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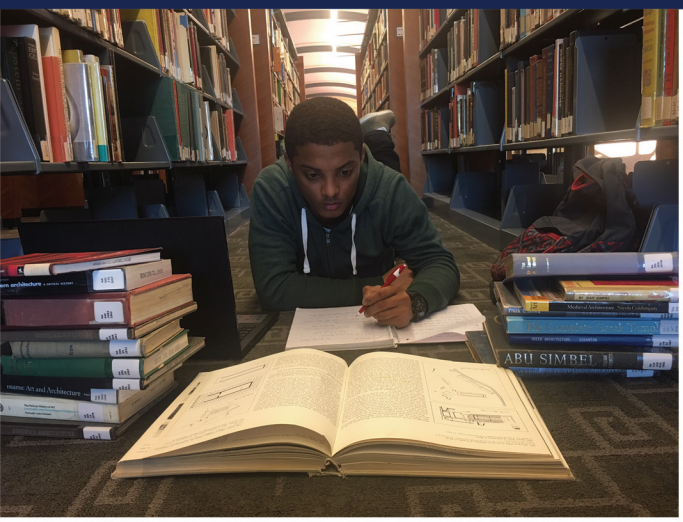
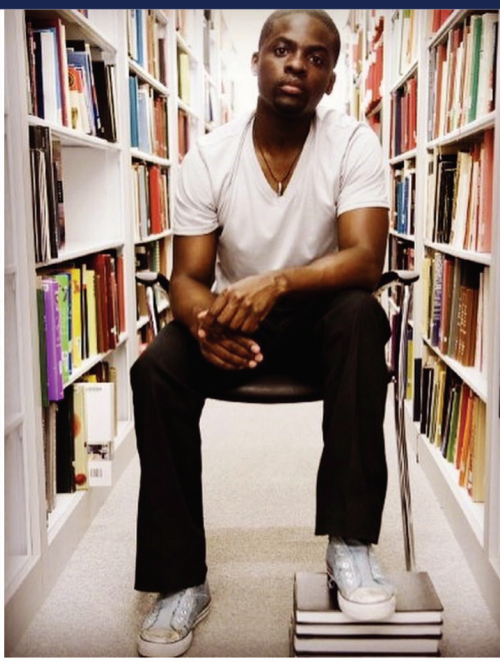
Engaging African American Males in Community College

Ted N. Ingram & James Coaxum, III, Editors





Engaging African American Males in Community College

A Volume in
The Contemporary Perspectives on Access, Equity, and Achievement

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Engaging African American Males in Community College

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DEDICATION

To U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Corey G. Ingram and the other shipmates who lost their lives on the USS John S. McCain on Monday, August 21, 2017.

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FOREWORD

I was raised in New Jersey with three brothers. While we all were reared in the same environment, I am the only one that graduated from high school, let alone, earned a bachelor's degree, a Master's degree, and a PhD. Sometimes I feel guilty because of the strives I have made in education while my brothers have and continue to struggle in various ways. Because I was labeled as learning disabled by one of my fourth-grade teachers, I feel like I had a lot against me whereas some of my brothers did not seem to have the odds against them in the realm of education. One of the aspects that made an important difference in my life was the love and pursuit of education. In a sense, I thought of education in the same manner that Frederick Douglass described it in his autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Specifically, in his book, he made the argument that knowledge was tantamount to liberation and empowerment.

In an age where more Black and Brown individuals are murdered at the hands of the police, I understand that educational attainment will not deter or prevent the systemic killing of my brothers and sisters, but I know that I view the world differently because of the power of education. For example, I do not share this with a lot of people, but during my youth, there was a time when I loathed being Black. My surroundings when I was growing up contributed to this mindset. Specifically, during my youth, I lacked access to positive Black role models. Consequently, I developed a loving for Whiteness because through the hidden curriculum (e.g., TV and magazines), they were the only examples of positivity I had access to at the time. Fortunately, that psyche changed as I encountered more positive examples of Blacks, such Frederick Douglass, Carter G. Woodson, Oprah,

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Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Thurgood Marshall). Though these role models were intangible, they helped me to realize and embrace the beauty of my Blackness.

Clearly, the power of education has played a pivotal role in my life. The transformative role of education is one of the fundamental reasons why I strongly recommend this book, *Engaging Black Men in Community College*," edited by Drs. Ted Ingram and James Coaxum. While often they do not get the credit due, community colleges play an important role in providing access and helping to facilitate success for racial and ethnic minorities desiring to enter postsecondary education. While this is particularly true for Black male collegians, as it often marks the starting point for their initial foray into higher education, it is becoming increasingly true for students in general as the cost of education continues to soar, and students look to community colleges as a way to gain a quality education at an affordable price.

Given the critical role that community colleges in serving as the linchpin to higher education for Black men, Ingram and Coaxum's book joins other important bodies of work on this topic to not only discuss some vexing challenges that impedes the success of Black men in community colleges, but that also seeks to provide solutions in terms of implications for practice or policies to help institutional officials and other stakeholders increase the retention and persistence rate for this student demographic. Indeed, many of the chapters in this edited volume are by well-established researchers or practitioners who have a tremendous amount of expertise on the topic of students of color in community colleges. While I find all of the chapters in Ingram and Coaxum's book to be compelling, the section of the book I found most intriguing was the qualitative portion, which highlighted the voices of the students. It is not often that we get a chance to hear the voices of the students, let alone—Black males— as they discuss their various forms of identities within the context of community colleges. For anyone concerned with improving outcomes among Black men in postsecondary education, specifically community colleges, this book is a must read.

Robert Palmer,

Interim Chair and Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Howard University

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PREFACE

Ted N. Ingram and James Coaxum, III

During the past decades, scholars have dedicated considerable time and effort to understanding the plight of African American males in educational sectors throughout the United States. While African American males in some of these sectors have been examined more than others, the critical importance of all of these studies has painted a unique portrait of African American males in education. These studies on African American males can be segmented into various themes depending on their educational experience and context. We have learned the most about African American males in primary and secondary education as well as higher education. Despite the significant contributions that have been made by scholars in these areas, there are still other areas critical to the experiences of African American males that warrant further examination.

One of the crucial areas where there has been recent growth is the experience of African American males enrolled in community colleges. Those scholars who initiated the research agenda on African American males in the community college sector should be commended for their efforts in addressing this population at a major juncture in the educational corridor. They also point to the vital importance of focusing more studies in this area. This in part is due to the fact that most African American males in postsecondary education get their start at a community college (Pope, 2006; Wood & Harris, 2015). However, most of the studies on African American males have been conducted at 4-year institutions.

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According to National Council of Education Statistics (2016a, 2016b), during 2015–2016 academic year, 12% of African American males were conferred at community colleges and 9% were awarded at 4-year institutions. Harper (2012) notes that African American male's college completion rates are the lowest of all major racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Therefore, community colleges must be challenged like four year institutions to improve educational outcomes and close the achievement gap between African American males and other ethnic groups. This was one of the goals of President Obama's administration who introduced several initiatives to expand access and success among community colleges through innovative programs and workforce development. There has also been an expanded focus on community colleges through graduate educational preparation programs like the Community College Leadership Initiative (CCLI) at Rowan University and research preparation programs like the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program at Morgan State University. These programs and others are designed to prepare practitioners and scholars to become educational leaders who are able to address contemporary issues impacting community colleges. Particularly, the Minority Male Community College Collaborative launched under the auspices of Dr. Luke Wood at San Diego State University has been pivotal in promoting access, achievement, and success among African American males enrolled at community colleges.

Therefore, this volume dedicated to the engagement of African American males in community colleges furthers the research agenda focused on improving the educational outcomes of African American males. Building on the foundation of Michael Cuyjet and associates who in 2006 edited a volume entitled *African American Men in College,* this volume *Engaging African American Males in Community Colleges* fuses empirical research, policy issues, and implications as well as programmatic initiatives all aimed at fostering successful outcomes for African American males. The theme *engagement* also supports the antideficit approach to research on African American males developed by Wood and Harper (2016). The true success of African American males in community colleges rests on how well these institutions engage young men into their institutions. This will require community colleges to examine policies, pedagogical strategies, and institutional practices that alienate African American males and fosters a culture of underachievement. The authors who have contributed to this volume all speak from the same script which proves that when African American males are properly engaged in an education that is culturally relevant, they will succeed. Therefore, this book will benefit ***ALL*** who support the education of African American males. It is our intent that this book will contribute to the growing body of knowledge that exists in this area as well as foster more inquiry into the achievement of African American males. The book offers

three approaches to understanding the engagement of African American males in community college which includes: empirical research (Chapters 1 through 7), policy perspectives (Chapters 8 through 10) and programmatic initiatives (Chapters 11 through 13).

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, Soua Xiong and J. Luke Wood's chapter extends scholarly understandings of engagement by overviewing the concept of engagement, its critiques, and by offering "welcomeness to engage" as an accompanying (yet critical) element that is necessary to advance discourse on student success for Black men attending community colleges

In Chapter 2, Xueli Wang, Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, Ning Sun, and Ashley N. Gaskew exploratory analysis using the Beginning Postsecondary Longitudinal Study employs an asset-based approach which is rooted in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth to analyze changes in the educational aspirations of Black men who are enrolled in community colleges. Their analysis offers a way to explore African American men's aspirational capital (goals, aspirations, and plans for the future that can be used as an asset in educational institutions). By understanding aspirational capital in this way, the researchers are able to offer insights into ways to better support and nurture the aspirations and educational outcomes for African American men in community colleges.

In Chapter 3, Peter Jordan and Larry Rideaux explore promising practices employed by faculty at two urban community colleges that support African American males in the classroom. They explore students' perceptions of forces that shape their success or create barriers to success in the learning environment. They also examine practices used by faculty to support engagement, persistence and success among students. The findings suggest that both student and faculty agree that the delivery of instruction and classroom engagement are critical to these students' success.

In Chapter 4, LaVon A. Williams and James Coaxum, III, describe the lived experience of Black males in an Education Opportunity Fund (EOF) program at a community college. This chapter highlights the importance of an EOF program in engaging Black males into the campus community through strong connections with advisors. Findings from this study indicate that Black males experience the duality of family and financial influence, have strong connections with EOF advisors, are academically and socially engaged, and demonstrate the resilience to stay focused.

In Chapter 5, Jill Wendt utilizes an action research study to explore the impact of a reciprocal mentoring model between faculty and minority male students in an effort to examine the effects on student persistence. Also

she analyzes the perception of African American male perspectives using a CRT framework. The results yielded eight assertions related to minority male retention and persistence strategies.

In Chapter 6, Ted N. Ingram and Eliezer Marcellus examine the lived experience of foreign-born Black males who participate in a supplement instruction program at a community college. Through this academic support program Black male reap personal and professional development while serving as peer leaders. This study highlights the importance of Black male participation in leadership activities and its connection to academic persistence. Findings from this study disclosed the critical importance of educational differences, overcoming language barriers, positive faculty interactions, and campus engagement for foreign-born Black males in a community college. This study is important for validating the experiences of foreign-born Black male students.

In Chapter 7, Malou Harrison describes the detrimental aspects of deficit thinking as it relates to issues of degree completion for Black male students in community colleges. Equally important, her chapter illuminates the voices of successful Black male students and shares perspectives on factors they believe contributed to their college success. These perspectives include organization membership, community service, advising, intrinsic motivation and ethnicity, provide insight into college experiences and interventions that have positive implications for Black male college student success.

In Chapter 8, Cameron C. Beatty and Jonathan A. McElderry engage in scholarly investigations to better understand the educational experiences of Black men at community colleges, and what administrators and faculty need to do to promote persistence, and eventually graduation. As such, understanding the educational experiences of Black men prior to college is important, as it sets the stage for their transition and persistence (or not) into higher education. Their chapter explores the role of retention, persistence, and policy implications on the engagement of Black men enrolled at community colleges in order to encourage student success. Additionally, the chapter highlights policy recommendations at the local community college level, the state level and national level to promote Black men's thriving at 2-year institutions.

In Chapter 9, Kadeem Fuller and Eboni Zamani-Gallaher explore the school to prison pipeline, racial disparities that exist across the educational pipeline, and how the community college has played a vital role in postsecondary access for African American males via prison education programs. The chapter highlights best practices, policy recommendations, and shares the experiences of African American males that participated in prison education programming and how they successfully transitioned following release.

In Chapter 10, Kevin McClain, Adam Ray, J. Luke Wood, and Adriel A. Hilton investigate how Black community colleges have prospered in the shadow of 4-year historically Black colleges and univeristies; the impending future of the Black community college; in addition to how these institutions have prepared their students for success. This chapter highlights policy recommendations on how these institutions can further enhance the educational aspiration of Black men.

In Chapters 11, 12, and 13, Jermaine Wright, Ted N. Ingram, Jame'l R. Hodges, and Edgar Hobbs, Jr., respectively, explore established programs at community colleges that support Black male students. The programs featured are the City University of New York Black Male Initiative, Shoot for Success at Volunteer State Community College, and the Black and Hispanic Male Initiative at Westchester Community College. Each chapter provides an overview of the program, inclusive of the impetus, objective, mission, as well as the program accomplishments.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to thank God for providing the vision for this volume and creating the path to make it possible as well as the strength and fortitude to persist and bring this project to fruition.

Second, we pay honor to our ancestors who paved the way, struggled, and fought so that we would have the opportunity to pursue an education. We are grateful for the "framework of resiliency" they provided because the journey of Black males within the academy still comes with many challenges even among an educated citizenry.

Third, through this work we pay honor to our parents Myrtle and the late Willard Ingram, and Rev. James and Mrs. Elizabeth Coaxum, II who sacrificed so that we could make our educational goals and dreams a reality. The Ingram siblings: Beverley Thomas, Gloria Ingram-Smith, Barbara Ingram-Alfred, Casbert, Hubert, and Phil Ingram; as well as the Coaxum siblings: Carla Malonda (Sam), Sonya Coaxum, and Saundra Akoh (Gibson) are all worthy of applaud for their continuous support over the years.

Finally, we thank colleagues from our institutions, Bronx Community College and Rowan University for their encouragement and for providing the space to do this work. The Adjusted Load Program at Rowan University for supporting this initiative. Additionally, we thank the community of scholars who contributed to this volume and for the opportunities they created through their scholarship to hear the voices of Black males in education and specifically within community colleges. We also thank Clynthia Graham for her meticulous eye and the feedback she contributed to this work. In effort not to exclude anyone, we are appreciative of our friends,

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mentors and mentees who share in our inspiration on a daily basis. Also, special thanks to our beloved organizations: the brothers of Kappa Xi Lambda Chapter ("the Wall Street Alphas") of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated (Ted N. Ingram) and the officers and members of St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church in Atlantic City, New Jersey (James Coaxum, III).

SECTION I

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

CHAPTER 1

PERCEPTIONS OF FACULTY WELCOMING ENGAGEMENT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Soua Xiong
San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University

J. Luke Wood
San Diego State University

While men of color (e.g., African American, Latino) are more likely to begin postsecondary education in community colleges (Bush & Bush, 2010; Vasquez Urias, 2012), these institutions have struggled to support their success. This is highlighted by the racial/ethnic disparities in success outcomes experienced by men of color in the community college. As noted by Wood, Harris, and Xiong (2014), men of color were less likely to complete their goals (e.g., certificate, degree, transfer) than their other male counterparts. Specifically, while 15% of Latino and 17% of African American men will complete their goals in 3 years, 27% of their White male counterparts will have completed their goals in the same time span. Given these

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disparate outcomes, advancing student success outcomes among men of color, particularly African American men, has been a growing concern for community college educators and scholars.

This growing concern has spawn decades of research focused on factors that influence their experiences and outcomes in community colleges (Harris & Wood, 2013; Wood, Palmer, & Harris, 2015). In a review of the extant literature on African American men in community colleges, Wood and Harris (2014) identified five domains of factors during college that influence student success outcomes for these men. These included environmental (e.g., family responsibilities, employment, stressful live events), institutional (e.g., sense of belonging, validation, access to campus services), social (e.g., interactions with peers, participation in student clubs/organizations), noncognitive (e.g., self-efficacy, locus of control, intrinsic interest), and academic (e.g., faculty-student interaction, academic service use, commitment to course of study) factors. From their extensive review of the literature, Wood and Harris (2014) provided further insights into factors that contributed to the success of African American men in community colleges.

Faculty-student engagement was among the various factors identified by Wood and Harris (2014) as a salient factor contributing to the success of African American men attending community college. They proposed that positive faculty-student engagement shapes the college experiences of African American men and directly influences student success outcomes such as achievement, persistence, degree attainment, and transfer (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harris & Wood, 2013; Mason, 1998; Wood & Harris, 2014; Wood, Harris, & White, 2015). While engagement with faculty has been found to facilitate student success among African American men, much of the current research makes the erroneous assumption that welcoming engagement practices are evident among community college faculty (Wood et al., 2015). This is an erroneous assumption because some African American men in the community college do not perceive faculty to welcome their engagement (Wood & Turner, 2011). As such, they were less likely to engage with faculty inside and outside of class (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012, 2014). Thus, there is limited understanding about the perceptions of African American men on faculty welcoming their engagement. Given this, the purpose of the current study was to examine perceptions of faculty welcoming engagement practices. More specifically, this exploratory quantitative study examines factors that predict African American men's perceptions of faculty welcoming their engagement. The next section provides a brief overview of the existing research on African American men in community colleges and their engagement with faculty members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the extant literature has generally documented the critical role of positive faculty-student engagement on the success of African American men in community colleges (Bauer, 2014; Bush & Bush, 2010; Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Wood, 2014; Wood & Turner, 2011), few studies have focused on the factors that contribute to engagement. While limited in nature, these studies do provide insights into positive facilitators of engagement. This body of research has indicated that faculty-student engagement is less of a function of students' background characteristics and environmental pressures but more of the campus ethos conditions fostered by the institution and educators that serve the students (Harrison & Palacios, 2014; Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Turner, 2011). Using data from the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM), Harrison and Palacios (2014) examined the influence of campus ethos factors on faculty-student engagement of 212 African American men who attended community college in a district in the western United States. They found that African American men who reported higher levels of faculty welcomeness and belonging were associated with higher levels of faculty-student engagement. As such, Harrison and Palacios argued that when faculty create conditions where students feel welcome to engage inside and outside of the classroom and have a greater sense of belonging with them, African American men were more likely to engage with faculty members.

Research from Bauer (2014) extended our understanding that faculty validation also contributed to enhanced engagement. Also analyzing data from the CCSM, Bauer examined the role of validating messages on faculty-student engagement among 289 urban African American men in community colleges. She found that African American men who reported higher levels of validation from faculty members also reported higher levels of engagement with faculty members. Therefore, Bauer concluded that the validation African American men received from faculty members created conditions that made them feel more comfortable engaging with faculty.

Wood and Turner (2011) provided the most comprehensive exploration of factors that contribute to enhanced engagement between African American men and faculty members. They interviewed 28 African American male community college students on factors contributing to academic success and most of them discussed the critical role of faculty on their academic success. They found five key conditions fostered by faculty members that contributed to enhanced faculty-student engagement. These conditions included faculty members who "were friendly with students from the onset; checked in on student academic progress; listened to student concerns; proactive in addressing performance issues; and encouraged students to

succeed" (p. 143). Wood and Turner asserted that these conditions were critical to positive engagement with faculty members for African American male students.

Unfortunately, not all African American male community college students have experienced these conditions that foster positive engagement with their faculty members. Scholars have found that African American males were less likely to interact with faculty members about academic and non-academic matters, inside and outside of the classroom (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012). Given this, Wood (2014) extended our understanding of academic disengagement among Black male students in the community college. Through interviews with 28 African American male students attending a community college located in the southwestern United States, he found that disengagement was a function of their apprehensiveness to interact with faculty members inside and outside of class. This stemmed from their perceptions of faculty members viewing them as academically inferior and inadequate. As such, faculty members who were attuned to this apprehension and were proactive in establishing rapport created conditions that allowed African American male students to feel comfortable engaging with them.

While these findings have underscored the critical role of the conditions created by faculty members (e.g., welcomeness, belonging, validation, rapport) on enhanced engagement, little is still known about whether these conditions communicate to students that their engagement is welcomed. Therefore, to better understand the perceptions of faculty welcoming their engagement, the current study examines factors that predict African American male community college students' perceptions of faculty welcoming their engagement. The conceptual framework undergirding the current study is discussed in the following section.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Wood, Harris, and White's (2015) "welcomeness to engage" framework guided the current study. They define "welcomeness to engage" as the "conditions created in and out of the classroom that communicate to students whether faculty members want students to engage with them" (p. 25). This framework examines the degree to which faculty members communicate to students that their engagement is both invited and desired. The model highlights that epistemological, curricular-andragogical, structural, and relational facilitators serve as positive facilitators of students' perception of faculty welcoming their engagement. While the model suggests that these are the four primary facilitators, the current study focused on

the relational facilitators. The model proposed that authentic care, validating messaging, high expectations, and time investment were positive relational facilitators of welcoming engagement. This includes creating an environment that communicates welcoming engagement by criticizing privately and praising publicly, communicating validation, fostering sense of belonging, and avoiding microaggressions. Additionally, this includes acknowledging and valuing students' presence on campus, connecting with students as a person, and willingness to engage with students beyond the classroom. These relational facilitators of welcoming engagement are critical for enhanced engagement with men of color in community colleges. As such, the model provided an appropriate framework to guide the current study that is primarily focused on examining factors that predict "welcomeness to engage." The methods for the current study is described in the next section.

METHODS

This study employed data from the CCSM. Guided by the extant literature on men of color in community colleges, the CCSM was designed to examine factors that influence student success outcomes among these men. The instrument includes items and scales consisting of background/defining, environmental, noncognitive, academic and campus ethos factors that influence success outcomes (e.g., persistence, achievement, graduation, transfer). The validity and reliability of the instrument has been evaluated and found to be reliable and have strong content, construct, and confirmatory validity (De la Garza, Wood, & Harris, 2015; Harris, Wood, & Newman, 2015; Wood & Harris, 2013). The sample was drawn from nine southern California community colleges from the larger CCSM dataset. While over 900 men of color who attended these community colleges completed the CCSM, the final sample was delimited only to men who identified as Black or African American (n = 212). This study employed responses from these men.

Key Variables

Dependent variables employed in this study included two measures of welcoming engagement inside and outside of class. These variables examined students' perception of whether faculty directly encourage them to engage with them inside and outside of the class. Welcomeness to engage (inside of class) was a composite variable derived from students' responses to four questions regarding their perceptions of faculty inside of class