

Abstract

Historically, persistence rates have remained steady at 45% as far back as 1885 (Tinto, 1982; Porter, 1990), however there are substantial disparities when the racial ethnicity is introduced (Cabrera, Nora, Terezini, et al, 1999). Closing the achievement gaps between high achieving students and those that are “at risk” has become a national priority (Waxman, Gray and Padron, 2003). Museus and Ravello, (2010) expressed attrition and graduation rates of racial and ethnic minority students are a serious concern for higher education, policymakers and other vested stakeholders. African American undergraduate students’ graduation rates and persistence rates continue to trail those of Hispanic and white students, often by a large margin, and must be improved for participation gains to yield success gains. University faculty, staff and administrators have implemented various strategies to combat this problem and improve the successful navigation from entrance to the successful culminating event of graduation for African American students (Harper & Harris 2012)

The concept of resilience has garnered attention as an important psychological factor impacting educational achievement (Waxman,et al, 2003). Benard (1993), for example found that there are four personal characteristics that resilient children typically display: social competence; problem solving skills; autonomy; and sense of purpose (as cited by Waxman, et al.). Resiliency can also be defined as the ability to succeed or persevere in spite of challenging external factors and conditions impacting routine physiological needs. Resiliency studies have often used educational standing as the measure to define resilient students. The use of achievement on exams may be an inaccurate means to represent a student’s level of resiliency (Waxman, et al, 2003). The culture of inclusion may differ at institution and a supportive and accepting climate for black students would be expected to positively impact student retention and graduation rates. (JBHE, 2012). The campus culture can impact student engagement.