



NEWS RELEASE

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NEW REPORT BUILDS ON UNDERSTANDING OF EXPERIENCES OF MEN OF COLOR IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

AUSTIN, TX— Black males and Latinos report having higher aspirations to earn a community college certificate or degree than their White peers, but only 5% of Black males and Latinos attending community colleges earn certificates or degrees within three years, as opposed to 32% of White males. This fact, among many others, prompted the Center for Community College Student Engagement to develop a special report released today: *Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community Colleges*.

As community colleges across the country respond to mounting calls for dramatic improvements in college completion, a necessary component of that work is to recognize and then close the persistent and troubling attainment gaps across a diverse population of students.

The new report includes analysis of student engagement survey results for over 145,000 male community college students and is accompanied by a video drawn from over 30 focus groups with Black male and Latino students. It builds on a growing body of research about the experiences of men of color in higher education and offers information community colleges can consider as they work to create conditions that will lead to better outcomes for these students.

Despite their diverse life and educational experiences, male students of color in focus groups agree on the importance of four factors as central to their success: building strong personal connections on campus; being held to high expectations; encountering instructors who are committed to their achievement; and being intensively engaged in the academic experience, both in and out of the classroom. Although students agree on these factors, their responses regarding the significance of race and diversity on campus are mixed across and within groups.

“Community colleges open their doors to all learners,” affirms Center Director Kay McClenney. “However, open access is only the first step in attaining the equity ingrained in the mission of community colleges. The more significant work is ensuring that all students have the support needed to succeed.”

Within every racial and ethnic group, higher engagement is associated with better outcomes among male students. Even so, *CCCSE* data also show perplexing patterns of engagement and achievement between male student groups. Black males are the most engaged in almost all areas, but report the lowest outcomes. Latinos consistently report levels of engagement and outcomes between their Black and White peers, while White males report the lowest levels of engagement at almost every level, but the highest outcomes.

Illustrative findings from student engagement survey data include:

- Black men at all levels of self-reported GPA are most likely to use skill labs and to participate in high-impact practices, followed by Latinos, and then White men.
- Among Black males who report a C- GPA, 39% say they never skip class, compared to 31% of Latinos and 24% of White males.

“Grappling with these disparities is a task for virtually every community college,” says McClenney. “Campus conversations and actions must address at least three factors: substantially different levels of college readiness across racial and ethnic groups, the demonstrated effects of stereotype threat on performance in higher education, and continuing impacts of structural racism evident in systems throughout American society.”

National data indicate that college readiness is a key factor in understanding the complicated relationship between engagement and outcomes by race and ethnicity. For example, only 14% of Black males and 30% of Latinos meet the ACT college-readiness standards in Math, whereas 53% of White men do. Apparently, even the typically higher levels of engagement of male students of color cannot compensate for these discrepancies in college readiness.

The phenomenon of stereotype threat is also identified as a likely contributor to the achievement gap. Stereotype threat—or the fear of fulfilling a negative stereotype—even when triggered unintentionally by people trying to do good work, can negatively impact academic performance. However, when colleges implement the engaging strategies and affirmations of diversity that students call for in focus groups, the threat may be mitigated or even removed.

Ultimately, the report emphasizes, in order to address these achievement gaps, community colleges must first acknowledge and then address the reality that “systematic disparities in

opportunity and privilege characterize the lives—and educational experiences—of people of color in American society.” To assist colleges in the work of improving outcomes for men of color, the report offers information resources, including a tool for conducting focus groups with men of color as well as a collection of questions to guide campus and community discussions around the issues of aspiration, achievement, and equity.

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Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community Colleges is available online: http://www.ccsse.org/docs/MoC_Special_Report.pdf

Additional Information

Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community Colleges is based on responses to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) from more than 453,000 students in the 2012 three-year cohort. The Center also conducted more than 30 student focus groups with Black men, Latinos, and White men at community colleges and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society national convention, as well as six focus groups with faculty and staff. The report includes a companion video based on the focus group work.

Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community Colleges is part of a Center initiative—Improving Outcomes for Men of Color in Community Colleges—funded by the Kresge Foundation.

The report may be downloaded free of charge at www.ccsse.org. The Center is a research and service initiative of the Program in Higher Education Leadership in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.