their lack of understanding of the nuances that governed how they should monitor their academic progress.

It stands to reason that the staff members have dealt with a much larger group of male athletes than the eleven that I was able to interview. As a result, the staff members answered my questions from a wider pool of athletes, many of whom they had dealt with during moments of academic crisis. It is quite possible that any one of the athletes whom I interviewed could generate the same perception from the staff members if he was to find himself in a situation that threatened his academic standing or athletic eligibility. At the time I interviewed each athlete, not one of them was on academic probation or expressed any issues with eligibility. So it is very likely that the relative peace that they were experiencing affected the responses they gave regarding their academics, and their integration on campus. It is also quite possible that if one of the athletes I interviewed

found himself facing a crisis that involved academics, that his visit to any of the four staff members whom I interviewed would have yielded the perception that athletes were unprepared. As with many things in life, perception is dominated by the prism through which a situation is viewed. Ultimately, I cannot dismiss either the staff members responses, or the athletes' responses, it simply means that each of their viewpoints must be examined within the context with which they were formulated.

Findings Related to the Two Main Research Questions

Although I did not directly ask either group of participants these two many research questions, every interview question was written with these two main questions in mind. Therefore, it is important for me to try to summarize the tenor of the responses for each of these two questions. The first question that I posed in this study was: What are the experiences of African American male student athletes in large, urban public community colleges? And while Sunny Cal Community College cannot take the place for every large community college in the U.S., I selected it because it has many of the demographic characteristics and administrative resources that accompany large, urban community colleges in the U.S. In general, the experiences of the student athlete participants at Sunny Cal were positive. Though many had experienced struggles and challenges, they had all persisted as of the time of the interview and expressed optimism about obtaining an AA degree, or transferring to a four-year university to continue academic or athletic pursuits. Every athlete whom I interviewed said that they felt welcomed and comfortable on campus, and that this comfort level was a strong factor in their desire to continue their enrollment. However, as mentioned above, staff members had a different view about this comfort level, with one staff member recounting her experience with an athlete who had felt uncomfortable and negatively judged by

nonathletes on campus. But that athlete's desire to confine himself to his own peer group may not be disadvantageous. As White and Cones (1999) have theorized, peers are a vital aspect of forging a sense of belonging and of providing motivation that may be critical to an athlete persisting at a community college.

The second question I posed was: What factors influence educational outcomes, including persistence and completion for the African American male student athletes in large, urban, public community colleges? From the interviews, it is clear that the main factors that influence retention are financial aid, academic resources, academic counseling, and family support. Without question, financial considerations played a large part in the retention of this particular group of athletes. Nearly all of them had obtained financial aid, or participated in programs that provided books, supplies, and counseling services. Without the financial resources to attend community college, a majority of the athletes in this study would have dropped out. Many come from family backgrounds in which every dollar is devoted to survival, leaving nothing for pursuits such as higher education. But perhaps equally important is the level of academic support the athlete receives at the community college. A majority of the athletes I interviewed cited academic counseling, caring teachers, coaches, and specialized programs as instrumental in their success.

While being able to afford the community college is a challenge, persisting is the next obstacle, and community colleges that don't offer programs that can help an athlete overcome academic difficulties will continue to see an increase in the percentage of African American male athletes who leave school. In particular, programs such as Umoja, geared specifically to African American male students, are vital, because they offer student athletes the opportunity to interact with people who share their cultural

background. And while the goal of these programs is not to segregate the student population, it is also clear that African American students athletes are more likely to flourish in a program that is run by people whom they recognize as having experienced similar struggle unique to their lives as minorities. African American male student athletes are a distinctive subset of a community college, which makes it imperative that academic programs are staffed with people versed in the language and life process endemic to this demographic. Developing an automatic comfort level with the African American athlete, allows staff members of programs such as, Umoja, the freedom to counsel and encourage without having to establish their cultural credentials, which would be the case if these staff members were not African American.

Family support was another vital factor in the persistence of African American athletes at the community college. For many of them, supporting their families in the future was a primary goal, whether this could be achieved by a professional basketball career or through a trade or career.

Nearly every athlete participant referenced a family member relative to motivation to obtain a degree, or to transfer to a four-year university for increased exposure to NBA talent scouts. Only one athlete made what could even be considered a negative comment about his family background, saying that his family was not a source of motivation, but that his friends were the people who encouraged him to pursue his dreams and stay in school. Given that the participants in this study were so overwhelmingly positive about their family support, it's difficult to know how a negative family background would have affected their level of motivation and desire. Would they have been even more determined to persist and succeed if they had family members who were hostile to their academic and athletic goals? Would they have used that as a driving

force to overcome the lack of family support? Or would that negative family support have weighed them down, and taken away their motivation to succeed? Millions of young African American males are valued solely for their athletic gifts, which are seen by many as a commodity. But talented athletes within the African American community often feel resentment from less talented friends, family members, and acquaintances from their neighborhood who are envious of the opportunities those talents bring to the athlete. This is an issue that requires further study.

One interesting aspect of the participant responses to the role of family is their retention, was how it flew in the face of the often-negative depictions of African American families as being weakened by the prevalence of single mothers forced to become head of households. Although several of the participants came from singlemother backgrounds, others came from two-parent households that were described as functioning units that placed an emphasis on education, religion, and achievement, the cornerstones of many traditional African American family dynamics. As already catalogued, many participants viewed family support and their upbringing with instilling the values of hard work, perseverance, and determination. So often these days, African American families are viewed through the prism of poverty and crime, which tends to obfuscate the values of many of these families who want for their children the same success and happiness available to white families. The participants in this study told stories about families that were the same as those found in the larger culture: hard working, flawed, but hopeful that the next generation would become high achievers. But more importantly, many of the families, in which support came not simply from a mother and father, but from uncles, cousins and neighborhood friends who had been adopted into the family context, and provided a communal sense of brotherhood that was evident in how many of the

participants spoke about succeeding not just for their own sake, but for all those who also had a personal stake in their success. The extended family and network of support in a uniquely African American concept that was born during the era when Africans were forcibly brought to the New World to become slaves, and had only their own relatives to provide strength and comfort.

Using the Lens of Mason's Theory of Persistence to Understand African American Male Student Athlete Experiences and Outcomes

I gained insight into the two primary research questions that I posed at the beginning of this study, and how the responses to those questions relate to Mason's (1998) theory. One of Mason's beliefs was that the persistence of African American male students could be aided in great part by a belief that a diploma from a community college was a viable means to future financial success. This theory was reinforced by nearly every male athlete I interviewed, even the ones for whom academics was secondary to pursuing a career in professional basketball. Contrary to the stereotype of black male athletes who only attended school to play sports, the athletes I interviewed all had a solid understanding that obtaining an AA degree would be advantageous for their future. Therefore, for many of these athletes, persistence was not merely about maintaining eligibility to play basketball and transfer to a four-year university, it was also about progressing academically.

But Mason also theorized that persistence was also based on the level of encouragement black male athletes received from college administrators, whose primary job should be to provide the necessary incentives and support that made it easier for athletes to persist and obtain their degrees. Nearly all athletes I interviewed cited a teacher, counselor or coach as a mentor who had provided them with the motivation,

support, and encouragement to persist. Some of the athletes indicated that administrative programs such as EOPS and Umoja were vital to their persistence. Teachers who took the extra time to work with an athlete provided that athlete with the positive reinforcement needed to take on the challenges of a difficult class.

By contrast, staff members were less focused on the validation of the athletes as valued members on campus, which is the centerpiece of Mason's theory, and more focused on the personal responsibility that the black male athletes needed to take in order to ensure their persistence at the community college. In that respect, Mason's theory was probably too narrowly focused on the psychological and environmental factors that determined persistence among African American male athletes at the community college level, because it failed to account for the athlete's role in persistence through a disciplined approach to academic counseling.

However, the bulk of Mason's theory was generally reinforced by my interviews, especially the idea that psychological and environmental factors were a vital determinant of persistence. Staff members I interviewed talked about environmental factors such as cultural barriers that existed when black athletes made the transition from high school to college, and how those barriers negatively affected their success rate. Staff members also talked about how psychological factors such as the inability of some black athletes to adapt their thinking into a "team" dynamic, affected how well these athletes were able to do well in their chosen sport, as well as in the classroom.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the interviews with the athletes and the staff members, there are three practices I recommend to improve the retention figures of African American athletes at the community college. Retention is vital not just for the current generation of young

black men who are seeking to transform their family's future economic outlook, but for the next generation as well, who need the motivation of successful young black athletes on which they can model their behavior.

First, the community college needs to create an outreach program to the local high schools that would focus on providing academic information to juniors and seniors about what the college offers. For example, the program could provide the available degree programs, required courses, and career prospects that students could pursue if they obtained a particular degree at the community college. But within this program, the community college should also hold special sessions for African American male student athletes who wish to pursue their education, even if their primary interest is playing professional basketball. These sessions would emphasize the importance of knowing required courses, the importance of knowing the required credits for eligibility, and the academic and social programs targeted at black male athletes. This outreach program would help offset the cultural barriers cited by the staff members that made persistence of African American male athletes such a challenge. In addition to high schools, programs at the lower levels such as in middle school should be developed as a starting point for educating African American students about their academic future. Part of the problem is that too often, minority children are either subjected to deficit thinking at an early age, or are treated as if their unique set of challenges and obstacles are non-existent. In an effort to combat both of these negative practices, middle schools should create mentor programs geared to minority students in which older minority students in high school who are good students, are brought in once a week to interact with the younger students, and provide them with encouragement about their academic future. These mentors would be effective, because they are only a few years older than the middle school children, and

are a flesh and blood example of an academic path to success. The middle school students would have the opportunity to ask questions and develop relationships, which creates trust that can change the trajectory of that student's academic progress. Middle school students in this mentorship program could then be given the opportunity to become mentors if they do well in school, so that schools are establishing a strong network of students who can continue to build on what others have taught them about academic success and the importance of having a plan.

Second, as a corollary to the high school outreach program, the community college should develop an initiation program that is designed solely for incoming African American athletes to participate in an all-day seminar where they can ask questions about academics, classes required for eligibility, the programs available to them such as Umoja and EOPS, the staff members to visit when they have academic issues, and most importantly, direct interaction with former athletes who have been successful at professional sports and civilian jobs to come and speak to the athletes, and share their experiences. Although this may seem like a repeat of the first practice I proposed, it would actually be a safety net for those black male athletes who did not attend or did not have the high school outreach program available, and for transfers from other community colleges. While many community colleges offer orientation, this usually amounts to a short session that covers the basics. What I'm suggesting is an all-day seminar that is required for all African American athletes to attend, a serious meeting in which each athlete is given a full packet of information, and may even be required to attend several mini-sessions during the school year to monitor their academic progress.

Lastly, the community college should assign academic guidance counselors to every sport on campus, and require the counselor for each sport to identify every student

athlete who is at risk of losing eligibility for academic reasons. Each of these counselors would have the authority to intervene on behalf of the student, and initiate an academic meeting between that student athlete and the instructor of the course or courses that the athlete is failing or for which the athlete is not meeting the minimum requirements. By establishing this initiative, the community college could stave off the number of athletes mentioned by staff members in my interviews that were only visiting counselors when their academic progress was in serious jeopardy. If the community college becomes far more proactive about monitoring the academic progress of each student athlete, and ensuring that the athlete got back on track before it was too late, this could aid the retention rates among African American male athletes on campus.

Recommendations for Future Research

On the basis of this research project, I believe there are several studies that need to be conducted to further delve into this issue of retention of African American male athletes at the community college level. First, the sample size of this study should be generally increased so that a more comprehensive view of the issue of retention among African American male athletes in community college is achieved. Broadening the scope of the study would also allow researchers to determine how geography and cultural practices based on different regions of the country affect retention. For example, the culture of a State in the Deep South has challenges and pressures for African American males that are not as present in a State in the Northeast or Northwest. It would also be helpful to include faculty members in the research, including professors, lecturers and teaching assistants, all of whom may have some relevant and insightful comments to make about their experiences with African American athletes in community colleges. A further study on this issue could also incorporate non-athletes and their views of

African American athletes, and how those views may impede or support retention. This is especially important in the current climate of college campuses, which have become 'hot zones' for cultural issues such as race relations, gender biases, gender inequality, and the way sexual assaults against female students are handled by school administrators. This would help to determine how the changing culture of community college impacts the way African American athletes feel about their presence on campus, and what effect that may have on persistence.

Perhaps most importantly, community colleges must take a less logical and a more holistic approach to the ways in which they attract and retain African American student athletes. Too many community colleges are more concerned with enrollment figures and graduation rates, than they are about how to best develop student athletes who come from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences that resist a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Community Colleges should develop a holistic approach to African American student athletes that is based on taking into account what makes African American student athletes so unique to the campus, and emphasizing those attributes as positive contributors to the community college's culture. As an example, community colleges could offer courses in which African American students are encouraged to interact with others who don't share their cultural or family background, about their unique experiences. This would include speaking to business, social and community leaders, and encouraging these leaders to reciprocate in order to find common ground. Community colleges could also offer experiential-based courses that speak directly to the backgrounds of many African American student athletes, by scheduling field trips to their neighborhoods in which direct interaction with local residents would strengthen the self-esteem and self-worth of the students. Community colleges should also revise the

required curriculum for African American student athletes to include courses that address ethics in sports, the power of sports to unify, the ways in which African Americans have used sports to empower themselves, and the ways in which sports is a metaphor for life's struggles. This may not seem like such a radical undertaking, but a holistic approach to educating African American student athletes is focused on developing moral and ethical strength, broadening their experiences, stimulating dialogue regarding real-world situations, and explaining the role of the athlete in the larger society as a potential icon, role model, and spokesperson of a generation.

Finally, it may be instructive to include interviews with African American athletes who dropped out of community college to discover what factors lead to their inability to persist. By comparing these factors to the factors cited by those athletes who remained in school, administrators could develop programs that help stem the tide. It would also reveal whether those athletes who dropped out did so despite all the available resources that past research has identified as the key to retention.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study was conducted to determine the factors that prevented African American male student athletes at a major, urban community college from persisting. The results indicated that those who remained enrolled did so largely because they were given financial resources, academic programs, tutoring, and family and mentor support. It stands to reason then, that taking away these resources would have a negative effect on the retention of the athletes in this particular group. However, the direct responses from the staff members whom I interviewed identified several other factors such as the lack of social integration, lack of faculty interaction, and cultural barriers. This pattern indicates that there must be a bridge for the disconnect between

what African American male athletes perceive as the biggest obstacles to retention, and what staff members at the community college perceive to be the biggest threat to encouraging persistence among African American male student athletes.

What I found heartening was the hope and optimism of these young African American male athletes, most of who will never get the chance to play professionally or earn a living by their athletic talents alone. These men understood that sports was but one path they could take for financial security, but that the value of their education was in and of itself the reward for their hard work and sacrifice. The persistence of African American male athletes at the community college is vital to the future success of black people in the U.S. The statistics show that too many young black men are dropping out of community colleges, which have long been the gateway to admission to four-year universities. If the community college system is failing these young men, or if these young men are failing themselves despite institutional resources designed to provide them with every opportunity for success, it's imperative that changes are made, or America risks losing an entire generation of African American males, who lacking the requisite skills, may turn to other non-traditional avenues for financial security.

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**APPENDIX A CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT ATHLETES
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Dorothy Smith and I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Program, California State University at Northridge. I am writing to request your participation in a study that I am conducting for my dissertation on African American student male athletes and departure.

I am exploring retention factors and support systems, which contributes to persistence at a community college. Please consider participating if you are an African American male student athlete between the ages of 18-24 and currently enrolled as a community college student or a faculty/staff member who works with African American male student athletes.

Your voluntary participation in this study will include an interview, which will be schedule at a time and place that is convenient for your schedule. The interview will last about 45-60 minutes. You will receive as compensation a \$30.00 gift card to Ralphs for your participation.

If you have questions about the study or are interested in voluntarily participating in this research study, please contact me at smithds@lattc.edu, or (213) 763-5507. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Smith
Dean of Student Services

**APPENDIX B CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
NORTHRIDGE CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH
PARTICIPANT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT
ATHLETES**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. My goal is to discover the factors affecting dropout rates of African American male student athletes at two-year public community college as part of the requirements for the Ed.D Degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:

Dorothy Smith

smithds@lattc.edu

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies 18111

Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330- 8265

818-830-4278

Faculty Advisor:

Durdella, Nathan R (nathan.durdella@csun.edu)

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies 18111

Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330- 8265

818-677-7895

Purpose of the Study

Explore African American male student athletes' experiences and how it impacts or influence their decision to withdraw from pursuit of their postsecondary education

SUBJECTS Inclusion Requirements

You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- identify as an African American male;
- currently participate as a student athlete
- attend a community college
- are a staff person in the athletic department
- have been affiliated with providing support services to athletic

Time Commitment

The interviews will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for your schedule. The initial interview will last about 45 minutes but no more than 60 minutes.

Participation is voluntary and at any point during the study or interviews you may decline to respond or withdraw your participation.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur: You will be asked to meet with me for a 45-60 minute interview about student athletes and factors related to departure from community college. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The audio recordings can be requested and reviewed for accuracy.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet with me for any interview about your work and how you advise your students with college access. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last

45-60 minutes. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to and still remain a participant in the study.

BENEFITS

Although you probably won't benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that others in the community in general will benefit by learning more about student athletes and factors related to departure from community college. Findings from the study may contribute to our knowledge as an institution and work to engage athletes as they enter the academic world. **Subject Benefits**

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study include understanding factors of African American athletes' dropout rate and how this has helped or hindered their higher educational experiences with regards to persistence. **Benefits to Others or Society**

This study may benefit other African American athletes who participate in sports have a greater knowledge of persistence factors.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT Compensation for Participation

You will receive as compensation a \$30.00 gift card to Ralphs for your participation.

Costs

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

Reimbursement

You will not be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses, such as parking or transportation fees.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to respond in any manner to the questions. You may refrain from answering any questions or part of the questions if you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions. There is no penalty for answering questions a certain way or for not completing the interview. You may request the audio recording device to be stopped at any time and/or leave the interview at any time without giving a reason and without facing any consequences. Once the interviews have been conducted, you have a period of 30 days to request and review the audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available) from your interviews. If you withdraw consent after participation in the interviews, your digital audio files and/or transcription files (whichever are available) will be immediately destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY Subject Identifiable Data

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will not be used in the reporting of findings. Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect you. No identifying information will be used, and your institution and/or program will not be identified by name in any published report. **Data Storage**

All of the identifiable data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and all of the de-identifiable data will be stored on a password-protected laptop. The audio recordings will also be stored initially in a password-protected laptop, but then transcribed and erased as soon as possible. **Data Access**

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you. **Data Retention**

The researchers intend to keep the research data indefinitely.

Mandated Reporting

Under California law, the researcher is required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not

limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, she may be required to report it to the authorities.

If You Have Questions

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study. **I agree to participate in the study.**

___ I agree to be audio recorded

___ I do not wish to be audio recorded

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Researcher Signature

Date

Printed Name of Researcher

**APPENDIX C CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
NORTHRIDGE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT
ATHLETES STUDY STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Hello, how are you? Thank you for meeting with me today. I have the consent form here if you would like to read it and sign it if you agree with participating in the study.

Purpose of the interview:

As you know this is to explore African American male student athletes' experiences and how it impacts or influence their decision to withdraw from pursuit of their postsecondary education.

Timing:

Today's interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Demographic Questions

Name: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Ethnicity (how you identify yourself) _____

Current Age: ____

Current Occupation: _____

Highest degree/level completed in college: _____

Major in community college: _____

Highest education level of your mother (Female legal guardian): _____

Highest education level of your father (Male legal guardian): _____

Please share any additional information you would like to share about yourself or your experiences in the West Bay Community College District.

III. Interview Session—Main Questions:

1. Why are you attending Sunny Cal Community College?
2. Do you feel welcomed at the community college?
3. Should retention programs focus on ethnic background or individual academic departments? (Ex. Math, Business)
4. Did you prioritize your academic goals when you began with one being most relevant?

5. Did you complete your original goal or did it change? Why?
6. Do you participate in any special programs, Learning Communities, groups or organizations while at the Sunny Cal Community College?
 - a. What type of programs or activities do you participate in?
 - b. What services do they provide?
 - c. How do the program's services help you?
7. What or whom do you attribute to your academic success?
8. What role does financial aid play in achieving your academic goals? Do you work while pursuing your goals?
9. When you are having challenges (academic/personal) is there someone at the college or a program that you used to assist you?
10. In what you know about the Sunny Cal Community College today do you feel African American's students feel a sense of belonging?

Closing Questions:

Those were some of the questions I wanted to ask you about being a student athlete at the community college. Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences at the college? If there is anything else you would like to add, please email or call me.

IV. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for spending your valuable time with me and participating in this interview session. I greatly appreciate your willingness to share this information with me. Please be assured that no part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be published.

As we conclude our meeting, I wanted to give you an opportunity to ask me any questions you may have about the interview. Can I clarify anything for you at this time?

**APPENDIX D CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
NORTHRIDGE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT
ATHLETES STUDY STAFF/ INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Hello, how are you? Thank you for meeting with me today. I have the consent form here if you would like to read it and sign it if you agree with participating in the study.

Purpose of the interview:

As you know this is to explore African American male student athletes' experiences and how it impacts or influence their decision to withdraw from pursuit of their postsecondary education. I would like to discuss institutional barriers that may exist with African American male student athletes enrolled at Los Angeles Trade Technical College.

Timing:

Today's interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Demographic Questions

Pseudonym: _____

Ethnicity (how you identify yourself) _____

Current Age: _____

Current Occupation: _____

III. Interview Session—Main Questions:

1. Do you feel that African American Male student athletes come for help only during a crisis? Why or Why not?
2. What language and cultural barriers do you think our African American student athlete have? Why or Why not?
3. Do you feel that African American male student athletes come with a deficient academic preparation? Why or Why not?
4. Do you feel that the African American male student athlete has low social integration skills? Why or Why not?
5. Do you feel that the African American male student athlete has low aspirations? Why or Why not?
6. Do you feel that the African American male student athlete has sufficient financial resources? Why or Why not?

7. Do you feel that the African American male student athlete have family pressures?
Why or Why not?
8. Do you think African American male athlete lack an understanding of how important faculty interaction? Why or Why not?
10. Do you think that the African American male athlete lack the concept of positive and /or negative peer interaction? Why or Why not?
11. Do you think the African American male athlete lack the understanding of the importance of a minority role model? Why or Why not?
12. Do you think the African American male athlete lack enthusiasm with student involvement? Why or Why not?

Closing Questions:

Those were some of the questions I wanted to ask you about being a student athlete at the community college. Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences at the college? If there is anything else you would like to add, please email or call me.

IV. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for spending your valuable time with me and participating in this interview session. I greatly appreciate your willingness to share this information with me. Please be assured that no part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be published. As we conclude our meeting, I wanted to give you an opportunity to ask me any questions you may have about the interview. Can I clarify anything for you at this time?

**APPENDIX E CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
NORTHRIDGE CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH
PARTICIPANT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT
ATHLETES**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. My goal is to discover the factors affecting dropout rates of African American male student athletes at two-year public community college as part of the requirements for the Ed.D Degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:

Dorothy Smith

smithds@lattc.edu

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies 18111

Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330- 8265

818-830-4278

Faculty Advisor:

Nathan R. Durdella

nathan.durdella@csun.edu

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies 18111

Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330- 8265

818-677-7895

Purpose of the Study

Explore African American male student athletes' experiences and how it impacts or influence their decision to withdraw from pursuit of their postsecondary education

SUBJECTS Inclusion Requirements

You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- identify as an African American male;
- currently participate as a student athlete
- attend a community college
- are a staff person in the athletic department
- have been affiliated with providing support services to athletic

Time Commitment

The interviews will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient for your schedule.

The initial interview will last about 45 minutes but no more than 60 minutes.

Participation is voluntary and at any point during the study or interviews you may decline to respond or withdraw your participation.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur: You will be asked to meet with me for a 45-60 minute interview about student athletes and factors related to departure from community college. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The audio recordings can be requested and reviewed for accuracy.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet with me for any interview about your work and how you advise your students with college access. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last 45-60 minutes. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to and still remain a participant in the study.

BENEFITS

Although you probably won't benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that others in the community in general will benefit by learning more about student athletes and factors related to departure from community college. Findings from the study may contribute to our knowledge as an institution and work to engage athletes as they enter the academic world.

Subject Benefits

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study include understanding factors of African American athletes' dropout rate and how this has helped or hindered their higher educational experiences with regards to persistence.

Benefits to Others or Society

This study may benefit other African American athletes who participate in sports have a greater knowledge of persistence factors.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation You will receive as compensation a \$30.00 gift card to Ralphs for your participation.

Costs There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

Reimbursement

You will not be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses, such as parking or transportation fees.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to respond in any manner to the questions. You may refrain from answering any questions or part of the questions if you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions. There is no penalty for answering questions a certain way or for not completing the interview. You may request the audio recording device to be stopped at any time and/or leave the interview at any time without giving a reason and without facing any consequences. Once the interviews have been conducted, you have a period of 30 days to request and review the audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available) from your interviews. If you withdraw consent after participation in the interviews, your digital audio files and/or transcription files (whichever are available) will be immediately destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY Subject Identifiable Data

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will not be used in the reporting of findings. Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect you. No identifying information will be used, and your institution and/or program will not be identified by name in any published report.

Data Storage

All of the identifiable data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and all of the de-identifiable data will be stored on a password-protected laptop. The audio recordings will also be stored initially in a password-protected laptop, but then transcribed and erased as soon as possible.

Data Access

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

The researchers intend to keep the research data indefinitely.

Mandated Reporting

Under California law, the researcher is required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, she may be required to report it to the authorities.

If You Have Questions

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If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

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I agree to participate in the study.

I agree to be audio recorded

I do not wish to be audio recorded

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Researcher Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Printed

APPENDIX F

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap

Achievement gap in this study is defined as the educational differences between the European Americans and the African Americans or any other historically disadvantaged ethnic groups in terms of educational success and completion rates. *Academic goal*

Academic goal in this study is defined as a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college/university. *Adjustment*

Adjustment in this study refers to a students' social and academic adaptation to the college. The adjusted student accommodates to a particular set of circumstances and environment in the rigors of higher education. *African American*

African American are persons having origins of African descent that were born and are living in the United States of America, also referred to as Black. *Associate's degree*

The awarding of a degree by an accredited institution based on the completion of 60 units/credits, which are degree applicable in liberal arts or a specified major. *Attrition*

Attrition in this study is the decrease or reduction of student enrollment usually as the result of dropout or the opposite of retention.

West Bay Community College District West Bay Community College District is the largest higher education system in the nation. The system is comprised of 72 districts, 112 colleges, and enrolls more than 2.9 million students. (West Bay Community College District Chancellors Office, 2010)

Certificate

The completion of the required number of units/credits of study in a specific field in which an award or certificate is granted for specialized training in a vocational field; for example, Biotechnology or Child Development. *Community College*

Community colleges are publically supported and locally operated colleges that provide basic skills education, workforce training that can be used toward a certificate or associate's degree, and courses that prepare students for transfer to 4-year universities. The colleges also offer opportunities for personal enrichment and lifelong learning. (West Bay Community College District Chancellors Office, 2010).

Dropout

Dropout is defined as one who abandons or leaves a chosen path and in this study a dropout is anyone who does not complete his or her academic goal, including the completion of a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average (GPA) progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university. *Factors*

In this research factors, which influence a sense of belonging were defined as groups, associations, organizations or programs the student utilized to support their success while attending a community college in West Bay Community College District. *Grade Point*

Average (GPA) Obtainment

Grade point average obtainment is one who maintains or achieves a desired GPA to reach their self-identified academic goals, the GPA must be between a 2.0 to 4.0. *Matriculation* Matriculation in this study is defined as being enrolled in at least 1 unit/credit of course work in one semester of the academic year while working toward a certificate, associate's degree or the required units to transfer to a 4-year college or university, and maintaining a satisfactory grade point average of a 2.0 on a 4.0 grading scale.

Persist

Persist is defined as a student who has completed the academic requirements toward a certificate, associate's degree, or the minimum requirements to transfer to a 4-year college or university. *Retention*

Retention is defined as a student who completed their courses at the community college and stayed enrolled at least one semester during each academic year as they completed the required courses based on their self-identified academic goal; i.e. GPA obtainment, certificate, associate's degree, or transfer to a 4-year college or university.

RESEARCH STUDY

Appendix G Flyer

ATTENTION!!!

I Need African American Male Student Athletes.

Current student athletes.

Must be in attendance at the community college.

What do participants need to know?

Participants will be asked to participate in two interviews.

Participants must also be available for 2 hours or more.

The **purpose** of this study is to:

1. Discover the factors affecting dropout rates of African American male student athletes at two-year public community college.
2. Explore African American male student athletes' experiences and how it impacts or influence their decision to withdraw from pursuit of their postsecondary education.

Want to participate? Question?

Please contact: Dorothy Smith, Dean at (213) 763-5507

Email smithds@lattc.edu