

Chapter 13

Strengthening HBCU Colleges of Education for the Current Climate: Hearing Multiple Perspectives for Change

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ABSTRACT

Central to any institution of higher education is its ability to successfully recruit and graduate students. The low graduation rates at many HBCUs is perplexing given their historical legacy. To address this woe, these authors suggest that HBCUs now face the conundrum of making themselves relevant for this generation of collegiate students. Adopting a participatory action research design (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), the authors detail their experiences to suggest strategies that will strengthen the overall college. In this chapter, the authors discuss 1) improving faculty productivity; 2) creating an environment that supports faculty success; 3) leveraging national and state accreditation expectations to improve overall program quality; and, 4) moving from an advising to mentoring model. These topics are discussed from the theoretical perspective of a change model.

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Concentric to the success of any institution of higher education is its ability to successfully recruit and graduate students. Ironically, this simple element for success is elusive for many colleges and universities in the United States. In 2011, the overall graduation rate for first-time college students was 59% nationally (Eackles, 2014). When you compare the national graduation rate with those at the top historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), only three HBCUs tout a graduation rate that exceeds the national average: Spelman College, Howard University and Morehouse College. The low graduation rates at HBCUs is perplexing given their historical legacy.

These authors contend that HBCUs now face the challenge of making themselves relevant for this generation of collegiate students. Adopting a participatory action research design (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), the authors detail their experiences to suggest strategies that will strengthen the overall College. “[A]ction researchers take an activist, critical, and emancipatory stance, using the research process as an empowering process in an organization or a community” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 165). From the perspectives of a Dean, an Assistant Dean for Assessment and Accreditation, a new Assistant Professor, and a doctoral student, we leverage our experiences in the development and implementation of strategies for transforming HBCUs.

In this chapter, the authors will address the following topics: 1) improving faculty productivity; 2) creating an environment that supports faculty success; 3) leveraging national and state accreditation expectations to improve overall program quality; and, 4) moving from an advising to mentoring model. Utilizing theories on organizational change, the authors work within their respective roles to *unfreeze* the climate to effect systemic change. We believe that when academic units focus on the aforementioned areas for improvement, the overall graduation rates of students will be positively impacted and the overall quality of academic programs improve.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recognizing the need for transformation, these authors utilize Kurt Lewin’s organizational change model as a framework to approach the process of transformation currently underway. In 1951, Kurt Lewin proposed that organizations exist in a state of equilibrium until driving forces propel the institution to a new stasis. Furthermore, an institution will continue in the current state until an occurrence necessitates change. In the collegiate arena, this necessity for change can be a lack of productivity, changing accreditation regulations, governmental oversight discretions,

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