

A Philosophical Approach to Minority Student Persistence on a Historically Black College And University Campus

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine the factors that influence student attrition on a historically black college/university campus. This article examines the inception of the first historically black college and university and discusses the current trends associated with the attrition of minority students. Strategies are discussed that are imperative to student success. Finally, the authors provided a philosophical approach to uncover a successful method for fostering minority student persistence and achievement. Retention strategies are presented that could be utilized to develop a culture of excellence in achievement in higher education for minority students on historically black college and university campuses.

The First Historically Black College and University (HBCU)

Education was an area where free African Americans pressed for equality. According to the author Lucas (1994) who gives a brief summary of the emergence of an HBCU, the women's struggle for access to higher education roughly coincided in time with the first stirrings of a movement to expand educational opportunity among blacks. There was opposition to the conception that African Americans should be educated, much less be afforded an opportunity to attend college. A Virginian by the name of Bebbet Puryear denounced proposals for any public support of black education. Intransigent opposition gradually abated in the post-bellum period, thanks in part to pressure from civil rights reformers, though strong reservations still remained as to the character and extent of the education most appropriate for blacks.

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The Encyclopedia Cheyney University (2006) states, "The beginning foundation of historically black colleges and universities began when the slaves were freed. The first black college that came into existence was founded in the North. The Institution for Colored Youth was created by Richard Humphreys, a wealthy Quaker born in the British Virgin Islands. Richard Humphreys bequeathed \$10,000 to a group of fellow Quakers to build a school dedicated to instructing the descendents of the African Race. It was later renamed to Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. The institution opened its doors on the corner of Seventh and Lombard Streets in Cheyney, Philadelphia, making it the first institution in the United States to offer elementary and high school instruction to African Americans. The original intent of the founder of this college was to afford blacks an education indistinguishable from that commonly pursued by whites. According to the author Lucas (1994), "in the 1860s and 1870s, that presumption meant liberal learning: Latin, Greek, and mathematics, supplemented by science, philosophy, history, astronomy, English composition and literature, and other curricular staples of the New England liberal arts college".

Under reconstruction and for several decades thereafter black higher education in the South developed primarily as the product of the work undertaken by the northern white benevolent societies, denominational missionary bodies, and private black charitable organizations. Lucas (1994), states, "Later, corporate philanthropic foundations and wealthy individuals lent support to the establishment and spread of black private colleges." Today these institutions are known as Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The Framework of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have been designated as institutions that were established prior to 1964 whose principal mission was to educate Black Americans. Today many historically black institutions are faced with similar issues and trends as other post-secondary institutions. As a result, these institutions continue to address the retention rate of minority students, specifically focusing on first time freshman students on a year-to-year basis. As the number of under-prepared freshman students grows, historically black colleges and universities continue to provide resources to accommodate students and ensure student success. These institutions also strive to provide a positive campus culture for minority students within a caring environment that ensures student success in completing a four-year degree.

Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning

William Kritsonis (2007) identifies five principal philosophical positions within the six realms of meaning that should be fostered during the matriculation process to assist students towards reaching self-actualization and to maximize the meaning of life. The *first* position of fulfillment of meaning is that of finding a sense of mastery. Students must select an academic major that is harmonious with their dominant personality type in order to find enjoyment. During the matriculation process the student must become an apprentice in that subject.

The *second* position of fulfillment of meaning is that of finding a sense of belonging within the school community. Kritsonis (2007) states, "Each person's life is the result from participation in the meanings of the social whole." Students must find a sense of connection to the institutional environment and the community. The academic environment within the institution must promote a socialization of their students into distinctive sets of preferred abilities and interests with either similar or dissimilar dominant personality types. Students' ability to be connected to the environment at the institution is related to their vocational and educational stability, satisfaction and success. Institutions must utilize an academic career-counseling center to guarantee student success.

The *third* position of fulfillment of meaning consists of finding a sense of many-sidedness. Students should find a variety of interests within their particular fields during the matriculation process. Kritsonis (2007) suggests, "The curriculum should be broad and diverse in many fields within a particular field of study." The *fourth* position of fulfillment of meaning is found in the integrity of the person. Kritsonis (2007) further suggests, "Each person should possess a sufficient range of meanings in his own self without depending for the significance of his life upon his position in the social whole." Students' must find a sense of integrity inside themselves that brings them pride when they are successful in a particular field of study.

Finally, the *fifth* position of fulfillment of meaning consists of gaining a certain quality of understanding. Kritsonis (2007) states, "The ideal of life has to do with quality rather than with depth, participation, effectiveness, or coherence." There are certain essentials that students must learn while they are in college in order to find self-actualization. Institutions must provide opportunities for students to reach their fulfillment and opportunities to find a sense of pride and self worth during their academic career. All five of these positions will ensure student retention and achievement.

Predictors of Minority Student Achievement

Student attrition and achievement is determined by the extent to which students' mature in terms of their abilities and interests. It is important for an institution to motivate its students during the matriculation process. The institution must also recognize the importance of meeting its students' needs and interests and respond positively in order to lead students towards self-actualization. According to Hoy and Miskel (2005), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that people often do not move towards self-actualization because of the impediments placed in the way by the environment. The classroom experiences, faculty and student interactions and intellectual growth experiences are powerful predictors of student commitment and persistence. According to Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003), student alliance and social participation are also powerful predictors of student commitment and persistence.

Factors Impacting Minority Student Achievement

Success in higher education for minority students is a critical issue faced by historically black colleges and universities as they strive to open doors of opportunity and scholastic superiority to all students. Many institutions have developed strategies for minority student retention by utilizing organizational theories and models to identify methods to guarantee student retention. Vincent Tinto's attrition model (1975) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are effective models in ensuring the student attrition process. An institution must fully comprehend the significance of these models within the organizational culture.

It is imperative for all historically black colleges and universities to provide opportunities for students to be connected with the institutional environment. These institutions must also provide opportunities for students to adapt to the organizational culture while ensuring vocational stability, educational stability, and student satisfaction and student success. According to Vincent Tinto (1993), "More students leave institutions of higher education prior to their degree completion than stay." For example, in a freshman class of 100 students 41% of those students will not matriculate the next

academic year and will leave without obtaining an undergraduate degree. As a result, the first year of college is the most critical year in ensuring minority student success. According to McLeod and Young (2005), the institutional environment and organizational culture must mediate both student academic and social experiences. Educational stability, student satisfaction and student success are the building blocks of the retention process.

Minority Student Retention Strategies

Historically black colleges and universities must continue to provide a unique learning environment that is diverse and allows for smooth operations. The administration, faculty and staff of the institution must be committed to promoting academic achievement and student success. The efforts of the organizational body must be focused on providing positive student experiences that will strengthen student integration, involvement and commitment to completing a post-secondary degree. The structure of the organization must also be supported and guided by effective administration, faculty and staff members who continuously shape the organizational culture to facilitate learning.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this article was to examine the factors that influence student attrition on historically black college and university campuses. This article examined the inception of the first historically black college and university campus and discussed the current trends associated with the attrition of minority students. This article also identified strategies imperative to student success and provided a philosophical approach to uncover the most successful method of fostering minority student persistence and achievement.

In conclusion, utilizing the text *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* by William Allan Kritsonis (2007), historically black colleges and universities will have the ability to identify strategies that can be utilized to develop a culture of excellence in achievement in higher education for minority students on their campuses. This process will also assist administrators in identifying the factors that influence student attrition. The process will provide a means to incorporate this model into a strategic planning process that will ensure academic achievement and the future and growth of the institution.

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