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HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

Resource Collection

**Advising at HBCUs:
A Resource Collection Advancing
Educational Equity and Student Success**

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NETWORK

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Advising at HBCUs:
A Resource Collection Advancing Educational Equity and Student Success

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About the Advising Success Network

The Advising Success Network (ASN) is a dynamic network of five organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and students from low-income backgrounds. The network develops services and resources to guide institutions in implementing evidence-based advising practices to advance a more equitable student experience to achieve our vision of a higher education landscape that has eliminated race and income as predictors of student success. The ASN is coordinated by NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and includes Achieving the Dream, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, EDUCAUSE, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

What We Do and How We Do It

Holistic advising interplays with many other facets of the institution, such as course selection, the student experience, and institutional culture. This means that an effort to redesign these services has broader implications for institutional transformation. This process can quickly become complicated and must therefore be done with intentionality and purpose to achieve the desired improvements in institutional and student outcomes.

The ASN has a deep understanding of the interconnection between advising, broader institutional goals, and student success. As thought leaders and experts in the field of holistic advising, we are able to provide resources on best practices in the field of advising as well as change management services to the institution more broadly. We believe this will result in new and reviewed structures and systems for advising that were designed to address racial and socioeconomic inequities and contribute positively to institutional goals and student outcomes.

We recognize that there is a large amount of variance in organizational structures, advising models, and student needs among higher education institutions. We therefore begin each engagement by aligning on a shared vision for success, including metrics (e.g., equity outcomes, retention & graduation rates, ROI) and reviewing existing advising processes, policies and structures, always with the joint goal of creating more equitable experiences and outcomes for students from low-income backgrounds, as well as African American, Black, Latinx, Indigenous peoples, Alaskan native, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students.

About the Publisher

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition was born out of the success of the University of South Carolina's much-honored University 101 course and a series of annual conferences focused on the First-Year experience. The momentum created by the educators attending these early conferences paved the way for the development of the National Resource Center, which was established at the University of South Carolina in 1986. As the National Resource Center broadened its focus to include other significant student transitions in higher education, it underwent several name changes, adopting the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in 1998.

Today, the Center collaborates with its institutional partner, University 101 Programs, in pursuit of its mission to advance and support efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. We achieve this mission by providing opportunities for the exchange of practical and scholarly information as well as the discussion of trends and issues in our field through convening conferences and other professional development events such as institutes, workshops, and online learning opportunities; publishing scholarly practice books, research reports, a peer-reviewed journal, electronic newsletters, and guides; generating, supporting, and disseminating research and scholarship; hosting visiting scholars; and maintaining several online channels for resource sharing and communication, including a dynamic website, listservs, and social media outlets.

The National Resource Center serves as the trusted expert, internationally recognized leader, and clearinghouse for scholarship, policy, and best practice for all postsecondary student transitions.

Institutional Home

The National Resource Center is located at the University of South Carolina's (UofSC) flagship campus in Columbia. Chartered in 1801, UofSC Columbia's mission is twofold: to establish and maintain excellence in its student population, faculty, academic programs, living and learning environment, technological infrastructure, library resources, research and scholarship, public and private support and endowment; and to enhance the industrial, economic, and cultural potential of the state. The Columbia campus offers 324-degree programs through its 15 degree-granting colleges and schools. In the 2020 fiscal year, faculty generated $279 million in funding for research, outreach, and training programs. South Carolina is one of only 32 public universities receiving both Research and Community Engagement designations from the Carnegie Foundation.

About the Editors

Jamila S. Lyn is a strong advocate for student support and success in the Historically Black College and University landscape. Jamila has served in multiple, cross-functional capacities including administration, leadership, advising and faculty positions at HBCUs. Her work centers on coordinating and facilitating strategic initiatives that address student success with a focus on co-curricular engagement and career pathways. As the Director of Specialized Programming at Benedict College, she provides leadership on policy development, project management initiatives and external strategic partnerships, such as Project Success, UNCF, and Student Freedom Initiative. Jamila's most recent focus centers on leveraging course sharing to bridge gaps in delivering quality academic courses and programs; track and eliminate roadblocks to student progress; develop additional guidelines specific to how to best serve students from low-resourced institutions; and develop instructive collateral pieces to guide Benedict's participation in online course share collaboratives.

Kiisha A. Hilliard is the Graduate Assistant for Research and Grants at the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Kiisha is pursuing a Master of Education from UofSC's Higher Education and Student Affairs program with a graduation date of 2023. She previously worked as a college adviser with the Furman College Advising Corps, which sparked her interest in studying student transitions and improving student success. Her research interests include bridge programs and the transition from K-12 into higher education, the experiences of Black students in higher education, and the barriers preventing first-generation, low-income, and historically marginalized groups from entering or persisting through postsecondary education.

Jenna A. Seabold is the Research and Grants Coordinator at the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Prior to this role, she spent 10 years in higher education helping college students define and discover their paths to success through her work in college access, academic advising, retention initiatives, and student success programs. She has worked at a variety of institutions including a community college, regional public university, and large research university. Her many research interests include the effects of early childhood education on college readiness and success, high-impact practices that improve college access and success for low-income and first-generation college students, and the landscape of higher education for displaced worker job retraining.

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Foreword

Omari Burnside, Assistant Vice President for Strategy and Practice, *NASPA*
Amelia Parnell, Vice President for Research and Policy, *NASPA*

The higher education community has committed to provide students a high-quality education that enables them to achieve their academic, personal, and career goals, regardless of their starting point, race, income-level, or any other social identity. As a result, institutions are working to improve traditional structures, policies, and practices that may have impeded students along their path toward a degree. In this pursuit to become more student-centered, one approach institutions have used is to create a more holistic and integrated suite of support services designed to better address students' diverse and unique needs.

Advising is a critical component to this holistic approach and, if implemented correctly, can be an excellent tool to help more students see the success higher education promises. This notion of student success through holistic advising can be achieved by developing an advising structure that effectively integrates academic, career, financial, and basic needs counseling and encourages strong advisor-advisee relationships, in which students have developmental conversations with advisors throughout their tenure at the institution. Holistic advising also includes nonacademic supports, such as student success courses and one-on-one time with faculty and staff. By implementing these foundational aspects, institutions are more equipped to proactively identify student needs and to provide a more tailored and seamless experience for students.

This is especially important because at every juncture of a student's college experience, there is an opportunity to make a decision. Such decisions are often critical and complex. In addition to seeking guidance on how to balance college and other competing priorities, students may look to staff and faculty to guide them through several unfamiliar situations and decisions. For example, a student may explore their options for selecting a major with the intent to understand how a career in that field might lead to certain earnings upon completing a credential. In a similar example, some students may start their decision-making process about whether to apply for a loan to cover college expenses by considering if job prospects after graduation will make repayment feasible. As students navigate these and other multifaceted decisions, high-quality and holistic advising is more vital to their progress than ever.

Klempin, et al. (2019) state that coordination among student support providers of various types can result in better aligned services. To see the full benefit holistic advising can have on the student experience, institutions need to understand the current state of their advising program, establish greater coordination among student support offerings, and provide the necessary resources for campus staff to effectively perform their roles and responsibilities. This type of holistic advising effort works well when systems and processes are in place that ensure professionals have the technology, training, and knowledge to appropriately advise students across domains. Holistic approaches also require ongoing communication and consistent feedback cycle from students, faculty, and administrators to address emerging needs. Institutions that commit to providing high-quality advising services will need to invest significant time and resources. However, the return on that investment will be worth it, as the efforts will prepare students to make their most important college decisions.

Throughout the years, institutions have made progress at achieving this ideal of holistic advising. Now as institutions reaffirm their commitment and continue in their pursuit to provide a high-quality education to students, there is an opportunity to accelerate progress by focusing more on the advising experience. Investing in holistic advising will bring greater clarity and alignment between advising and other relevant student supports and foster a more student-centered institution where all students have a clear path to success.

Klempin, S., Kalamkarian, H.S., Pellegrino, L., & Barnett, E.A. (2019). *A framework for advising reform*. Community College Research Center. https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/framework-advising-reform.pdf

Introduction

Jamila S. Lyn, Director of Specialized Programming, *Benedict College*

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is honored to be a core partner in the Advising Success Network (ASN). Established in 2018, the ASN is a multi-faceted network of five organizations "partner[ed] to support educational change and improved student outcomes through a holistic approach to addressing the operational, programmatic, technological, and research needs of colleges and universities in direct support of a more equitable student experience" (Advising Success Network, n.d.). Recognizing advising as a fundamental element of student success, the ASN identified a critical gap in the advising discourse—if the focus is on "scaling equitable and holistic advising solutions" for Black college students, then engaging key individuals/units doing "the heavy work" in the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) space was necessary and long overdue. As part of the ASN Investment Grant, the partners imagined a convening of HBCU thought leaders committed to fostering a "real talk" conversation around how to improve retention, persistence, and completion rates for predominately first-generation, Pell dependent student populations. The *Advising Success Network Symposium: Equity and Student Success at HBCUs* was designed to focus on high impact advising models while highlighting the often-overlooked voices of those who are doing innovative, effective advising work on the front line with students. The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition was committed to planning a symposium that garnered support from a diverse group of HBCUs to promote well-balanced conversations.

Context

This three-part collection, representative of qualitative research examining holistic support for Black men at 5 HBCUs in North Carolina, four HBCU advising case studies, and a critique of a peer-reviewed journal's coverage of Black student experiences, is intended to foreground best advising practices rooted in a culturally relevant framework that affirms HBCU students and their unique perspective, lived experience and need for community connections. The collection's contents examine a range of advising models—centralized, decentralized, and hybrid—that yield positive outcomes for HBCU students.

Advising at HBCUs institutes a unique high-touch approach that often differentiates its strategies from other institutions. Based on their history, function, and purpose, HBCUs institutions provide a deep sense of belonging and community that may not exist in other societal settings (Harris, 2018). Strayhorn (2015) asserts, "Sense of belonging takes on heightened importance in certain contexts, for certain people, and during certain moments. Sense of belonging is critically important the moment someone feels alone and isolated." At HBCUs, the matrix of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (further complicated by being a first-generation college student) presents specific barriers that require high-touch engagement, including intrusive interventions, to support student retention and persistence (Pascarella, Pierson, & Wolniak, 2004). This tailored engagement can reflect both prescriptive and developmental advising strategies (Harris, 2018).

Prescriptive advising focuses on the more transactional aspects of advising: course scheduling, degree mapping and registration. While these are important guided exercises in a student's academic career, they tend to not promote relationship building between advisee and advisor (Harris, 2018). Developmental advising is rooted in personal conversations between advisee and advisor that acknowledge a student's entire identity, not only the academic self:

> *Because it leads to student growth, developmental advising is based on several developmental theories, such as those related to personal, cognitive, career, and psychosocial advancement. Advisors use these theories to assist students with goal setting, decision making, problem solving, creating self-awareness, and other areas to promote academic success. (Harris, 2018)*

The case studies featured in this collection fuse both approaches, recognizing the practicality of prescriptive advising and the connectivity of developmental advising. Understanding the impact of these advising relationship dynamics, the institutions evaluated their current advising practices and sought to find new ways to ramp up academic/emotional support services. The outcomes of their institutional efforts are reflected in their respective chapters.

Advising is a foundational part of the student experience. It is the cornerstone of student success. Strayhorn (2015) boldly asserts, "Bringing students to higher education means nothing if they're not successful. Access without success is useless, but access with success is everything." Recent data on the HBCU student-debt crisis indicates that HBCU students are disproportionately saddled with high loans—32% more than their counterparts at other institutions and they (HBCU students) are less likely to repay them (Mitchell & Fuller, 2019). This shocking data is disturbing; however, the reality remains: "[I]n coping with tuition increases, Black students have fewer resources to draw on than many Americans" (Mitchell & Fuller, 2019). Limited funds drive Black students' borrowing patterns. This financial crisis leaves many HBCU graduates with high debt, poor credit, and little cash while earning nearly 17% less per hour than white graduates—ages 21-24 (Mitchell & Fuller, 2019). The impact of the debt crisis has an even greater crippling effect on HBCU students who stop or drop out. In short, HBCU students do not have the time or resources to get off track due to poor advisement. We have a moral imperative to coach HBCU students through completion, removing barriers that threaten to derail their academic progress and personal growth.

About this Collection

The purpose of this three-part collection is to promote the complementary, yet distinct ways that select HBCUs are assessing, framing, and collaborating to implement best practices with the goal of maximizing advising effectiveness for students. Part I introduces a qualitative study that explores the impact of intrusive advising, peer support and other wraparound services on a sample group of Black male students enrolled at 5 HBCUs in North Carolina. Part II spotlights 4 HBCUs and their innovative advising strategies, which span from deepening faculty training to developing a learning cohort among top-performing students to foster community. The collection closes with Part III, a reflective article written by a journal editor who chronicles the journal's publishing trend over a three-decade period to identify gaps in scholarship focused on HBCU experiences and opportunities to diversify journal content.

One goal of the collection is to celebrate the complexity of varied advising strategies to prioritize the importance of developing student-centered practices. Unique to this collection is the positioning of HBCU practitioners as active creators and experts who challenge their respective campus communities to move beyond understanding advising as merely course scheduling. An expanded definition of advising, one that encompasses safe spaces for students to be vulnerable about their academic uncertainty and/or other stressors, drives intentional advisor training, unlocks the value of peer coaching, and sparks innovative partnerships which directly contribute to impactful student experiences. Strong advising models are only as effective as the advisors who implement and reinforce them to improve student success (Schreiner & Nelson, 2020). In the college ecosystem, advisors generally have an awareness of student issues that very few campus stakeholders are privy to (King and Kerr, 2005). If leveraged the right way at the right time, advisors' special insight could potentially make a significant difference in the academic trajectory of their advisees through meaningful interventions and smart referrals (Dial and McKeown, 2020). The cases featured in this volume illuminate the transformative power of culturally competent strategies for not only "at-risk" students, but also high performing students who we often overestimate as exceptionally independent and emotionally resilient.

Additionally, a review of *The Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* highlights the importance of not only doing "the work" but also telling the story. The absence of scholarship centered on the Black college student experience is indicative of key realities, the most urgent of these points to the support staff capacity issues at under-resourced institutions, like HBCUs.

Without question, COVID-19 pandemic fatigue and its impact on various sectors of campus life (e.g., enrollment, retention, emergency resources, crisis management, health & wellness, information technology) affected our ability to successfully recruit case contributors. While both ASN HBCU symposium participants and non-participants expressed strong interest in the collection concept, many shared that they felt stressed and overwhelmed by responding to student needs, juggling multiple roles on campus, managing emergency aid interventions, caring for family while trying to practice some degree of self-care. One major takeaway from the recruitment phase is that our HBCU colleagues in advising support roles need continuous support from their institutions. High-capacity people run the risk of burnout, and given what we know about their incredible value on campus, we simply cannot afford to delay extending resources to them.

That said, our three-part resource collection represents committed HBCUs who have broached strengthening advising practices through technology, intrusive and frequent engagement, peer mentors, faculty advisors, counseling services and/or other external constituents. The chapters are organized by focus areas beginning with faculty advisor training, community building, peer coaching, and hybrid advising models for differentiated student populations. A digital resource intended to spotlight high impact advising practices as tools for student success and equity, this collection has the potential to reorient advising strategies at HBCUs, while sparking new wraparound support models at all institutions serving Black students.

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Glossary of Terms

- **Developmental Advising:** Advising process focused on shared responsibility between the advisor and students in which the primary goal is for students to take ownership of their decisions and actions (Frost, 2003)

- **Educational equity:** The Advising Success Network defines racial and socioeconomic equity as centering the lived experiences, talents, and aspirations of students from low-income backgrounds, as well as Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islander students. The network seeks to raise awareness from an institutional perspective, focusing on how the institution's design systems, policies, and processes either build healthy inclusive cultures or perpetuate systemic inequities. Moreover, the network seeks to change the institution's understanding of how legacy practices and policies affect student performance, and impact student economic mobility and personal, academic, and career success—to address systems of power, privilege, and race through analysis of advising policies and procedures.

- **Equity:** A concept grounded in the principles of justice and "do no harm."

- **Equity gap:** Another alternative to "achievement gap" that evokes the notion that institutions have a responsibility to create equity for students.

- **Experiential learning:** Experiential learning describes the ideal process of learning, invites you to understand yourself as a learner, and empowers you to take charge of your own learning and development (Kolb, D., 2020).

- **Historically Black College and University (HBCU):** Institutions established prior to 1964 in an environment of legal segregation with a mission of educating Black Americans and providing access to higher education (Lomotey, 2010).

- **Holistic advising redesign:** The process of identifying, implementing, and refining high-quality, effective institutional practices that support students as they work toward achieving their personal, academic, and career goals. Recognizing that changes in advising will impact other areas of an institution, this type of redesign typically requires cross-functional collaboration with a focus on aligning people, processes and technology. Successful holistic advising redesign promotes an institutional culture of being student ready.

- **Opportunity gap:** An alternative to the phrase "achievement gap" that recognizes the inequality of opportunity in education, or "education debt," characterized by a long history of discriminatory gaps in educational inputs (Ladson-Billings G., 2006).

- **Predominantly White Institution (PWI):** Institutions of higher education where the population for White students is 50% or greater of the entire student body (Lomotey, 2010).

- **Prescriptive Advising:** Advising process focused on academic matters and sharing information for degree program progression where most student follow the advice of an advisor without much personal engagement. (Barbuto et. al, 2011).

- **Retention:** Institutional measure for a student staying at the institution until the completion of a degree (Hagedorn, 2006).

- **Student success:** The outcome of a personal, rigorous, and enriching learning experience that culminates in the achievement of a student's academic goals in a timely manner and fully prepares them to realize their career aspirations (Lawton, 2018).

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HBCUs in North Carolina: Holistic Student Support toward Black Male Success

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Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are important institutions for the success of Black male students; yet, these institutions are understudied and often unrecognized. As part of a larger study funded by the National Resource Center's Paul P. Fidler Grant, this study looks at the extrinsic support that high-achieving Black males received from their HBCUs to demonstrate the importance of holistic student support models. Twenty-six high-achieving Black males at five HBCUs in North Carolina participated in this focus group study. The findings highlight four major themes regarding the elements of holistic support provided by the participants' HBCUs: (1) resources and services, (2) relationships, (3) opportunities, and (4) racial/cultural identity development.

Holistic Student Support: HBCUs as a Model

Advising Success Network core partner, Achieving the Dream (2018), posits that holistic student support is a culture shift in which colleges and universities strategically design and provide equitable services that are both proactive and responsive to student needs. Achieving the Dream (ATD) asserts that "to better serve students we must understand them as whole individuals – recognizing that addressing basic needs, academic supports, mental health, and advising among other student experiences must be holistic and equitable to provide valuable supports toward student success" (Achieving the Dream, 2021). In its *Holistic Support Redesign Toolkit*, ATD (2018) outlines multiple characteristics integral to holistic student support:

- **Building Meaningful Relationships** - the success of holistic student support is rooted in consistent attention to the relationships with students and among staff and faculty.

- **Creating Connections** - connecting students to short- and long-term services such as orientations, financial education, courses, workshops, and public benefits referrals.

- **Providing Services** - understanding life factors of students, their strengths, responsibilities outside of the classroom and creating relevant and aligned academic advising, career coaching and planning, workforce training, financial coaching and planning, benefits access, and transportation and childcare assistance.

- **Monitoring Student Progress** - constantly checking on student progress to ensure support before they reach a crisis point and consistently assess quality and effectiveness of services.

While we agree wholeheartedly with ATD's convictions about holistic student support, we also posit that holistic student support is not necessarily a culture shift, but rather, a student support tradition modeled by many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Established in the 1800s for the purposes of establishing culturally centered educational opportunities, HBCUs have been a significant educational pillar in African American communities (Bracey, 2017). Founded and developed "in a hostile environment marked by legal segregation and isolation from mainstream U.S. higher education…[HBCUs] have maintained a very close identity with the struggle of blacks for survival, advancement, and equality in American society" (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, pp. 3-4). According to Lomax (2020), existing research demonstrates that HBCUs outperform non-HBCUs in the retention and graduation of first-generation, low-income African American students. A critical aspect of the HBCU experience is "their provision of a welcoming environment for Black students, who are able to thrive in a context of acceptance and mutual support" (Bracey, 2017, p. 678). Indeed, HBCUs "have come to symbolize the racial pride, self-determination, and intellectual prowess of the Black community" (Ford et al., 2021). According to Wilson (2008), HBCUs have educated 80% of Black federal judges, 75% of Black PhDs, 65% of Black physicians, 50% of Black engineers, and 45% of Black executives.

Research on Black Males at HBCUs

Honing specifically on the support and success of Black males at HBCUs, research by authors well known in this area have illuminated both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of high-achieving Black males at HBCUs (e.g., Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Bonner, 2014; Gasman & Spencer, 2012; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer et al., 2015). The extrinsic factors contributing to the success of Black men have included their relationships with faculty and administration (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Bonner, 2014; Bonner, 2010; Palmer et al., 2010; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer et al., 2015), engaging students intensively with faculty in STEM programs (Flowers, 2012; Fries-Britt et. al, 2012; Palmer et al., 2010), a positive and affirming campus climate (Palmer & Gasman, 2008), creating a sense of family, brotherhood, and strong peer relationships around academic success (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Bonner, 2014; Palmer & Gasman, 2008), participating in summer bridge programs (Palmer et al., 2015), and intentionally engaging in Black Male Initiatives (Brooms, 2018; Palmer et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2015).

It is because of this rich history that Arroyo and Gasman (2014) developed the first HBCU-based theoretical model that frames Black college student success through a focal lens on the institutional context and conditions that nurture their success. They define this "holistic success model" as an interactive process between individuals and the environment that includes (a) an institutional entry point of relative accessibility and affordability, (b) a supportive environment, (c) identity formation of students that includes an interrelated process of racial-ethnic identity, intellectual identity, and leadership identity development, (d) values cultivation, and (e) achievement. The authors assert that HBCUs have consistently (though not uniformly) demonstrated this level of commitment to holistic student success.

The context of this case study is North Carolina HBCUs. The state is home to 10 accredited four-year HBCUs, the most of any state in the U.S. (Ford et al., 2021), and home to the largest HBCU in the country, North Carolina A&T State University. According to a recent report on the 10 HBCUs in North Carolina, Ford et al. (2021) provide evidence that HBCUs in the state produce the majority of educators of Color and create a two-billion-dollar impact on the state, collectively. From their report findings, the authors assert, "The keen ability of HBCUs to provide the nurturing and affirming experiences to usher those students to academic and personal success cannot be overstated" (p. 9). Consequently, it was important to us as researchers to understand more about the myriad ways in which HBCUs in North Carolina nurture Black male success and serve as role models for holistic student support.

Methods

This qualitative case study highlights the holistic support mechanisms for high-achieving Black males at five HBCUs in North Carolina. The study is part of a larger study funded by the National Resource Center's Paul P. Fidler Research Grant. The larger study focused on the skills, habits, characteristics, and relationship to achievement for high-achieving Black males enrolled in HBCUs in North Carolina and conceptualized their achievement as Black Male Brilliance (Bryson & Sheppard, 2021). While the focus of the larger study was more on the intrinsic or personal characteristics of the participants, they also spoke to the extrinsic support they received from their HBCUs that contributed to their success. We focus on those extrinsic support elements in this article.

Criteria for study participation included: 1) Black males who were just beginning their second year at an HBCU, 2) with a GPA above the mean GPA of students in the same year at their institution, and 3) participation in at least one co-curricular or extracurricular activity. Twenty-six high-achieving Black males at five HBCUs in North Carolina participated in the study. A total of eight, 60–90-minute focus groups were conducted across the five participating HBCUs. Key informants at each institution were identified to help navigate the process of identifying and connecting the researchers with focus group participants, and to help to arrange visits to their institutions. Key informants are defined by Payne and Payne (2004) as "those whose social positions in a research setting give them specialist knowledge about other people, processes or happenings that is more extensive, detailed or privileged than ordinary people, and who are therefore particularly valuable sources of information…" (p. 134). Given the importance of relationships and connections for our participants, the key informants were integral to gain access and begin to build rapport.

Focus groups were co-facilitated by the authors, audio recorded, transcribed, and double checked for accuracy upon receipt of the transcription. Our analysis of the data began with an inductive, collaborative coding procedure that entailed randomly selecting a transcript to analyze, read, and re-read. We worked toward trustworthiness by using an iterative process of coding and checking our individual understandings of the participants' stories and perspectives for interrater reliability. We drew on Corbin and Strauss's (2008) "open" and "axial" coding procedures in which data are broken apart, examined closely to "identify concepts to stand for the data," and then put back together by "relating those concepts" to others (p. 198) while simultaneously maintaining the essence of the participants' language and stories (Creswell, 2009).

As a cross-racial research team, we brought to this study both insider and outsider status and knowledge that helped us to understand the participants' experiences and probe more deeply. Dr. Will Sheppard is a Black man who identified with many of the participants' experiences, who worked at an HBCU early in the study, and previously led a Black Male Initiative.

Dr. Brandy Bryson is a White woman sociologist of race and education who previously worked as a social worker in a Black community where she realized the effects of systemic racism, the cultural strengths of Black communities, and her commitment to anti-racism efforts. During the analysis and interpretation of the data, we intentionally utilized our identities while working iteratively. In particular, Will drew analytical and experiential connections while Brandy probed with questions to help "make the familiar strange" (Delamont et al., 2010). Simultaneously, Brandy posed analytical questions while Will considered expanded interpretations of the participants' lived experiences.

Findings

Four major themes or categories pointed to the elements of holistic support provided by the participants' HBCUs. Figure 1.1 lists the order of frequency they emerged in the findings: (1) resources and services, (2) relationships, (3) opportunities, and (4) racial/cultural identity development.

Figure 1.1 **Frequency of Themes**
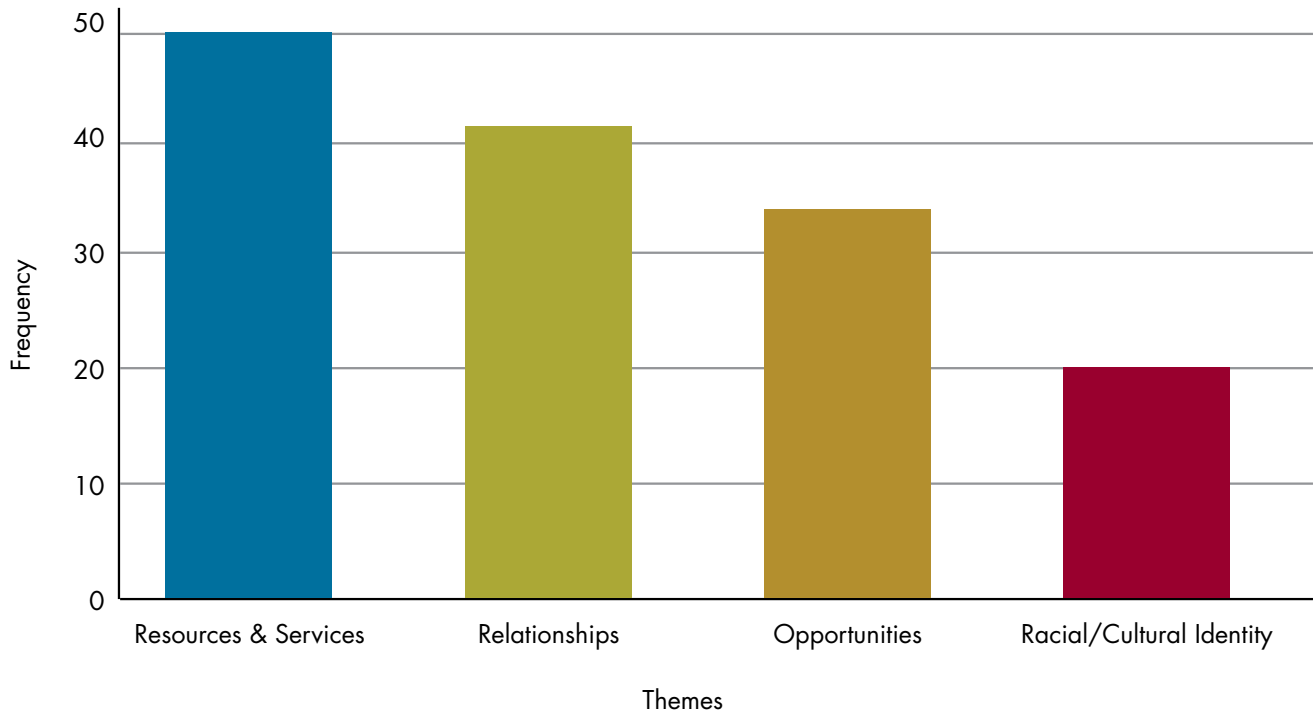
Many participants chose their HBCU due to the resources and services they were exposed to *before* enrolling in the institution, as well as a glimpse into the relationships and opportunities from which they would benefit. Aligned with Arroyo and Gasman's (2014) HBCU-based theoretical model that focuses on institutional context and conditions, several participants spoke about the institutional entry point. For example, one participant shared that he chose his HBCU because he felt it had a:

> *really good foundation right from the start. They already had everything prepared for me that was set up– from my financial aid to my housing– and compared to other schools, those schools were quite more difficult and much more technical just to get a look at little stuff like that. So, it was more straightforward and it felt like every time I did a tour here, it really felt closer to like a new home for me."*

Resources and Services: Other participants spoke to resources such as tutoring, a coaching-style of support, TRIO services, financial literacy programs, study groups, and a center that was geared specifically toward males. At one institution, every focus group participant spoke to the meaningful and effective resources and services provided by the men's center. Although the services themselves were helpful, the most meaningful aspect to participants was the mentoring they received from the people who provided the services. They spoke of mentors who were academic or student organization advisors, faculty members, a staff member in campus recreation, a tutor, and other staff members. These mentors were described as consistent and proactive in their communication and checking in, but at the core of the most meaningful mentoring experience was an encouraging relational component. One participant spoke of his mentors in the men's center keeping him going when times were tough:

> *The [men's center] since freshman year helped me grow as an overall person. And they kept me here. Like, you know, it kept me going when I didn't want to keep going. They kept me waking up every day to say, okay, I have this to do, so let me do this."*

Several participants shared the positive impact on their success made by those who provided these resources and services. One participant spoke to the meaningfulness of people who were authentic, real, and full of firm and affirming love:

> *My advisor for my freshman year, she kept me in line and a lot of times she was that mom I needed. She kinda kept it real on some stuff with me. And [a faculty member], he was just a dope mentor for me. He just told me the truth."*

Relationships: These types of meaningful, truth-telling, firm and caring relationships were consistent in the participants' stories. Several men expressed appreciation for being seen by faculty as a whole person and being known by name rather than by number. Like the participant quoted above about his mentor, many participants compared their highly impactful relationships to familial relationships: *"My best experiences with people who support me here are those who understand that this is home too, people you can feel safe around, people you love."* These supportive relationships created a greater sense of community, or togetherness, for the men. One participant said, *"At the HBCU, we're all together, we're all one. We all come together as a community. We all help each other. If somebody is down, all of us are down."* Another shared,

> *When I got here, that community vibe started to come out, that little neighborhood vibe I got from back home kinda came and showed itself. Basically I got that vibe here. I can do myself, I can be, and I'm around people who have common goals and common dreams."*

With these relationships, and the community they created, came the connections and networking that the participants felt were integral to their current and future success. Some spoke of the relationships with caring and influential faculty and staff who connected them to other supportive people, thus expanding their sense of community and sense of belonging. Others spoke of the connections to services and support that came directly from having a relationship with a mentor or advisor who knew them and cared for them well enough to connect them to what they needed. Although the distinction between connections and

networking was not fully delineated, several of the participants spoke of the importance of networking as an avenue to connect with others, as well as one that would increase their success. One participant stated:

> *I'm here for the opportunities out of here. I know a lot of people don't get it when I say I'm not particularly here just for the degree. I'm also here for the opportunities, the internships, the people I meet. The network. I'm here to open countless doors."*

The men were clear that networking and connections were important to them and were part of the relational aspect of their experiences that led to additional and greater opportunities for success.

Opportunities: When the men spoke about opportunities, there was both breadth and depth. They spoke about opportunities to engage on campus in activities and in professional development. They expressed their appreciation for opportunities to learn and be exposed to graduate education, various internships, and external constituents in the business sector or in their field of study. For example, one participant stated,

> *I'm in like eight organizations on campus. And being in the marching band and of course, it's not easy. I'm also a part of the TRIO student support services program. And I'm part of the scholars program, so they also give me a lot of exposure to different types of grad schools and how to grow more professionally. I'm here for all the opportunities!"*

The participants also spoke about opportunities to mentor others and to develop their leadership skills. One participant shared, "There's a program I'm part of where you mentor young boys at the elementary school after school, do homework with them, activities with them. Giving back and helping lead the youth is important to me." For some of the participants, the career opportunities were especially important and were the reason

they selected their particular HBCU or a particular degree program. For example, a participant stated,

> *I chose this university because of the programs that it has here. I wanted to do computer science and engineering and they have a really good engineering program here. And they also have ROTC, which I thought would help me get more experience for my future career opportunities."*

Racial/Cultural Identity Development: Like other studies on the holistic support of Black men at HBCUs, the final theme was the development of a positive racial/cultural identity that came through empowerment and uplift, as well as a counternarrative to racist societal stereotypes (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Brooms, 2018; Bryson & Sheppard, 2021; Whiting, 2009). One participant stated, "Coming to an HBCU teaches you how to make it in life as a smart Black male." Another shared a sense of inspiration and connection to other intelligent Black people:

> *I just feel like I'm around people I can relate to, even the professors. And it's kind of inspiring to see successful Black people, you know what I mean? Just doing well. I feel like seeing that motivates me to see myself as an intelligent Black man and makes me want to be my best."*

Speaking to the importance of identity at the intersection of overcoming barriers and embracing community, one participant exclaimed:

> *It's inspiring to see a bunch of people that look like me do great things because I know a lot of us aren't able. So it's a breath of fresh air to see a whole lot of motivated and educated and talented people who all look like you and want to succeed too, in the same place."*

Having their Black Male Brilliance (Bryson & Sheppard, 2021) acknowledged, and connecting with others around this brilliance, was important to the men.

In sum, participants shared the importance of resources and services, relationships, opportunities, and racial/cultural identity development provided by their HBCUs. Importantly, the intersection of these extrinsic factors is most notable for educators and institutions. It is the centeredness of relationships with Black males that connects mentoring to the provision of resources and services, that creates opportunities through networking and connections with others, and contributes to positive racial and cultural identity development of Black males that comprise holistic student support (See Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 **Thematic Intersections**
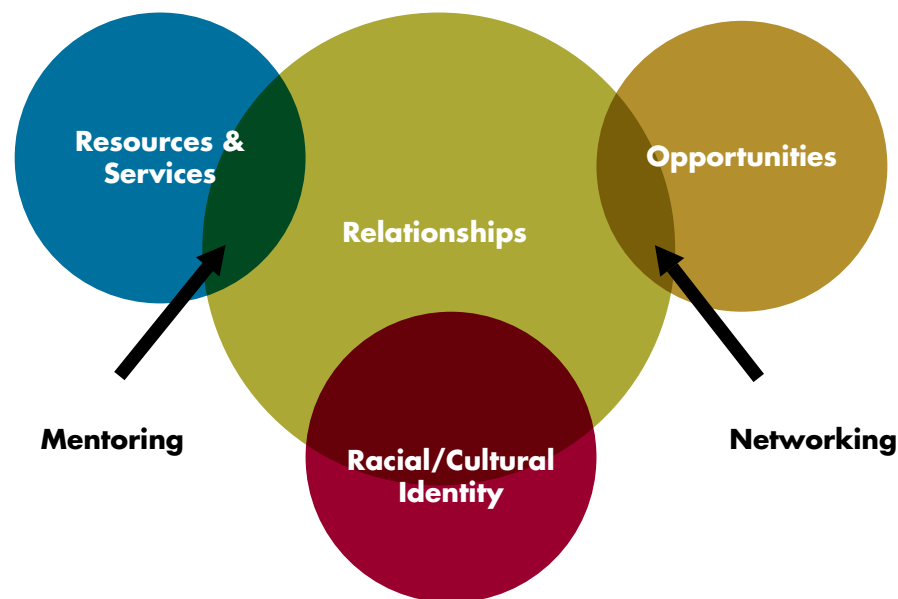
Implications & Recommendations

Before offering a set of recommendations that emerged from our thematic analysis of the extrinsic factors that contribute to the success of Black males, we want to offer an implication that emerged from a gap in the findings. Although none of the men spoke about mental health services they received as extrinsic factors that contributed to their success, many of them spoke about their mental health. They expressed a need for their difficulties and pain to be heard and recognized, but these Black men also talked about the difficulty of being vulnerable and their need for mental and social support to be able to open up. One participant shared,

> Black males feel like they can't show weakness and feel like they have to carry a lot on their shoulders." Another stated, "Look in the mirror. Think more deeply. We need to think and talk about mental health. We have to deal with our trauma. If anybody needs counseling, it's going to be us."

Higher education must address these needs by providing adequate counseling services and providing Black students the space to process their lived experiences with structural racism and intersecting forms of oppression, their trauma, and their well-being from the outset of their college experience through programming, classroom curricula where appropriate, and in casual conversations with mentors and advisors. Additional recommendations include:

Intentional Relationship-Building

- Connection points - Find and create connection points with Black male students to nurture a relationship.
- Authentic - Interact with Black males authentically and vulnerably.
- Loving but firm - Faculty and staff should demonstrate consistent care and commitment to students' well-being and success while also having high expectations.
- Impart life lessons- Faculty and staff should share wisdom, stories, and lessons learned from their own experiences.

Resources and Services

- Tutoring and Supplemental Instruction - Faculty, staff, and advisors should work closely with their student learning centers to create more active engagement, participation, and accountability.
- TRIO and Student Support Services - Staff these offices and programs with high quality staff members who are well respected by students.
- Proactive and consistent mentorship and advising - Advisors and mentors should be proactive in providing resources. Consistent follow-up is also important. Be present in spaces where students spend time (i.e., dining halls, libraries, residence halls, gyms, etc.).
- Study groups - Create intentional structures for study groups and focus on trust and rapport building of the groups to increase participation.
- Referrals to resources and services - When referring Black males to any resources and services, faculty and staff should do so relationally (i.e., walking them over to those services, send a connecting email instead of offering an email address or website, sharing their personal experiences of how similar resources and services have helped them in the past, etc.).

Programming

- Confidence and motivation building - Intentionally focus on confidence and motivation building and the intrinsic factors that contribute to the men's success.
- Time management - Create opportunities for Black males to articulate specific behavioral limitations (e.g., spending two hours per night gaming, taking on too many activities, procrastinating an assignment due to anxiety, etc.) rather than talking about time management broadly.
- Financial literacy - Develop relevant and accessible financial literacy programs that position them as personal entrepreneurs of their education and career path.
- Mental health and wellness - Create structured and impromptu opportunities for students to talk about trauma, healthy coping strategies, and holistic well-being. Be intentional about addressing stigma. Faculty and staff should model vulnerability.

Black Male Excellence Centers

- Networking - Create opportunities for Black males to connect and network with faculty and staff on shared interest and network with internal and external partners.
- Resources and services - Consider housing many of the resources and services in the Center and using the Center as a satellite space for student learning center services to be offered.
- Critical conversations - Create opportunities for Black males to talk about systemic racism and its impact.
- Cultural strengths and healthy masculinity - Discuss topics such as Black male strengths and healthy masculinity that are integral to their success.

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Student Success at HBCUs: Institutional Case Studies Elizabeth City State University

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Optimizing Academic Advising

Aligned with the Advising Success Network, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition aims to prioritize and improve advising practices for low-income, first-generation, and students of color by highlighting best practices present at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As part of that mission, Elizabeth City State University submitted a case study outlining its Optimizing Academic Advising (OAA) initiative in which the university focused on creating standardized advising procedures, offered more advisor trainings, and increased advisor visibility and availability for student appointments. Findings demonstrate advisor satisfaction with the new training and standardized procedures, and a positive increase in graduation rates after implementing the initiative.

Institutional Profile

Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) is a Historically Black University in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, that is part of the University of North Carolina System. It is the only four-year public university in the northeastern region of the state, with a 21-county service area comprised largely of Tier 1 and Tier 2 impoverished rural counties. Of its 1,956 FTE undergraduate students, 61% are Pell grant recipients, 82% receive some type of financial aid, and 24% are first generation (i.e., no family member has received a college degree). Forty-eight percent of the student population resides on campus and 52% are commuters. Sixty percent of the student population is female and the remaining 40% are male. A growing population of students, 23%, are over the age of 25. ECSU continues to attract a diverse student population. Most students attending ECSU are Black or African American (68.3%), followed by White (17.5%) and Hispanic (4.7%).

The Optimizing Academic Advising Initiative

The Optimizing Academic Advising (OAA) initiative launched in Fall 2016 to standardize faculty advising practices at Elizabeth City State University (ECSU). This initiative became critical to the academic success of students, particularly low-income and socioeconomically marginalized populations, when the university experienced changes in organizational structure because of significant declines in enrollment. Between 2010 and 2015 ECSU's enrollment declined by 52%, which led to significant budget cuts and changes in the academic departmental structure. Prior to 2013, the university had 4 schools with 15 departments; between 2013-2014 there were 3 schools and 10 departments, and in 2016 the university had no schools and just 8 departments. Changes in organizational structure not only led to varying academic advising procedures across campus, but in some instances, variations within a single

department. Disruptions in the organizational structure intensified the need to optimize academic advising.

Academic advising is one of the most significant contributing factors for a student's success in college (Tinto, 1999). Tinto emphasized the importance of providing clear and consistent information to students. With all the responsibilities of faculty, including teaching, research, and scholarship, academic advising at ECSU did not always garner the attention it deserved. Forms and policies pertinent to academic advising were available on the ECSU website; however, the documents were housed in various locations and were often difficult to locate. The university was committed to students receiving the same quality of academic advising regardless of major or advisor; standardizing the academic advising process and creating a uniform format for advising forms was one way to help ensure this was being done (Koch, 2007). Establishing a standard advising protocol helped bring consistency to a student's advising experience and served as the initial step in the OAA process.

In addition to standardizing advising processes, research clearly indicated that advisor training was an essential component of any successful advising program (Koring, 2005). Prior to the implementation of the OAA initiative, every student had a hold on their account prior to pre-registration and thus, had to see their advisor to register; however, what happened during those meetings varied dramatically among advisors. ECSU did not offer a campus-wide protocol for advisors or offer advisor training beyond the new faculty training, which focused solely on articulating general education requirements. Advisees cited knowledge of university policies and procedures as a key component in building a quality advising relationship; a single new faculty orientation advising session was clearly not sufficient (Ohrt, 2016). To ensure the implementation of the standard advising protocol across campus, this project sought to train faculty advisors on the new protocol and key policies and procedures.

The last element of this initiative focused on advisor availability. Students feel that advisor availability is another vital characteristic of a quality advising program (Ohrt, 2016). Although advisors posted office hours on their doors, first-generation and low-income students are often not proactive in initiating contact with academic advisors. Advisor pre-registration holds were embedded in the pre-registration process as a strategy to ensure meetings between advisors and advisees; however, there was no procedure to outline who would initiate these appointments. Some advisors were proactive in their outreach to students, sending emails or launching appointment campaigns, while others felt having posted availability on their door during pre-registration was sufficient. A creative, proactive outreach initiative was needed to ensure that students remained on the right path. In 2013, ECSU began using GradesFirst because of the university's involvement in UNC System Office Early Warning System pilot program. Faculty participation in the GradesFirst project was encouraging, with Progress Report Campaigns having faculty response rates of at least 90%. In June of 2015, ECSU joined EAB's Student Success Collaborative (SSC), the company that recently acquired GradesFirst, which ECSU branded as E4U

(Engaging, Enriching, Empowering, Effective). The E4U initiative was launched in March 2016 just prior to the Optimizing Academic Advising Program. At that time, 93% of all faculty had been trained on E4U, and numerous ECSU specific E4U resources and training modules were developed. Furthermore, more than 50% of faculty advisors were using at least one advising feature within E4U, which made it ideal to use the platform to address campus-wide advising deficiencies. Specifically, E4U was used to electronically store advisor availability and as a mechanism for advisors to proactively launch advising appointment campaigns for students.

The Optimizing Academic Advising (OAA) project ran from 2016 – 2018 and had two specific goals aligned with the institutional goal of increasing retention and graduation rates:

Goal 1: **Provide faculty with a set of tools and resources to properly advise students on policies, procedure, and academic curriculum.**

Goal 2: **Increase communication and engagement concerning students' academic standing and progress towards graduation.**

Because the majority of ECSU students are Pell Grant students, having an advisor who is proactive, knowledgeable, and accessible should help them reduce academic advising ambiguity and therefore enhance academic success. Approximately 112 faculty and staff were involved in the project: faculty advisors (107), general education staff (4), and the office of retention (1). It is likely that more than just first-year students benefited from the academic training that was received by all faculty. The importance of first-year advising cannot be overstated. If a first-year student receives improper academic advising their first semester, it will not only affect their progress towards degree, but it will lead to distrust in the academic advising process which can drastically affect retention (Nutt, 2003).

The Academic Advising Advisory Board, comprised of a representative from each academic department, two department chairs, and staff from the Registrar's Office, Financial Aid, and Student Affairs, was the most integral component of the project during Year 1. The Advisory Board developed ECSU's advising mission statement, advising values, and advising student learning outcomes, and standardized templates for curriculum balance sheets and plans of study. The Advisory Board also created Advisor and Advisee Responsibilities documents, a spreadsheet of key policies that impact advising (e.g., satisfactory academic progress policy, transient study policy, withdrawal limitation policy, etc.), and a single document with important contacts (e.g., financial aid, registrar, bursar, counseling, etc.). The Advisory Board also reviewed key student forms and processes (e.g., permit for excess hours, substitution, change of catalog, etc.) and updated the forms and process, as necessary.

The final products created by the Academic Advising Advisory Board were an Advising Handbook and Advising Syllabus branded with the theme: *Charting Your Course – Destination Graduation*. In the Advising Syllabus, each year of a student's academic career had specific advising expectations. This document was referred to as "Staying on Course" and each

level had an individualized theme: First Year – Plan Your Voyage, Sophomore Year – Set Sail, Junior Year – Navigate Your Journey, Senior Year – Prepare to Dock. All information created by the Academic Advising Advisory Board was housed in a Faculty and Student Resources Blackboard Shell.

Assessment

A mixed method design using quantitative and qualitative components was used in this case study. The methods included evaluation of the effectiveness of the training and an analysis of faculty's appointment availability, proactive outreach, and advising appointments in E4U. Retention and graduation rates were also used to assess the institutional goal. Below is an overview of how each goal was assessed.

Goal 1: Provide faculty with a set of tools and resources to properly advise students.

1.1 Development of standardized advising documents.

1.2 Development of a uniform advising protocol.

1.3 Creation of a central location for forms and documents pertinent to academic advising.

1.4 Survey of advisors on effectiveness of academic advising training.

Goal 2: Increase communication and engagement concerning students' academic standing and progress towards graduation.

2.1 Assessment of percentage of faculty advisors with appointment availability in E4U.

2.2 Assessment of percentage of faculty advisors that launched Advising Appointment Campaigns in E4U.

2.3 Assessment of documented advising appointments for first-year students that are a direct result of Advising Appointment Campaigns.

An analysis of retention and graduation rates was used to assess the institutional goal. Census data were retrieved from the Student Information System (SIS) to determine cohort populations and demographics at the time of entry and to calculate retention and graduation rates. IPEDS methodology was used as the strategy for gathering retention and graduation rates. This sampling strategy was reflective of full-time, degree/certificate-seeking students who started and ended their undergraduate education at ECSU. This approach was cohort specific.

Findings

During year two, open-ended questions were posed to academic advisors who were provided training using the newly developed advising protocol. The Academic Advising Advisory Board collected and analyzed the data to make modifications to the syllabus. Four different one-hour mandatory advising workshops were held on topics ranging from understanding ECSU's Advising Mission, Values, and Responsibilities to proactive academic advising. All the trainings were well received, with an average of 93% of faculty strongly agreeing or agreeing to the following two statements: "The workshop increased my understanding of the topics" and "As a result of this workshop, I am more prepared to use the tools, resources and content provided." Additionally, at least 15 minutes of the four General Faculty meetings held during the academic year were dedicated to updates on academic advising.

Faculty advisors were tasked with having their availability loaded into E4U so that advisees could schedule appointments via E4U at any time. An average of 93% of advisors had their availability loaded into E4U during year 2 of the OAA initiative with 100% of first-year advisors launching Advising Campaigns.

Retention rates of first-year students who had a documented advising session in E4U in response to an Advising Campaign were significantly greater than those who did not have documented advising sessions. Eighty-eight percent of first-year students who attended at least one appointment campaign persisted from Fall to Fall, while only 67.2% of first-year students who did not attend any appointment campaigns were retained. These results are, however, limited by the assumption that there may be motivational differences between students who show up for advising appointments and those who do not show up. Although first-time first-year students were the only students monitored for advising appointments, faculty heavily used E4U with over 120 appointment campaigns launched by faculty and 6,451 advising appointments tracked through E4U.

The assessment findings for the overall goal of increasing retention and graduation rates showed that prior to the implementation of the OAA initiative, the 2015 graduation cohort had a retention rate of 67.8%. The first-year student cohort of 2016, the year of OAA implementation, had a 73.9% retention rate and the 2017 cohort of first-time students had a 72.5% retention rate.

In addition to the increase in retention rates, 4-year graduation rates increased significantly. Prior to implementation, the cohort of 2012 first-year students who graduated in 2016 had a four-year graduation rate of 21.1%. The 2016 cohort of first-year students, which reflects the inaugural class experiencing the initial implementation of the OAA initiative, had a four-year graduation rate of 24.3% and the 2017 first-year cohort of first-year students, had a four-year graduation rate of 29.2%.

There is a positive correlation between the implementation of the OAA initiative and the increase in retention and graduation rates.

Figure 2.1 Retention Rates for First-Year Student Cohorts

Retention Rate
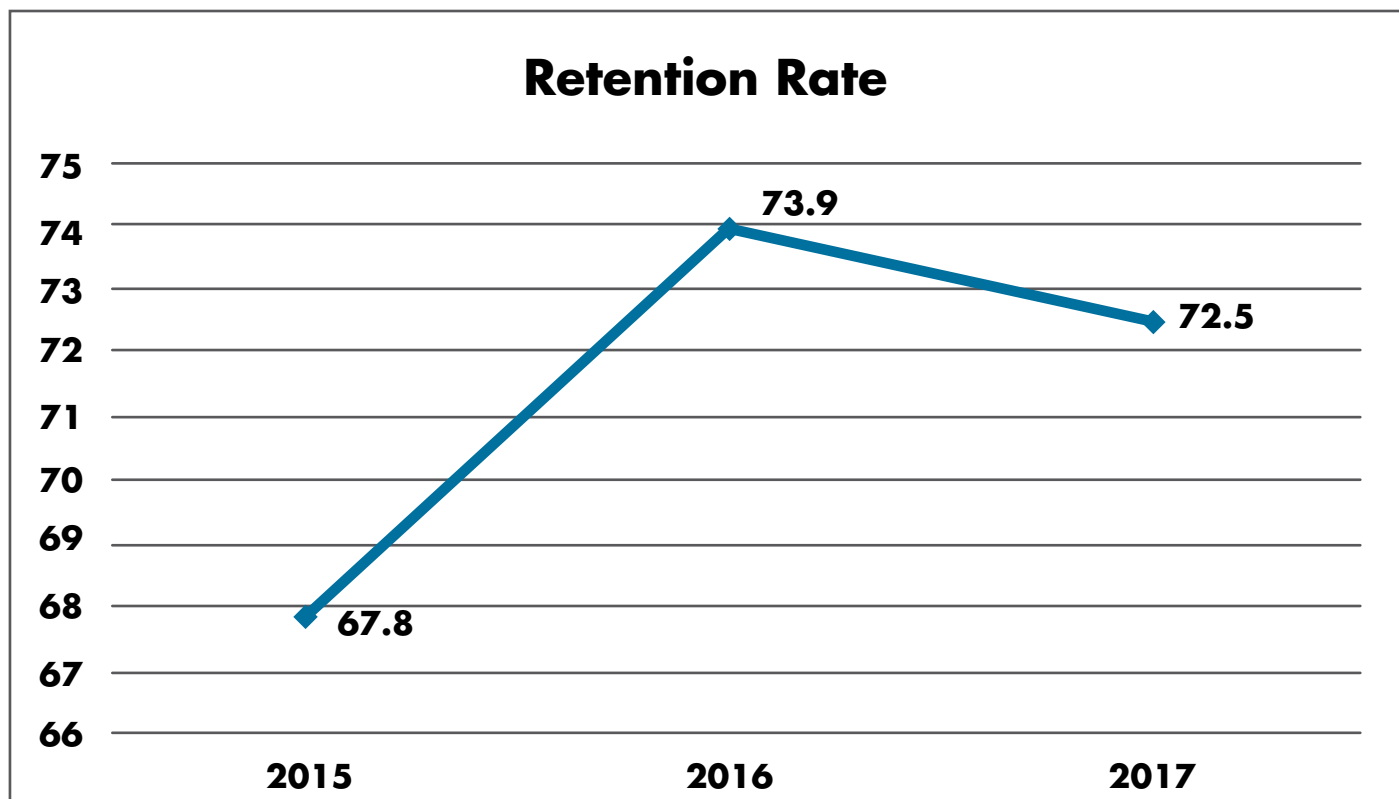
Figure 2.2 Graduation Rates for First-Year Cohorts

Graduation Rate
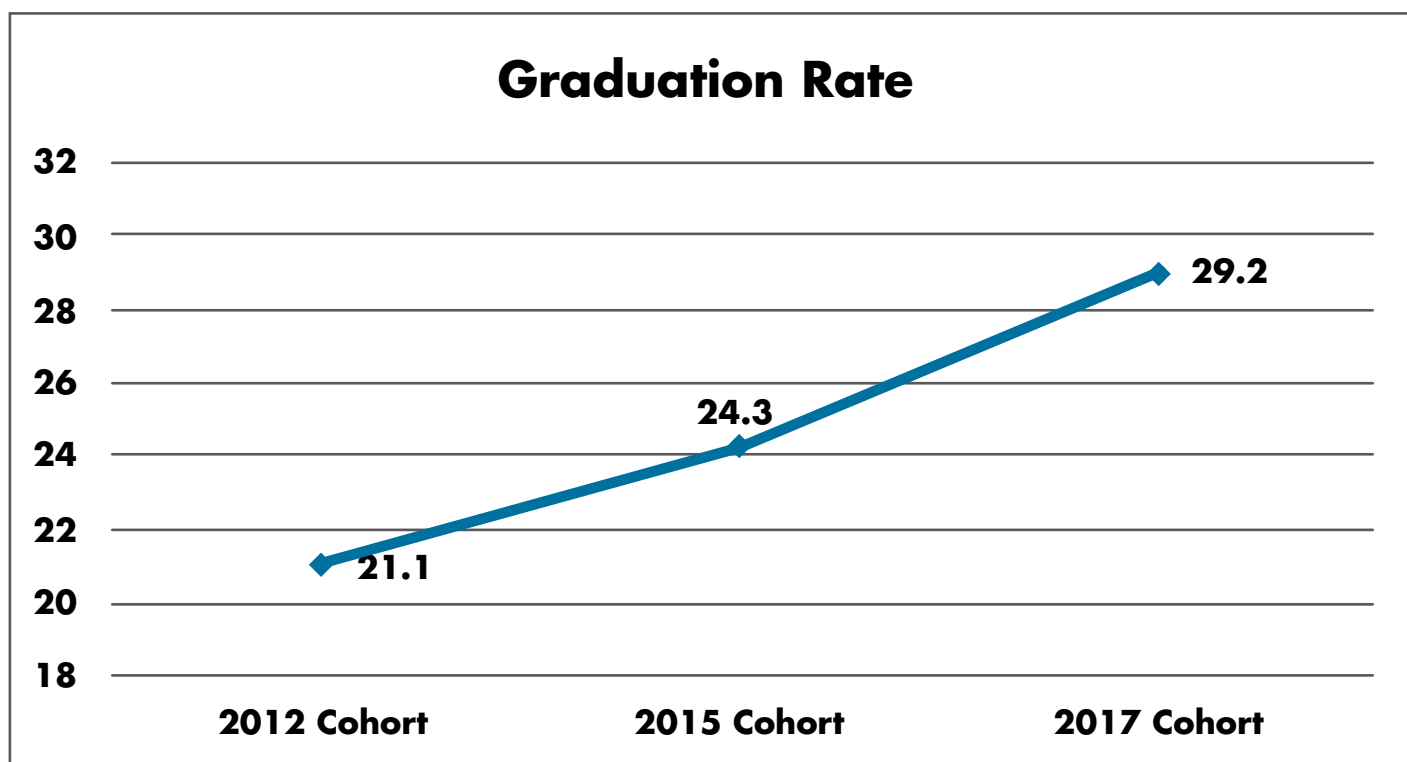
Implications for Practice

For 130 years, ECSU has been committed to providing a quality education to students regardless of their economic background. Having a well-trained advisor who can assist students, particularly low-income and first-generation students, with navigating the complex university structure has a positive impact on students' overall success. Creating an academic advising culture where advising procedures are routinely and uniformly practiced by all academic advisors takes time and getting buy-in when establishing the advising protocols is key to the process. Addressing institutional advising deficiencies does not always mean starting from scratch. ECSU's ability to implement departmental advising best-practices and build on established momentum that E4U was experiencing played an integral role in the overall success of the Optimizing Academic Advising Initiative. Faculty and students have a clearly defined map to work collectively to achieve academic success. Since experiencing a 52% decline in enrollment from 2010 to 2015, ECSU has experienced a 51% increase in enrollment from 2016 to 2021. The Optimizing Academic Advising Initiative and the university's continued focus on advancing academic advising has played an integral role in increasing the institution's retention, persistence, and enrollment. This initiative also aligns with the institution's 2020-2025 strategic plan, Forging Our Future, which emphasizes the importance of inclusion and equity. Students are empowered to participate in their achievements when they are provided with clear maps to academic success. The E4U platform provides an early alert to students, faculty, and administrators so that collectively, no student is overlooked. Students are more satisfied and engaged because of the Optimizing Academic Advising Initiative.

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Student Success at HBCUs: Institutional Case Studies Fayetteville State University

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Expanding Advising During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Virtual Student Success Peer Coaching

Aligned with the Advising Success Network, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition aims to prioritize and improve advising practices for low-income, first-generation, and students of color by highlighting best practices present at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As part of the mission, Fayetteville State University submitted a case study outlining its Virtual Student Success Peer Coaching initiative in which the university implemented virtual peer coaches to help students through courses with high DF rates. Findings demonstrate that 81% of students agree that virtual peer coaches contributed to their success in the course and students participating in the initiative had lower DF rates than non-participants.

Institutional Profile

Founded in 1867, Fayetteville State University (FSU), located in Fayetteville, NC, is the first public Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the state. Fayetteville State University is a proud member institution of the University of North Carolina System. It is home to 5,563 undergraduate students (FTE 4,633), of whom approximately 1,058 (19%) live on campus. The University's demographic composition includes the following:

- 3,920 female and 1643 male students (70% female, 30% male);
- 2,201 students (40%) who are over age 24;
- 58% Black or African American students, 20% White, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 2% Asian, 5% two or more races, 4% unknown, and 2% other;
- 30% of students who identify as first-generation, which FSU defines as neither of the student's parents completed a bachelor's degree;
- 2,674 students (48%) who are Pell Grant recipients.

Virtual Student Success Peer Coaching

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, only 34% percent of course offerings at FSU were online. In spring 2020, there was a huge shift in traditional higher education learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fayetteville State University, along with

other institutions nationwide, moved to a 100% online learning modality, which disrupted learning for traditional classroom student learners who had to learn how to navigate learning in an online environment. A survey was conducted in spring 2020 and of the students who responded, 39% did not feel they could successfully learn the content of their courses through online instruction. As a result, when students began transitioning from a face-to-face to online learning modality, FSU sought to provide personalized interaction with students to help them stay on track. Initially, the project—FSU Cares Virtual Coaching—was comprised primarily of administrative support personnel who contacted students via text, phone, and email to remind students about assignments, make referrals to campus resources, and most importantly make the student aware that FSU cares about student academic, social, and mental well-being.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, students have expressed negative emotions such as uncertainty, anxiety, and nervousness as they transitioned to virtual classes (Murphy & Eduljee, 2020). By the end of spring semester 2020, nationwide, the challenges of online learning were well documented: 1) waning levels of motivation to stay in school as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, 2) continued challenges of students' adjustment to online learning, 3) students struggling to manage their time due to competing priorities, and 4) the continued adjustment to the absence of face-to-face engagement with faculty, staff, and other students. As a result of these findings, the FSU Cares Virtual Coaching project transitioned to become the Virtual Student Success Peer Coaching project (VSSPC), which launched in summer 2020. The Virtual Student Success Peer Coaching project used a student-centered evidence-based coaching model designed to facilitate student success. The target population continued to be students enrolled in high "DF" courses in select first-year and second-year level courses (courses where students receive a D or an F as a final grade). In addition, the services were provided by upper-level students, identified by faculty, who had taken the course and successfully completed it.

The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan Priority 1 focuses on "academic excellence that supports student success." One of the goals was to increase 6-year graduation rates from 35% to 44% over the next five years. Multiple strategies were identified to include strengthening advising through redesign efforts and financial investments. To meet this objective VSSPC was a strategy implemented to strengthen advising. Initial investments for VSSPC were leveraged through seed funding provided by the University of North Carolina System. As the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved, VSSPC has served as a sustainable method for strengthening advising, as a result the institution has worked to continue the project by hiring a full-time coordinator and shifting coordination efforts from the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success & Enrollment Management.

Fayetteville State University recognizes that many students give up their pursuit of a college degree for reasons that are not primarily academic in nature and that there is a need to help students clarify their goals and reflect on their daily decisions considering long-term goals. The Virtual Student Success Peer

Coaching project is modeled from the Inside Track Coaching study (Bettinger & Baker, 2011) which supported students by addressing non-academic factors that contribute to persistence and graduation. The Inside Track Coaching study meets the What Works Clearinghouse group design standards without reservation and shows evidence of a positive and statistically significant effect on credit accumulation and college persistence (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). The What Works Clearinghouse is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) where IES identifies existing research on education interventions, assesses the quality of the research, summarizes and disseminates the evidence from studies. In the study, the coach contacted students regularly to develop a clearer vision of their goals, to guide them in connecting their daily activities to their long-term goals, and to support them in building skills, including time management, self-advocacy, and study skills.

Virtual peer coaches conducted weekly check-ins with their designated students via text (primary), phone (secondary), and email (last choice). The core services to students included the following:

- nudging reminders regarding upcoming assignments and exam dates;

- marketing and providing a soft handoff to campus resources such as online tutoring and counseling to help with navigating college decisions;

- assisting with concepts in the course to increase understanding (homework assistance);

- providing encouragement to stay on track and get back on track; and

- ensuring student awareness that FSU CARES about their success.

Assessment Method & Design

The Virtual Student Success Peer Coaching project seeks to address the most effective strategies for implementation of an expansion of advising using virtual peer coaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. Assessment questions that FSU seeks to address are:

1. What impact does virtual peer coaching have on 100 and 200 level courses with historically high DF rates?

2. Is there a difference in DF rates for students who are engaged in peer coaching as compared to students who are not engaged?

3. Were there any findings in the formative and summative assessments to help guide continuous improvement?

Student engagement is a critical element of the peer coaching project. As a result, texting software was utilized for two-way texting between the coach and student. One-way texting (nudging) from the peer coach is a useful tool; however, according to research, two-way texting has a greater impact on student success as it

allows for the student to engage by asking questions (Arnold & Israni, 2020). Participation and performance data will be gathered to include demographic information, course enrollment, and course outcomes data provided by Institutional Research. In addition, formative assessment tools will be used throughout the project to allow for changes to occur along the way.

Assessment Findings

For this study, the data findings focus on outcomes during spring 2021.

Rationale: The program was initiated in Summer 2020 for STEM courses, however there was a delay in funding; hence, the project began about two weeks after classes started. In Fall 2020, because of additional funding, the project was expanded to non-STEM courses. Due to the delay in notification of funding, the expansion began about 4 weeks into the semester. In Spring 2021, coaching began the first week of classes. One class participating in VSSPC was a face-to-face course, all others were online courses (71.7% asynchronous and 26.5% synchronous). Hence, the quantitative performance outcomes are focused on the semester in which all students had access to the coaching intervention for the full semester.

General Findings: The coaching project was initiated during summer 2020, and since its inception, 81% of students responding to surveys agree that their virtual peer coach contributed to their success in the course. Moreover, students who were engaged in the peer coaching project had lower DF rates as compared to those who did not participate.

Data Collection

A "DF" rate for a course is the percentage of students who receive a D or an F as a final grade in the course. Historically, freshmen-level courses have high DF rates; this has an impact on persistence and on-time degree completion rates. Fourteen faculty members voluntarily participated in the peer coaching project for a total of 35 courses. A total of 706 students were invited to participate in virtual peer coaching, of which 81 opted out, which left 625 students participating in the peer coaching project. The participant demographics comprised of 27% military affiliated, 30% first-generation, 28% adult learners, 75% female, and 25% male. A total of 13 peer coaches were assigned to course sections and each coach on average had 55 students that they supported.

The cumulative DF rate for all courses assigned a coach was 20%. To have useful comparative results, only the courses where the faculty taught the same course pre-COVID-19 pandemic (fall 2019) are included in the assessment findings. While there was a total of 14 faculty who participated in the coaching project, only ten also taught the course in fall 2019. Table 3.1 summarizes DF outcomes for STEM courses taught by the same faculty during fall 2019 and spring 2021. Overall, the DF rates increased by an average of three percentage points. However, there were significant decreases in particular courses, such as General Physics, where the DF rate decreased from 38% to 6%, followed by College Physics II where the DF rate decreased from 21% to 13%.

Table 3.1 *STEM Courses DF Rate Comparison*

Course Title	Fall 2019 % DF In-Person (Pre-COVID-19 pandemic)	Spring 21 % DF Online (COVID-19 pandemic)	Passing Rate Point Difference
College Physics I Lecture	10%	20%	-10
College Physics II Lecture	13%	22%	-9
College Physics II Lecture	21%	13%	8
Comprehensive Physical Sci Lec	17%	29%	-12
Comprehensive Physical Sci Lec	6%	11%	-5
Comprehensive Physical Sci Lec	5%	15%	-10
Comprehensive Physical Sci Lec	10%	17%	-7
General Physics I Lecture	38%	6%	32
General Physics II Lecture	9%	4%	5
Intro to Organic & Biochem Lec	18%	16%	2
Intro to Organic & Biochem Lec	8%	16%	-8
Precalculus Mathematics II	42%	47%	-5
Quantitative Reasoning	15%	24%	-9
Quantitative Reasoning	8%	32%	-24
Total	**16%**	**19%**	**-3**

Table 3.2 summarizes DF outcomes for non-STEM courses taught by the same faculty in the fall 2019 and spring 2021. Most non-STEM courses showed some form of decrease in the DF rates. Overall, the DF rates decreased at an overall average of two percentage points. The most significant result for a non-STEM course was Elementary Spanish, where the DF rate decreased from 50% to 24%, followed by World History, which decreased from 39% to 16%.

Table 3.3 summarizes student engagement with the coaching project. Engagement levels are defined by the percentage of students who responded to text messages. A total of 26,788 text messages were sent to students, and overall, 53% of the students were engaged.

Through further analysis, the data demonstrates that DF rates by classification for students not engaged in coaching were higher than DF rates for students who were engaged. Table 3.4 indicates that the average DF rate for students who engaged in coaching was 21% and for students who did not engage in coaching was 25%. Across all classifications, students who engaged had lower DF rates than students who did not engage. Furthermore, seniors had the lowest DF rates, and first-year students had the highest DF rates.

Table 3.2 *Non-STEM Courses DF Rate Comparison*

Course Title	Fall 2019 % DF In-Person (Pre-COVID-19 pandemic)	Spring 21 % DF Online (COVID-19 pandemic)	Passing Rate Point Difference
Critical Thinking	34%	19%	15
Critical Thinking	21%	19%	2
Critical Thinking	9%	19%	-10
Critical Thinking	10%	19%	-9
Elementary Spanish I	50%	24%	26
English Composition I	17%	60%	-43
General Psychology	44%	29%	15
World History since 1600	39%	16%	23
Total	**28%**	**26%**	**2**

Table 3.3 *Student Engagement with Peer Coach*

	High Engagement (51%+)	Medium Engagement (15%-50%)	Low Engagement (1%-14%)	No Engagement	Opted Out
Total Number	42	122	211	250	81
Percentage	6%	17%	30%	35%	12%

Table 3.4 *DF Rates by Classification*

	First-year students	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Total Average
Participated but not engaged	42%	22%	27%	9%	25%
Participated and engaged	37%	16%	22%	9%	21%

A variety of data was gathered over the duration of the project which have impacted changes along the way; these data include: 1) peer coach weekly feedback logs, 2) faculty mid-year and end of semester feedback, and 3) student end of semester satisfaction surveys. These data have allowed for an understanding of what should be added, continued, and discontinued. Figure 3.1 summarizes feedback gathered from faculty, students, and peer coaches. The assessment findings of VSSPC have helped to inform opportunities for expanding the services of Peer Coaching to high need groups.

Implications for Practice

Advising is an institutional priority that supports the student experience from enrollment to completion. This case study suggests that the expansion of advising through a peer coach has the potential to increase student agency. Coaching allows students to tap into their peers to gain confidence with decision making, advocate for self, and make use of campus resources. A limitation of this analysis is that it is difficult to establish whether the program caused the difference or not across populations. There are significant differences in the kind of students who opted out or do not engage as much—these are potential variables that account for differences in the outcome.

There are several opportunities for future research because of the findings:

- Further analyze why DF rates varied drastically across courses? Most faculty were satisfied with the coaching project; however, for students to pass a course they must master the learning outcomes. Data alignment with participation in other support services (tutoring) may help to explain the variation in DF outcomes.

- Seek to understand how to move student engagement of low and no engagement to high engagement. Exploring techniques related to faculty/coach interactions, understanding the right number of contacts with students, and why students opt out or do not engage are elements to consider.

As a result of the findings FSU is committed to advancing equity to support student success by

- Dedicating institutional funds to support and expand virtual peer coaching.

- Increasing first-year outcomes by expanding coaching services as a mandatory intervention in all first-year seminar classes. The first-year class is one of the most homogeneous populations at the institution, which allows for standardization of coaching.

- Enhancing peer coaches' skills to expand the scope beyond texting to include one-on-one sessions to better connect students to their personal goals.

- Integrating student services and data tracking systems to better understand the impact of peer coaching with other interventions.

Figure 3.1 **Summative recommendations for continuous improvement.**

Peer Coach Feedback

- Access to syllabus and announcements in Canvas is needed for coach to reinforce course expectations

- Professor reinforcing coaching contributes to student engagement

- Texting software has limited visibility on mobile devices

- Professor does not provide coach with feedback regarding the course

Faculty Feedback

- The peer coach should keep the instructor informed about activities with class weekly

- Some students in classes were irritated when they received more than one contact from the peer coach per week

- Coaching works well, but students' time management and content mastery are just as important

Student Feedback

- Some coaches' responsiveness decreased during the semester

- Some students confused peer coach with their Supplemental Instruction leader

- Would like more support with tutoring in addition to coaching

As of fall 2021, fifty-three percent (53%) of courses continue to be offered online. There is a continued need for coaching services as persistence and degree attainment depend on providing students with the support needed to manage not only their coursework but their ability to navigate and leverage university resources. The implications of VSSPC have far-reaching contributions as an integrated model between faculty, advising services, and academic support.

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Student Success at HBCUs: Institutional Case Studies Albany State University

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Academic Advising as a Tool for Student Success and Educational Equity

Aligned with the Advising Success Network, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition aims to prioritize and improve advising practices for low-income, first-generation, and students of color by highlighting best practices present at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As part of that mission, Albany State University submitted a case study outlining its comprehensive program combining technology and cross-functional approaches with faculty and staff. Findings demonstrate that students who participated in the initiative had higher GPAs and fall-to-fall retention rates than non-participants.

Institutional Profile

Located in Albany, GA, Albany State University (ASU) is the largest public Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the state. ASU is home to 6,509 students (FTE 5,676) and is a proud member institution of the University System of Georgia. The University's mission focuses on access, equality, and diversity, ensuring all students have an opportunity to pursue a degree. For example, more than 23% of students are first- generation college students (i.e., neither parent completed a four-year college or university degree), while more than 80% receive some form of financial aid with 55% receiving the Pell Grant. Approximately 28% of the student population reside on campus, and the remainder (72%) are commuters. Undergraduate students account for 94% of the enrollment, and graduate students account for 6%. The University's demographic make-up includes 72% female, 27% male, and 17% over 25 years of age. Regarding race and ethnicity, 77% of students are Black or African American; 11.4% are White; 6.1% are Hispanic/Latino; 2.4% are multiracial; 2.9% are undeclared; and less than 1% are American Indian, Alaska Native, or Asian. First-year students (i.e., those with 0-29 earned hours) account for 40% of the total enrollment, and sophomore students (i.e., those with 30-59 earned hours) account for 24% of the total enrollment.

Technology-Enabled Advising

In 2017, ASU merged with the local junior college, Darton State, to form the new ASU, which combines the strengths of both institutions to fulfill the access mission

while offering workforce-related degrees. The consolidation of the two institutions has demanded more rigorous academic advising geared toward supporting and ensuring each student's opportunity to graduate. The University offers a broad array of graduate, baccalaureate, associate, and certificate programs at its main campuses in Albany as well as strategically placed branch sites and online instruction. For the past three years, ASU has invested time and resources into establishing a quality advising system that is consistent across campuses and provides appropriate training and evaluation of students and faculty.

Because of ASU's varied student population, including first-generation, commuter, and minority students, as well as those of diverse ages, ethnicities, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, our success in advising is attributed to the use of the case management approach and intrusive advising. According to the NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA), case management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, and advocacy for services that benefit students, and intrusive advising involves personal contact with students to develop a caring relationship aimed at intervention (Pierce, 2016). Based on the model described by Richardson (2008), ASU's advising practices include the following:

- reliance on detailed advising notes and student records;
- use of requirements of academic programs of study;
- intentional referrals to other departments and services;
- advocacy for policies that promote student success;
- evaluation of the advising process, and
- consistent direct contact with the faculty regarding the progress of students.

The advising model at ASU is a combination of centralized and decentralized services. For example, incoming students use the Academic Advising and Retention Center (AARC). With a focus on effectively transitioning students to college academics, the AARC success coaches (i.e., professional advisors) are the first point of contact for students with fewer than 60 earned hours (i.e., first-year and sophomore students). Therefore, the AARC is the first academic home for 100% of each year's incoming class. This includes students who have decided on a major, those who are undecided or exploring, and those who have not yet met the entrance requirements for specialized programs of study. Finally, students are required to meet with their advisors at least twice a semester and are encouraged to visit or conference with them whenever they feel it is necessary.

For the past three years, the AARC has supported students in their progress toward graduation. The responsibilities of the success coaches include the following:

- develop plans of study with clear pathways to achieve academic goals;
- facilitate connections with faculty and academic support services;

- facilitate connections with the University's resources, including disability services/counseling, career services, and student affairs' organizations;
- review or monitor students' academic performance and send them emails with observations or questions about their academic record; and
- provide workshops as well as individual and group training sessions covering a range of topics to ensure a successful academic and social transition to university life.

The success coaches use various methods of outreach such as the EAB platform, which sends messages to the student's university email account, and the learning management systems email. Text campaigns are generated through the university artificial intelligence chatbot named Goldie. Also, the majority of the advising contacts are scheduled appointments with very few walk-in appointments. Regardless of the approach—case management and/or intrusive advising—the goal is to build a strong and structured advisor- advisee relationship to support the success of the student at ASU.

A Cross-Functional Approach to Advising

At ASU, the 60-hour mark includes the completion of all general education courses and entrance into the core content curriculum. Once students earn more than 60 hours, they are assigned faculty/program advisors within their department with whom they meet to follow their program of study until the completion of their program. This group of juniors and seniors are not able to enroll in their classes without consultation with their faculty advisor. The hand-off at 60+ hours is seamless because of the effective communication and work done on the front end to build a meaningful student experience between the success coaches and the faculty advisors. The AARC is housed in Enrollment Management and Student Success; however, faculty advisors are located in Academic Affairs. Both divisions have seen early and sustainable success with advisement by collaborating, communicating, and interacting frequently on matters, including, but not limited to, policies and standard operating procedures, which promote student success and the integration of academic support services. For example, the Center for Faculty Excellence provides advising workshops and training sessions regularly, in which success coaches and faculty advisors attend. The director of advisement meets with department chairs during their monthly meetings with the provost, and interestingly many of the meetings include the registrar, who is a former faculty advisor.

Department Advisors

The faculty advisors play a critical role in student development relative to students' career goals and their particular program of study. Before this advising transition, the success coaches and the faculty advisors communicate frequently not only to share information and check on students' progress but more importantly to review potential roadblocks or situations that could hinder a student's progression toward degree completion. For example,

advisors manage early alert progress report cases to ensure the student has received the appropriate interventions to be successful in the course(s). This initiative is part of the University's strategic plan to increase student retention and academic success. The progress reporting system provides outreach and support to students who are struggling academically early enough in the semester to help them find the resources they need to be successful at ASU.

Research has shown that quality interactions between students and faculty, peers, and staff increased retention (Drake, 2011). At ASU, the success coaches and faculty advisors promote an advising relationship with students that supports academic success. We are confident that the success we have in advising is because of the knowledgeable and informed faculty and staff who demonstrate care and respect in helping students navigate through the university experience. Moreover, the cross-functional home of advising provides opportunities for collaboration, creating clear goals, setting priorities, effective communication, and cross-training.

Assessment Methods and Design

ASU uses enrollment management software for advising students with 60 or fewer earned credit hours. The EAB Student Success Collaborative-Navigate is a web-based retention and advising platform used to schedule advising appointments, communicate with students, issue alerts for students who might be in academic danger and refer students to tutoring and other academic support services. In this quantitative case study, data were collected from digital appointments using the advising platform, comparing students registered at ASU who had some form of advising interaction documented for them, typically an in-person appointment (Population A), to the overall population of first-year, sophomore, and junior students (Population B). The data represent distinct students who have interacted with an advisor for registration purposes. The assessment focused on the number of students who registered in Fall 2019 and again in Fall 2020.

Assessment Findings

When comparing fall-to-fall (2019-2020) registration, there was a 5.1% improvement for Population A students (Table 4.1). Underperforming students with GPAs less than 2.39 who interacted with an advisor through the Navigate scheduling system had a 1.4% higher retention rate than ASUs student population overall with GPAs below 2.39 (Table 4.2). In addition, this same group of students showed significant academic improvement over a one-year period, raising their average cumulative GPA from 1.88 to 2.23 (an 18.6% increase). We took the data one step further to predict degree attainment for the underperforming students. By raising a student's cumulative GPA 18.6%, we also increased the likelihood they would graduate from 20.8% to 37% (see Figure 4.1). Based on ASU's historical 6-year graduation rates, improving a student's GPA historically shows an improvement of 20.8% to 37%. At ASU, academic advising is a major factor for the successful transition of first-year students. The data indicated an increase in retention from fall-to-fall for students who interacted with an advisor. These students were retained at higher rates. We have also seen an increase in persistence rates due to registering students for at least 15 hours per semester. The advising system at ASU aligns with student success outcomes such as increasing the fall-to-fall retention rates, increasing persistence rates to align with retention rates, and increasing the four-year and six-year graduation rates. The advising model at ASU has strengthened the following initiatives to improve retention, persistence, and graduation:

- including intrusive advising and outreach for students with low GPA and intentional intervention for returning previously suspended students within the advising model;
- establishing priority and early registration for first-time first-year students;
- expanding collaboration between advising/coaching and tutoring and increasing tutoring options, including online on-demand tutoring;

Table 4.1 *Students with Appointments (A) versus ASU Overall (B), Fall 2020 Registration Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors*

Enrollment summary	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Percent retained
A: Enrolled	2,236	1,536	68.7%
B: Enrolled	4,463	2,840	63.6%

Table 4.2 *Students with Cumulative GPA between 0.1 and 2.39*

Enrollment summary	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Percent retained
A: Enrolled	521	360	69.1%
B: Enrolled	623	422	67.7%

Figure 4.1 Degree Attainment for Underperforming Students
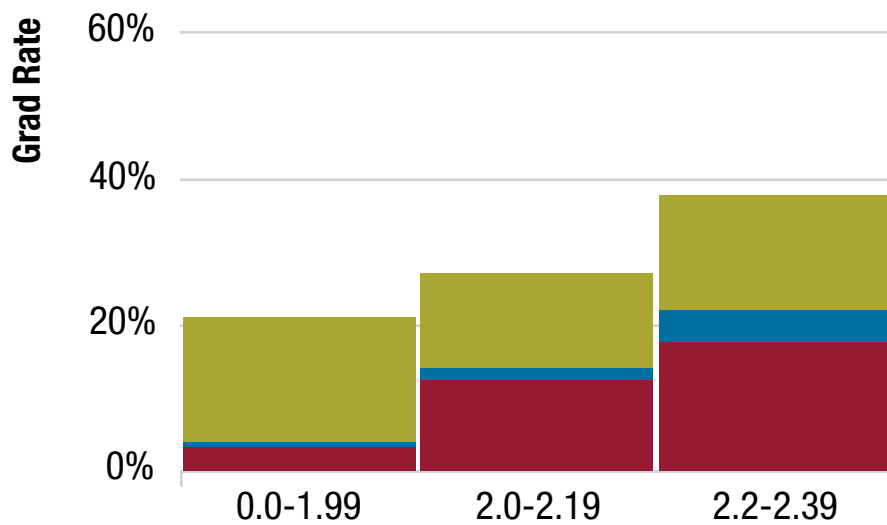
- increasing the completion of Momentum Year courses, such as core English and mathematics during the first year; and
- achieving on-time degree completion by enrolling in at least 15 hours each semester of enrollment.

Research has shown that frequent advising interactions can positively affect student retention (Bland et al, 2012). It is evident that the student–advisor interaction at ASU has the potential not only to increase retention, but to also help students persist to degree attainment. The student's decision to remain at ASU is strongly influenced by personalized engagement with a faculty and staff advisor, a peer, or even an alumnus at the University, such as a faculty and staff advisor, a peer, or even an alumnus.

Implications for Practice

We are combining multiple strategies at ASU to create a comprehensive program that addresses academic, social, and cultural factors of student success, retention, persistence, and completion. This includes key areas that must work collaboratively at an optimal level in order to ensure student success. These areas align with the University's strategic plan and include the following: academic advising, financial aid, technology, early warning and progress reports, and co-curricular activities/experiential learning.

A large component of student success at ASU focuses on lowering student debt and ensuring that students do not have an unreasonable debt load when they graduate. Because a large percentage of our students come from modest backgrounds and receive financial aid, we are cognizant of the reality that some students will reach their maximum grant or loan prior to completing their degree programs. Examples like this help us identify challenges that could impede a student's academic progression.

At ASU, students who experience academic difficulties or under-preparedness respond well to case management/intrusive approaches to advising. We do a great job identifying problem areas early that could hinder progress towards degree attainment and providing deliberate opportunities for academic and non-academic support. This structured approach to program completion and strategic emphasis on enhancing the student experience makes ASU unique.

Success and degree attainment at ASU depend on students receiving continued support, not only in their first-year, but also throughout the college career. At ASU, we pride ourselves on personalizing and customizing the undergraduate experience. Advisors make early contact with students during the pre-advising sessions/early registration days. They closely monitor student progress, and they meet with students several times per semester. The advisors work hand-in-hand with academic support services, student affairs, and counseling services to evaluate the whole student to ensure academic success, social integration, and wellness. The competent and caring success coaches and faculty advisors at ASU have created a supportive environment that has resulted in students being retained beyond the first-year.

For the past three years, post-merger, enrollment has increased, including transfers, for programs that lead to certifications and/or licensures, specifically nursing and teacher education. This influx has increased the need for higher-level transcript evaluations and course substitutions. Therefore, going forward we will capitalize on the success of the advising model by adding embedded advisors within certain departments. These staff members will report directly to the department chair. All other departments at ASU will continue to follow the success coach/faculty advisor model. Lastly, the implications of the advising model at ASU have far-reaching contributions to cross-campus collaborations in support of student success.

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Student Success at HBCUs: Institutional Case Studies North Carolina Central University

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BAM! Merits of a Blended Advising Model for Removing Barriers and Encouraging Success

Aligned with the Advising Success Network, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition aims to prioritize and improve advising practices for low-income, first-generation, and students of color by highlighting best practices present at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. As part of that mission, North Carolina Central University submitted a case study outlining its Blended Advising Model where high-preforming students in the Cheatham-White Scholars Program (CWSP) participate in a tripartite advising approach. Findings demonstrate that the CWSP participants have higher cumulative GPAs and retention rates than their non-participant peers.

Institutional Profile

North Carolina Central University (NCCU), a state-supported liberal arts institution, is a public, Historically Black University in Durham, North Carolina. Founded in 1910, it became a member of the University of North Carolina System in 1971. Total enrollment is more than 8,000 learners with 85% of learners arriving from within NC. NCCU offers a liberal arts education culminating in majors spanning sciences, arts, and business, among other disciplines. In 2018, the first-year retention rate was 76% and the six-year graduation rate was 46% for the 2012 cohort. Graduate and professional degree offerings continue to expand.

Biomedical research programs at NCCU have been particularly successful in pushing the frontiers of life science as highlighted by the awarding of more than $33 million in extramural funding during 2018. NCCU is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and identified as a Community Engaged Institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. NCCU is invested in delivering the transformative power of a college education to students from lower-income backgrounds as well as students from rural parts of NC. Our successes in higher education have been consistently recognized and distinguish our campus as a preeminent higher education destination in the Southeast.

Prior to presenting the blended advising model, it is helpful to detail salient demographic data describing NCCU and the Cheatham-White Scholarship Program (CWSP). (See Table 5.1 for a composite impression). CWSP parallels the larger NCCU enrollment in important ways. Notably, the representation of African American

Table 5.1 Essential Demographics Describing Learners at North Carolina Central University, Fall 2018

	North Carolina Central University		Cheatham-White Scholars	
	Value	Percentage	Value	Percentage
Full-time Undergraduate Enrollment	5,328	100%	36	100%
male enrollment	1,739	33%	9	25%
female enrollment	3,589	67%	27	75%
Ethnocultural Diversity				
Hispanic/Latino	405	6%	0	0%
Black or African-American	4,998	78%	28	78%
White	408	6%	4	11%
American Indian or Alaska Native	28	0.4%	0	0%
Asian	70	1%	0	0%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	4	<0.0%	0	0%
two or more races	338	5%	4	11%
race and / or ethnicity unknown	170	3%	0	0%
nonresident alien	13	0.2%	0	0%
Age Diversity (> 25 years of age)	997	19%	0	0%
Living Off-campus / Commuting	3,552	66%	0	0%
Sophomore (earned / transferred 30-59 credits)	1,338	16%	19	53%
First-Generation Learner	2,067	32%	10	28%
Pell Grant Eligible	3,674	57%	12	33%

learners is the same (78%). Also, the educational history of CWSP is comparable to the entire student body. At NCCU, a first-generation student is recognized as a student whose parents (both) did not complete a bachelor's degree, or in the case of a student living with and supported by only one parent, a student whose only such parent did not complete a bachelor's degree. CWSP has 28% first-generation students and similarly, the total NCCU campus is 32%. One difference to highlight is the higher percentage of CWSP learners classified as sophomores. Scholars served in the blended advising model arrive with more college credits, and this translates to a larger population of second-year learners (53% CWSP versus 16% total enrollment).

Blended Advising Model

Answering the call for access and affordability to higher education in the state, the Cheatham-White Scholarship Program at NCCU was developed in 2017 in partnership with the University of North Carolina General Administration and the state legislature to attract the highest performing and most academically prepared learners in North Carolina. The mission of CWSP is to prepare students to become exceptional scholars and global citizens proficient in the arts and sciences, and actively engaged

in the community. The program provides a remarkable education for students who are well-rounded individuals with a broad range of interests by delivering a fully funded scholastic experience and intellectually challenging enrichment opportunities. Our goals are as follows:

1. Sustain the success of Cheatham-White Scholars through a supportive and highly structured academic environment.

2. Promote a diverse community of highly motivated scholars through enriching, intellectual opportunities aligned with personal and professional experiences.

3. Prepare Cheatham-White Scholars for substantive contributions to North Carolina, the nation, and the world through a culture of leadership in public service.

Building upon high performing students' qualities of scholarship, leadership, integrity, and service, CWSP blends academic preparation and accessible advisor relationships to develop intro/extrospective purveyors of change in an evolving, global community. In alignment with the University Strategic Plan 2019-2024, the current practices of CWSP create a campus-wide Student Success Plan which integrates students' overall campus

engagement to increase degree attainment. More specifically, the program supports the following integrated goals and strategies of the University:

- Increase access for underserved student populations through expansion to at least two new remote markets, with emphasis on Tier 1 and 2 counties.

- Develop a robust scholarship program to support the enrollment of low-income and rural students.

- Graduate 25% more students from low-income backgrounds.

High-performing students create change and growth opportunities in the classroom, as their contributions challenge peers and faculty alike to rise to meet these talented students. Fostering academic rigor and reputation benefits the retention of all students by increasing the valuation of the day-to-day college experience and burnishing the significance of earning a degree at NCCU.

At its core, the blended advising model of CWSP delivers an experience unique and intentional to counsel learners holistically during their undergraduate experience. When considering the swift implementation and mandated requisites outlined by legislative initiators of the program, it was evident the scholars would require quality support if their exceptional success were to continue. For the Cheatham-White Scholarship Program, rather than fashioning a supplementary model based upon a paradigm or strategy, less attention was paid to the transactional process of formal academic advising sessions. More consideration was given to long-term relationships and their impact on the student experience. Having recognized the strengths and talents of specific staff members who were working in a shared space, the idea was created to form an advisory team that would fully support the scholars in achieving their heightened academic expectations.

Being so, Cheatham-White Scholars participate in a tripartite advising approach such that student learning and satisfaction are maximized while exceeding advising learning outcomes. Each student has three advisors: an academic advisor, a program advisor, and an academic coach. It is important to note that each student is advised by the same group of advisors each semester, so ongoing familiarity with group dynamics and overall program expectations has become a critical component of success. The role of each team member is substantial as their combined services provide comprehensive, continuous support guiding the scholars' advancement through the term (see Figure 5.1). Together, the team has identified three areas of focus for each scholar: academic matriculation, program development and compliance, and personal growth and awareness.
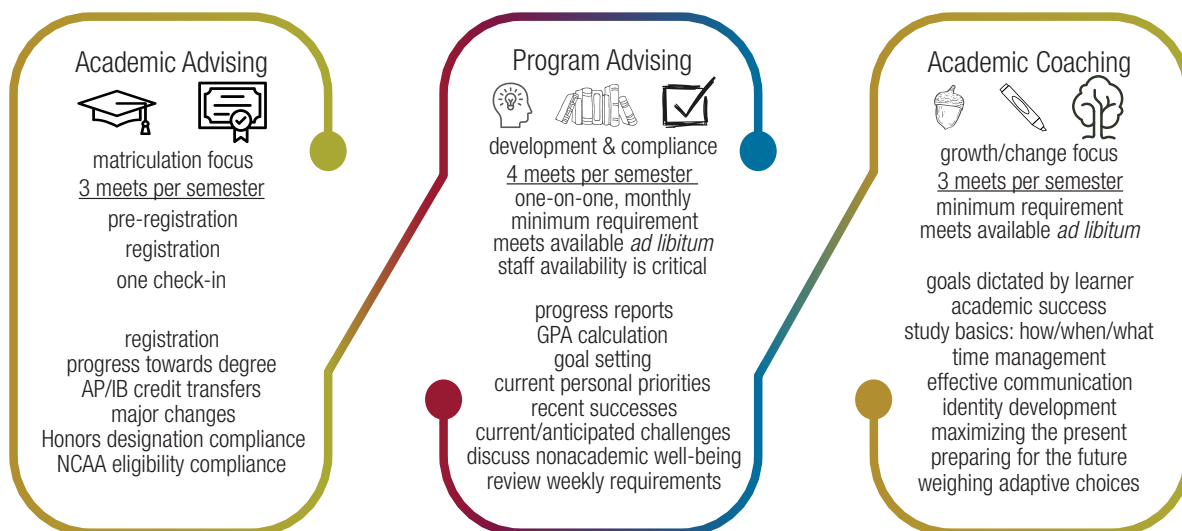
An academic advisor meets each scholar a minimum of three times per semester: pre-advising, course registration, and a routine check-in. Through evaluation of high school AP/IB credits and university double majors and dual degree programs, these meetings are used to catalog anything curricular from honors accreditation to athletics compliance records, as students chart the winding path to graduation.

A program advisor counsels each scholar a minimum of four times per semester during the last week of each month for a 30 to 45-minute meeting selected by the student. Students complete a brief inventory prior to their arrival upon which the expectation is to discuss past and future opportunities for personal and academic progress and any impending barriers to success.

An academic coach trains each scholar a minimum of three times per semester on a date, time, and/or modality the student selects. After meeting with an academic coach, students anticipate having an improved aptitude to define academic success and fashioning appropriate skill, will, and resources for effectively identifying and defining personal goals.

Moreover, the advisors establish and maintain communication with each student the summer prior to their first year and sustain

Figure 5.1 Blended advising model: academic advising, program advising, and academic coaching.

Academic Advising
matriculation focus
3 meets per semester
pre-registration
registration
one check-in

registration
progress towards degree
AP/IB credit transfers
major changes
Honors designation compliance
NCAA eligibility compliance

Program Advising
development & compliance
4 meets per semester
one-on-one, monthly
minimum requirement
meets available *ad libitum*
staff availability is critical

progress reports
GPA calculation
goal setting
current personal priorities
recent successes
current/anticipated challenges
discuss nonacademic well-being
review weekly requirements

Academic Coaching
growth/change focus
3 meets per semester
minimum requirement
meets available *ad libitum*

goals dictated by learner
academic success
study basics: how/when/what
time management
effective communication
identity development
maximizing the present
preparing for the future
weighing adaptive choices

a communication plan each subsequent summer when students have departed campus; thereby increasing student success by providing opportunities for direct access to the advising team until the model begins again the following academic year. The blended advising model practiced by CWSP permits both the advising team and the scholars alike, to define and openly communicate the growing expectations such high performing students covet to enact necessary change and growth opportunities in the classroom.

However, fostering this level of academic rigor does not come without significant investment from all parties involved. These students have similar challenges as other students, plus some additional ones, such as lack of self-identity or self-esteem/confidence, trouble with relationships, and communication difficulties. Transitioning from high school and being immediately asked to be "the best and the brightest" is no easy feat, especially when surrounded by those whose achievements rival your own, yet the Cheatham- White Scholars do not shirk challenges. For example, campus support services do not often target high- achieving students or their course loads, but rather, focus on assisting at-risk populations and the general education curriculum, and instructors are normally curious as to why students with "A" or "B" markings are so insistent on having feedback and thus, professors are less likely to respond. Considering these challenges, establishing the blended advising model as a form of "concierge- like advising" responds to the targeted needs of these students, thereby positioning staff to become experts in who the student was, is, and will become.

Assessment Methods & Design

The Cheatham-White Scholarship Program seeks to address what successful advising involves at each stage of the blended advising model and how to measure such success. Assessment questions that CWSP seeks to address include the following:

1. What does successful academic advising accomplish?
2. What does successful programmatic advising accomplish?
3. What does successful academic coaching accomplish?
4. Are the accomplishment measures effective for assessing successful advising?

Successful academic advising is quantitatively assessed by the accrual of earned credits per semester, annual progress in academic classification, quantity of withdrawn credits, and cumulative grade point average. Proactive academic advising creates a critically important plane of success wherein programmatic advising and academic coaching can operate in the continued best interest of scholar development.

Assessment of programmatic advising is accomplished by recording the scholars' successful completion of the building blocks of short-term scholarly success inclusive of completion of weekly study hall hours, documenting weekly interaction with professors, attending weekly scholar development sessions, monthly one-on-one progress report meetings, providing biannual evidence of scholarly development, and providing an annual reflection of successes resultant of programmatic participation. The weekly assessments capture quantitative, participation-based data, while the monthly meetings, biannual reports, and annual reflection capture qualitative evidence of the emerging habits of scholarship.

In addition, academic coaching is a qualitative task that solicits student reflection. Using focus-group-tested questions, students are asked to compare/contrast the current semester to the prior semester regarding transition, identity, communication, intentionality, procrastination, resilience, and past/present/future orientation.

Assessment Findings

The blended advising practices and expectations support scholarly thriving demonstrable as successful academic performance. The Cheatham-White Scholarship Program has already increased the academic profile: the GPA of CWSP (3.86) surpasses averages of learners participating in other campus scholarships and high-touch programs (3.46). Scholars have maintained an average cumulative GPA above 3.80 while attempting and successfully completing 15 or more credit hours per semester (see Figure 5.2). Current practices also support the need to serve specialized populations such that 94% of students were retained from the 2018 inaugural cohort. The immediate year following, 93% of those students returned for their third year in the program, and ever since, one scholar has graduated in under four years. The Cheatham-White Scholarship Program shows student success increases with appropriate intentional academic support alongside the removal of impediments characteristic of undergraduate populations.

Additionally, individual holistic development has been observed in scholars through goals defined by insightful student reflection such as mental health awareness, extracurricular experiences, and professional development. Scholars increased interactions with their professors (at least once a week outside of scheduled instruction time), originally a short-term success practice, which led to additional growth opportunities such as advisory board appointments and permanent research lab assignments.

Figure 5.2 **Indicators of academic success: GPA, credits earned, credits withdrawn**
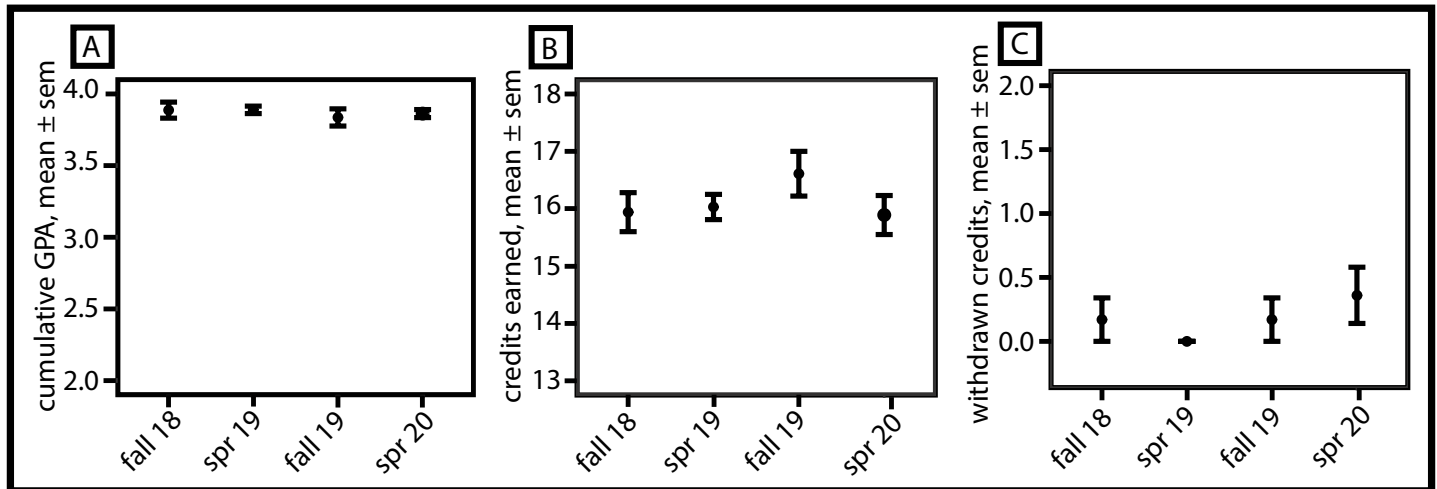
When asked to reflect on their first year with the Cheatham- White Scholarship Program, one student shared the following:

My short time as a Cheatham-White Scholar has resulted in some of the most enriching and character enhancing experiences that I have ever had the pleasure of being a part of. Through the program, I have been able to take advantage of numerous opportunities that have allowed me to connect with a multitude of professionals from a vast array of different fields, including my intended field of study… [It] has provided me with a community of scholars and advisors alike who all care about my development and success. All of whom have left an indelible mark on my journey to become a great physicist, engineer, and person."

Implications for Practice

Student-centered success is NCCU's guiding principle. In providing opportunities for college access to students with historically limited access to higher education, the Cheatham-White Scholarship Program will continue to deliver an exceptional educational experience for remarkable scholars, versatile thinkers, and well-rounded individuals. In promoting student learning and development extending beyond the first and second year, the program will provide a fully funded scholastic experience and intellectually challenging enrichment opportunities to support a highly structured academic environment. Current practices support the need to serve a special population of high-achieving students by creating a meaningful and withstanding advising experience to support an honors focused course of study.

The Cheatham-White Scholarship Program at NCCU has established clearly defined goals for access, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and the blended advising model was designed and strategically implemented to support those goals. Recognizing that equitable and inclusive practices could only be sustained with the efforts of an advising team who is willing to focus their attention on serving student needs, equitable access is provided so student success can be realized.

Furthermore, Cheatham-White Scholars reside together and participate in a living-learning community which provides a distinct setting where students learn to bridge their academic, social, and institutional experiences with their everyday lives. They participate in weekly, non-credit bearing formative seminar series to support heightened academic expectations, as well

as receive guidance from assigned faculty mentors in their field of study. Scholars also complete community service, research opportunities, and international experiences as a cohort under the guidance of CWSP.

The experience of developing this program may be of interest to minority-serving institutions, small/medium-sized universities, and resource-lean campuses. With the implementation of a blended advising model, the Cheatham-White Scholarship Program has proven quality student interaction and engagement can achieve positive student impact. Recognizing there are still other metrics to be determined to effectively measure long- term accomplishments, historical change must begin with building distinctive relationships created to remove barriers and encourage success.

Black Students in Transition: A Review of *The Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*

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As the National Resource Center continues to amplify the voice of HBCUs regarding advising and advancing equity in partnership with ASN, it becomes crucial for the center to conduct a content and literature analysis on the scholarship within its scholarly journal, *The Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*. This article's purpose is to focus on the Black student experience at Predominantly White Institutions and HBCUs across the *Journal's* 33 years. There are three sections: a quantitative analysis of the types of articles the Journal has published, a content analysis of the articles exploring the Black student experience at PWIs, and a content analysis of articles exploring the student experience at HBCUs. The research demonstrates important themes surrounding college success for Black students. Most importantly, the analysis identifies the gaps in the *Journal's* literature surrounding HBCUs and highlights where the *Journal* can amplify HBCU voices with content submitted by authors addressing those gaps.

Holistic Student Support: HBCUs as a Model

In its 33-year history, the *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* has published peer-reviewed articles covering a multitude of topics about students in critical moments of transition. These transitional periods include from high school to the first year of college, between the first and second year, transferring to another institution, and transitioning out of college through graduation, as well as other changes college students face. The *Journal* is the only peer-reviewed publication dedicated solely to first-year and transition topics in higher education and has served as a resource for scholars and practitioners since it was started by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (the Center) in 1989.

The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is a core partner in the Advising Success Network—a network of five organizations who partner to support educational change and improved student outcomes through a holistic approach to addressing the operational, programmatic, technological, and research needs of colleges and universities in direct support of a more equitable student experience. The mission of the Advising Success Network is to help institutions build a culture of student success, with a focus on students from low-income backgrounds and Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students (Advising Success Network, 2022).

A primary goal of the *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* is to understand and share the transition challenges of underrepresented students. To this end, exploring the content of the *Journal* and analyzing how the Black student experience at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) is timely and important. Stemler (2001) describes a content analysis as "a systematic, replicable technique" (p. 1) that is helpful for identifying trends and monitoring changes in scholarship and public opinion. In 2013, Campbell et al., noted the importance of providing scholars, professionals, and practitioners with a content analysis, conducted a broad examination of the first 25 years of the *Journal*. This comprehensive review included an examination of the types of research conducted, types of interventions or programs discussed, the target populations of these interventions or programs, and the overall topics included in articles published by the *Journal*. Researchers concluded that the ideas, methods, results, and recommendations provided by authors over the first 25 years of publication provides a starting point for determining best directions for future research on the first-year experience and points of transition.

The purpose of this article is to provide a content and literature analysis on the scholarship within the *Journal* that focuses on the Black student experience at PWIs and the student experience at HBCUs. This analysis specifically focuses on the research methodology, programmatic interventions, targeted populations, and relevant findings as they relate to HBCUs and the Black student experience across the *Journal's* 33 years.

The History of HBCUs

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines HBCUs as "…any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency…" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 1). After centuries of slavery ended in the U.S. after the Civil War, education continued to be segregated and was used as a form of oppression and marginalization with Black Americans. Colleges were formed to specifically address the higher education needs of Black Americans, but these institutions were significantly disadvantaged because of the lack of federal funding. The Morrill Act of 1890 extended the original federal higher education land-grant funding program of 1865 to Black colleges in the Southern states of the U.S. Although this funding extended higher education opportunities to Black Americans, it continued the establishment of racial segregation and provided even more funds to land-grant institutions that served White Americans (Thelin, 2011). In 1896, the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision codified racial oppression and marginalization in education by establishing the "separate but equal" policy in U.S. public education. This systemic racism remained legal until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision rejected the doctrine of separate but equal, leading the way for U.S. public schools to become desegregated (U. S. Department of Education, 1991).

Cheyney University, Lincoln University, and Wilberforce University were established before the Civil War as the first institutions for Black students in the U.S. (Gasman, 2009). Today, although admission at HBCUs is open to all races, there are 101 colleges and universities dedicated to advancing Black student learning and outcomes. The importance and significance of HBCUs is undeniable: Wood (2021) notes that although HBCUs only account for 3% of higher education institutions in the U. S., they enroll 10% of all Black students and account for 20% of all bachelor's degrees earned by Black students. Further, empirical evidence suggests students who attend institutions where most of the student body is of a similar racial/ethnic background as themselves self-report higher satisfaction with their education (Mayhew et al., 2016). However, students at PWIs benefit from racial diversity (Mayhew et al., 2016), suggesting that racial homogeneity is helpful only for underrepresented races that have experienced marginalization in the U.S. Among Black women, students who attended an HBCU reported higher analytical and problem-solving skills (Kim, 2002). HBCUs also have lower tuition rates, and students graduate with less student debt than those at PWIs (Wood, 2021).

There has been a recent resurgence in acknowledging the importance of HBCUs and their value to students. The Fostering Undergraduate Talent by Unlocking Resources for Education (FUTURE) Act, signed into law at the end of 2019, secures permanent funding in the amount of $250 million per year for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and other Minority-Serving Institutions (Long, 2019; St. Amour, 2019). Additionally, in September 2021, President Biden issued Presidential Executive Order 14041, establishing the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (White House, 2021). The purpose of this initiative is to reduce barriers HBCUs face in fully participating in federal funding and programs. The struggle for equitable access to funding and other resources for HBCUs is an ongoing battle.

Content Analysis of the *Journal*

Sample

The sample for this review is comprised of the peer-reviewed articles published in the first 33 years of the *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* from 1989 through 2022 that contained research on the Black student experience at Predominately White Institutions and the student experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The analysis excluded works that were not peer-reviewed, such as editorials, introductions, and notes. There were eight articles about the Black student experience at PWIs and

four articles about the student experience at HBCUs, for a total of 12 articles. There are three sections to our analysis: a quantitative analysis of the types of articles the *Journal* has published on this topic, a content analysis of articles exploring the Black student experience at PWIs, and a content analysis of articles exploring the student experience at HBCUs.

Types of Research by Decade

Like Campbell et al.'s (2013) analysis of the *Journal*, we coded the type of research (qualitative, quantitative, mixed method, conceptual, intervention or program description) and then analyzed the types of articles by decade. The types of articles published in the last 33 years in the *Journal* describe several trends across four decades (see Table 6.1). First, Campbell et al. (2013) noted an overall decline in publication of conceptual and literature review articles in their review of the *Journal*. We noticed the same trend; there were no conceptual pieces about the Black student experience published in the *Journal*. Similar to other higher education peer-reviewed journals, the *Journal* continues to emphasize empirical research from authors and discourages thought pieces and literature reviews. Just one article was identified as a program description, and only one article used mixed methods in our sample.

Regarding method, there is a trend towards qualitative methods and away from quantitative methods. This trend is a turnaround from the tendency toward quantitative research in the first two decades of the *Journal*, which suggests the need to reexamine dominant mythological assumptions and practices when capturing the experiences of Black students and other student subpopulations. Across the four decades of publications, there is now an equal proportion of quantitative and qualitative articles. Within the context of articles focused on the Black student experience and HBCUs, five articles use quantitative methods and five use qualitative methods. However, it is important to note in the most recent history of the *Journal* (2009-2021), none of the Black student experience articles used quantitative methods.

Furthermore, 58% of the articles published about the Black student experience were published in the first two decades of the *Journal's* history, leaving only 42% that were published since

2009. In the first two decades of publication (1989-2008), there were seven articles published about the Black student experience; more recently (2009-present), there were five articles published. It is important to note that these dates compare 20 years to 12 years, so the *Journal* could continue this upward trend of including more articles about the Black student experience and HBCUs. The increase in qualitative methods brings voice and depth to the scholarship of the Black student experience in higher education. The increase of these qualitative articles in the *Journal* relates to scholars seeking to specifically study the Black student experience. The decrease in quantitative articles may be due to a lack of quantitative researchers specifically seeking to study Black students, thereby leading to insufficient sample sizes when general studies are disaggregated by race. There is a continued need for quantitative research, however, as these studies identify important trends and patterns that relate to Black student success.

The Black Student Experience at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)

There were eight articles examining the Black student experience at PWIs in the *Journal*. Of those articles, one describes a program, two use qualitative research methods, one is mixed methods, and four use quantitative methods. The first article to appear in the *Journal* about the Black student experience was published in the *Journal's* first year—1989—indicating a commitment to understanding and researching this important topic.

The Admissions Process and First-Year Transition for Black Students

Three of these articles examine the student experience starting before the college career begins, focusing on the admissions process. In the first article, about the admissions process, Gold et al. (1992) describes minority "at-risk" students as those "who show academic promise but who have not yet demonstrated academic competence" (p. 102). Their study took place at Georgia State University, which is not technically an HBCU, but is a predominately Black institution that boasts the largest number

Table 6.1 *Number of Type of Research Published in* The Journal of the First Year Experience & Students in Transition by Decade (N=12)

Type of Research	Number by decade				
	1989-1998	1999-2008	2009-2018	2019-present	Total
Quantitative	4	1	0	0	5
Qualitative	0	0	1	4	5
Program description	1	0	0	0	1
Mixed methods	1	0	0	0	1
Conceptual	0	0	0	0	0

of Black students at any public or private institution in Georgia (Gold et al., 1992). The summer bridge program at Georgia State University aimed to increase retention of Black students through four weeks of classes including math, reading, writing, study skills, and computer skills. Students were also offered free tutoring, academic and career counseling, mentoring, and additional follow-up programs throughout the academic year. Students had to apply to this bridge program after being admitted to the Developmental Studies program, which was designed for students who are at-risk.

Evaluation of this program included a satisfaction survey of both students and faculty, as well as retention data of students for their sophomore year. Although 10% of students admitted into the Developmental Studies program dropped out within the first weeks of the academic semester, no student who completed the summer bridge program dropped out before the semester was over (Gold et al., 1992). Even more impressive, 90% of students who completed the bridge program retained through their first year in comparison to 65% of students admitted into the Developmental Studies program. Researchers attributed this success to the bridge program providing a solid foundation to the start of students' college career.

In a second article, Bryson et al. (2002) used data from a predominately, White institution to predict first-year grades of students. The students in the sample were enrolled in a special admissions program for applicants with below average ACT scores but with what the review committee deemed "potential for success in college" (p. 69) based on their academic and non-academic record. The sample for this study began with 1,078 students (53% White and 42% Black). Of those original students, 937 remained at the end of the study due to voluntary withdrawal, but the racial composition percentage remained the same.

In addition to examining traditional student success markers such as high school grade point average, standardized test scores (in this case, the ACT), and high school rank, researchers used the Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) and Bryson's Instrument for Noncognitive Assessment (BINA) to determine noncognitive traits that were related to academic success for students (Bryson et al., 2002). Non-academic variables examined in this study included racial sensitivity, self-confidence, gender sensitivity, self-esteem, and realistic self-appraisal. Results indicated there were different processes involved in academic success for Black and White students at the PWIs.

Although high school rank, ACT reading, and ACT math scores emerged as significant predictors of academic success for White students, only high school GPA was statistically significant for predicting Black student success. Interestingly, levels of self-confidence and gender sensitivity were more predictive of first-year GPA than any other noncognitive measures. Gender sensitivity represents students' expectations of the level of influence that gender has on personal interactions. Because of these results, researchers urged admissions committees to examine college applicants holistically rather than as a composite score on a standardized test. Results suggest neither the ACT composite score nor any ACT subscale can accurately predict first-year grade point average for Black students, while ACT reading and ACT math scales are the most effective predictors for White students (Bryson et al, 2002).

In a qualitative analysis of another summer bridge program, McGowan and Perez (2020) examined how 11 Black men gained familial, navigational, and aspirational capital during and after their time in the summer program. The six-week program offered academic and social support for underrepresented, first-generation students at a PWI. Types of support included tutoring, academic advising, career advising, and the opportunity to engage in social opportunities.

Using qualitative methods and citing Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework, McGowan and Perez (2020) found that the men in their study identified their time in the program as "critical" (p. 49) in the development of their peer networks. Researchers gathered data through two sources: semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation interviews. Photos were used to illustrate the close relationships developed between participants. Researchers found two major themes: the program helped students sustain bridges to capital and created bridges to cultural wealth. Once the academic year began, participants noted feeling underrepresented on campus. Indeed, only 4% of the student body identified as Black. However, the program described by McGowan and Perez (2020) provided a solid foundation for participants to navigate through their college experience. Black men in this study gained several types of capital and cultural wealth, making the results significant and of interest to any practitioners or scholars seeking to understand more about the influence of summer bridge programs for minority students.

How College Affects Black Students

In an exploration of the changing attitudes of college students, Regan and Sedlacek (1989) compared the change in social commitment of first-year students who had enrolled in 1988 to first-year students who had enrolled in 1978. In this quantitative study, they examined attitudes towards recruitment of Black students, the use of university influence to improve broad social conditions, and the university's use of financial aid awards. In 1978, 86% of respondents were White, while 8% were Black; in 1988, the sample was 76% White and 12% Black. Results from this study indicate students in 1988 were more in favor of the university actively recruiting Black students and the university using its influence to improve social conditions than students were in 1978.

However, in both 1978 and 1988, Black students were more favorable to the university recruiting Black students than White students were. Although gender differences were considered, there were no statistically significant differences in any of the items examined by gender. Regan and Sedlacek (1989) concluded that, in general, students in 1988 were more favorable to social change than students a decade earlier. However, these researchers urged practitioners to consider taking steps to increase how much students value diversity, specifically

for White students. Noting an imperative to increase Black student retention, Regan and Sedlacek write, "It seems unlikely that an atmosphere conducive to black success on campus can be created without facilitating the development of white students as well" (p. 16). These authors were some of the earliest to bring attention to how the extent to which White students value diversity influences Black student success.

Highlighting the importance of understanding social change, a decade later Schwitzer et al. (1998) studied the social adjustment of Black students at PWIs. In this mixed methods study, researchers describe a model consisting of four elements: sense of "underrepresentedness," direct perception of racism, overcoming the obstacle of approaching faculty, and the effects of faculty familiarity. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the extent to which the proposed model described Black student experiences. Researchers used a qualitative methodology through focus groups and analyzed quantitative data through surveys to evaluate the social support of both Black and White students. Survey scales included the Classroom Environment Scale (CES) and the Faculty Support Scale (FSS). Participants included 123 senior-year students; 101 were White and 22 were Black. Results indicated the model described Black social climate experiences at PWIs. Black students reported feeling underrepresented and experienced specific incidents of racism, while White students did not. During advising and other out-of-class activities with faculty, Black students reported both positive support and more discouragement, a finding Schwitzer et al. note is paradoxical. One explanation offered for this finding is that Black students might be more concerned with faculty responses than White students, making them more perceptive of both positive and negative experiences. The model of Black student social adjustment offered concrete ways in which student affairs practitioners can provide better support to encourage positive adjustment for students.

Another element of the student experience is career advising. Helm et al. (1998) noted the importance of considering differences that might exist for minority students at PWIs. In their quantitative study, they surveyed 343 Black students on their career and advising needs and interests. Gender differences existed, with 42% of Black women planning to attend graduate school compared to 21% of Black men with an interest in graduate study. Black men were more likely to cite higher earnings as a reason for attending college than Black women (29% and 17%, respectively). More women in the sample also expressed interest in career counseling than their male counterparts, which confirms previous studies. Helm et al. urged practitioners to remain up to date on advising issues for Black students, which, in turn, will lead to higher retention of Black students in higher education.

Student sense of belonging and their participation in social and academic opportunities often go together, as behavior is influenced by expectation (Rotter et al., 1972). In a quantitative study, Kim and Sedlacek (1996) surveyed incoming Black students at a PWI on their academic and social expectations and then examined gender differences. All incoming students (N = 2,538) were administered a survey about various aspects of the college experience, including expectations for involvement in social and academic activities. Of these incoming students, 212 identified as Black and 123 of those students were women.

Results indicated differences by gender for several areas. First, in academic expectations, more male students indicated their main reason for attending college was to make more money. In contrast, most female students indicated they were attending college to develop themselves or to prepare for graduate school. Next, in social areas, more female students expected to belong to a formal social group, except for campus athletic groups. More male students expected to be involved in intramural sports, but more female students expected to belong to a residence hall group. Kim and Sedlacek (1996) urged future researchers to be intentional about assessing different expectations of Black students to assist minority students in their transition to college.

Black Student Subpopulations

One subset of minority students that are understudied in the college student success literature is Black African immigrants. Stebleton and Aleixo (2016) noted that Black African immigrants are one of the fastest immigrant populations in the U.S. and an emerging area of inquiry. These researchers conducted a qualitative study evaluating student perceptions of belonging at a PWI. Findings included three major categories, including: negotiating stereotypes and perceptions, discovering affirmation through connection, and inhabiting spaces. Researchers found that African immigrant students' sense of belonging is shaped by interactions between the student and intersecting factors within their environments (Stebleton & Aleixo, 2016). Furthermore, this research suggests immigrant Students of Color experience college differently than Black Americans, especially as it relates to sense of belonging.

The Student Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

There are four articles addressing the student experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the *Journal*. All but one of these articles uses qualitative methodology, and the first of these articles was published in 1998. Washington and Schwartz (1998), noting few studies published at that point on the Black student experience at HBCUs, examined first-year retention of 442 first-year Black students on one HBCU campus. Researchers measured cognitive, non-cognitive, and demographic variables to determine if academic success and first-year retention could be predicted. Cognitive variables in this study included SAT or ACT scores, high school class rank, and high school grade point averages.

To measure non-cognitive variables, they used eight scales from Tracey and Sedlack's (1984) Non-Cognitive Questionnaire, including: knowledge acquired, positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, long-term goals, understanding of and ability to contend with racism, availability of support, leadership experience, and community service. They also used four adjustment scales from Baker and Siryk's (1989) Student

Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), including personal-emotional, academic, and social adjustment and attachment. Dependent variables included academic performance, as measured by grade point average at the end of the semester; academic success, as measured by the college's academic probation standards; and persistence, as measured by continued enrollment (Washington and Schwartz, 1998).

The most significant predictors of academic performance for students attending the HBCU in this study were high school rank, personal emotional adjustment, availability of a support person, high school grade point average, and social adjustment. This combination of variables accounted for 30% of the total variance, while high school rank alone accounted for 20% of the total variance. Further, social adjustment and attachment to the college were the best predictors of persistence to the second semester. Washington and Schwartz (1998) note that for Black students at HBCUs, students' ability to integrate into the college environment impacts commitment and satisfaction with their college experience. Consistent with Tinto's (1975, 1987) integration theory, Washington and Schwartz note Black students at HBCU's are at risk for academic failure when they are unable to adjust to the educational and social demands of the university experience. Washington and Schwartz encouraged future researchers to conduct more studies on HBCU campuses and on the Black student experience to improve student outcomes and satisfaction.

More than two decades later, Bryson and Sheppard (2021) heeded this call to specifically examine Black men in their first year at a HBCU. Citing a gap in the current first-year experience literature, Bryson and Sheppard conducted several focus groups of high achieving Black men at five different HBCUs in North Carolina. Specifically, researchers examined the skills, habits, characteristics, and relationships to learning and achievement of 26 students. Noting previous research that has focused on deficits, Bryson and Sheppard focused on academically thriving Black men within the context of a university experience that "offers a culturally authentic sense of belonging" (p. 8).

Sophomore students with grades above the mean GPA at their respective institutions who were involved with at least one non-academic activity were invited to participate in several focus groups. Students shared the importance of confidence and motivation in the first year of college. In addition, these students embraced the significance of believing in their own capabilities and recognizing their own shortcomings. Bryson and Sheppard (2021) urged first-year experience practitioners to help students develop confidence and intrinsic motivation for learning. Further, students in this study noted how they were able to develop good study habits that contributed to their academic success. Bryson and Sheppard suggested that orientation, first-year, and transition programs could further benefit students by embracing a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit-based approach, especially when working with Students of Color. Students in this study showed a strong and positive racial identity and even described the experience of participating in the study as transformational. Finally, Bryson and Sheppard encouraged institutions to support

Black male students with strong programs that address positive attributes and encourage the development of tangible skills.

While Bryson and Sheppard (2021) focused on Black men, Amechi et al. (2020) examined the college choice process for Black students who had been in the foster care system and who chose a HBCU. Four women and three men who had spent between 6 and 20 years in foster care participated in the study. All the students in the study reported experiencing basic needs insecurity, which Amechi et al. defined as lack of food, clean clothing, transportation, access to broadband Internet, and stable housing. Utilizing qualitative methods, researchers identified three central themes: resilience and intrinsic motivation from adverse childhood experiences, the importance of foster care specific support programs, and the role of extended family in the college enrollment process.

In line with previous research, this study found a specific need for students with foster care experience to connect and feel included in the campus community (Amechi et al., 2020). In addition, participants highlighted the usefulness and benefit of the foster youth campus support program (CSP), which connects former foster youth with others of similar backgrounds. Finally, researchers suggested paying particular attention to the importance of affinity groups, organizations, and campus support programs as motivating factors for the college choice process (Amechi et al., 2020). Amechi et al.'s study further highlights the need to understand and study the subpopulations of Black students.

A common thread among the literature on the Black student experience at HBCUs is the importance of culturally relevant practices (CRP) and policies. Wilkerson et al. (2021) examined first-year seminar pedagogical practices at three HBCUs, both public and private. Using qualitative methodology, researchers conducted a case study with six first-year seminar professionals to discuss the ways in which they utilize culturally relevant pedagogy to encourage engaged student learning. They utilized Ladson-Billings' (1995) CRP as a theoretical framework to explore teaching practices.

Wilkerson et al. (2021) found that first-year seminar faculty can utilize culturally relevant pedagogy to express care and concern for students. Application of CRP practices in first-year seminars encouraged engaged student learning. Participants had a holistic approach to instruction, meaning that professionals sought to provide support to engage with their students during office hours, at campus events, and in the classroom. These authors argue for the importance of promoting learning of the CRP framework to build competency in pedagogical approaches to first-year seminars.

Discussion

Over the past 33 years, the *Journal* has published a rich and important body of literature focusing on students in transition. Although only 12 of those articles focused on the Black student experience at PWIs or at HBCUs, there is a trend of more articles published in the *Journal* on this topic in the last decade. There

are gaps in the literature we can identify, and there is a clear need for more authors to submit content to the *Journal* to address those gaps. Methodologically, qualitative articles capture the stories and experiences of Black students, and campus leaders can transfer the findings from these articles to their students and institutions. However, there is an identifiable need for more articles that utilize quantitative measures as well to grasp larger trends that can lead to big-picture changes on campuses. In addition, the experience of Black women and LGBTQ students at PWIs and HBCUs is understudied, and research on Black student subpopulations is needed. Examples of studies that examined Black student populations include Amechi et al.'s (2020) work on Black students with foster care experience, and Stebleton and Alexio's (2016) study on Black immigrant students.

Two of the 12 articles examined in this review were recipients of the Paul P. Fidler Grant: Amechi et al. (2020) and Bryson and Sheppard (2021). The Paul P. Fidler Grant was established in 2005 by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition to encourage and enable scholarly research on issues pertaining to student transitions in the first year. This grant funding opportunity has helped to encourage empirical research on the Black student experience and HBCUs. Other centers, foundations, associations, and institutions may want to consider using research grant funding as a tool to encourage scholars to pursue scholarship on HBCUs, the Black student experience at PWIs, and other understudied areas of college student transition, learning, and success.

Overall, it can be helpful to understand the principles related to college success for Black students found from the 12 articles in this content analysis and review. Although standardized tests predict college student performance for all students, these tests do a much poorer job of predicting the performance of Black students specifically (Bryson et al., 2002). Instead, high school performance is the best academic predictor of Black student success. Overall, there is a need for colleges to shift from a deficit and remedial approach with Black students to an approach that draws on the assets and strengths of Black students while providing practical help for success (Bryson & Sheppard, 2021).

Such practical help for success can emphasize both academic health and psychosocial health. Regarding academic health, colleges can provide programs that help Black students improve their math skills, reading skills, writing skills, and study skills, as appropriate (Bryson et al., 2002; Gold et al., 1992). But there may be even greater potential for positive impact with psychosocial skills. These programs can help Black students gain academic and social capital on college campuses and help to develop motivation and resilience in students (McGowan & Perez, 2020).

The most important finding from the content analysis is how colleges themselves need to change to foster Black student success, rather than colleges attempting to change Black students. Colleges need to make a compelling case to Black students, and particularly Black men, as to the benefits of higher education that go beyond merely making more money in the future (Bryson & Sheppard, 2021; McGowan & Perez, 2020). In addition, the campus social environment of colleges must proactively seek to include and appreciate Black students while also providing the availability of staunch support resources (Helm et al., 1998). Culturally relevant and inclusive pedagogy can encourage engaged student learning and promote the benefits of diversity to students of all races on campus (Wilkerson et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Although the current research provides helpful knowledge for campus leaders on promoting Black student success, the need for more scholars to submit works on these topics and issues is a clear need for the improvement of higher education. As the *Journal* and other scholarly entities continue to identify gaps in the literature discussing HBCUs and Black student success, these institutions must recognize the significant ways that publishing research can be inaccessible for scholars, especially scholars of Color, because of systemic barriers and unconscious biases in the process.

The responsibility is not only on scholars to conduct more research; it is also on the academy to create an atmosphere where such research is supported and encouraged. First, as a field, there needs to be an acknowledgement and a reexamination of our assumptions regarding methods and methodology that might represent dominant positions that discount the cultural relevancy of some forms, such as the cultural richness of storytelling in communities of Color. Secondly, scholars cannot submit and share experiences without resources and support from scholarly journals. The Paul P. Fidler grant is an example of providing financial resources for scholars to support their work and share their findings with the community at large.

Furthermore, editorial processes must be inclusive of editors and reviewers of Color while being non-discriminatory and social justice-minded in practice. These processes need to consider research on identity areas and the representation of Black authors as an area of need and priority in the recruitment, selection, and editing of articles. Lastly, citations have a significant role in the reputation of scholars, and the field needs to promote citations of scholars of Color to bolster their status and research.

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Conclusion

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The purpose of this resource collection was to contribute to the scholarship focused on data driven, HBCU advising models as instructive paradigms aimed to increase student success, which includes academic and personal development. As largely tuition-driven institutions, HBCUs are consistently confronted by Enrollment Management's directive to "make a class." However, what happens to those students once they have paid their enrollment deposit? Ideally, confirmation of enrollment should mark the beginning of a student's advising journey. The transition from candidate to student may cause deep anxiety, especially for first-generation students or those who are academically unprepared and not ready to tackle the rigor of college-level courses.

Recognizing these triggers early and responding to them by extending support can undo the self-fulfilling prophecy of failure that often haunts at-risk students. It is not uncommon to identify at-risk students as the primary group in need of direct support; however, more research is now pointing to the specific struggles of high-achieving students who we tend to forget about when coordinating intrusive interventions. The scholars featured in this collection advocate standardized, high-quality advising for all HBCU students irrespective of Expected Family Contribution (EFC), college admission test scores, high school transcripts, athletic participation, or institutional legacy. For many students, academic advising is the single opportunity afforded to them to connect one-on-one with a trusted faculty or staff member (Dial and McKeown, 2020). Therefore, we cannot overstate the importance of impactful advising in the first-year experience and beyond.

In an article aptly titled, "When it comes to student success, HBCUs do more with less," Dick Startz (2021) cites a Gallup survey that reveals when HBCU graduates were asked, "what happened in college that made a difference to them?", the top three responses were 1) my professors cared about me as a person, 2) I felt supported, and 3) I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams. The Gallup survey results underscore Dr. Will Sheppard and Dr. Brandy S. Bryson's findings shared in Part I of this resource collection. Black students attribute their academic, emotional, and social growth to the culture of care that is synonymous with HBCUs. The transformative power of empathetic advisors who commit to know students by name and not their identification number is one of strongest themes throughout this collection. At the same time, it is imperative to acknowledge the ways in which budgetary constraints challenge capacity, making it tough for advisors to offer high-touch engagement for all students. As the adage goes, "we do a lot with a little," but how does this mantra stand up to questions of sustainability and scalability (Startz, 2021)?

The contributors in the collection were asked to assess effective advising models on their HBCU campuses. Their findings and reflections have tremendous implications on policies, practices, and products in the field of advising Black students. Engstrom and Tinto (2008) argue, "access without support is not opportunity. That institutions do not intentionally exclude students from college does not mean that they are including them as fully valued members of the institution and providing them with support that enables students to translate access into success." The case studies represented in this collection demonstrate the respective HBCUs' commitment to holistically affirm and uplift their students beyond admission, providing real opportunities for Black students to increase their life chances. Advising is high-stakes work, especially for historically disadvantaged students, and it is critical that we continue to be present, innovative, and flexible in our approaches to guiding our students.

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