

Title: Persistence of African-American College Students Enrolled in the Act 101 Programs at Predominantly White, Four-Year Postsecondary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Retention of African-American students continues to be an issue that most historical White institutions face. The increase of students with developmental needs into these institutions further compounds this challenge. Hence, this study examines the factors influencing the persistence of African-American students. Specifically, this study addresses the following issues: (a) the concept of marginality and its impact on African-American students at state public institutions; (b) the factors which aid in the persistence of African-American students at these institutions; (c) the barriers which impede the persistence of African-American students at these institutions; (d) the characteristics of African-American students who are persisting at these institutions; and (e) the comparison between African-American and White students in the Act 101 program as it relates to their experiences at the institution.

This qualitative study involves data collected from a survey and data compiled from focus group sessions at two institutions. The overall theoretical framework utilized Tinto's (1987, 1993) and Bean's (1990) model which addresses academic and social integration in conjunction with Cuyjet's (1994) work on marginality which sets the stage for examining African-American students' perceptions on how they are perceived at their institution.

The results indicate that when African-American students are compared to White students, African-American students feel marginalized. Further, academic and social adjustment

contributes to both the persistence and to the downfall of African-American student. These students reported experiencing covert racism along with the stigma from participating in a special support program due to the fact that the campus environment possessed a negative view of the program. African-American students' characteristics did not change overtime at the institution except for peer interaction, which did positively increase with time. Moreover, these students were coping with the fear of failure, because they carried the burden of not disappointing their families. Ultimately, institutions need to re-evaluate their support of this student population and make the necessary adjustments to help them succeed and remain at the table of learning.