


Chapter 57

Impact of Mentoring and Support Programs on Academic Performance of African American Males: Analysis Through a Critical Race Theory Lens

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ABSTRACT

This chapter takes an in-depth look at the impact of mentoring programs and student success programs on the academic performance and retention of African American males at institutions of higher education. A review of the literature and data on the effects of mentoring and student success programs in postsecondary education was conducted through the lens of critical race theory. U.S. Census data indicated an achievement gap in the number of African American males with a Bachelor's degree when compared to White males. To combat the achievement gap, postsecondary institutions began developing mentoring programs designed to provide an environment that is supportive of the academics needs of their students. Three common themes emerged in the literature: the need for mentoring programs, the training mentors should receive, and the need for institutions to acknowledge that more needs to be done to support African American males.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-4507-5.ch057

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to take an in-depth look at the impact of mentoring programs and student success programs on the academic performance and retention of African American males at institutions of higher education. It is intended to review literature and data on the effects of mentoring and student success programs in postsecondary education within the United States through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Through the interjection of the theoretical framework, we plan to disrupt current discourses in relation to race and academic success in higher education. Specifically, in this chapter the authors will argue that the critical race theory has important implications for both research and policy in the field of higher education, in particular, in relation to the inclusivity, success, and retention of African American males.

The objective of this chapter is to outline the critical race theory for researchers and policymakers in higher education. The authors will also examine the impact of mentoring programs and student success programs on the academic performance and retention of African American males at institutions of higher education. Additionally, the authors will systematically review studies of this topic, asking the following questions: What type of mentoring programs and academic support programs have institutions of higher education in the United States implemented to provide academic support to African American males? What level of impact has been seen from mentoring and academic support programs? What factors and elements of mentoring programs or academic support programs show to be beneficial to the retention and academic performance of African American males at institutions of higher education? Do institutions of higher education see a direct benefit in terms of retention and academic performance when requiring students to take at least one developmental course upon entering college? It is hoped that the chapter influences future leaders who will research and oversee efforts to enhance the inclusivity, success, and retention of African American students at institutions of higher education. Critical race theory is an important theoretical framework for future research and policy to consider.

Critical Race theory

This chapter will utilize critical race theory as a theoretical approach to analyze academic success and support programs for African American males at institutions of higher education based on race, policy, and social justice. Critical race theory provides an array of perspectives and pedagogies that are meant to assist in identifying, challenging, and transforming the design of education where subordinate and dominate racial elements exist (Soloranzo, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Soloranzo et al. (2000) described challenges faced by African American males as existing in five main elements. These elements are: the intersectionality of race and racism with forms of subordination, challenging dominant ideology, maintaining a commitment to social justice, experiential knowledge, and a transdisciplinary perspective. Critical race theory provides a way to understand and discover forms of discrimination and to challenge the established discourse and paradigms in higher education (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

With regards to this chapter, it is intended to look at the systemic challenges experienced by African American males in postsecondary education. Research has indicated that an academic achievement gap exists between African American males and White males, showing lower graduation rates among African American males (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014). When comparing the academic success at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), African American males have seen higher rates of academic success at HBCUs (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014).

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