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RETAINING AFRICAN AMERICAN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN TEACHER EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF A PWI AND AN HBCU



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Synopsis:

The dismal statistics of the number of African American teachers in U. S. Public schools supports the need for Teacher Preparation Program to implement activities designed to retain pre-service teachers of color to assist in decreasing the gap of students of color and teachers of color. The purpose of this presentation is to share data on strategies and outcomes of a Retention Program implemented at a PWI and an HBCU to retain African American pre-service teachers in Teacher Education. The results indicate that retention efforts for African American pre-service teachers can vary based on the type of institution.

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Abstract

According to a report from the Center for American Progress (2014), it is important as a nation, to undertake strategic efforts to retain and increase the number of effective teachers of color in the educator's workforce. Presently, students of color make up almost half of the public school population. However; teachers of color, those who are not non-Hispanic white, make up only 18 percent of the teaching force. Retention of students is a challenge for colleges and universities especially for students in the first year therefore retention is more of a challenge in Teacher Education. Teacher Education programs need to begin retention activities during the first year of college as opposed to after admission to Teacher Education. This study was conducted to compare the results of the implementation of a retention program at a PWI (Predominantly White Institution) replicated at an HBCU (Historically Black College or University). Data collected included value perceptions of students who participated in the program. The success of the program is evaluated based on the number of students admitted to the Teacher Education Program.

Introduction

Increasingly, the number of students leaving institutions of higher education before the completion of a prescribed course of study is a dilemma for college and university faculty and administrators. Historically, the issue related to students who leave college before degree completion was raised after the founding of Harvard College in 1636 (Kowalski, 1977). The power of institutions to hold students through graduation continues to be a major concern. Ewell (1984) suggested that initially, departure from an institution before graduation was considered as only a loss to the individual. Students not persisting and the absence of initiatives to retain students are perceived more and more as institutional failures, a loss to the individual and society.

Students leave college before completing a degree for a number of different reasons. However, critical circumstances underlying the institution's ability to retain students through graduation has been identified. For example, Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980) summarized the

circumstances of student retention and categorized these as being related to (a) student characteristics, (b) institutional environmental characteristics, and (c) student interactions within the institution. Student characteristics develop from academic, demographic, and financial factors as well as student aspirations and motivation. Specifically, academic influences on student characteristics include high school GPA and class rank, academic aptitude and the ratings received by high school attended and extend to first semester grades in postsecondary education. Martin & Williams-Dixon (1991) asserted that the category of environmental characteristics which needs to be addressed to assist the retention of students include academic advising, orientation programs, learning and academic support services, and student services as defined in the mission and role of institutions. Involvement in institutions which helps student persistence includes extracurricular activities, friendships, and student/faculty relationships.

Tinto (1988) suggested that the stages of student departure from colleges and universities as parallel to the stages experienced in the rites of passage. The stages of acclimation to college life equate to the rites of passage stages of separation, transition and incorporation. The assumption is that if the problems students might encounter at each given stage are minimized, potential for retention increases.

Literature

The dismal statistics of the number of teachers of color in U.S. public schools support the need for Educator Preparation Programs to increase activity for retaining pre-service teachers to assist in decreasing the gap of ethnic student/teacher ratio. Data obtained from the Center of American Progress (2014) include demographics report that enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools will increase 7 percent between 2011 and 2022. Within this same time span, the enrollment of Hispanic students will increase by 33 percent; Asian students will increase by 20 percent; and African American students will increase by 2 percent. Presently, students of color make up almost half of the public school population. However; teachers of color, those

who are not non-Hispanic white, make up only 18 percent of the teaching force. Data from the National Education statistics (2016) reported that the number of African American teachers has witnessed minimal change from 6.4% in 1990-1991 to a high of 7.0% in the year 2003-2004 and decreased again in 2011-2012.

Researchers support the claim that Black teachers are particularly suited to teach Black students because Black teachers can assist students in building cultural bridges to learning (Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Since there is a shortage and low representation of Black teachers in U.S. public schools (Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2013), retaining African American pre-service teachers through graduation will help to increase the number of African American teachers in the pipeline. Teachers of color are significantly underrepresented in the public school population despite the fact that the number of students of color is growing rapidly. The aforementioned dismal statistics support the need for Teacher Preparation Program to increase activity for retaining pre-service teachers of color to assist in decreasing the gap of ethnic teacher/student ratio.

Following an examination of projected demographics on teacher supply and demand, O'Connor and Taylor (1990) reported a growing shortage of qualified public school teachers, especially teachers who represent ethnic minorities. Programs designed for teacher educators can support the retention of preservice teachers when needs and concerns are tracked and addressed as students' progress through the program of study. Retention in teacher education appears to address more readily the need to retain or increase the number of minorities in teacher education. It is crucial that students are retained through graduation in teacher education to add to the pipeline of minority teachers needed. Tinto (2013) related retention to Newton's first law of motion as a way to get students to graduation. When a student is at rest, the student tend to

stay at rest and students in motion tend to stay in motion. Once they gain momentum, after acquiring degree credits, they are more likely to stay in motion unless acted upon by an external force. According to Astin & Oseguera (2005 as cited in Tinto, 2013) the greater the rate at which students acquire degree credits, the greater their momentum toward degree completion and in turn the greater the likelihood they will stay in motion to degree completion even when external forces intervene.

The Teacher Education Program is a means by which pre-service teachers become licensed to teach. There is a dearth of literature regarding the retention of African-Americans in teacher education. However, three consistent aspects were universal to retention programs in place. Fields (1987) suggested that the first aspect is retention programs are predominantly campus-wide. Campus-wide programs are designed to bring students together based on ethnicity and not any specific major. But, departmental or college retention programs used successfully can complement campus-wide efforts. Secondly, retention programs are organized based on what administrators and faculty think is relevant for retention. According to Martin and Williams-Dixon (1991) if institutions would take the medical approach to a client, it will require asking two simple questions: "What hurts and where does it hurt?" In other words, what is needed to persist? The third and final universal aspect is that retention programs are not mandatory neither is there a link with academic credit. When African-American students attend predominantly European-American institutions, the opportunity to connect with other African-American students academically is limited. Students connect socially through residential living and social activities. If retention programs allowed African-American student to connect academically, i.e., through a credited course, then persistence would increase which would eventually lead to graduation.

Anderson (1989) identified recruitment strategies implemented by historically African-American institutions. The three most utilized recruitment strategies identified by 62% of the

institutions responding to Anderson's survey were brochures, letters to prospective candidates, and collaborative internships with public schools. The retention strategies, on the other hand, have been restricted to achievement being monitored based on direct classroom experience. Teachers are in great demand and African-American teachers are in even greater demand. Since a large majority of students in HBCUs are black students, these institutions provide an important opportunity for black education degree-seeking students. For the academic year 2012–13, 75 HBCUs reported enrollment data under the HEA Title II reporting system. Programs at these HBCUs enrolled 2 percent of the individuals enrolled in IHE based teacher preparation programs; however, 16 percent of all candidates in IHE-based teacher preparation programs attend HBCUs (King, 2016). Bachelor's degree completion rates for students who major in education are lower for black and Hispanic students than white students. The completion rate gap between black and white bachelor's degree students majoring in education is approximately 30 percentage points (73 percent versus 42 percent) and the completion rate gap between Hispanic and white education majors is more than 20 percentage points (73 percent versus 49 percent) (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

Many colleges, universities, and communities have answered this demand by implementing programs to increase the recruiting of African-Americans to teacher education. However, there is a paucity of literature identifying the implementation of programs with intervention strategies to increase retention of African-American students. One way the demand can be met is to increase the number of African-Americans who persist and graduate from teacher preparation programs. Diversity in schools, including racial diversity among teachers, can provide significant benefits to students (Young & Laster, 2007). While students of color are expected to make up 56 percent of the student population by 2024, the elementary and secondary

educator workforce is still overwhelmingly white. The most recent, a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals showed that 82 percent of public school teachers identified as white. This figure has hardly changed in more than 15 years based on data from a similar survey conducted, found that 84 percent of teachers identified as white (U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 2016).

The Department of Teaching & Learning at an HBCU has attempted to increase the number of African-Americans persisting and graduating in teacher education by supporting the implementation of the Teaching & Learning Retention Program. The program was implemented based on the tenets of the “Retention Program for Culturally Diverse Preservice Teachers” implemented at a PWI (Johnson & Young, 1992). The PWI program, based on Boykins' (1983) nine dimensions of African-American culture, utilized a three-tiered model of mentoring, urban classroom experiences, a monthly meeting, communal, and tutorial for African-American preservice teachers. The HBCU program replicated the PWI program by utilizing the monthly meeting, teacher education admittance exam workshop, Principal Panel and Teacher Panel. The three-tiered mentoring modeled was scheduled to be implemented.

The monthly group meetings were designed to disseminate information regarding teacher education, to inform participants of opportunities provided by the Retention Program, and to provide experiences in networking with other minority preservice teachers. The additional activities were implemented to encourage and support pre-service teachers accomplishing admission to the Teacher Education Program. The researcher believed these activities would be effective due to the fact that the number of students being admitted to the Teacher Education program had decreased over the past two years.

Methods

The Retention Program was developed based on the needs of African American students who were pursuing a degree in Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education at an HBCU. The tenets of the Retention Program were replicated from a Retention Program instituted at a PWI for students pursuing a degree in Elementary, Middle School and Secondary Education. The population for the study included all education majors. The sample size consisted of students majoring in Early Childhood, Elementary Education and Secondary Education who choose to attend the activities which comprised the retention program.

Data was collected based on attendance in activities, the number of students admitted to teacher education and interviews of student who participated in the program. The program operated for one academic year under a grant. Attendance data was collected for each activity organized for the program as well as informal interviews of participants. This study will report data of attendance and qualitative data from program participants.

Results

In each situation, the monthly meeting was scheduled for one-hour. The meetings were a discussion on advising, admittance to teacher education, addressing concerns of students, and guest speakers. The number of education majors at the PWI comprised 165 students. The number of majors at the HBCU comprised 100 students. Data was collected on the number of students who attended the retention activities and were admitted to teacher education. The activities included a monthly meeting, communal, mentoring, test assistance and visits to urban public schools. The activities implemented at the HBCU included a monthly meeting, admittance exam workshops, study sessions for admission exam, and advising.

The results of the comparative study reported data on the number of students who attended the retention events and were admitted to teacher education. The chart below provides the attendance data:

PWI		HBCU	
Activity	Attendance (avg)	Activity	Attendance
Monthly meetings	65	Monthly meeting	15
Exam workshops	30	Exam workshops	6
Communal	30	Study Sessions	7
Urban Field Exp	40	Advising	30
Mentoring (3-tier)	15 (sets)	Mentoring	1(set)

The program was originally implemented at a PWI for African American student majoring education. The attendance for the program's activities comprised 65 students. Based on the qualitative data collected, the students attend the monthly meeting at the PWI as a way to interact with other education majors, identify persons who are education majors, an avenue to have a voice and address issues and to support each other in courses. The students who participated in the retention activities gained admission to teacher education and received additional assistance if needed for admission.

The students at the HBCU had low attendance for all of the retention activities based on the number of students who were identified as education majors. Even though incentives were initiated, attendance was still low. Based on an informal assessment of ten students, the primary reason for lack of attendance was work and other reasons included, I forgot, I did not put the date in my calendar or I will attend next time. At least three of the student's conflict was having a course at the same time of the retention events.

Limitations

The following limitations of this study were identified:

- 1) This study is limited to a group of students at one HBCU and one predominantly white institution.
- 2) The participants in this study are all African- Americans pre-service teachers.
- 3) The efficacy of the program is based on persistence and retention rates assessed in the second year of the program, but not graduation rates.
- 4) Assessment of the program by qualitative analysis is formative not summative.

Conclusion

After the successful implementation of a Retention Program for African American Student education majors at a PWI, the idea was to implement the same program for students at an HBCU who are education majors. The level of participation was drastically different at the HBCU compared to the PWI. The characteristics of the students included:

Ethnicity – African American

Classification – Freshman, Sophomore & Junior

Major – Elementary Education, Early Childhood & Secondary Education (HBCU)
Elementary Education, Middle School Education & Secondary Education (PWI)

Status - Aspiring for Admission to Teacher Education

Assessment - Assessment required for admission

Campus - Residential

The students at the PWI viewed the Retention Program as a way to obtain assistance to be successful in their academic program. The student's success at the PWI is indicated by their attendance in retention activities and admission to teacher education. In the qualitative data collected three themes emerged related to participating in the program because of the

opportunities they perceived were available, the positive atmosphere in the meetings, and because of interactions with the persons who were implementing the program before attending their first meeting. Additional data revealed that students believed it was one of the best programs implemented for African American students, wanted the program to continue. Subsequently students felt connected to the major and then tied that connection to the university.

In terms of the HCU, data collected to ascertain success was based on student admission to teacher education. In the Spring Semester, 2017 twenty students, who were identified as Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education majors, applied for admission to teacher education. Six students were admitted. The students admitted attended the assessment workshop and subsequent study session as well as the retention meetings. Additional data is being collected for the academic year 2017-2018.

Implications

Implications for this study include since the attendance was so low at the HBCU, then it is important to find another means of getting students to take advantage of the opportunities in the Retention Program. Another implication is to assess the students to determine a better time to implement activities.

Recommendation

An unequivocal commitment to the persistence, retention, and graduation of African-Americans in higher education is critical. Secondly, it is imperative that successful intervention strategies are implemented at universities to increase the persistence, retention and graduation rates of African-Americans interested in teaching as a career. The following are recommendation for this study:

To encourage students to participate and realize the value of the retention activities is to embed the activities in an education course as a requirement to support the grade in the course.

In addition, data should be collected on GPA of students in the program and compare to students who do not participate in the program.

To learn the perception of student participating in the program, obtain qualitative data as a formative assessment.

It is imperative to implement strategies, whether it is in a retention program, to increase the number of pre-service teachers who persist through the completion of a Teacher Education Program. This is a way to increase the number of African American teachers who will teach minority children who need advocates for excellence and equity in education, as well as positive and same-ethnic role models to nurture and support their educational achievements.

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