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## Goal and Strategy Formation for Persistence for Men of Color at a Community College

Owen G. DeVance  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Owen G. DeVance

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Goal and Strategy Formation for Persistence for Men of Color at a Community College

by

Owen G DeVance

MA, California State University, Long Beach, 1997

BS, California State University, Long Beach, 1992

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2021

## Abstract

At a community college, the first-year student persistence rates for men of color, especially Black men (61.6%), were lower than for White students (70.3%). The purpose of this study was to determine if men of color at the community college had high goals and self-efficacy strategies already in place or whether they receive application guidance in setting high goals and developing self-efficacy strategies in the admissions/enrollment process during the first year. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy was the framework used to guide this study. The research questions explored setting goals at the community college during the admissions process or during the first year for men of color and how it makes a difference in their first-year persistence at the research site. The methodology of this study was a basic qualitative design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected sample of eight men of color to determine if they used high goals and self-efficacy strategies for persistence. The resulting qualitative data were coded manually and then entered into the NVivo software program. Data analysis yielded five themes: preference for institutional support of academics over athletics, limited understanding of mentorship, impact of admissions versus academic advising staff on goals, belief in the self as the arbiter of success, and lack of an academic roadmap. These findings were the basis for a policy brief that included recommendations that advising and admissions staff work together to assist men of color in creating academic goals and strategies. These recommendations could ensure sustained persistence in higher education for men of color, resulting in positive social change.

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## Dedication

I dedicate the accomplishment of this educational endeavor to the memory of my childhood growing up on Teague Street in Longview, Texas, hearing stories from a couple of old men, one a teacher from Chicago who talked about the importance of an education, and the other, a dreamer who wanted to write a movie script but had no success due to life conditions. These two men inspired me to challenge myself to go further and leave a legacy for my kids and grandkids.

## Acknowledgments

First and above all, I give thanks to God for his watch, care, and protection, and for giving me the will to persevere through all the challenges involved in helping to make this goal a reality.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and thanks to my advisor and dissertation chairperson, Dr. Katherine Garlough, for her patience and guidance, valuable advice, and encouragement throughout the course of my study at Walden University. Dr Garlough went above and beyond to take me to the point I am at now. I am forever grateful for her faith and belief in me. I would further like to thank Dr. Charles Cook and Dr. Markus Berndt as members of my committee for providing valuable feedback in the completion of this project.

Special thanks go to members of the staff at the California community college that served as the project site for their support during the completion of this project. A very special thanks to the institution's Gateway to College program director, who served as a role model by giving me sage advice in how to complete this project.

Finally, a very special thanks to friends and families for always giving me encouragement and for believing in me when I had doubts about myself.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

The local problem is that men of color entering community colleges may not have academic goals or self-efficacy strategies to help them persist in college. At community colleges, persistence rates are tracked by the completion of 30 units over a 6-year period (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2019). At the site, Black and Latino men had the lowest persistence rate among all students who entered during the Fall 2017. The persistence rate for men of color was 61.6% compared to 70.3% for Whites (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2019). Application guidance that supports academic goal setting and self-efficacy strategy may make a difference in persistence for male students of color at the site.

The persistence of men of color at U.S. community colleges is different than at 4-year institutions, and their experiences and backgrounds are also different (Wood & Williams, 2013). Yet, most research literature on male students of color focuses on 4-year institutions (Harris & Wood, 2013). Black men in 2-year institutions are likely to be older, to have dependents, and to support themselves (Harris & Wood, 2014); therefore, they are likely to be less ambitious about pursuing a 4-year degree (Wood & Harris, 2015). More importantly, 2-year Black male students are less likely to have social and academic integration, as found in 4-year students (Harris & Wood, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish persistence between 2-year and 4-year students.

At the public community college in Southern California under study, persistence among men of color was one of the primary issues facing the college, according to its

CEO (personal communication, December 2015). The CEO said that a low persistence rate among men of color has much to do with life issues that include high poverty rates, lack of academic preparation, and lack of job opportunities. A better understanding of academic goal setting and strategy-formation by men of color during the application process may make a difference in the guidance that college staff offer for persistence during the first year at the community college.

Academic goal setting is included in the online application on the community college website via a drop-down menu from the student selections part of the form. The drop-down menu has a predetermined list of academic goals for students to choose from. An example of an academic goal would be a student attempting to complete a 2-year degree. Table 1 shows the academic goals presented to students in the application form.

**Table 1**

*Educational Goals Listed on the Research Site's Online Application Form*

Number	Goal
1	Complete credits for a four-year degree Obtain a two-year degree and with the intent of transferring to 4-year institution
2	Transfer to a 4-year institution without the associate degree
3	Complete studies to obtain a 2-year associate degree without transfer
4	Complete high school credits for a diploma or GED
5	Go from taking noncredit coursework to work toward a degree
6	Complete credits for a four-year degree

At the site, students may or may not be advised to select their academic goals before, during, or after the admissions process by an admissions officer, academic advisor, or external/internal mentor. Advisement is offered but not required. I use the

term *application guidance* throughout this capstone to refer to the support of any admissions officers, academic advisors, or internal/external mentors.

Many students become persistent at community college through academic goal setting and strategizing (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). It is essential that students set goals at the application stage because they will work harder to meet those goals and direct their learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The three possible sources of application guidance for setting and strategizing academic goals are admissions officers, academic advisors, and mentors. For this study, mentors could be external or internal to the academic institution and included members of the broader community. Officials did not offer application guidance for academic goal setting and strategy formation at the site. There is evidence showing that it is relevant in preparing men of color for persistence (Maguire, 2019; Roman, 2007).

Men of color at U.S. community colleges have more limited academic success during their first year compared to other college students, research shows (Wood et al., 2014). Statewide, the persistence rate (completion of 30 units) at California community colleges for Blacks and Hispanics combined was 63.4% compared to Whites at 72.2% as of Fall 2017 (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2019). Furthermore, men of color were less likely to complete their goals (e.g., certificate, degree, transfer) than other male students (Wood et al., 2014). Low persistence rates affect students not only in completing college goals; it affects the community because of the loss of skills and knowledge.

## **Rationale**

Several studies related to persistence and men of color point out the disproportionate number of students who fail to persist during their first year of community college (Tovar, 2015). According to some experts, Black male students leave college and fail to persist because of stigmatization and negative stereotypes (Wood & Williams, 2013). However, many Black male students do continue and persist to complete a degree (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Palmer et al., 2015). For this reason, the success of male students of color, especially Black and Latino men, should be acknowledged as much as the low persistence and graduation rates.

Students need to have strategies and self-efficacy to overcome hurdles that may impede persistence (Casperan & Raaen, 2014; O'Neil & Thompson, 2013; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Application guidance is particularly relevant to men of color seeking college admission (Bethea, 2016). Admission officers are necessary in the application guidance process due to a lack of academic preparation among men of color, especially for first-year math courses (Bowen & Bok, 2016). According to Bethea (2016), who researched minority admission professionals, many U.S. colleges lack intentional resources to prepare students of color. The resources omitted include college applications, workshops, and structured programs and conversations about communicating about oneself other than through transcripts (Bethea, 2016). The lack of an application guidance process as a resource contributed to a decrease in persistence, Goldrick-Rad et al. (2016) found.



The success of men of color at community college affects society in general. Strategies employed by men of color to persist impact society from a sociopolitical and economic perspective (McGlynn, 2011). As more men of color obtain degrees, the United States may be better able to compete in the global knowledge economy (Harrison, 2018). The achievement of Black and Latino students in community college will lead to a more positive narrative regarding graduation and persistence (Harrison, 2018). More importantly, the rise in the education level may impact the standing of the United States around the world. The purpose of this study was to determine if men of color at the community college have high goals and self-efficacy strategies already in place or whether they receive application guidance in setting high goals and developing self-efficacy strategies during the admissions/enrollment process or during the first year.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Academic goals:* For this study, a term that refers to broad statements that are part of the strategic plan related to a student's matriculation and academic adjustments within the college (Keflezighi et al., 2016).

*Academic preparation:* Academic performance and skills that will inform future efficacy judgments (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016).

*Application guidance:* The support provided by admissions officers, academic advisors, or internal/external mentors during and after the application process.

*College-prepared:* Students who have minimal course attempts in math and English (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2014). The *college-level* is also used in the capstone.

*Completion:* The rate at which students who begin higher education at a given point in time continue in higher education and eventually complete their degree, regardless of where they do so (Goldrich-Rab et al., 2016; Tinto, 2012).

*Educational goals:* Statements that describe the competences, skills, and attributes that students should possess upon completion of a course or program. Goals often operate within the interacting domains of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (You, 2018).

*First-year progress:* Student learning and retention during the first year. The first year of college is a crucial period in student learning and retention; therefore, investing in learning during this time will likely yield a great return in retention (Kim, 2015).

*First-generation college student:* A student for whom no parent or guardian has earned more than a high school diploma or has any college experience (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

*First-time students:* Students who take credit or noncredit courses in the community college for the first time (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2014).

*Graduation:* The rate at which an institution retains and graduate students who first enter the institution as a freshman at a given point in time (Barbera et al., 2020; Tinto, 2012).

*Males of color/Persons of color:* A phrase that is used to identify students who are members of racial/ethnic groups that have been historically underrepresented and underserved in the U.S. educational system and socially defined as minorities who are

most likely to become targets of oppression, prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination regardless of numerical status and distribution (Rendon, 2006).

*Overall:* Students who attempted the only level of Math or English available to them. (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2014).

*Persistence:* A term for students who reenroll from one semester to the next prior to obtaining a degree; the term refers to the rate at which students who begin higher education at a given point in time continue in higher education and eventually complete their degree, regardless of where they do so (Tinto, 2012).

*Persistence rate:* The percentage of degree-, certificate-, and/or transfer-seeking students starting for the first time in 2007-2008 who enrolled in the first three consecutive terms; officials tracked the rate for 6 years through 2012-2013 (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2014).

*Retention:* A term that refers to program completion at the community college level or staying in school until completion of the degree (Barbera et al., 2020).

*Retention rate:* The percentage of students who remain enrolled through the end of a course out of all students enrolled on the census date. The retention rate also includes the percentage of students who did not drop late or withdraw (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

*30 units:* A term used to track students over a 6-year period starting in 2012-2013 and continuing through 2017-2018 (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2019).

*Unprepared for college*: student's lowest course attempted in math and/or English was remedial level (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2014).

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the insights it provides about goal setting and self-efficacy strategies among male community college students of color. Specifically, I sought to determine whether men of color at the target community college have high goals and self-efficacy strategies already in place or whether they receive application guidance in setting high goals and developing self-efficacy strategies once they are in the admissions/enrollment process or during the first year. In conducting this study, I wanted to further knowledge on academic goal setting and strategy formation, both of which are known factors in college student persistence but have not been studied as much as other factors (CITE). Intensive examination of these two factors can help provide a basis for further studies of this nature. This study allowed participating men of color to give feedback on what they viewed as important to their persistence in the admissions process.

Self-efficacy furthers students' self-confidence; the more confidence students have, the more likely they are to fulfill their stated goals and intentions (Carpi et al., 2017; Klassen & Lynch, 2007; Parsons et al., 2011). As more students persist, college leaders have more funding available to them that can be used to strengthen programs (Stuart et al., 2014). Thus, the increase in course completion leads to increase in degree completions, subsequently leading to increased employment opportunities and increased income. Increased income opens the door to other benefits. The more programs supported lead to advanced skill levels for the local community.

### **Research Question**

The objective of the overall research question (RQ) is to determine if men of color at the community college have high goals and self-efficacy strategies already in place or whether they receive application guidance in setting high goals and developing self-efficacy strategies once they are in the admissions/enrollment process, or during the first year. I interviewed eight men of color who may or may not have completed first-year courses to determine whether academic goal setting and academic advising as part of the application process, as well as admission advising and mentoring, made a difference in persistence during the first year of college. The overall RQ and sub questions were as follows:

RQ How do men of color describe their academic goals and form strategies to accomplish those goals during the first year?

- a. How do men of color at the research site describe speaking with an admissions officer about academic goal?
- b. How do men of color describe setting academic goals at the research site?
- c. How do men of color describe speaking with an academic advisor about academic goals?
- d. How do men of color describe speaking with an internal/external mentor about academic goals?

The RQs were aligned with the conceptual framework of the theory of self-efficacy to help understand whether students who set goals typically work to fulfill those goals through tasks.

## **Review of the Literature**

I based the project study on findings from the literature review. The first section of the literature review includes the conceptual framework underlying this project. In the second section, I cover the broader issues associated with men of color and the admissions process. The issues include academic advising, academic goal setting, mentoring, persistence factors associated with men of color, and first-year persistence.

I used education, psychology, and multidisciplinary databases to find resources for the literature review. These included ERIC, Sage, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, and the Education Research Complete. Next, I searched for dissertations and theses published from 2010 to 2019. I also searched textbooks related to theory, community college, and men of color. ERIC, Google Scholar, and Educational Research were searched along with multidisciplinary databases such as Walden University Library's Thoreau Multi-Database Search. The search terms I used included *self-efficacy theory, setting academic goals, the admissions process, mentoring, academic advising, persistence, goal setting theory, Black males and the admission process, men of color and admissions, retention at community colleges, persistence at community college, admission officers, and men of color at community college related to persistence.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theory of self-efficacy originated with Bandura (1989). Bandura defined self-efficacy as an individual's ability to employ introspective measures in evaluating and managing their competence to successfully actualize desired outcomes. Capara et al. (1992) stated that self-efficacy is a byproduct of social cognitive-learning theory, which

posits that people learn from one another (through observation, imitation, and modeling) observing others' behaviors, attitudes, and the outcomes of those behaviors (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Therefore, a student's self-efficacy is influenced by learning from others and setting higher goals. Students in an academic environment can benefit from self-efficacy, especially students of color (Foster, 2019; Salvo et al., 2019; Reid, 2013). To be successful, students of color may need to set higher goals and observe the success of current students who would serve as role models.

For the current study, I chose self-efficacy by Bandura as the relevant theory because leaders of U.S. higher education institutions have primarily used self-efficacy as a theoretical mechanism to explain and understand college students' academic performance and persistence (Lee & Zhenxing, 2016). Although researchers use self-efficacy less than other mechanisms it has relative significance related to community college, persistence, and men of color (Foster, 2019; Reid, 2013; Salvo et al., 2019). Research shows that students who lack academic self-efficacy have a hard time persisting at the community college level (Thompson & Verdino, 2019). In discussing self-efficacy, Pajares and Schunk (2001) also spoke of feelings of competence that encourage individuals, especially for those who have struggled in the past, to put forth the effort and persevere when confronting obstacles. This confidence-building is pertinent because the literature available indicates that students of color encounter more challenges than their White counterparts, before and during college (Bui, 2002; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Majer's (2009) definition of self-efficacy is confidence in oneself to accomplish tasks and work toward goals.

The four primary sources of influence, by which a person's self-efficacy is developed and maintained, are (a) performance accomplishments or master experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal or social persuasion, and (d) somatic and emotional states (Bandura, 1989; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). In each of the primary sources of self-efficacy, men of color may lack confidence when it comes to mastering difficult tasks, which can ultimately affect their motivation to persist at the community college (Caprara et al., 1992). For each source related to self-efficacy, men of color are met with challenges, starting with master experiences.

Experts contend that mastery experiences or personal performance accomplishments build strong self-efficacy. It takes experience to show resilience in overcoming obstacles through effort and perseverance. In seeing others who come from a similar place in life achieve success, an individual is more likely to believe that they can persevere (Bandura, 1989). It can also have an opposite effect if similar others fail despite their best efforts (Bui, 2003; Reid, 2013). Men of color at the community college are more vulnerable to lower academic performance, eventually leading to nonpersistence (Bui, 2002; Reid, 2013). An increase in self-efficacy can lead to higher academic performance and affect persistence positively (You, 2018). Mastery experiences consider that people overcome obstacles by being aware of the people around them and learning from others' experiences vicariously.

Vicarious experiences come from individuals observing others who they see as models or as having something in common with them. Seeing people around oneself have success raises hope that one can also have success (Capara et al., 1992). Men of color at



the community college may have challenges from being part of a lower socioeconomic group and being members of an underrepresented racial group (Bui, 2002; Reid, 2013). If others convey that they believe in them through verbal influence, male students of color may be more resolved to succeed.

Verbal influence may therefore have an influence on men of color at the community college level. Verbal or social persuasion affects one's perception of self-efficacy. It is a way of strengthening people's belief that they have what it takes to succeed (Bandura, 1989). Influential people in their lives, such as parents, managers, or coaches, can increase students' belief that they have what it takes to succeed (Reid, 2013). Academic advising at the community college for students of color will significantly impact persistence, research shows (Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Museus & Ravello, 2010). Being told that they will persevere in a manner that resonates with them could enhance self-efficacy and lead to more significant mobilization. Ultimately, when theoretical questions arise in coursework, students are in a better frame of mind to handle them. The mental state is essential as well in judging capability.

Emotional and somatic states help determine how well community college students perform academically. In this stage, students rely on their somatic or emotional state when judging their capabilities. Stress and tension are seen as "signs of vulnerability" (Capara et al., 1992, p. 7 to the pressure. Three concepts in the process help students access their experiences: (a) locus of control, which is a conception of their power to control their environment and desired outcomes; (b) coping behavior, which refers to their ability to adjust to a new environment; and (c) self-efficacy, which is their

conception of their confidence in academic and social skills (Sonmark & Modin, 2017).

Students have an outlet for performing academically through self-efficacy.

A few researchers have used the self-efficacy theory in investigating students of color at community colleges. There is a small body of literature that points to the positive impact self-efficacy has had on the success of students of color at the community college (Majer, 2009; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Reid (2013) found that self-efficacy benefitted vulnerable groups of students in community college. Because male students of color are a vulnerable group, the use of academic self-efficacy seems pertinent.

Self-efficacy was appropriate to this study because, in the higher education literature, scholars have used this theory to explain and understand college students' academic performance and persistence (Reid, 2013). However, the literature available on students of color at community colleges indicated that they encounter more challenges than their White counterparts, both before and during college (Bui, 2002; Brooms, 2019). One challenge faced by men of color is adapting to the college environment (Brooms, 2014; Dreury & Brooms, 2019). Research shows that students of color are more vulnerable to lower academic performance, leading to nonpersistence (Reid, 2013). It is therefore crucial that administrators have a strategy that will lead to success during the first year and beyond at community college for male students of color.

## **Review of the Broader Problem**

### ***Goals and Strategies for Men of color***

A number of factors account for strong academic performance and persistence among male students of color. Goals, behaviors, school performance, and personal beliefs

account for Black men's success in community college, according to Harris and Wood (2013). Harris and Wood discussed how students' goals (academic, career, education, personal), background (age, high school grade point average [GPA], and academic preparation) and societal norms shape society's perceptions of male students of color. Educational goals are an essential factor in persistence because the more time a student spends studying, the higher the GPA (Wood & Harris, 2015). Students are less likely to miss school frequently as well. Hagedorn et al. (2001) predicted retention for men of color based on six factors: age, high school GPA, confidence in a major, and greater emphasis on finishing college. Spirituality is also a factor in success for men of color (Hagedorn, 2001; Wood & Harris, 2015). Students who believe in a higher power as having meaning in their life and who attend services were likely to have success in one study (Wood et al., 2014). Educational goals, academic behaviors, and personal beliefs all contribute to the persistence of men of color at community college.

Four strategies identified in the literature as necessary for men of color in persisting to graduation are mentorship, socialization, support, and expectations (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Tolliver & Miller, 2017). The mentoring relationship strategy is essential because it helps develop students' abilities upon entering the college environment given that this is likely their first college experience (Demetriou et al., 2017; Tolliver & Miller, 2017). The goal of a mentoring relationship includes refining a young person's skills, abilities, and understanding (Lavant et al., 1987; Tolliver & Miller, 2017; Sáenz et al., 2015). In this study, I found that mentorships are essential in helping with the transitions that take place during college, in addition to ensuring that students stay on the right path

that leads to success (see Demetriou et al., 2017; Tolliver & Miller, 2017). Participants talked about how they met other students through fraternities and other campus organizations. Leaders from these organizations served as role models. They formed formal or informal relationships, whether on-campus or in their neighborhoods (Tolliver & Miller, 2017). These associations led to the development of socialization. Socialization on a college campus is essential in establishing support with students who may not look like oneself. Tolliver and Miller (2017) stated that students' cultural backgrounds and cultural norms on a college campus at times may lead to a feeling of conflict. This competition feeling is especially relevant on a college campus where men of color are not the majority population (Harris et al., 2015). The support can come through on-campus supports.

The on-campus supports strategy encourages interactions with other ethnically diverse students. Students from minority populations may not be as comfortable on campus as the dominant population (Tolliver & Miller, 2017; Whitehead, 2019). Minority populations must be socialized into the new environment through stages, if possible (Tolliver & Miller 2017). Having on-campus supports allow students to meet other students and faculty and to share their perspectives on issues that are happening on campus and around the world.

Another strategy found during the research was the importance for men of color to have family members who went to college. Family members who had gone to college shared their college experiences and provided inspiration and motivation to students. The sharing of stories by attendees about the long-term benefits students would derive from

attending college is beneficial (Tolliver & Miller, 2017; Vasquez et al., 2019). In many cases, family and community provided financial support and guidance to students (Wood et al., 2014; Vasquez et al., 2019). Wood and Williams (2013) pointed out how family obligations could negatively predict Black male persistence because it could cause them to neglect their academic studies. The input of families plays a key part in graduation for men of color as well as strategy. Another challenge for men of color that involves strategy is financial challenges.

It was important for men of color who were undocumented to come up with plans to make money when faced with financial struggles at the college. They employed three strategies to manage financial challenges (Saenz et al., 2018). Strategy 1 involved developing a business plan in which several participants came up with the idea of starting a business to address immediate financial burdens and relieve financial stress (Saenz et al., 2018). Strategy 1 would transfer to another college, and Strategy 3 involved using campus resources to pay for necessary living expenses. A program known as Extended Opportunity Programs & Services provided book vouchers that helped cover books' costs (Soltani et al., 2017). On-campus employment was also an option. Another strategy used at community college involved a diversity initiative.

Men of color at predominantly White institutions have a different challenge that requires communication to overcome. A strategy involving diversity initiatives at the community college involves faculty, staff, administrators, and student leads (Stanley et al., 2019; Torrens et al., 2017). Students interviewed and communicated the impact of a strategy that highlighted vision and commitment to diversity and inclusion at the site

(Stanley et al., 2019). The chief diversity officer worked with campus leaders to support, assist, and empower units to engage and address issues related to diversity (Stanley et al., 2019). The challenge was to integrate diversity goals into formalized plans at a predominantly White institution (2019). Students employed a communication strategy that valued diversity in the learning environment. A diverse learning environment is also crucial in the admissions process.

### *Admissions Advising for Men of color*

In considering the admissions process for this study, I included the policy, the admissions officer, and a learning program that addressed admission requirements. Unemployment rates are positively associated with college enrollment (Wood & Harris, 2015). The greater the local community's unemployment, the higher the enrollment at community college (Cristobal & Hidrowoh, 2018; Wood & Harris, 2015). Research indicated that college selection is a function of convenience with open-access policies, the campus location, and the ease of support services influencing the decision to enter college (Bennett, 2020). Open-access or open admissions policies enable all who wish to enroll in college and earn a higher education to do so (Bennett, 2020; Cristobal, 2018). Open-access extends access to individuals who lack college-level competency in basic subjects such as math, reading, and writing. (Bastedo et al., 2016).

Men of color need admission policies to prepare for the application process (Bethea, 2016). Bethea (2016) stated that admission officers believe many non-traditional Black students were turned away from college admissions because of incomplete applications. One of the first studies to address the voices of minority admission

professionals highlighted the lack of intentional resources such as college application workshops, structured programs, and conversations about how to represent oneself other than through transcripts (Bethea, 2016). The Education Advisory Board cited that student success concern is a lack of academic preparation, especially in math for 1st-year students (Bethea, 2016). Bethea stated that academic policies must address how to prepare men of color for the admissions process. Admissions professionals play a large part in preparing students for admission policies.

College Admissions Professionals (DCAPS) play an important role in college access because they are put in positions to help transition from K-12 to higher education (Bethea, 2016). DCAPS are specialists who recruit students of color as part of their formal duties. They make college decisions by evaluating students' academic performance and college readiness in assessing the students' sociocultural backgrounds (Bethea, 2016). DCAPs are knowledgeable about college entrance requirements (Bethea, 2016). Being knowledgeable about college policies make DCAPS an essential part of the admissions process.

Based on extensive studies, low income and underrepresented students do not possess adequate knowledge of the college experience, the differences between institutional types, and understanding of the admissions process (Tovar, 2015). Together We Achieve program was created for Black men at the college site to address policy, practice, and research limitations (Baber et al., 2015). The approach promoted equity for men of color. The site used disaggregated institutional data to address outcome inequalities among Black men (Baber et al., 2015). This program was one of many first-

year learning communities with a mission to create an academic environment where students focus on academic achievement, community building, and leadership development (Baber et al., 2015).

A male academic success program is essential to Black male community college students and the institution (Wood et al., 2014). Further research stated that academic engagement involved studying, meeting with faculty, meeting with advisors, and going to the library (Flowers, 2006; Wood & Williams, 2013). The Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) in New Jersey was an example of a support program that provided advising and support for educational initiatives and leadership activities (Watson & Chen, 2019). Black male students highlighted the importance of having a comfortable place, something the program provided (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). Besides, Black male students spoke positively about the special connection they had with the program advisors (Ingram & Coaxum, 2018). They were quick to connect with and follow the lead of advisors in the program. EOF is one program of many that Black male community college students used in the admissions process of college.

Admission programs can improve predictions and reduce error rates in assessing candidates (Covarrubias et al., 2018; Sedlacek, 2017). One way to achieve this is by going beyond traditional measures such as grades and test scores. Sedlacek (2017) stated that admission policies can assess candidates more thoroughly who may have been overlooked by conventional processes. By considering a student's strengths and weaknesses, professionals can personalize a student's plan of action. Using a non-traditional method of assessing students can positively affect men of color in general



(Sedlacek, 2017). Academic advising takes up where admission leaves off in assessing students.

### ***Academic Advising for Men of color***

Another component of application guidance is academic advising. It started in the 1970s but took off during the 1990s when its purpose became more than just a professor signing off on a registration form (Thelin, 2011). The reinstated academic advising included career goals, selecting a study program, and scheduling courses (Thelin, 2011). Academic advisement offers students a chance to discuss goals and other barriers that may impede their success (Thelin, 2011). More importantly, it may save a student who may feel academically overwhelmed and who is about to drop out. Since most first-year students are new to the college environment, advisors should be competent and caring (Thelin, 2011). Academic advisement provides an avenue for students to have success during their first year.

The quality of academic advising and persistence are related, however, there is a deficit of knowledge on the influence of qualitative aspects of academic advising that is problematic (Lee, 2018; Museus & Ravello, 2010). Academic advising is defined as essential to all students, especially men of color, because, in most cases, it will be their first indoctrination into college life (Lee, 2018; Museus & Ravello, 2010). Students are involved in procedure processes i.e., registration, placement, orientation, financial aid, and, academic advising during the first weeks of school (Hatch & Garcia, 2017; King, 1993). King (1993) stated that the structure of academic advising on college campuses ensures students will interact with institutional representatives. This interaction with

institutional representatives is critical because it causes higher student retention (Beal & Noel, 1980). Beal and Noel's (1980) study confirmed that academic advising was ranked by institutional representatives for two and four-year institutions to cause higher retention. For men of color in this study, academic advising could significantly impact first-year success (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Academic advising in best-case scenarios motivates students of color to achieve academic persistence.

Several motivational factors that examine motivational strategies affecting Black males' persistence to help them succeed academically are in a study. This quote from Garibaldi is noteworthy... more must be done to motivate, encourage, and reinforce more young Black men to perform well in the classroom. While negative peer pressure tends to diminish African American males' propensity to succeed academically, that influence can be reduced, if not eliminated, by verbally and materially rewarding academic achievement in the same way that society acknowledges and even extols athletic performance. When we publicly recognize young African American men's successful academic experiences, we simultaneously raise their self-concept, self-esteem, and academic self-confidence  
Garibaldi, 1992, p. 7. (Wood et. al., 2014)

Garibaldi asked educators to embrace their role as educators in motivating Black students through external motivators such as praise and encouragement from teachers, family, and community leaders (Wood et al., 2014).

Men of color must receive external support because this support plays a big part in students' success to persist during their first year. Also, Black male students perform

better when they feel valued and affirmed (Williams & Coaxun, 2018). Prior research indicated that family obligations were also strong indicators for academic persistence (Hatch & Garcia, 2018; Saenz et al., 2018). Other participants in the study stated that positive motivation contributed to their academic persistence, including a) career goals; b) proving others(naysayers) wrong; c) creating a better future for oneself and one's family; d) a responsibility to others (family, friend, children) to succeed, including making one's family proud; and student's interest in their course work (Wood et al., 2014). Men of color must have academic validation as well as support that comes through their college counselors.

The role of community counselors as validating agents for men of color helps drive their academic persistence (Xiong et al., 2017). Rendon's theory of validation pointed to in-class agents (e.g., faculty, teaching assistants) and out-of-class agents (e.g., counselors, advisors) as significant influences in guiding students' academic persistence (Xiong et al., 2017). College counselors provide the appropriate framework for men of color to seek different validation forms that contribute to academic persistence. (Xiong et al., 2017). Academic validating includes building self-confidence of men of color and showing them as competent learners. Counselors offers validation through committing to the success of their students (Xiong et al., 2017). They offer faith in the student's ability. A commitment is shown by getting to know students personally and socially. Some counselors also take on the role of mentoring students.

### *Mentoring for Men of color*

Mentoring as a component of application guidance is vital for men of color entering college and proceeding through college. Mentoring provides a way to seek help as students navigate through the college experience (Harris & Wood, 2013; Saenz et al., 2018). Mentoring can be external or internal to the campus environment, and it has different forms (Wendt, 2018; Ponjuan, 2011). Mentoring impacts other student development areas such as critical thinking, self-confidence, and persistence rates (Wendt, 2018). Mentors are essential in various stages of development in students' lives, especially Black male mentoring (Wendt, 2018). Often formal mentoring programs are designed to increase enrollment and retention of minority and other students and increase student satisfaction with the academic experience (Harris & Wood, 2013). Mentoring has a positive effect on the application process for men of color, and it has an impact on persistence (Harris & Wood, 2013).

Research points out that some of the most influential schools for Black male students offer to mentor as part of their program. Students of color benefit from schools that provide a positive open environment and a caring student-adult relationship (Brooms, 2014). Male students of color must hear from instructors and counselors who can relate to their life experiences and speak a language that they understand. Researchers pointed out that Black male youth should be allowed to navigate the classroom environment in a way that will enable them to maintain their self-identity (Harris III et al., 2015; Brooms, 2014, 2017). The relationships between students and teachers are beneficial to student's success, especially Black teachers.

Men of color benefit from male role models, in particular Black teachers.

Therefore, some Black teachers can fulfill the role of 'otherfathers' or other male role models in teaching male students to love themselves and to make a difference in the world (Brown et al., 2018; Bryan et al., 2016). The underperformance of Black male's argument is in response to racism and limits on their educational and economic opportunities (Brooms, 2014; Wright et al., 2016). Harper & Davis (2012) argued that African Americans disengaged from the academic process due to the inequities listed. From the literature presented, over-fathering can play an essential role in developing students' social, emotional, educational, and identity needs (Brooms, 2014; Brown et al., 2018). Other staff members also play a role in mentoring.

Mentoring relationships expand with more mentors who understand the value of mentoring, taking on a new definition (Torren et al., 2017). Researchers defined mentoring as a two-way relationship between a senior member (mentor) who guides a junior member (mentee) through formal and informal professional development. The mentoring experience extends to professional, psychical (Torren et al., 2017; Davidson & Wilson, 2013) political (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007) and academic (Ensher & Murphy, 1997) assistance. Creswell (2012) defined phenomenology as it related to men of color as a process that speaks to a phenomenon described by participants in surviving and graduating as open for other men of color. Participants having multiple mentors may have more opportunities to find commonalities with their mentors. Multiple mentoring allows participants to set clear expectations for acquiring skills in the mentor's field of expertise. There is a lack of literature when it comes to the development of male staff members of

color at the community college (Turner et al., 2008). The literature points out that men of color who have access to multiple mentors have a better chance of success during their first college years.

### *Persistence for Men of color*

Each year many students transition from high school to college. Many will attend four-year colleges. However, most Black males will attend community colleges, two-year institutions (Spangler, 2015). Around 54.9% will enroll in public two-year colleges (Saenz et al., 2018; Wood & Harris, 2015; Villareal & Garcia, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2004/2009). Within one year of enrolling, 11.5% of Black male students will leave, after three years, 48.9% will leave, and after six years, 81.9% will have left college without receiving a certificate or degree (U.S. Department of Education (NCES), 2006). Harris and Wood (2013) pointed to the sense of belonging as playing a significant part in academic achievement during the first year. Family members, peers, and community roles were also crucial to first-year persistence.

The first-year persistence rates for Black male students at the community college are lower than in other ethnic groups (Wood & Harris, 2015). During the first year, Black males have a 73.6% first-year persistence rate compared to Whites, who had a 74.7% rate, Hispanics had 76.9%, and Asian Americans had the highest at 90.6% (Wood & Harris, 2015; U.S. Dept of Education (NCES), 2006). The Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) found that Black males had the lowest graduation rate among all males in every racial/ethnic category, with only 16% graduating in three years. Black males also had the lowest GPA with an average of 2.64; the White male average

was 2.90, Hispanic/Latino males 2.75, and Asian American males 2.84 (Wood & Harris, 2015; U.S. Dept. of Education (NCES), 2006). Research pointed out that men of color, especially Black males, had lower persistence rates during the first year than other ethnic groups at community colleges (Strayhorn, 2017; Villareal & Garcia, 2016).

Latino males also have a low persistence rate and a low graduation rate at community colleges (Wood & Harris, 2015). A national report indicated that Hispanics represent the largest non-White student ethnic group in higher education at 17%, with 52% enrolled in community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014c). In addressing Latino males in community college, there are three critical areas: a) community college enrollment; b) community college experiences; and c) community college characteristics (Strayhorn, 2017). The factors influencing their attendance are a) family obligations; b) financial aid literacy; c) help-seeking behaviors, and d) non-traditional aged student status. A recent report found that Hispanic families expect males to provide financial support, contribute to daily family activities, and share childrearing responsibilities (Ellerbe et al., 2018; Ponjuan & Hernandez, 2016). Latino students are less likely to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application (Saenz et. al., 2015). All these factors listed lead to a lack of success at community colleges.

Several scholars have questioned why there is a lack of success for men of color at community colleges. The poor results in persistence, graduation, and academic persistence have led scholars to be critical of community colleges (Donaldson et al., 2016; Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Nevarez and Wood (2012) went a step further. They stated

that community colleges could not brand themselves as institutions of opportunity based on the dismal success rates, especially related to specific populations groups (e.g., minorities, low-income). Flowers (2006) pointed out that Black men in 4-year colleges are different than Black men in two-year colleges, and that they are likely to benefit from academic and social integration experiences. What are some of the differences between the four-year institution versus the two-year institution?

The characteristics of community colleges are different from four-year institutions. Community colleges have differing governance, faculty qualifications, teaching missions, and open access admissions (Kelchen, 2019; Senie, 2016). Black men in community college are likely older, classified as low income, have dependents (e.g., children), are likely married, and have delayed their higher education enrollment. They also have more inadequate preparation in a foreign language, mathematics, and science than four-year students (Wood & Williams, 2013). Harris and Wood (2013) stated that when students have greater family responsibilities tied to financial support, they were less likely to persist. Students also left college for reasons related to environmental pulls.

What are some of the environment pulls that male of color students encounter at community colleges? Preparedness is listed as a significant deficit when it comes to Black students (Baber & Graham, 2015; Kelchen, 2019; Saenz et al., 2018). Strayhorn (2012) pointed to emotional challenges and threats that limited Black students' opportunities to participate in higher education. The challenges included high incarceration rates, negative stereotypes, and low self-confidence (Brooms, 2019; Strayhorn, 2012). The environmental pulls faced by Black males have affected first-year



persistence. Scholars have made some recommendations to ensure academic persistence for men of color.

There are efforts put forth to address the academic and social needs of Black male college students. Several scholars have recommended establishing peer support and the same race programs that encourage academic and social engagement with the university (Brooms, 2019; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). Strayhorn (2012) found that low-income Black males were motivated by peer mentoring programs. Research showed that peer mentoring increased minority retention and produced Black male leaders (Zambrano et al., 2015; Budge, 2006). Student-designed programs have the potential of having a positive impact on college persistence and lead to graduation (Hylton, 2019). Peer mentoring and student-designed programs implemented during a student's first year may positively impact Black males' academic persistence. Other college selection factors were essential, as well.

College selection factors are predictors of persistence for men of color that include Black and Latino males. The body of literature on Black males in community college point to social variables (e.g., campus friendships) as having a small negative effect on persistence (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood & Harris, 2015) while academic factors (e.g., early major identification, study habits, relationships with faculty) play a significant role in persistence (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Wood & Harris, 2015; Wood & Turner, 2010). Several factors influence the commitment to attend a college that includes their educational and occupational goals, social class, academic aptitude, and parental support (Wood & Harris, 2015; Wood, 2012). The predictors of success for men of color during their first year have to do with their selection process.

## **Implications**

This qualitative research project based on current data will provide greater insight into perceptions of men of color and their success at the community college. More importantly, the concept of self-efficacy is used as a theory because it emphasizes self-confidence that if students come into the college system believing that they can achieve, the process of taking advantage of resources can become a norm. Bandura (1981) described self-efficacy as a system of developing a plan and following through with goals (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Men of color entering the community college system for the first time should have a goal or a strategy during the first year. The results of the study have implications for men of color beyond Blacks and Hispanics. Other underserved populations including American Indian, and women of color may benefit from a streamline process that include academic goal setting and a self-efficacy strategy. The research site's application process may lead to positive changes for other groups who may not have had a strategy or goal before entering community college.

Based on how well students strategize and set goals, the results of this study may strengthen the position that men of color have a viable support system during their first year at a two-year college. The admissions officers, academic advisors, and mentors could create positive results for first- year students by starting a streamlined admissions process. If the study results prove that men of color benefit from the application process, they could put a plan in place that would require students to use the application process as part of admissions during their first year. Having a support system in place supports the theory of self-efficacy because it creates confidence in academic progress.

The theory of self-efficacy described in this study may strengthen the narrative around the application process for students of color. If the results of the study show that one section of the application process was more effective in increasing persistence than the other area, a plan may be implemented. The program should place more emphasis on the site that had the most significant impact. The high schools could introduce the project before students enrolled in community colleges. Students who are aware of the information presented before enrolling at the college tend to perform better in college (Bandura, 1982; Bell et al., 2009). There is a need to address some of the strategies used to ensure that men of color succeed at the community college.

Data collected from students is essential to the community and the administration. The collection of data from students could lead to results that may improve policy, and the policy may improve persistence. Therefore, the application process could improve student relationships to the institution, a relationship that has a substantial impact on persistence. Hence, relationships will significantly impact academics, which has a substantial effect on persistence (Cardon, 2015; Tovar, 2015). The data collected results will have far-reaching implications for perception of male students at community colleges. Further, the process may lead to a narrative in the community regarding community college and the effort put forth to ensure success for a marginalized group. The interview results from students will benefit the college as well as similarly situated community colleges.

## Summary

The persistence and success rate at community college for men of color is lower than in other ethnic groups. Educational issues that begin in grade school where men of color were discouraged from college have led to needed work to make up the education gap (Harrison, 2018). Based on current findings, there are many factors to consider when addressing persistence during the first year. The selection of goals during the admissions process and the first year and subsequent strategy, mentorship, and academic advising are essential factors in the success of men of color.

In the Literature Review section, I discussed Bandura's theoretical approach on self-efficacy to understand better how male students of color may go through several tasks to complete a goal (Capara et al., 1992). Self-efficacy is important because it gives confidence to students faced with challenges (Bandura & Schunk 1981; Pedota, 2015). In this study, men of color face society challenges; therefore, it is essential to change the narrative—the narrative changes when men of color achieve higher graduation and retention rates at the community college.

The research literature points out some possible remedies to retention related to men of color at the community college. The goal-setting strategies point out four themes that male students of color may use to ensure success during the first year. They include mentorship, socialization, on-campus supports, and family and community expectations mentorship (Tolliver & Miller, 2017). The research on academic advising is beneficial to male students of color because it lays a foundation for navigating through the first year.

Advising and mentoring are essential because of the role modeling plays in students' lives in a college environment. The relationships established with teachers during mentoring are pivotal to men of color's success during the first year at community college (Kimbark et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important that men of color have a model during their college years to help ensure persistence during the first year and beyond.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

In this study, I examined whether men of color at the target community college have high goals and self-efficacy strategies during enrollment. I wanted to determine whether they receive application guidance in setting high goals and developing self-efficacy strategies once they are in the admissions/enrollment process or during the first year. The primary RQ was, How do men of color describe their academic goals and form strategies to accomplish those goals during the first year? The subquestions centered on the application guidance with admissions officers, academic advisors, and an internal/external mentor. The RQs are qualitative because they seek to understand the importance of academic goal setting and strategies students employ to achieve academic goals during their community college experience.

Qualitative researchers examine different forms of data, such as interview transcripts, photographs, memos, and other official records (Creswell, 2012). For this study, I used a basic qualitative design that relied on interview transcripts to describe the strategies that students at this college take to reach their goals. I asked participating students to share detailed experiences in selecting a goal and whether having a strategy to communicate helped or hindered their success in achieving the program's goal. Data were analyzed inductively where I searched for patterns or themes in the data and developed a generalization from the analysis of those themes. The direction of the research came from spending time with research participants and collecting data from them. The research

picture came together as data were collected. This is known as an inductive qualitative research design.

In a basic qualitative design, persons, organizations, and institutions constitute the case. A researcher using a basic qualitative design seeks to gain understanding and insight into individuals, groups, or situations (Flick, 2018). The process can be captured in more detail and with more precision during the study (Flick, 2018). Merriam (2002) stated that a researcher is interested in the participant's perspective and in how they make meaning of the situation. Data are analyzed inductively for current patterns and themes. Researchers design studies that can test, modify, or develop theories. It was vital to elicit the participants' detailed perspective; therefore, a basic qualitative design seemed to be a better fit for a study of this nature.

A case study design was considered for this study based on several benefits. The benefits of a case study included an opportunity to collect different kinds of data about the case (Merriam, 2009). A case study also helps the reader examine a certain case so that the reader may learn more about the case (Merriam, 2009). I chose a basic qualitative design because the overall purpose of this study was to understand how participants at the research site made sense of their lives and experiences. Although a basic qualitative design and a case study design are similar, the basic qualitative design was a better fit for this study because of the emphasis on individual's experience.

The participant's perspective is essential to the qualitative approach because researchers select participants based on their characteristics and knowledge related to the RQs (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, it was essential that I accurately captured the

participating students' perspectives. I focused on asking questions of participants to reveal their experiences and their insights regarding those experiences. In observational case studies, the focus is on a particular organization or some aspect of the organization (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, I conducted interviews for this study instead of performing participant observation. I also did so because, although participants shared common traits, they did not form groups.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2016), in qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways: to collect data or joined with participant observation, document analysis or other techniques. In conducting the interview, the researcher aims to gather descriptive data in the participant's own words to gain insights into how the participant interprets their world (Bogdam & Biklen, 2006). The researcher informs participants of the purpose of the interview before data are collected. Participants have latitude in going beyond the question's limits, which is known as a guided conversation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Most questions in this study were open-ended questions so that participants could guide the interview. Structured interviews provide comparable data, though unstructured interviews allow the participant to structure the interview and cover the topic broadly (Bogdam & Biklen, 2006)). Participants in this study spoke freely about the relevant topic.

I used a quantitative study based on persistence data and the effect on this population to guide this study. It was essential to have goals and strategies once enrolled in college. The goal-setting theory proposed by Locke and Latham (2013) stated that students who set goals before college have a better chance of persisting than those who



do not. Thus, if students are provided information regarding academic goal setting prior to enrollment, they may be more likely to follow the goal-setting theory.

### **Participants**

For this study, I chose as participants male students of color who had completed 1 year of community college. I aimed to identify participants who could provide quality data for the data collection process (see Creswell, 2012). Participant characteristics included men of color over 18 years of age who completed their first year of community college. Participants may or may not have persisted beyond the first year. The calculation of the study size was to maximize information and minimize redundancy. Based on prior studies (e.g., Vasileiou et al., 2018), eight to 10 participants appeared to be a reasonable number to conduct this study, which requires depth and breadth.

In a qualitative methodology, the term *population* refers to a group of individuals who have a distinguishing characteristic that sets them apart (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). The target college had unique characteristics based on the demographics and the location of the college. I drew a target population from this population of students to help ensure that research conducted would reflect the demographics of the area. Eight participants took part in open-ended interviews using their own words in a person-to-person account. This study's type of sampling is known as purposeful sampling because individuals were selected from the student population to represent that population (Lodico et al., 2010). The population at the college for men of color for 2017-2018 was approximately 2,487 out of 4,125 men overall. I chose first-year men of color sampling from this site.

I used purposeful sampling, which is often used in qualitative research, for this project. Researchers using this technique accurately identify and select a sample that yields the most results (Lodico et al., 2010). For this study, I asked male students of color to identify the goals and strategies they used during their first year of college. The type of purposeful sampling used for this study was maximum variation sampling. Researchers using this type of sample seek participants who have different opinions regarding this topic. As applied to this study, maximum variation consisted of choosing students who persisted and students who may not have persisted (see Lodico et al., 2010). Seventy-five male of color students who met the participant requirements were selected as possible participants in the study. The next step was to select a sample from that subpopulation. The selection represented the population from which it was drawn, which is known as random sampling. In random sampling, everyone in the community has a chance of being selected (Lodico et al., 2010). In a simple random sample, the researcher draws a list of names and assign numbers to individuals from that list of names (Lodico et al., 2010). A number is assigned to each individual until everyone on the list has a number. Next, a computer generates a random sampling. Then clusters of numbers randomly generated by the table are assigned. The number selected from the table allows one to pick the person chosen. The chosen numbers are random until the entire sample is selected (Lodico et al., 2010). This method of sampling helps get rid of bias by the researcher.

I shared the purpose of the study with the dean of students at the college research site. Thus, the dean of students provided contact information from the population of men of color who enrolled at the end of the first semester. I selected a random sample of eight

participants from that population, regardless of whether they persisted to the second semester. The announcement that was sent out included an overview of the research, the participant criteria, and informed consent information. The dean of students' representatives sent students a follow-up announcement as part of the plan. Next, an invitation letter was sent via email asking students to participate in an interview that would last up to 30 minutes. I waited one week before sending email reminders to the eight participants selected for the study. Those who chose to participate received an informed consent form that required them to confirm whether they were 18 or over. Students read and signed an electronic version of the consent form. The email confirmed the date, time, and location of the interview. Participants were provided with a \$20 Starbucks card via email within 10 days of the interview as compensation for their time. I sent a one-to-two-page summary of the results to each participant upon completion of data analysis to assist in member checking the accuracy of responses.

Building a relationship and getting to know participants was a significant part of the work (see Creswell, 2012). I connected with participants via telephone before conducting the interviews. Prior to conducting the interview, participants were informed of the interview's purpose and advised of the confidentiality aspect. I made sure that no participants participating in the study felt pressured to participate. Ethical protection was a priority of the study. Therefore, participation was voluntary, and all participants knew their rights. More importantly, there was no identifying information that displayed participant's real name.

### **Data Collection**

I waited to begin the research until I had obtained approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Approval # 02-19-21-0358713). Once approved, 75 students received invitations. To ensure a random selection, I chose the first eight students who responded for the project study. Students signed a consent form and sent an email response informing of their intent to participate in the study. The words "I consent" were required from students who choose to participate in the study. At this point, students had an opportunity to ask questions about the research and the interviewing process. Participants were scheduled for a telephone interview once they responded to the invitation to participate in the research email.

The interviews took place over the telephone after consent forms were obtained. Most of the interviews took place during the evening within an agreed-upon time frame. I used a microrecorder to record the telephone conversations. Before each conversation, I sought permission from each participant. None of the participants voiced concerns with having the interview recorded. Participants were informed that they would receive a copy of the interview transcript within a week of the interview. The recorder was positioned next to the cell phone, and it was in speaker mode. There was no one in the room during the interview. The interviews took place in an apartment. Due to the COVID-19 precautions, face-to-face meetings were discouraged per CDC guidelines (CDC, 2020). Participants preferred telephone interviews as opposed to Zoom meetings.

After the interviews were completed, I used the NVivo software program to transcribe the data from the recorder into a readable transcript via a Microsoft Word

document. Additionally, I read each document two to three times to start coding, after which I wrote a summary. Participants were contacted to let them know that the summary of the interview would be sent via email. I followed up with participants via an email or telephone call to verify the accuracy of the summaries. All participants responded via email or telephone regarding the accuracy of the transcripts. Two summaries of interviews were modified based on input from participants.

Establishing the researcher-participant relationship was essential in conducting the qualitative interviews. The expectation was to establish a relationship with each of the participants by sharing personal and professional backgrounds. This information was crucial in establishing trust with each of the participants. Besides, many of my personal experiences involving college were like some of their experiences, and it was necessary to be careful as the observer to avoid researcher bias. Participants shared stories beyond the scope of the research. In addition, they were inquisitive about the why of the research.

It was essential that I listen carefully and not be judgmental. The hope was to explain to participants why I was interested in the data and let them know that the information gathered might help others who come after them. More importantly, it was essential to emphasize confidentiality. Before conducting interviews, participants signed a consent form with a promise of confidentiality. An audio recording was used, but only with participants' permission. After the interview, field notes were typed on a laptop using a word processing program. The field notes are a written account of what I observed during the interview. These notes complemented the interview. They had to be as descriptive as possible to capture the essence of the moment.

The use of field notes in addition to the interview was used as a medium for documentation. During the interview, the notes contained questions and information about the interview. Notes should be recorded immediately or as soon as possible about the interview (Creswell, 2012). Researchers must be careful to estimate the time involved in the observation versus the time condensed to interpret events (Flick, 2018). Field notes and observation require the interviewer to pay careful attention to the recording's timing to ensure accuracy.

I interviewed eight students using open-ended semi-structured questions. An interview is a purposeful conversation between two people where one directs to get info from the other (Flick, 2018; Creswell, 2012). Open-ended semi-structured interviews allow participants to tell their stories in their own words. Most of the interviews lasted no longer than 30 minutes. The interview data's completion was transferred from the recorder to a personal computer to a password-protected file. I transcribed the data and encrypted the files. The data will be kept for five years, and then it will be deleted. In addition, interview transcripts and data analysis are stored on a password-protected laptop.

### **Data Analysis**

It is important when conducting a study of this nature to have a thorough analysis. Flick (2018) stated that using the steps to analyze data will allow for a more thorough analysis. I completed the following steps in analyzing the data. After tape-recording the interviews, data were transcribed using NVivo software. NVivo software captured the entire interview. The next step was to organize the files of the interviews so that there

was an established record. I organized the files and established a record. During this step, anonymity and data protection were essential. The computer software that supports the management of data was an option (Flick, 2018). Flick (2018) stated that using the steps to analyze data would perform a more thorough analysis.

Data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, and drawings (Flick, 2018; Ridder, 2014). In this study, the data consisted of information gathered from semi structured interviews. I began transcribing the data after I concluded the interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, the next step was to analyze the data. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2006), some researchers will choose to pause and reflect on the data. In waiting to analyze the data, the interviewer can make connections and gain insights into the fieldwork.

After data was collected and formatted, notations began. During the note gathering stage, I wrote preliminary words or phrases for codes on the notes. The first comprehensive column contained the data from interview transcripts and field notes. The second column contained preliminary codes and notes, and the third column contained the final codes. I kept the notes in a separate file on the computer.

While writing notes, I reread the data to come up with ideas for the coding. In addition, memos were created that included references to the literature and diagrams to structure and contextualize concepts. Finally, the memo writing included descriptions of the interview setting and circumstances related to the interviewee. The next step was to develop a coding system. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2006), specific theoretical

approaches and academic themes lend themselves to a particular coding scheme. For this study, coding focused on the narrative was employed.

Coding has been defined as labeling and categorizing data as the first step in the analysis (Flick, 2018). Coding was used in this study to label, sort, and compare excerpts of the data. Ridder (2014) stated that a qualitative inquiry code is a word or short phrase that symbolically captures a portion of language based on visual data. Coding is a transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis.

For this study, everything collected was coded. Qualitative researchers typically use 30 or 40 codes—the more complex the study, the more code usage (Lodico et al., 2010). I used 12 codes for this study. Next, coded data causes researchers to write detailed descriptions of the study's people, places, and events (2010). This process is known as thick descriptions, where evidence confirms the hypothesis. Codes were sorted into categories and reexamined to ensure that nothing was missing or coded inappropriately. I searched for patterns in the coded data to categorize them. Once the data was grouped, I looked for commonalities, even if the commonness contained differences.

After data were categorized, I searched for themes or concepts that summarized what the categories meant. Lodico et al. (2010) defined themes as recurring issues or concepts that help the researcher focus on the RQs. Therefore, I created four themes to explain specific occurrences within the data and organized ideas that represented the categories. Additionally, themes were created in conjunction with codes to explain further the RQ underlying the study.



I relied on reliability and validity in determining the quality of the data.

Reliability and validity are critical terms in determining the quality of qualitative research (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition field notes are essential as a starting point for reliability (Lodico et al., 2010). According to Bogden and Biklen (2006), writing fieldnotes captures the interview's meaning and context more completely. Therefore, I wrote field notes as close to the interviews as possible to lessen the chance of an imperfect recall, thereby increasing the data's accuracy.

I used a word document to record demographic data about each participant and noted their responses to interview questions. Then, participant's interview files were separated and stored in a private place. In conducting interviews, it was crucial to check the interviewee's statement versus my interpretation and determine where one ended and the other began (see Creswell, 2012). Another way of ensuring validity is through member checks where the interviewee has a chance to agree with the transcript's summary.

I used member checking to determine that participants concurred with the qualitative results from the interview. Member checking was one of the primary validity strategies used to check the findings (Flick, 2018). Participants did not receive copies of transcripts, however I provided a case analysis. In addition I created summaries for all eight interviews and provided them to participants. Moreover, follow-up interview allowed participants to add commentary to the findings. I changed information in two instances based on the follow-up to the interviews. Another way of checking validity was through triangulation.

I used triangulation in this study. Triangulation is another primary strategy used to check the accuracy of qualitative findings (Flick, 2018). Moreover, it is used to conduct interviews, write field notes and observations. Triangulation uses multiple methods or data sources when there is a convergence of information from different sources (Denzin, 2012). Confirming evidence compares other data sources or perspectives of various participants, also known as triangulation (Lodico et al., 2010). In this study, I used interviews, field notes, and interview transcripts to check the accuracy of the findings. Triangulation was appropriate for this study due to interviews and field notes.

### **Data Analysis Results**

In the following section, I describe the data results from the interview questions presented to eight participants. Coding is used to better analyze the data (Gibbs, 2007). I formed codes based on evidence derived from the interview transcripts. Next, I designed a category of codes to find a relationship between the data passages; these categories led to five themes.

The primary analytic strategy for themes is coding, which involves sorting and labeling. A large part of analysis allows the researcher to dissect the data but keep the relations between the parts intact (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I created 12 codes based on participant interview transcripts and grouped them according to how they related to one another.

#### ***Codes***

In this section, I described and gave examples of raw data that were clustered together to form the codes. Twelve codes were extracted from the data transcripts. I

defined each of the codes and provided two examples of the raw data to support the relationship to the code. The term *application guidance* was used to describe the enrollment process that included support from the admissions office, academic advising, and mentoring.

The code academic support described how participants felt about the support they received from the staff at the research site. Several participants expressed reservations regarding the lack of support from the research site related to academic guidance. For example, Participant 6, a football player, stated that academic counselors were more interested in his playing football than in his academic pursuits. He stated that he was not encouraged to pursue educational goals. Similarly, Participant 7 felt that the school was more interested in him playing basketball. Although an academic advisor counseled him, the advisor did not advise him on taking suitable classes. In both examples, academic support was not beneficial to the academic pursuits of participants.

The code proactive academic advising described how proactive admissions or academic advising helped participants plan their educational program. However, several participants felt that the school could have done more in helping them prepare academically. For example, Participant 8 acknowledged that an academic counselor sat down with him to plan classes, but the classes were sport related. As a result, he felt that he had to work out his schedule to ensure that he could transfer to a university. Participant 3 also expressed that the classes could have been planned better because he ended up taking classes he did not need to graduate. In both situations, participants shared

that academic advising should have been proactive in advising them of the classes needed to graduate.

Several interviewees discussed financial challenges they encountered during their first semester and how these challenges influenced their academic plans. Most participants in the study had financial obstacles. Participant 5 stated, "Okay, we are not from like an extremely wealthy family. They [other students] could be going to, you know, a four-year starter, but it is just way more expensive." Participant 6, when asked if he was still enrolled in community college, stated that the college had altered his lifestyle. He had to live out of state for a while, and when he tried to reenroll at the college, the college charged him \$3,000 that he could not afford. Participant 2 stated that he had to leave college for a while because he needed to work. Several participants participated in sports while holding down part-time jobs. These financial situations created obstacles to participants persisting during their first year at the college. In addition, the focus was shifted away from creating academic goals and strategies because of "life" issues.

In discussing role models, a typical response among participants was how significant their parents' influence had been on them. Participant 5 stated that the most prominent personality in his life was his dad and that his dad was good at many things. More importantly, it was his dad's advice and encouragement that led to him attending community college in the first place. Some participants felt connected to their high school teachers. For example, Participant 2 responded that his old choir teacher was "cool," that he was an African American who taught African Studies, and that he felt a connection with him. These examples highlight the importance of role models.

Several participants expressed positive support from family. The mention of family impact led to this coding category. For example, Participant 3 shared,

I guess my mom and dad are my biggest mentors. He [dad] told me like this.

“This is how we are going to deal, you know, just having the same family.” They were big, and they were big hands up, you know, with guidance.

Several other participants expressed a similar sentiment regarding the impact of family in their pursuit of education. Participant 7 pointed out how his mother had impacted him continuing with his college pursuits. Family support was listed as a code because several participants identified their families as being impactful in their college life.

In this study, most participants expressed that they did not understand the role of a mentor, and only a few were mentor-influenced. For example, Participant 1 stated, “I would say I have many mentors coming from Seattle, but not a lot, but two or three people that gave me advice, you know, even beforehand.” However, most participants expressed a desire to have a mentor. Participant 3 shared,

Everybody would be better with a mentor, especially people of color, you know, this year we had a couple, we had a class, you know, and it was like mentorship group. I think it set me up to fire me down. I think that the number one thing that black kids need is mentors to help guide us through this environment that we have.

Most participants expressed the same sentiment as Participant 3 regarding mentor influence.

The study results revealed that most of the participants were self-reliant. They took it upon themselves to make changes related to their educational pursuits. A common theme around self-reliance was that most participants felt it was up to them to pave the way for themselves. Participant 7 was vociferous in stating that life is about personal decisions; he used basketball as an analogy to state that no one can make him go out there and play better. He had to go out there and have the will to do better. Participant 3 decided that he was not just going to do school. He asserted that he could balance football, studies, and a full-time job. He spent 5 hours a week relaxing and dedicated more time to homework. Participant 3 shared, "I figured this out on my own, but I guess they offer advice, so it was more that I had to figure out my schedule." All participants in this example were motivated to do for themselves, and this made them self-reliant.

The code misdirection was used to show how participants started with a plan or goal, and something happened that changed their focus. Several participants started with an initial plan, but circumstances changed. For example, Participant 6 stated that he went to a counselor to fix his classes because he had many classes coinciding or back-to-back, but the counselor brushed him off. Participant 6 shared that he did not feel supported. He felt that the counselor should have told him which classes he should have taken. Instead, the counselor assigned classes that complemented football, but not academic pursuits.

Similarly, Participant 2 stated that he did not have an academic goal or strategy upon enrollment. First, he intended take some classes, but then he decided to major in business, then he changed his mind again after attending another community college. Eventually, he started taking classes to learn new things. Misdirection was listed as a

code based on several factors that caused participants to start and end up with a different goal. Several participants were not adequately prepared, based on research results for the college experience, but some were.

Preparation was something that most participants wished they had known.

Participant 6 stated that he had to balance basketball and school, which made him see things differently. He asked himself if he wanted to do this or throw himself in that water because he had basketball as an excuse. Participant 7 response to the preparation question was that he got accepted into all those schools but was not prepared, and he was not well known. He says that he did not know how college was coming out of high school due to how the system is, in a sense, towards boys of color. Thus, preparation was a code worth noting based on several responses.

The code aspiration referred to how motivated participants were to achieve, whether academically or life in general. Research results indicated that most participants in this study had high aspirations. For example, Participant 6 stated that he wanted to go to school, although there was no reason he could list. He says that if he had everything before school, there was no need to take a stand. Participant 7 stated: "I might take a gap year, collect my thoughts, go through life, see what it takes me that way when I go back to school". Aspiration was listed as a code because all participants had something that they aspired to be or do.

The code fortitude referred to participants dealing with adversity and being able to get through it. Fortitude was a common theme throughout this study. For example, Participant 5 stated that he wanted to come and experience college on his own and start to

learn about college and the system. Participant 1, when asked about a plan involving engineering class, stated that he was not sure, and that was the scary part. However, he was willing to take the risk. Participant 8 had some problems with his classes. He replied that he could not trust too many people, academic advisors, and anybody to watch himself. He goes on to say, "I realized that I wanted to pass this class, and I was going to do everything needed to do to pass and not to have to retake the class, so I got to do so, and I did." Other participants from this study faced adversity that they were able to overcome through fortitude.

Bandura (1988) defined self-efficacy as having a goal and the confidence to complete that goal. Several participants in this study showed self-efficacy. For example, Participant 7 stated that he kept a positive attitude for every class no matter how hard the class. He said that he talked to himself and said that no matter how difficult the class, he would persevere. If there is an obstacle or challenge, he will pass this class regardless. Participant 5 stated that he had never really struggled in school. Some people have different situations, but he held himself accountable as being independent and knowing what he was doing. Participant 5 was not good at math, but he succeeded in math by doing homework over and over to make sure he got it.

The 12 codes derived from the transcripts were based on participant's responses to interview questions. The common theme was that most participants did not create goals and strategies during enrollment because there was no application guidance. However, all participants had a solid determination to succeed regardless of their obstacles during and



after enrollment. Once Codes were formed and grouped, categories were formed based on similarities.

### ***Categories***

The evidence for the codes came from the transcripts of participant's interviews. I grouped 12 codes into four categories based on the nature of the codes. The category of codes included codes that matched the category assigned. All four categories of codes were indirectly related to goals and strategies that led to participant's persistence or nonpersistence at the research site. Table 2 lists the codes and coding categories.

**Table 2**

#### *Codes and Associated Categories*

Code	Category
Academic support	Absence of admission protocols
Proactive advising	
Financial obstacles	
Role model	Absence of mentoring
Family impact	
Mentor influence	
Self-reliance	Absence of an academic roadmap
Misdirection	
Preparation	
Aspiration	Self-perseverance
Fortitude	
Self-efficacy	

The first category of codes, the absence of admission protocols, refers to the issues in the college system and the absence of support offered as part of the academic matriculation. Academic advising was also crucial because it is part of the college system related to how students matriculate through the system. The code financial obstacles were related to administrative deficiency because it plays a significant role in navigating the

college system. For participants in this study, the absence of admission protocols lead to a lack of student support, creating obstacles for student persistence.

The absence of mentoring, the second category of codes, is based on role models, family impact, and mentor influence. The absence of mentoring has to do with relationships. The first code is related to mentoring because it relates to the role in one's life, whether positive or negative. Next, the family impact is also related because it had to do with influence in pursuing goals. Lastly, mentor influence is a way of providing direction to help in the achievement of a goal. Therefore, all three codes are related to influencing and providing direction to participants.

The third category of codes is the absence of an academic roadmap. The absence of an academic roadmap impeded participant's overall matriculation to the academic environment. Although individuals showed character and inner strength based on the three codes, self-reliance, misdirection, and preparation, they did not have a clear vision of navigating the college environment. Participant's absence of an academic roadmap impeded academic success. Next, misdirection is when one feels that they are not headed in the right direction to ensure success. The last code preparation has to do with being prepared. Participants were adrift of what was necessary to succeed in the college environment.

The last category of codes is self-perseverance. It has to do with how well one perseveres when things are tough. The codes for self-perseverance are aspiration, fortitude, and self-efficacy. Aspiration is the willingness to aspire, fortitude is the willingness to seek out goals, and self-efficacy is related to accomplishing goals

confidently. All three codes help make up self-perseverance because they relate to an individual's willingness to take care of themselves against odds that may not be in their favor. All participants in this study showed great self-perseverance.

The four categories of codes were based on the 12 codes and grouped accordingly. The first category of codes addressed the institutions, and the second category of codes was related to the participants' support or lack of support system. Finally, the last two categories had to do with the character of participants while they were going through the college experience and their mindset during that time.

### **Discussion of Themes**

According to Roberts and Sarangi (2005), theme analysis is a means of seeing, finding relationships, analyzing, systematically analyzing a case, and quantifying qualitative data. The data source for this analysis of themes was from the codes and categories. Thus, the categorization of codes led to the creation of themes (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Coding Categories and Themes*

Code category	Theme
Absence of admission protocols	Men of color in the study had a preference for institutional support of academics rather than their athletics
Absence of mentoring	Men of color in the study had a limited understanding of mentorship
Absence of admission protocols	For men of color in the study, the admission staff had minimal impact on goals while the academic advising staff had a substantial influence on goals.
Absence of academic roadmap	Men of color in the study lacked an academic roadmap.

Self-perseverance

Men of color in the study believed they were the arbiters of their success

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***Theme 1: Preference for Institutional Support of Academics Rather Than Athletics***

The absence of an admission protocol theme was formed because it was directly related to the institution's system and its goals and strategies for men of color. The institution included academic advising and admissions processes and procedures. Men of color were looking to persevere through the college system; however, the academic and advising office did not meet the needs of several participants in this study.

***Theme 2: Limited Understanding of Mentorship***

The absence of mentoring category of codes helped form theme two because it linked how men of color related to mentorship and relationships in general. Men of color either had relationships with parents or, in some cases, with teachers, but they did not have a clear understanding of how a mentor was defined. However, the lack of an understanding of a mentor relationship led to influences other than mentors. For example, men of color in the study families influenced men of color a great deal. Again, however, most participants could not define a mentoring relationship.

***Theme 3: Impact of Admissions Versus Academic Advising Staff on Goals***

The admissions and academic advising staff are part of the institution system. They have the liberty to make decisions that affect men of color positively or negatively. The lack of admission protocol speaks to the success and lack of success of two systems within the institution. Most participants in this study felt that one part of the institutional system had more influence than the other. The lack of communication with the admission staff led to a minimal impact on goals for men of color.

***Theme 4: Lack of an Academic Roadmap***

In most situations, participants may have had a goal, but they did not have a strategy to complete the goal. In three of the eight situations, academic guidance provided by academic counselors/advisors led to creating strategies. However, the lack of goals and strategies in most situations led to participants in this study's failure to persist beyond the first year. The lack of an academic roadmap category of codes led to the theme that men of color did not have an academic roadmap based on their sheer will to persevere without a clear plan.

***Theme 5: Belief in the Self as the Arbiter of Success***

The self-perseverance category of codes led to the theme that men of color believed they were the arbiters of their success. Men of color had an attitude toward the institution that they would succeed regardless of any obstacles they had to endure or overcome. They realized that they would prevail and accomplish what they set out to do through their inner strength. Several participants relied on inner strength in moving toward their success.

**Discussion of the Results in Terms of the Research Questions**

The discussion of men of color related to the description of their academic goals and forming strategies to obtain those goals during the first year to ensure persistence included participants discussing how they planned on getting through the first year of community college. In most cases, the question was directly related to whether they had discussed with an admissions officer, an academic advisor, or an internal/external mentor regarding goals and the strategy to obtain those goals. Four of the eight participants spoke

with an academic officer regarding goals but did not have a clear strategy to persist during the first year. Two of the eight participants spoke with an internal/external mentor regarding goals but did not discuss a clear strategy for persisting beyond the first year. None of the eight participants had a clear definition of what a mentor relationship entailed. The discussion around mentors included informal conversations through a teacher or a parent. Analysis of the interview questions posed to participants yielded the following results (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Participants' Use of Different Supports*

Experience	Frequency
Admissions Office assistance	2/8
Internal/External mentor	3/8
Persistence beyond the first year	4/8
Academic advisor assistance	8/8
Goal and strategies defined	3/8

**Discussion of the Results in Terms of the Literature**

Goals, behaviors, school performance, and student's personal beliefs lead to Black males' success in community college. (Harris & Wood, 2013). Participants in this study who started with goals and a solid personal belief had more success than those who did not have goals. Educational goals, academic behaviors, and personal beliefs were essential contributions to persistence for men of color at community college. Participants who started with educational goals were more likely to persist beyond the first year. Participants 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 knew that they wanted to complete their degree when they

enrolled in community college. As a result of their goals, Participants 7 and 8 will transfer to a university or graduate from a community college.

Mentorship identified in the literature is a vital strategy necessary for men of color persisting to graduation (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Tolliver & Miller, 2017). Mentoring is an essential component of the application guidance, vital for men of color entering college and proceeding through college. Mentoring provides a way to seek help as students socialize and navigate the college experience (Harris & Wood, 2013; Saenz et al., 2018). Mentoring can be external or internal to the campus environment, and it has different forms (Wendt, 2018; Ponjuan, 2011). Six of the eight participants in this study did not have a mentor. Participant 7 was the one participant who came close to having a mentor as a mentor is defined. This participant was a member of the First-Year Experience (FYE) program. FYE provides guidance and assistance to students throughout their first year of college. This program acted as a support system for participant 7.

In this study, mentorship as a strategy for persistence was important as well. Of the eight participants in the study, only two of the eight participants had what could be called mentors. Participants 5 and 8 stated that one of their parents was influential in helping them continue their education. Participant 3 was the only participant who seemed to understand what it was to be a mentor because he was a mentor to others. However, participant three did not wholly understand mentorship because he did not have a mentor for himself. In the academic environment, a mentor is someone who not only supports but helps guide the process through experience.

The admissions office is important in the application guidance process. Men of color need admission policies to support them in the application process (Bethea, 2016). Six of eight participants in this study either did not speak to an admissions officer or remember speaking to an admissions officer. Bethea (2016) stated that academic policies must address preparing men of color for the admissions process. Participant 2 stated that the admissions officer looked at his transcripts and tried to point him in the right direction, but he was not interested at the time. Participant 8 also spoke with an admissions officer who looked at his transcripts and tried to point him in the right direction. Other participants in the study do not remember speaking with an admissions officer. Bethea stated that college admission professionals must prepare students for admission policies. Two of the eight participants dropped out of college because of a policy involving out-of-state tuition. The admissions office could have played a role in ensuring that students were aware of the policy.

The reinstated academic advising included expectations, career goals, selecting a study program, and scheduling courses (Thelin, 2011). In addition, academic advisement offers students a chance to discuss goals and other barriers that may impede their success (Thelin, 2011). All participants in this study remembered meeting with academic advisors or counselors during their enrollment. Participant 3 felt that the academic counselor was not as helpful as he/she should have been in advising him of academic goals. The selection of classes accommodated his athletics as opposed to academics. Participant 8 felt the same way as participant 3 in his assessment of the academic advising office. However, the remaining participants in the study felt that the admissions office had



guided them in the right direction. Specifically, Participant 7 stated that he changed his major several times, and each time he was guided to take the correct courses by the academic advising office.

Men of color, especially Black males, had lower persistence rates during the first year than other ethnic groups at community colleges (Strayhorn, 2017; Villareal & Garcia, 2016). Latino males also drop out of college at a high rate during their first year (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2015; Wood & Harris, 2015). In this study, four of eight participants persisted beyond the first year. Participants 1, 2, and 6 did not persist beyond the first year. Participants 2 and 6 dropped out because of the out-of-state tuition charged. Participant 2 stated that he was unaware of the policy regarding out-of-state tuition. Participant 6 does not blame anyone but states that he would attend a different community college if he had to do it again. Participant 1 realized that he was not interested in general ed classes, and if he went back, it would be to pursue classes that were of benefit to him.

### **Discussion of the Results in Terms of the Conceptual Framework**

According to Bandura, the four primary sources of influence by which a person's self-efficacy is developed and maintained are (a) performance accomplishments or master experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal or social persuasion, and (d) somatic and emotional states (Bandura, 1989). Performance accomplishments or master experiences speak to perceptions that are mastery experiences or personal performance accomplishments that build strong self-efficacy. It takes experience to show resilience in overcoming obstacles through effort and perseverance. Seeing others from a similar place

in life success raises the belief that one can persevere (Bandura, 1989). However, it can also have an opposite effect if others fail despite their best efforts (Bui, 2003; Reid, 2013).

Vicarious experiences come from observing others around that may be seen as models or having something in common. Seeing people around have success raises hope of others success (Capara et al., 1992). For example, men of color at the community college have challenges coming from a lower socioeconomic group and being members of an underrepresented ethnic group (Bui, 2002; Reid, 2013). By others believing in them through verbal influence, their resolve to succeed increases.

Verbal influence has an influence on men of color at the community college level. Verbal or social persuasion affects one's perception of self-efficacy. It is a way of strengthening people's belief that they have what it takes to succeed (Bandura, 1989). Influential people in their lives, such as parents, managers, or coaches, can increase the belief that they have what it takes to succeed (Reid, 2013). Academic advising at the community college for students of color will significantly impact persistence (Hatch & Garcia, 2017; Museus & Ravello, 2010).

Emotional and somatic states help determine how well community college students perform academically. In this stage, students rely on their somatic or emotional state when judging their capabilities. For example, stress and tension are seen as "signs of vulnerability" to pressure (Capara et al., 1992). In addition, three concepts in the process help students access their experiences: a) locus of control, which is a conception of their power to control their environment and desired outcomes; b) coping behavior, which

refers to their ability to adjust to a new environment; and c) self-efficacy, which is the conception their confidence in their academic and social skills (Sonmark & Modin, 2017).

Majer's (2009) definition of self-efficacy is that one's personal belief in accomplishing tasks leads to a goal. Participants in this study expressed a belief in working toward goals once they knew what the goals entailed. Pajares and Schank (2001), speaking on self-efficacy, also spoke of feelings of competence that encouraged individuals to put forth the effort and persevere when confronting obstacles, especially those who have struggled in the past. All participants in this study encountered obstacles once enrolled at the college.

Participant 2 spoke of the situation with Kobe Bryant's death having a significant impact on his decision to take off for a year. He does not blame the college but stated that he will be more focused on taking classes he is interested in upon returning to college. Participant 1 also stated that he would take classes interesting to him, not necessarily degree classes. Participant 7 expressed a strong motivation to succeed in every class he took, although he did not have the resources to ensure success at community college.

Participants in this study developed self-efficacy through the four primary sources of influence. Several participants told stories of how they had seen others in their circle of friends give up hope because they lacked the will and desire to persevere. Others shared how their family had a significant impact on their will to succeed. It was through a strong desire to pass a class that one participant tested repeatedly. Further, participants received

verbal influences from teachers, parents, and others to persevere to achieve their goals.

Lastly, most participants in this study had obstacles that they had to overcome to succeed.

### **Evidence of Quality**

Established methodologies established trustworthiness that is currently in place (Lietz et al., 2006). First, the Dean at the research site submitted names that led to participant interviews. Next, I listened to tape-recorded data at least three times and wrote summaries for each participant in the study. Finally, codes and themes were refined and verified through the committee with approval to move forward.

I conducted member checking during and after semi-structured interviews to ensure that the data collected was accurate. In addition, I reached out to participants during and after the interviews. Information was changed in two cases to address discrepancies noted by participants adequately. Emails were sent to all participants, followed by phone calls to participants who did not respond via email.

I used participant quotes in this study to understand parts of the data.

Triangulation uses multiple sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Creswell, 2012). Data triangulation was used to verify statements made by participants through interviews conducted. In-Depth Interviews (IDI) elicit rich information about personal experiences and perspectives (Russel et al., 2005). In addition, I took considerable time and effort to transcribe and analyze the results of the interviews.

### **Discrepant Cases**

Discrepant cases are the outliers or unique cases that fall outside the themes of the research. For example, participants 2 and 6 stated that they did not re-enroll at the college under study partly due to the out-of-state tuition that the school tried to charge them. In addition, participants 6 and 8 felt that the school emphasized athletics more than academics. These participants' perceptions fell outside the normal parameters of the study. Thus, these participants' perceptions also modified the perception that the admissions office lacked communication regarding policy.

### **Limitations**

The size of the sample size was a limitation. Specifically, the number of participants chosen for the study based on men of color at the college of the study was a concern. According to Creswell (2012), the number of participants varies based on the qualitative research approach used. This study was a basic qualitative design, so two to 10 participants were adequate. The use of triangulation (i.e., interviews, documents, and transcripts) allowed for verification of participant's understanding of the admissions process. However, the vague understanding of mentorship did not complement the data gathered. The use of semi-structured open-ended interview questions allowed participants to speak freely. However, the terms used in the interview questions led to dialogue that lacked clarity.

Interviews were conducted via telephone, so some of the emotions associated with face-to-face interviews were missing. In addition, three of the participants were no longer attending college, so the admissions and academic advising data may lead to

partial data based on self-interest. Hence, the researcher's bias and integrity could limit the data results. Therefore, triangulation should restrict the researcher's bias.

Data collected during this study involved participants who self-reported. One of the drawbacks of self-reported data is credibility. Participants might not have been as truthful in the interviews or have only given information that made them look favorable. Therefore, I attempted to guide participants regarding the topic when participants tended to veer off-topic and express opinions and biases deflected from the subject matter—the analysis of data allowed for a more accurate assessment of participant's input.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether men of color create high goals and strategies during enrollment at the community college to ensure that they will persist during and beyond the first year. I conducted the study at a community college. The participants were eight male students of color enrolled during the first year. The study involved those who persisted and those who did not persist beyond the first year. The interview questions focused on participants' perceptions of completing the application form and recollections of whether they spoke with an admissions officer and academic advisors during the admission process. After collecting data regarding the process during enrollment and assessing the gains and missed opportunities, I developed a policy to ensure collaboration with the admissions office and the academic advising office. The policy recommendation, a white paper, aims to ensure that students create goals and strategies to ensure persistence during the first year. The aim is for staff to

ensure that students are familiar with the policies and procedures of the college during enrollment so that they will have the opportunity to make more informed decisions regarding their academic choices. A crucial finding in this study that could make a difference in persistence for some men of color is the importance of mentorship, a finding that is also reflected in the literature (Harris & Wood, 2013). The study results shows that a lack of understanding of mentorship provides an opportunity to strengthen the enrollment process by having the admissions and academic advising office coordinate efforts in addressing mentorship.

For this study, I designed a policy recommendation that addresses creating goals and strategies at the outset of enrollment. In addition, the collaboration between the admissions office and the academic advising office may ensure a seamless process that addresses the gap in practice. Further, the policy recommendation addresses the implementation of a mentoring program. The mentoring program is incorporated into the enrollment process so that men of color understand the importance of mentoring in a college environment and the difference that a mentor can make in creating goals and strategies.

### **Rationale**

Based on the research findings, I decided that a policy recommendation in the form of a white paper was the most appropriate method for addressing the lack of an academic roadmap for men of color. Men of color should receive support in forming goals and strategies in the initial phase of the enrollment process. In addition, the policy also addresses the lack of collaboration between the admission and the advising offices.

Men of color may benefit from having a coordinated program between the two offices that addresses college policies and procedures and makes recommendations. The policy recommendation also suggests clarification of a clear policy on mentorship at the college under study for men of color. In analyzing the data collected for this study, I found that the male students of color in the study did not have a good understanding of admission policies, specifically those that involved tuition. An example of the lack of understanding of school policy was when two students left college and returned, the college attempted to charge them out-of-state tuition. Students were not aware of this admissions policy.

The results of the study showed that few participants could describe their academic goals, but no one could describe academic goals, a strategy to go with the goals, or a time line. All participants showed self-efficacy in that they felt they could achieve their life goals, but only five of eight participants were able to describe academic goals. The objective of the policy is to help participants create timelines to match their fortitude.

The policy recommendation addresses other issues found in this study including the lack of communication with an admissions office. The admissions office has its responsibility to acquaint students with the school admission policies and procedures. For example, two students in this study said they could not reenroll because the school attempted to charge them out-of-state tuition. The policy regarding out-of-state tuition should have been communicated to students. The failure to address this policy led to two students failing to reenroll at the college. Therefore, it is critical to address policy regarding out-of-state tuition during the enrollment process.



In the study, a lack of understanding about mentorship was evident during and after the application guidance process. Coordination between the admissions and academic advising offices could help ensure and facilitate the onboarding of a mentoring program to safeguard increased persistence among men of color. Results of the study indicated that some participants felt that they would have had success if they had a mentor to help them navigate the college experience. The policy recommendation includes an application guidance process so that men of color have the option of mentorship.

### **Review of the Literature**

In the literature review, I addressed themes related to the lack of goals and strategies for men of color and the lack of a policy that addresses what should happen once men of color complete the application process. This process may ensure that once men of color complete the application process, there would be coordination between the admissions office and the academic advising office through a possible streamlined process. In this section, I review the literature for white papers and goal and strategy policies. Last, I address how the search for the present literature review was conducted, including a description of key search words and the electronic search engines used to identify peer-reviewed literature. The literature included in this review was collected using the following search terms individually and in combination: *men of color*, *admissions*, *advising*, *internal/external mentors*, *mentoring*, *community college policies*, *African American males*, *Latinx males*, and *educational equity*. I found journal articles using ERIC, Google Scholar, and EBSCOhost database on Education. The remainder of

this section includes a description of the project, evaluation plan, and project implications.

### **White Papers**

The policy recommendation with detail (white paper) is a recommendation paper meant to address goals and strategies for students once they complete the application form. I chose a white paper for this project because of the need to persuade the intended audience of administrators at the site. White papers help people make decisions (Stelzner, 2017). A white paper is an in-depth report or guide about a specific topic and the problems that surround it (Kolowich, 2014). The white paper educates readers and helps them understand how to solve an issue (Kolowich, 2014). The white paper also serves as a reference for other education institutions of a similar nature.

I proposed a white paper to address the need for men of color to create goals and strategies during enrollment. The white paper is a document that describes a problem and how to solve the problem (Stelzner, 2017). There are four types of white papers: technical white papers tend to be targeted at engineers, business white papers are targeted at decision makers in business, hybrid technical/business are at both influencers and decision makers, and government white papers discuss the implications of policy decisions (Stelzner, 2017). I modeled the business white paper for this study to discuss the implications of the policy implementation targeted at decision makers.

### **Goal and Strategy Policies**

Goal and strategy policies should be facilitated through the admissions and academic advising office. This effort is a coordinated effort by stakeholders. When

students are exposed to academic goals upon entry and during the application process, they will likely incorporate those goals into their programs (Getzel, 2008). Most students in this study said they did not remember speaking to an admissions officer regarding goals or strategies. According to White et al. (1997), students who set goals have a more realistic chance of completing those goals. Goals contributed to self-efficacy, defined as a student's confidence in their ability to accomplish those goals (Card & Luke, 2019). Further, the greater the self-efficacy, the less likely students will fail to persist.

According to Harper and Harris (2012), various groups and national leaders have an agenda to improve policy supporting students from populations with the highest college dropout rate. Three Black and Latino males in this study did not persist during their first year at the community college under study. Further, these participants did not have precollegiate advisement from the admissions office on navigating the college environment. Officials at several institutions around the country have devised initiatives to improve student success and attainment rates targeted explicitly to Black men (Harper and Harris, 2012). One of the ways that students have success at college is through a sense of belonging and feeling that they are welcome at the college (Card & Luke, 2019). The support system for men of color is important to their success in college.

The admissions office is the initial college encounter for men of color enrolling at the college. It may benefit them if they feel a sense of welcomeness during this encounter. The recommendation policy may ensure that male students of color feel a sense of welcomeness during the application guidance process. Mentoring provides a way to seek help as students navigate through the college experience (Harris & Wood, 2013;

Saenz et al., 2018). According to Taylor and Francis (2005), men of color need to have mentors when going through the college experience.

By incorporating a policy recommendation, college officials may be able to help men of color form goals and strategies that increase their access to higher education. Although several think tanks and stakeholders have designed an agenda focused on improving college completion, greater policy emphasis on those with low persistence is still needed. In this study, only two participants remembered speaking to an admissions officer, and no one remembered discussing goals and strategies. The coordination between the admissions, advising, and internal/external mentors can be the pathway to college completion. According to Wood et al., (2015), men of color at community colleges in the United States have been historically underserved and underrepresented. Disparities that include trends in persistence, retention, and transfer for men of color at community college have received little attention (Harris & Woods, 2013). Providing a policy recommendation offers another way of improving retention for men of color.

### **Project Description**

Student persistence continues to be a problem at the community college, especially for men of color, as the results of this study indicated. Four themes evolved from the research results: (a) absence of admission protocols, (b) absence of mentoring, (c) absence of academic roadmap, and (d) self-perseverance. Based on the results, the theory, and current literature, I proposed three recommendations: (1) the creation of a white paper that recommends creating a goals and strategies checkoff form during enrollment; (2) seeking collaboration between admissions, academic advising, and

internal/external mentoring through a checkoff list; and (3) the assignment of a mentor for men of color. The creation of the goals and strategies list and the sign-off form would be the responsibility of admissions. Students would be responsible for obtaining the necessary signatures. The white paper ensures that there is a process for how students matriculate through their first year. Included in the recommendation is a background of the existing policy and possible revisions.

The theoretical framework for this study focused on self-efficacy by Bandana (1986). According to the theory, student's confidence in their ability to succeed in academic efforts and a sense of welcomeness is linked to positive messaging (Card & Wood, 2019). Furthermore, studies indicated that college experiences influence persistence intentions, especially students from traditionally underserved minority groups who face barriers (Museus & Quaye, 2009). Therefore, the initial encounter with admissions and academic advising was more critical in creating a sense of welcomeness. Further, creating a policy recommendation that addressed academic goals and strategies from the outset was a possibility.

The policy recommendation may benefit students by increasing their exposure to the college environment. Since most men of color begin their postsecondary experiences at community colleges, these sites are looked at as a path to improved social and economic inclines (Harris & Wood, 2013). More exposure to faculty and staff at the college improves men of color persisting (2013). This study found that only three of eight participants had mentors, and none of the participants could identify the role of a mentor. Therefore, the policy recommendation would ensure that internal/external mentoring was

defined during enrollment. Policy recommendations ensure that students understood the role of mentoring and its importance to their academic careers.

### **Policy Recommendations Evidence**

The purpose of the present study was to determine if men of color at the community college have high goals and self-efficacy strategies already in place. It also determined whether they received application guidance in setting high goals and developing self-efficacy strategies during the admissions/enrollment process during the first year. The responses to the RQ centering on how men of color described their academic goals and formed strategies to accomplish those goals during the first year indicated some confusion on the participants regarding the question. The following theme related to the first question emerged: men of color did not have an academic roadmap.

In response to whether men of color described their academic goals and formed strategies to accomplish those goals during the first year, most participants responded that they were not asked this question during the admissions process. Wood and Harris (2012) noted that precollege considerations influenced men of color college matriculation to community college. It also helped determine their success. Precollege considerations included student's goals (academic, career, education, and personal). Participants in this study would benefit from the recommendation policy that addresses precollege consideration because the certainty of goals is a factor in persistence that leads to lower absenteeism, higher GPAs, and commitment to a major (Mason, 1998).

This study's result also indicated that most participants did not clearly understand their academic goals or strategies to achieve those goals. The admissions office could

provide a clear definition of how to set academic goals, and they could provide a guide on how to form a strategy to achieve those goals. As noted by (Bush et al. 2009), Harper (2009), Freeman and Huggans (2009), and Ray et al. (2009), the institution has some responsibility and accountability for the success of men of color by being proactive in designing programs, services, and policies that meet student's needs. This action supports the need for policy recommendations with details.

In response to how men of color at the research site described speaking to an admissions officer about academic goals, the study results indicated that only two out of eight participants remember speaking to an admissions officer. The first few weeks at the community college for men of color presented opportunities and drawbacks to getting started on the right foot. Early processes and procedures such as orientation and academic advising are related to student's persistence (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Therefore, the omission of collaboration with the admissions officer could hurt student's success.

The results of this study indicated that all participants had discussed their academic goals with an academic advisor. Although there are relatively few studies regarding the specific role of advising, student's perception of advising is based on the quality of advising (Elliott & Healey, 2001; Metzner, 1989; Metzner & Bean, 1987). The results of this study indicated that some participants were not satisfied with the quality of advising and had stated that the academic advisor had recommended classes that were not useful to their academic goals. Further, some participants felt that each time they changed majors, they were pointed in the right direction by the academic advisor. King (1993) stated that academic advising was pivotal to mitigating early departure from the

community college. Implementing a policy suggestion could lead to coordination between the admissions office and the advising office to help mitigate early departures by men of color.

Regarding the question of: How do men of color describe setting academic goals at the research site? The study results indicated that men of color did not have a roadmap to academic success in this study. Since most participants in this study were 1<sup>st</sup> generation college students, they did not have a road map in navigating the initial college exposure. Early college experiences can influence advising and persistence intentions, especially for students who are under-prepared or from underserved minority groups (Museus & Quaye, 2014). The policy recommendation detail would provide options that link admissions, academic advising, and internal/external mentors at the beginning of their college experience to ensure that men of color will set academic goals and create strategies that lead to persistence.

Further results regarding how men of color described speaking with an academic advisor led to mixed results. All participants in this study spoke with an academic advisor regarding academic goals. The quality of advising was the central question due to the lack of a process. Three out of eight participants in this study had transcripts evaluated to determine that they took the courses necessary for their academic goals. There is an interaction between goal setting and goal attainment (Villareal & Garcia, 2016). Further studies have concluded that positive attitudinal changes from a goal-setting exercise can have a lasting impact on students. The implementation of policy recommendations may assure that students go through a goal-setting exercise during the application process to



ensure that they understand the role of the academic advisor and how the setting of goals can impact their persistence.

The question regarding how men of color described speaking with an internal/external mentor led to the following results: men of color in this study did not clearly understand the term mentoring or mentorship. When asked what a mentor is, none of the participants could provide a correct response. One participant stated that they felt that everyone could be a mentor because one can learn from anyone. Another participant stated that he considered his parents as mentors because they encouraged him to continue in college. The implementation of a policy recommendation could make clear what is meant by mentoring or a mentoring relationship.

Mentoring is important for men of color in college. The traditional understanding and definition of mentoring involves a one-on-one relationship with an experienced and trusted individual who encourages, engages, counsels, and guides an often younger or less experienced mentee (Brooms et al., 2021). This study included two participants who stated that they had received advice from their teachers on what classes they should take to reach their academic goals. However, no one in this study received successful mentoring under the expanded definition. The expanded definition of mentoring involved clear intentions, reciprocity, and a clear focus on growth and development (Liou et al., 2016). Successful mentoring for men of color as a strategy may involve formal and informal mentoring.

In this study, participants who reached out to teachers did persist beyond the first year of college. A pattern of studies indicated that Black and Latino males schooling

successes that include performance and achievement indicated positive relationships (Brooms et al., 2021). The teacher-student relationships in this study revealed the gains and benefits of their learning experience. Two participants who did not persist indicated that they believed a mentoring relationship would have made a difference. A mentoring program as part of the application guidance process could make a difference in the persistence of men of color at the community college.

One participant in this study indicated that he knew what a mentor was because he was a mentor, and he had served as a mentor for other students. Teacher-student relationships are essential to mentor relationships and so are student-mentor relationships. Researchers have found that reciprocal relationships, as in student-mentoring, create a caring environment that enhances student's sense of self-efficacy to school and educational goals (Brooms et al., 2021). In addition, previous studies indicated that students' co-curricular activities for Black and Latino males supported leadership development and helped students better negotiate higher education to support persistence.

The results of this study also indicated that most of the participants were 1<sup>st</sup> generation, college students. This study included Latino and Black males. According to research, minority men were more likely to be first-generation college students and did not have the benefit of obtaining knowledge of their parent's college experience (Bray et al., 2019). This study also revealed that most participants had limited knowledge of the college environment or how to navigate complicated financial aid processes. Two participants did not persist because they felt that the college was unfair to charge out-of-state tuition. Implementing a policy recommendation during the application guidance

process could define how out-of-state tuition works to ensure that students understand how to navigate the process. Community colleges are known to be affordable. However, several students faced financial barriers, as stated in the results of this study. Studies indicated that 82% of Black students and 76% of Hispanic students at public two-year institutions had unmet financial needs compared to 66% of White students (Bray, Beer, and Calloway, 2019). Three participants in this study failed to persist primarily because of financial hardships, discontinuing their studies to seek full-time employment.

### **Elements of the Policy Recommendation**

The policy recommendation for men of color at the community college to determine goals and strategies for persistence at the community college based on the results of this study showed that an ongoing theme of this study was the omission of clear academic goals and strategies to attain persistence. The results of this study indicated that all participants had contact with the academic advisor. Academic advising is considered one of the most effective retention strategies, especially in community colleges that typically have less than favorable completion rates (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Implementing policy recommendations would support the overall effort of robust, effective academic advising on a level necessary to ensure success at the research site. In addition, curricula at community colleges are constantly changing to keep up with the community's needs (King, 2008). The implementation of policy may help ensure that advisors attempt to resolve these challenges.

The policy implementation aims to ensure that men of color are encouraged to create goals and strategies for persistence at the research site. Research shows that

Latinx, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders do not persist, earn degrees, or transfer at rates equal to Asian and White peers (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015a, 2015b 2015c). Further, equity policies focus on achieving equitable educational outcomes for racially minoritized students, specifically African Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Implementing policy recommendations (white paper) would help support equity policies in achieving equitable educational outcomes by continually encouraging persistence by men of color.

Student success outcomes are significant challenges facing community colleges (Grubbs, 2020). The results of this study indicated that three out of eight students did not persist beyond the first year, and four students did not plan to transfer to a university after graduation. Some believed that a significant cause of problems with the completion rates had to do with the open admissions process that allowed students to register and start taking classes right away (Scherer & Anson, 2014). The implementation of policy recommendations may help ensure that students are familiar with which classes are necessary to help achieve their academic goals.

Another facet of the goal and strategy policy formation is to create a validation process between the admissions, Academic Advising, and internal/external mentors that internalizes students' intention as they are going through the application process. Validation serves as an enabling, confirming, and supportive process (Rendon, 1994, p.33). Based on the study conducted, the academic advising office was the only checkpoint regarding goals. Participants in the study do not remember anyone emphasizing academic goal setting or creating strategies based on goals. The

internal/external mentor could also encourage students to create goals and strategies during the enrollment process.

***A goal and strategy checklist***

Creating a goal and strategy checklist during the admissions process will ensure that the college of study has initial contact with men of color before enrollment. This list would ensure that students had a process for persistence during the first year and beyond. Educational and academic goals contribute to men of color at the community college (Villareal & Garcia, 2016). The checklist would require input from the admissions and academic advising office on creating goals and strategies. A clear definition of goal setting emphasizes why it is essential to persistence and is included in the checklist. It will be up to admissions and academic advising to get buy-in from students. One of the ways to get buy-in is to show statistics that emphasize how the setting of goals makes a difference. Another way to get buy-in is to let students know that this is part of the enrollment process and essential to their success at the college.

The checklist implementation would occur when students meet with the admissions officer or with the academic adviser. The checklist implementation would occur before students taking classes, preferably during the enrollment period after they complete the application. The admissions and academic office would be responsible for administering this checklist to students. Students would have to complete the checklist before taking classes at the college under study.

***Sign-off Form between Admissions, Academic Advising, and Internal External Mentor***

A sign-off form is a document signed by all the stakeholders. Creating goals and strategies, the collaboration between admissions, advising, and internal/external mentors would ensure that students have verification that they have created goals and strategies. More importantly, having a checkoff form ensures that all stakeholders are involved in the success of students. Students must interface with all three entities during the application process. Students' sign-off forms would ensure the process. The extension of this process helps with establishing a culture at the school of study that fosters persistence. A blueprint given to men of color shows how to navigate community college during their first year.

The sign-off form would be a simple document that would require signatures from admissions representatives, academic advising representatives, and an internal/external mentor. This form would help ensure an enrollment process took place, and students learned goals and strategies creation at the outset of their college experience. The potential barrier to the sign-off form is getting everyone on board with following through with signatures. Three signatures would be required, so this would require collaboration between the student and the three entities.

Presenting the results and recommendations may help the research site make necessary changes to ensure that students create goals and strategies during the enrollment process for persistence. Further, the policy recommendation in the white paper may serve as a reminder to similarly situated colleges.

### *Internal/External Mentors*

The assignment of an internal/external mentor would be an essential part of the school culture. The mentor assignment would ensure that men of color who enter the school of study will have someone to support them throughout their tenure at the school. Mentors are critical to men of color due to the lack of engagement that they experience at the college level (Harris & Wood, 2013). Students and academic advising would decide who would be a mentor and whether mentoring was formal or informal. Often formal mentoring programs are designed to increase enrollment and retention of minority and other students and increase student satisfaction with the academic experience (Harris & Wood, 2013). More importantly, is that students would have a support system in place during their first year.

The internal/external mentoring selection should collaborate between the student, admissions, and academic advising. Once mentors were selected, one of the requirements would be for the student and the mentor to have a sign-off agreement that describes the nature of the relationship. The sign-off form would include the agreement between the mentor and the student. The mentoring relationship must ensure that everyone is in complete agreement with the expectations of the agreement. Barriers to the mentoring relationship could be finding someone to devote time to mentoring. Students would be more responsible for finding someone they trust to support them during their college experience.

Creating a goals and strategy checklist, along with a sign-off from between admissions, academic Advising, and an Internal/External mentor would occur during

student enrollment. Students would be responsible for completing the checklist and making sure that everyone signs off on the sign-off form. This process would be called the application guidance process. The requirement is that all three entities would work together to ensure that this process works seamlessly. Admissions must start the process since students will ideally meet with them after completing the enrollment application. The sign-off form would ensure that students met with all the stakeholders and took the necessary action to complete the application guidance process.

### **Resources, Existing Supports, and Potential Barriers**

Needed resources for disseminating the white paper include administrative support, access to stakeholders, and access to a presentation venue. The use of photocopying the white paper is of minimal expense. Time is one of the significant resources needed due to the changing of the process. Since the process takes place during the enrollment process, a plan for making sure that students are aware of the process would need to happen. Admissions could remind students during enrollment that they will need to sign off on the new forms before taking classes at the college.

Potential barriers to the program are getting buy-in from admissions and academic advising regarding a new process. Another potential barrier is finding suitable mentors for students when they are going through the application guidance process. Since community college has an open admissions policy (Bush & Bush, 2010), creating a new policy regarding admissions could have been pushed back from some stakeholders. Another barrier is the selection of mentors. Once a mentor is selected, having them complete an agreement between the mentor and student could run into some obstacles.



Lastly, the introduction of a new process can cause concern among stakeholders as well due to change.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

Upon approval from Walden, I will set up a meeting with the Dean at the research site and others interested in the study. I will present the white paper and discuss the study. As noted in the white paper, there are issues related to retention among men of color, not only at this college but also at other colleges, so additional presentations are possible. Further, recommendations are not cost prohibitive when effectively implemented.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

Admissions will provide the goals and strategies list for students to complete. Admissions and Academic Advising will provide the sign-off form that shows students created goals and strategies. Academic advising will also provide the mentoring agreement to students. Students will be responsible for taking the sign-off form to the entities and getting the necessary sign-offs completed. Academic advising and students will collaborate in the selection of a mentor. The primary responsibility of securing a mentoring relationship agreement falls with the student.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The project evaluation plan for this project is a policy recommendation with details. The goals of the policy recommendation are (a) provide insight and understanding of the experiences of eight participants from the college under study regarding goals and strategies and (b) recommend the creation of goals and strategies checkoff list to ensure that students are exposed to goals and strategies during the

application process. Formative evaluation was conducted while the project was underway (Lodico et al., 2010). Data were conducted, and the results of the data are in the appendix. If there were any issues with the data, they were corrected right away, and that is one of the advantages of using formative assessments.

The project's overall goal was to determine if men of color used goals and strategies to persist during the first year. The outcome of the study also indicated there was a lack of a mentoring relationship. The lack of a mentoring relationship led to a failure to persist in some cases. The recommendations provided in the study will help students create goals and strategies and help establish mentoring relationships that ultimately lead to more persistence for men of color.

### **Project Implications**

The policy recommendation recommends a process for improving persistence for men of color during the first year. Initially, the creation of a goals and strategies list helps students in the planning of their academic goals to ensure that they have a plan for how to have success in completing their goals. Ultimately, the creation of goals leads to the successful completion of those goals. Second, the recommendation of a mentoring relationship is essential for men of color who have traditionally lacked a support system at the college. A mentoring relationship also contributes to more engagement for men of color at the community college. Lastly, the policy recommendation for a process known as application guidance lacks at other community colleges, as pointed out by recent research. Collaboration between Admissions and Advising can help catch students who may fall through the cracks. Finally, the recommendation of the sign-off form ensures

that the two entities have connected with the student on some level. The recommendations provided to the college research site are helpful for similarly situated colleges and institutions of higher learning.

The research site is important because existing research shows a link between postsecondary completion and employment in urban areas (Bray, Beer, & Calloway, 2019). Eight men of color between the ages of 18 to 35 were in this study. Out of eight participants, three participants did not persist during the first year of enrollment. More importantly, six out of eight participants did not speak to an admissions officer during the application guidance process.

In 2014, California policymakers passed the Student Equity Plans (SEP) policy to address disparities in the community college system. This plan called for required institutions to develop goals and strategies to address identified inequities and use new resources to realize their plans (Felix & Castro, 2018). The policy recommendation developed in this study falls under the SEP policy because one of the plans calls for addressing inequities facing Black and Latinx students. The study results indicated that Black and Latino men of color faced a barrier to not having adequate admissions office responses. A policy recommendation could ensure that students' first point of contact would be with an admissions officer.

In addition to SEP policy planning is a tool used by higher education to develop a shared vision and make necessary improvements (Felix & Castro, 2018). Policymakers and institutional leaders rely on planning initiatives to address systemic issues affecting higher education, such as racial equity gaps related to persistence. For example, at the

research site, an effort is needed to address the policy regarding collaboration between admissions, advising, and an internal/external mentor. The policy implementation could include a checkoff list between admissions and advising to ensure that participants were informed of the necessity of creating goals and strategies.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

#### **Project Strengths**

A key strength of this project was that it is a white paper. I identified the problem, made suggestions on resolving issues, and recommended possible policy changes regarding men of color at the college under study. With the results of the study, I present recommendations in this section that are grounded in theory, based on current literature, and connected to the institution's cultural values. Whether men of color create high goals and strategies is a research topic that has not been explored in great detail, according to my review of the literature, so the policy recommendations appear novel. In addition, they provide a new avenue of study.

Another value of the policy recommendation is that it provides more than one recommendation based on current research. First, the recommendation regarding a mentoring agreement is a possible solution to issues regarding persistence. Men of color must have a support system in higher education because of some of the hardships they have had to endure (Strayhorn, 2017). Second, I suggest having two entities (Admissions and Academic Advising) collaborate with students to be more engaged with their academic goals and strategies. Third, I suggest using a checklist to ensure that there is an interface between students and admissions, academic advising, and an internal/external mentor. Last, I believe that the policy recommendation can be used at other similarly situated community colleges, which is a potential strength.

## **Project Limitations**

The white paper identifies a couple of problems and presents possible solutions, but there is no surety that the recommendations will be accepted or implemented. Obtaining resources that can be directed to achieving the recommendations and obtaining buy-in from the administrators at the college are not certainties. Another limitation of this study is that there are no studies that I am aware of that have addressed goals and strategies for men of color at the community college during the enrollment process. Finally, the term application guidance used in this study refers to collaboration between the admissions office, the academic advising office and an internal/external mentor. The three entities are part of the enrollment process. They could be pivotal to emphasizing the creation of goals and strategies for men of color during enrollment.

Another limitation of the project was the sample size. The sample size was small compared to the population of the institution, which makes it difficult to generalize the results of the study at similarly situated institutions. Another limitation of the study was that it was specific to the research site under study and not generalizable to community colleges in general. Finally, I focused on a group of students during a national pandemic under conditions that were less than favorable to this population. Five students persisted beyond the first year, but three students had to leave after the first year due to life issues.

Another limitation was that data collection occurred amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic made collecting data more challenging because in-person interviews were not possible. The participants in this study were adversely affected by the virus. Moreover, some of the answers regarding academic goals reflected the virus. Some

participants were faced with life-altering situations that affected their attitudes and beliefs regarding the educational process at the college under study.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

The problems I addressed in this study involved creating goals and strategies for men of color or the lack of an academic road map. Also, the lack of mentoring led to participants not being sure of which road to pursue their academic goals. The creation of goals and strategies is a way to improve self-efficacy, especially among men of color (Pajares & Schunk, 2001) One alternative approach would be for K-12 education to do a better job of orienting men of color to the college environment. Research shows that the earlier men of color develop self-efficacy, the more likely they are to complete their goals (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). The creation of goals and strategies in coordination with mentoring may improve self-efficacy and improve persistence for men of color.

Another approach is for the college to have a class that students must attend before enrollment at the college under study. This preadmissions class could be a requirement that reviews the college application process and ensures that students are provided with the necessary information to help them navigate the college environment. One of the requirements of this class would be to create academic goals and have a strategy for achieving those goals. In addition, some of the terminology associated with the college environment would be defined to ensure that students had a better understanding of college life.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

This research project has helped me grow as a life-long learner, scholar, and educator. I worked in a corporate environment for many years before I decided to become an educator. Being a scholar was more inspiring and challenging than anything I had encountered in my professional life. Participating in the doctoral program has helped me grow as an individual and as a scholar and educator. I look forward to using this experience to help others who face similar challenges. In addition, I want to be an inspiration, especially for men of color who have had to overcome adversity in pursuit of their dreams and ambitions.

#### **Scholarship**

Scholarship and learning refer to gaining knowledge by studying, which equates to the process I have engaged with since beginning this project study. Graduate-level scholarship requires learning at a higher level well enough to be able to teach others (Mckinley et al., 2021). Students are expected to be critical thinkers, formulate an effective research design, and communicate results in ways that matter (Mckinley et al., 2021). The most challenging part of this project was formulating a practical design. The topic of study was relevant to me as a practitioner because I was a non traditional student. I did not attend college directly after high school. It took me several years to obtain a college degree due to life challenges, some of the same challenges as participants in this study. More importantly, I did not have a goal or a strategy while attending college. My college experience would likely have been more successful with a goal or strategy.



After spending several years collecting quantitative data but not making progress with my proposal, I switched to a basic qualitative research design. The switch to a basic qualitative design garnered approval for my proposal from the IRB; however, it was during the actual research that I was able to see new issues that arose. For example, I understood the difference between the inductive approach, where I uncovered theory as the research progressed, versus the deductive theory, where I started to prove a theory that was already there. In addition, using a basic qualitative approach, collecting data, and conducting semistructured interviews helped me obtain the data needed to answer the RQs.

The policy recommendation provided a vehicle to offer suggestions on improving the application process. The topic is unique because there is not much research, according to my review of the literature, that focuses on the application process that involves creating high goals and strategies for men of color. Writing the literature review for the proposal and the project helped me understand this project's uniqueness and the limited studies involving men of color and the application process. In the white paper, I address the study results and provide recommendations for leaders of the college under study to consider.

### **Project Development**

When I decided to embark on my doctoral journey, I had an idea of which project to study. I knew that there was vast information on persistence related to men of color (Wood & Harris, 2015). I decided to research a college in Southern California. Once I completed all the doctoral coursework, I moved to Northern California and started

working as an educator at a college. Through my experiences of working with young men of color, I understood that the topic chosen was unique. I chose a white paper because it seemed to be the best vehicle to implement a policy change. I have learned a great deal about white papers since embarking on this project. The white paper was a good choice because I could relate theory, current literature, and research results to possible solutions. Learning about white papers gave me insight into how they can be used to change or influence policy. Writing the white paper also helped me clearly and succinctly convey solutions that I had proposed. I am optimistic that the development of the white paper will influence stakeholders to consider policy changes to the enrollment process moving forward.

### **Leadership and Change**

This doctoral project has increased my confidence in being an effective educator and leader for change in the academic environment. I have been involved with education for the past 20 years as a practitioner but not in a leadership capacity. I have learned the importance of conducting research and sharing information that can or may lead to change. Most importantly, I have worked with men of color in the past 10 years. Working with men of color has increased my understanding of issues they face in navigating higher education and society in general.

As I come to complete this project, I realize that educators need to be proactive in sharing information that can lead to positive change for those who come from underserved communities. Leaders must stay current with research conducted in their field of study and the need to be a change agent when change is necessary for the better

good of society. I believe that new ideas and policies should be tried and implemented for better results.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

The persistence of men of color is an ongoing issue at the community college level. Community college leaders have implemented several programs to encourage everyone to attend community college. The percentage of students of color entering higher learning is steadily increasing (Ginder et al., 2015). The college under study is in an urban community, and the persistence rates are lower among men of color than their White counterparts (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2019). The results of this study support the idea that the creation of goals and strategies helps with persistence. During the collection of research, I learned that the lack of a mentor could contribute to the failure to persist, and more importantly, that mentoring was something that students wanted.

As a life-long learner, I have learned the value of research is in resolving issues related to learning. During my research, I also learned the value of listening to issues and keeping an open mind to solutions that may differ from mine. I was able to apply skills that I had learned in other work areas to help with the rigor of organizing, researching, and drawing conclusions related to this study. In addition, I was excited to learn more about the experiences of men of color at the college research site and how they wanted to make a positive contribution to the research.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The policy recommendations that evolved from my research revealed a possible solution for men of color on how to improve persistence at the college level. Improving persistence for men of color will benefit society in general. The implications for social change related to men of color will become more pronounced because minority populations in the United States are expected to significantly increase by 2050 (McGlynn, 2011). Obtaining a college degree may level the playing field in terms of economic opportunities. A college degree provides an opportunity for men of color to become better contributors to society (McGlynn, 2011). The results of this study indicated that men of color are determined to be successful.

Self-efficacy has to do with creating goals and believing that one can attain those goals (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). This study showed that all participants in this study had high self-efficacy even in the face of adversity. They believed in themselves and believed that they would achieve success in their academic quests. The research was instrumental in revealing the lack of an academic roadmap for men of color. Therefore, the recommendation that creating goals and strategies during the enrollment process can help provide the academic roadmap to persist and achieve academic success was important.

This project can positively affect social change at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. An essential benefit of this project is the recommendation that academic advising help students select a mentor, whether internal or external. The selection of a mentor during the application process ensures that men of color have a support system as they begin their college experience. Mentoring provides value to the

organization because they help students persist through the first year and beyond. Society benefits when men of color achieve academic success. It translates to a more educated workforce, ensuring that more men of color will enter the workforce. A more educated workforce leads to technological breakthroughs that benefit the country overall.

The results of this study can serve as a model for other similarly situated community colleges. The issue with persistence for men of color is a nationwide problem. More research is being conducted to develop a solution to the persistence issue for men of color. The literature suggests that more resources are directed toward minority groups that include men of color to increase persistence. The creation of goals and strategies during enrollment is an option to help resolve some of the issues associated with persistence.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, my goal was to determine whether men of color created high goals and strategies for persistence during the first year at the college under study. I was not sure of where the research would take me once I embarked on the study. There were some challenges in getting participants to agree to an interview. I was familiar with the demographics of the research site but not sure of the determination of students to pursue academic goals. The study and data analysis resulted in a recommendation policy that generated four categories of themes. The category of themes was categorized as absence of admission protocols, absence of mentoring, absence of academic roadmap, and self-perseverance. Absence of mentoring and absence of admission protocol category of themes were barriers to creating goals and strategies, while self-perseverance and absence

of an academic roadmap supported and detracted from the overall goal of persistence beyond the first year.

Based upon the themes, I made three recommendations that included: (a) creating goals and strategy checklist; (b) creating a sign-off form that verifies collaboration between admissions and academic advising; and (c) create a mentoring form to ensure that students have an internal/external mentor as part of their program. These recommendations would take place before students enrolled at the college. This process, known as application guidance, would ensure that students had a process for persistence during the first year.

Completing this project has been an ongoing challenge personally and professionally. I have had several obstacles that extended the expected time it would have taken to complete this project. However, I have gained a better understanding of how the community college system works and how it affects the self-efficacy of men of color. The collection of data via the interview process was the most revealing aspect of the study. I was able to gain an understanding and deeper appreciation of some of the struggles that men of color in urban environments deal with daily. I came away from the study enlightened and encouraged by the self-determination of participants involved in the study. Despite going through a pandemic that created hardships, participants in the study were optimistic about the future. I appreciated being able to relate to some of their struggles based on my journey. As a result, I will be more involved as an educator in being the change that I hope to see.

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Appendix: The Project



Goals and Strategies for Men of color for  
Persistence at Community College

Owen G DeVance



## Executive Summary

One of the main concerns for men of color at the community college is persistence during the first year. Men of color are more likely to begin post-secondary education at the community college (Bush & Bush, 2010; Vasquez, 2019). However, often these institutions have not emphasized goals and strategies for success for the first year and beyond. While researchers have noted that men of color were less likely to complete their goals of certificate, degree, or transfer than their other male counterparts, few, if any, studies have addressed the creation of goals and strategies for men of color about academic success (Wood & Newman, 2017).

This study addressed whether there was the creation of goals and strategies for men of color at a community college in Northern California. The purpose of the paper is to present findings and recommendations related to a doctoral study of eight students, some who persisted beyond the first year and some who did not persist beyond the first year. Guided by Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, RQs focused on whether goals and strategies were influenced by (a) the admissions office, (b) the academic advising office, and (c) by an internal/external mentor. Data analysis revealed four categories of themes: (a) absence of admission protocols, (b) absence of mentoring, (c) absence of academic roadmap, (d) self-perseverance. These findings, the theoretical concepts, and strategies described in the review of the literature led to the following recommendations for creating a policy recommendation:

- create a goal and strategy checklist

- create a sign-off form that verifies collaboration between admissions and academic advising
- create a mentoring form to ensure that students have an internal/external mentor as part of their program

### **The Problem**

According to Wood and Ziong (2017), 15% of Latinos and 17% of African Americans completed their goals in 3 years, while their white male counterpart number was 27%. This study showed that although five of eight students persisted during the first year, they did not complete their academic goals during that time. Only three students started with original academic goals and achieved those goals during the first year.

Only two of eight students remembered speaking with an admissions officer regarding academic goals. According to Strayhorn (2017) point out that there is a need for institutions to take a role in fostering the degree aspirations of Black men. The omission of a conversation regarding goals and strategies in this study led to the possibility of dialogue during enrollment. Participants in this study varied in terms of having goals and strategies, as shown in Table A1.

Table A1

#### *Overview of Participants*

Experience	Frequency
Admissions officer assistance	2/8
Internal/External mentor	3/8

Persistence beyond the first year	4/8
Academic advisor assistance	8/8
Goal and strategies defined	3/8

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### **Importance**

Men of color must succeed in urban community colleges. Community college is where a sizable majority of low-income, first-generation, and minority students enroll (McGlynn, 2011). Urban community colleges are considered an entry point for men of color, especially African American men (Bush & Bush, 2010). Men of color have a high secondary school dropout rate and poor collegiate academic preparation and performance (Thompson & Parker, 2007). Therefore, community college may be the best hope for those who desire a degree in higher education (Bush & Bush, 2005). The result of this study helps to understand the educational experiences of a group of men of color. Additionally, it makes recommendations for how to increase persistence among men of color. The creation of goals and strategies supports Bandura's theory of self-efficacy that those who set goals are more likely to achieve those goals.

### **Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy**

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy informed the study, analysis, and recommendations that went into this paper. Self-efficacy is defined as a judgment about the ability of the self to pursue activities that will achieve a particular goal or level of performance (Hudley, 2009). According to Locke & Latham (2013), those who set goals are more likely to achieve those goals. In addition, research suggests that self-efficacy

can boost student achievement, foster emotional health and well-being, and serve as a valid predictor of motivation and learning (Gutierrez & Tomas, 2019). Bandura (1981) identified four primary sources of self-efficacy (see Table 1).

**Table A2**

*Four Major Sources of Self-Efficacy*

Name	Definition
Master experiences	It takes experience to show resilience in overcoming obstacles through effort and perseverance.
Vicarious experiences	Vicarious experiences come from observing others around you that you may see as models or having something in common.
Verbal or Social persuasion	It is a way of strengthening people's belief that they have what it takes to succeed.
Somatic and emotional states	Emotional and somatic states help determine how well community college students perform academically. In this stage, students rely on their somatic or emotional state when judging their capabilities.

*Note.* I created this table using data from Bandura (1981).

Employing Bandura's self-efficacy for this study was based on research conducted that showed positive results using this theory to help explain and understand college students, especially men of color, academic performance, and persistence at the higher educational level. The literature available on students of color at community colleges indicates that they encounter more challenges than their white counterparts (before and during college) (Bui, 2002; Brooms, 2019). The results of this study were no different when it came to the challenges faced by men of color.

### **Purpose and Design**

The purpose of this project study was to determine whether men of color created goals and strategies during the enrollment process. I used a basic qualitative approach to determine if men of color had dialogue regarding goals and strategies with admissions, academic advising, or with an internal/external mentor during the enrollment process during the first year. Research has determined that those who set goals have a more realistic chance of achieving those goals (Locke & Latham, 2013). Therefore, the RQs for this study were as follows:

RQ: How do men of color describe their academic goals and form strategies to accomplish those goals during the first year?

- a. How do men of color at the research site describe speaking with an admissions officer about academic goals?
- b. How do men of color describe setting academic goals at the research site?
- c. How do men of color describe speaking with an academic advisor about academic goals?

d. How do men of color describe speaking with an internal/external mentor

I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with eight students from the research site under study. Purposeful and select sampling was used to select eight men of color from a list provided by the college dean. The sampling criteria was that a group of male students may have or may not have persisted during the first year of college during the 2019-2020 session. Seventy-five students were chosen from a sample. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. The form shared the voluntary nature of the study, background information, compensation for their time, and contact information. I obtained IRB approval from Walden University and the research site before the study commenced.

### **Results**

I coded the interviews using in vivo values and axial coding. The analysis of the data revealed four themes:

- absence of admission protocols
- absence of mentoring
- absence of an academic roadmap
- self-perseverance

#### **Absence of Admission Protocols**

The first theme, absence of admission protocols, is related to research sub-questions a and c. This question looks at the systems in place. This theme states that men of color in the study prefer their institution to focus on their academics rather than athletics. Three participants in the study described their experiences with an admissions

officer. The common theme was that the college was more interested in them as athletes than as students at the college. Another feature of lack of admission protocols, as related by Participant 6, stated that the institution was not interested in him academically. He believed that they looked at him as someone who could play football.

Absence of admission protocols also had a theme that stated the admissions staff had minimal impact on goals while the academic advising staff substantially influenced goals. There were only two participants out of eight who remembered speaking with an admissions officer during enrollment. Participants two and three spoke with an admissions officer, but they do not remember setting goals or having strategies. However, all eight participants remember speaking with an academic advisor/counselor. Four participants out of eight remember seeking academic advice and creating strategies on how to achieve those goals. It was not a plan mapped out with the academic advisor. It was a student-created plan as a way of getting through the semester.

In most situations, the academic advisor was instrumental in advising students to select the appropriate classes for their field of study. For example, participant three stated that his academic counselor set him up with the best schedule to get him to the next level. On the other hand, participant two felt that his academic advisor had him taking many classes that did not benefit him and had no interest in taking. There were only two participants who remember an academic advisor going over their high school transcripts with them.

The lack of a transparent process by the admissions office and the academic advising office led to a lack of consistency in creating goals and strategies. In identifying

success factors for men of color at the community college, success outcomes are shaped by the interaction between pre-college considerations before enrollment (Harris & Wood, 2013, p. 176). This study reveals that four out of eight students did not have a good experience with the admissions or academic advising office. The collaboration between the two entry points upon enrollment could help create goals and strategies for men of color.

### **Absence of Mentoring**

The next theme, absence of mentoring, states that men of color in the study had a limited understanding of mentorship. Three of eight participants in the study had a relationship with a mentor. Mentors are essential in various stages of development in students' lives, especially Black male mentoring (Wendt, 2018). However, when asked how participants described speaking with an internal/external mentor, five of eight participants did not have an internal/external mentor, and they could not define the purpose of a mentor. Woods (2014) states that men of color advisors consciously or unconsciously provide students with a sense of belonging.

Participant 3 states that coming out of Seattle, he had many mentors, but two or three gave him advice, and then he had a mentor who reached out to him and asked him to mentor young kids. Participant 7 states that when he looks at a mentor, he looks at somebody who is there consistently there to motivate, not just to understand. Mentors are essential in various stages of development in your life, especially for men of color (Wendt, 2018). Two participants in the study that did not persist felt that a mentor would have made a difference in their academic success. Research has shown that formal



mentoring programs have had success (Harris & Wood, 2013). The lack of mentoring during enrollment for the participants in this study impacted persistence.

Mentoring provides a way to seek help as students matriculate through the college experience. It is essential for men of color, as the results of this study indicated. Men of color must receive external support because it plays a big part in their persistence during the first year (Williams & Coaxun, 2018). The results of this study indicate the importance of having a mentor during the first year of college, especially for men of color. The collaboration between admissions, academic advising, and an internal/external mentor would make a difference in persistence for men of color. The theme of absence of mentors is illustrated by this participant response:

Yeah, I did have many mentors from Seattle, but not a lot, but two or three people who gave me advice, you know, even beforehand. And then I have a mentor who I was one of my mentors reach out to me and ask me to mentor young kids so I can have a lead, like mentoring young kids as I got paid for that. I kind of mentor myself, you know, because I knew I was in that position. I understand that.

(Participant 3)

### **Self-Perseverance**

The theme self-perseverance states that men of color in the study believed they were the arbiters of their success. All participants had in common that they believed that their success was ultimately up to them. The interview sub-questions were based on this theme: What is your recommendation about what the institution could do to help other men of color in a similar situation? Participant 7 stated that his positive attitude helped

propel him to the best grade possible in every class that he took. He knew that there would be hiccups along the way, but he was prepared to overcome any obstacle. If the class were more difficult than anticipated, he would talk to himself to get past the obstacle. This study pointed to participants who did not persist during the first year but still showed determination to succeed regardless of obstacles.

Participant 6 stated that he was not encouraged to pursue educational classes when he was at the research site and felt that he was there to play football. However, participant 6 does not blame anyone because he felt he needed to make money since he had recently moved out. He is determined to go back to a different community college when he reenrolls. Participant 1 felt that the school tried to help, but he was not ready for help. He feels that students must be motivated to succeed in college, and at that time, he was not ready. Participant 1 has decided that his focus will not be on academic courses but on courses that are of general interest to him when he goes back. The engagement of participants from either an admissions officer, academic advisor, or internal/external mentor could have made a difference for participants who did not persist during the first year.

### **Absence of an Academic Roadmap**

Absence of an academic roadmap as a theme stated that men of color in the study did not have clear directions in their academic pursuits. This theme was related to the RQ, How do men of color describe their academic goals and form strategies to accomplish those goals during the first year? Study results show that participants did not have clear goals and strategies for persistence during the first year. Six of eight

participants do not remember talking to an admissions officer during the application process. Men of color need the admissions office to prepare for the application process (Bethea, 2016). Participant 7 stated that he was not prepared for the college system at that time, and he did not have many resources as a person of color. However, he had always been a good student, so he could navigate his way through the system and persist during the first year.

The academic advising office helped students with self-perseverance. It offers students a chance to discuss goals and other barriers that may impede their success (Thelin, 2011). More importantly, it may save a student who may feel academically overwhelmed and who is about to drop out. For example, participant 5 states that: "I told myself that I should try, and it was easy, easier to pick up on things real fast. Everything I do, I think of me". The strategy that participant 5 used to stay in college was that he would not work and focus on schoolwork with his family support. He also indicated that he held himself accountable to follow through with taking classes that required less rigor and the more challenging courses during the first year. This strategy worked well for Participant 5, who persisted during the first year, as illustrated by this response: "Moreover, I was not sure. I just signed up with no clear goal in mind. I just did it because I am like, I do not know what else."

### **Recommendations**

Using themes generated from the research results, theories of self-efficacy, and current literature, I developed three recommendations for Goal and Strategy Formation. The first two recommendations include: creating a goal and strategy checklist and

creating a sign-off form to ensure that students have an internal/external mentor as part of their program. The third recommendation is to assign an internal/external mentor to students who do not have one.

### **Create a Goal and Strategy Checklist**

Creating a goal and strategy checklist during the admissions process will ensure that the college of study has initial contact with men of color before enrollment. This list would ensure that students had a process for persistence during the first year and beyond. Educational and academic goals contribute to men of color at the community college (Villareal & Garcia, 2016). The goal and strategy formation would include goal-setting theory. The goal-setting theory claims that establishing clearly defined specific goals stimulates goal-directed behavior and boosts performance (Lock & Latham, 2013). Students need to have strategies and self-efficacy to overcome hurdles that may impede persistence (Casperan & Raaen, 2014). According to Latham (2013), goal setting is related to individual performance improvement.

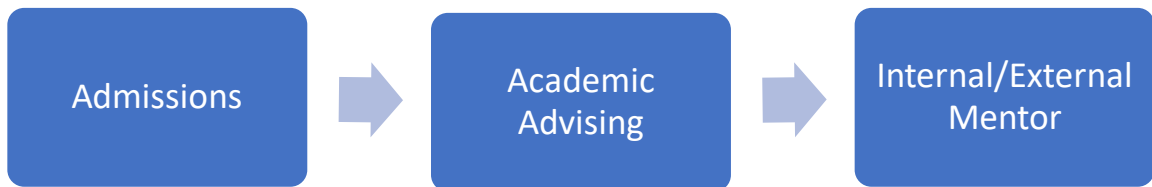
The goal-setting theory also states that individuals who set goals are more likely to perform at higher levels than individuals who do not set goals. Research has shown that setting challenging goals and participating in the goal process positively influences performance (McShane & Von Glinow, 2005). This checklist would be required to be administered during the admissions process, and it would be an enrollment requirement. Included in the checklist would be clear guidelines for how to create goals and strategies. The checklist during admissions could coordinate with the academic advising office.

### **Create a Sign-Off Form Between Admissions, Academic Advising, and Internal/External Mentors**

A sign-off form is a document signed by all the stakeholders. Creating goals and strategies, the collaboration between admissions, advising, and internal/external mentors would ensure that students have verification that they have created goals and strategies. More importantly, having a checkoff form ensures that all stakeholders are involved in the success of students. Students must interface with all three departments during the application process. Students using the sign-off form ensure they are aware of the process. The extension of this process helps with establishing a culture at the school of study that fosters persistence. Men of color are provided a blueprint for how to navigate community college during their first year.

**Figure 1**

*Process for Navigating the First Year of College*

**Assign an Internal/External Mentor**

The assignment of an internal/external mentor would be an essential part of the school culture. This assignment would ensure that men of color who enter the school of study will have someone to support throughout their tenure at the school. Mentors are essential to men of color due to the lack of engagement that they experience at the college level. The team would decide whether the mentoring is formal or informal. Often formal mentoring programs are designed to increase enrollment and retention of minority and other students and increase student satisfaction with the academic experience (Harris & Wood, 2013). More importantly, is that students would have a support system in place during their first year.

The internal/external mentoring selection should collaborate between the student, admissions, and academic advising. Once mentors were selected, one of the requirements would be for the student and the mentor to have a sign-off agreement that describes the nature of the relationship. The sign-off form would include the agreement between the mentor and the student. The mentoring relationship must be defined to ensure that everyone is in complete agreement with the nature of the relationship. Input should come from admissions and advising, with students having the final input. As Participant 7 stated, “The school does not know the magnitude of issues students face. They see their friends get killed. They could come from a single-parent home. They do not know whether the student has eaten or not.”

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The challenge of creating goals and strategies and creating a process for how to persist beyond the first year for men of color is new to the field of research. Participants in this study were not familiar with goals and strategies related to academics. Although some participants managed to create goals and strategies, it was not strategic. Five participants persisted during the first year, but only three participants had clear goals but no strategies during the enrollment process. Failure to create goals and strategies during enrollment led to some unnecessary hardship. Due to hardships in the country, the lack of planning could delay graduation for many men of color.

Implementing recommendations in this paper may help with persistence during the first year, especially for men of color. In addition, creating a process where there is accountability for everyone involved could lead to more men of color graduating from

community college within a specified time. Further, increasing graduation rates will lead to a more sustained workforce.



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