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Exploring factors that impact the Persistence of Black males at Nashville State Community College

A Capstone Research Study By:
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VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

Nashville State
Community College

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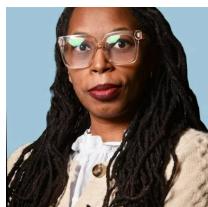
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors associated with the persistence of Black males at Nashville State Community College by examining the relationships between student engagement, college GPA, and persistence using longitudinal retrospective data for students attending 7 campuses across Nashville, TN (n=14,161). Data sources also include student-level information from the most recent Community College Survey of Student Engagement, Focus Groups with Black male students on two campuses, and surveys administered to Black males during the Fall 2023 semester. The findings indicate that Environmental Pull (Financial Concerns), Academic Integration, and Pre-College Skills (Academic Achievement) were the primary factors of concern impacting the persistence of Black male students at Nashville State Community College. The data collected and extant research suggest that career development/exploration, heightened engagement, and community collective impact strategies could lead to compensatory effects for Black male students.

ABBREVIATIONS & DEFINITIONS

Abbreviations

NSCC - Nashville State Community College

CCSSE - Community College Survey of Student Engagement

SCOTUS - the Supreme Court of the United States

Definitions

Persistence - NSCC defines persistence as: 1) a completed credential, and 2) if a student continues in the spring following their enrollment in the fall.

Retention - NSCC defines retention as students attending the year(s) following their initial year.

Graduation - NSCC defines graduation as earning a credential, earning an associates degree, and/or a bachelor's degree.

Ecological - The term 'ecological' refers to social ecology or how individuals interact with and respond to the environment around them.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to assist Nashville State Community College (NSCC) in identifying how to best support persistence and completion rates among Black male students, their lowest performing student demographic. With the continually changing landscape of secondary and post-secondary education, Black male students at NSCC have undoubtedly encountered significant obstacles and systemic barriers prior to arriving on campus. Without intervention, those challenges may jeopardize their degree completion. Using informed data to alleviate the staggering education gap could help NSCC meet the academic, social, and ecological needs of the students and ultimately prepare them for the workforce upon graduation.

Our research questions for this study are:
- What do Black male students need to persist on NSCC Campuses?
- What is the perspective of Black males regarding persistence and their experiences at NSCC?
- What are the social and ecological factors that contribute to the success of other subgroups?
- Do the graduation rates of Black male students differ from other groups at NSCC? and,
- What concerns do the campus community and community partners have about how to best support Black male students at NSCC?

A conceptual framework adapted from the Freeman Longitudinal BPS Model was deployed to incorporate relevant factors impacting persistence. We used a mixed-methods approach to analyze data from Black male students, experts from NSCC stakeholder groups, and from multiple sources working in proximity to Black male NSCC students. Our interview protocols were developed to elicit data from Black male students with interrupted and uninterrupted educational journeys.

The findings indicated that financial concerns, academic integration, and academic achievement were the primary factors of concern impacting the persistence of Black male students at NSCC. The triangulation of data collected, coupled with extant research, suggests that career development/exploration, increased engagement and activities for students, and the use of collective impact strategies may bolster progress and success of Black male students at NSCC.

Black male students at NSCC face unique challenges, including limited career exploration and mentorship opportunities. To address these challenges, we recommend implementing career-based mentoring programs, convening stakeholders for ongoing collective impact strategies, and implementing an intrusive advisement model to support Black male students. We also suggest implementing strategies such as ride sharing

stipends and commuter-friendly lounge areas to foster a sense of community and belonging amongst students to enhance the overall student experience.

Introduction

Community colleges in the U.S. are the interface between would-be workers and employers (Wyner, 2014). They provide a unique opportunity for students to obtain more affordable certifications and associate degrees without having to relocate and reside on a larger university campus. However, there are aspects of attending community college which may exhibit marked dissimilarities for students after leaving high school. Community college students encounter particular types of challenges [managing work, school and oftentimes a family] and require different retention strategies from those employed by four-year colleges. Rates of completion for students at community colleges have steadily declined since the early 2000s (IPEDS report, 2017). In the state of Tennessee, the six-year college graduation rates for Black males are at least 20 percentage points below the rates of other students every year (THEC, 2021). To understand and address these gaps, institutions of higher education have adopted evidence-based practices to improve student engagement and boost completion rates [tuition waivers, textbook programs, and free technology].

With community colleges serving as complex networks with multiple performance standards (Wyner, 2014), it is vital to consider how their practices map onto students who are often a unique population faced with resource constraints. Even with Nashville State Community College offering multiple programs, services, and financial assistance, the 3-year completion rate of Black male students is still only seven percent (TBR, 2023).

Organization Context

Nashville State Community College

Nashville State Community College (NSCC) serves approximately 7,000 students across seven campus locations in the Metro Nashville area (TBR, 2023). Over 60 percent of students attending Nashville State are Pell-eligible, and approximately 40 percent are adult learners over the age of 25. Nearly 40 percent of NSCC students identify as Black or Hispanic.

Nashville State Community College is attended primarily by students from the 37013 and 37220 zip codes, and those demographics are representative of the student

population at NSCC (see Zip Code Map of Nashville: Figure 1) (TBR, 2023). Two of the primary feeder schools in MNPS schools to NSCC are Cane Ridge High School and John Overton High School - both of which are located in the zip codes provided above, respectively. Nashville State's 2022 Fall demographic data indicates that female students made up sixty-three percent (63%) of their population with male students at thirty-seven percent (37%). white students represented forty-seven percent (47%) of the Fall 2022 population and Black students were twenty-eight percent (28%), with Hispanic students at thirteen percent (13%) (TBR, 2023).

Supporting the persistence and completion among students of color – particularly male students of color – was a top priority for all community and technical colleges governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents in 2022. Black male students persist and complete at rates lower than any other demographic group at Nashville State Community College (TBR, 2023). The commitment to designing and implementing a program to support Black male students is beneficial to Nashville State Community College because it will increase enrollment numbers, which theoretically promotes social and economic development (Marks & Caruthers, 1999). Providing resources and opportunities that will support more Black male students to cross the graduation stage will help to increase the number who enter family-sustaining wage jobs.

"...detailed answers as to why Black males are not enrolling in or being more successful at postsecondary institutions in Tennessee are lacking. Although there are important efforts underway to understand the issues, there is a need for more focused research to provide nuanced answers and finding high impact solutions." (THEC, 2021)

Figure 1 - Nashville Zip Codes Map

https://reddoorcollective.org/blog/eviction-report-h1-2021/
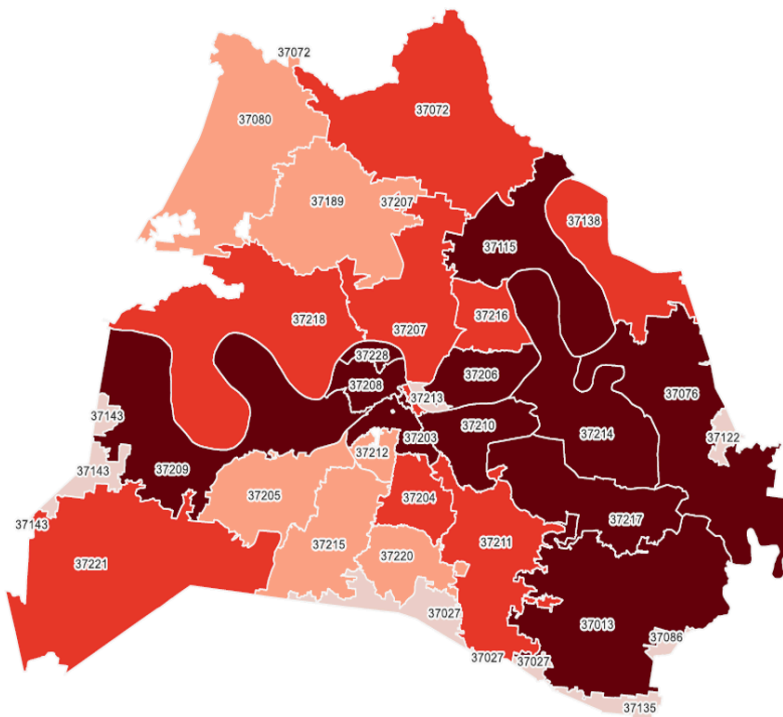
Problem of Practice

"Although greater numbers of minority students are entering college than in previous years, fewer earn degrees compared with non-minorities." (Kuh, 2007, p. 3)

The widening of gaps in achievement of Black males and other groups has intensified the need to better understand the factors that influence student success in college. A critical issue contributing to this gap is the insufficient engagement of researchers in partnership with educators in actionable inquiry projects. This lack of collaborative efforts impedes the development and implementation of culturally relevant curricula and pedagogical approaches that resonate with the unique needs and backgrounds of student minority groups. Culturally relevant pedagogy can be 'designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). Educators must use continued feedback from students to address and neutralize the effects of harmful environmental factors on persistence—also via empowering students through skills development and/or their own agency (Horsford et al, 2018).

Workforce Development

As students weigh their options after high school, many have become uncertain about the benefits associated with obtaining a college degree (Dynarski et al., 2021). To some degree this study aims to survey and observe which variables or factors (Freeman, 2003) have the greatest impact according to Black male students in attendance at NSCC.

Questions addressed in our research include considering what higher education programs in Nashville have implemented to introduce and prepare our target group for careers through college, and what type(s) of careers? How much does their experience in high school shape their views of community college? Do they see a degree as just symbolic power? Or real positional power? And how might that affect their decision to persist when they hit a wall?

Many community colleges do not have the resources to implement high impact learning through partnerships with local businesses. This results in ineffective requisite resources and support necessary to navigate the complexities of higher education and the professional sphere. NSCC is currently engaged in a [Metro Nashville Police Department partnership](#) that provides students up to 30 hours of credits if they successfully complete law enforcement training. [NSCC also partners with Tennessee Oncology](#) to provide a 72 hour certification preparatory course targeted at ensuring students will excel on the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) exam. There are collective impact initiatives in action at the college that we are aware of. Under the leadership of the current president, Dr. Jackson, a group of 20-30 community partners have been meeting to develop a program to address the needs of students who are not persisting to graduation. However, the lack of robust college development strategies exacerbates existing disparities by ignoring or limiting access to opportunities conducive to upward social mobility.

Most models that examine student success include five sets of variables. These include: 1) student background characteristics, encompassing demographics and pre-college academic experiences, among other factors, 2) institutional structural characteristics such as mission, size and selectivity, 3) interactions with faculty, staff, and peer groups, 4) student perceptions of the learning environment, and 5) the quality of effort students invest in educationally purposeful activities (Kuh et al., 2007). Experts argue that achievement disparities result from subtle environmental factors and opportunity gaps in resource availability (Freeman, 2003). However, they often avoid spelling out racial prejudice and the current system of practice that it has influenced.

The mere discussion of race in education is becoming a political land mine (i.e. the resignation of Harvard & University of Pennsylvania Presidents, book bans, and removal/rebranding of EDI[1] programs). The SCOTUS Fair Admissions decision implies that white students outperforming Black students is either coincidental or due to the failures of Black children and obscures the presence of racism and the deliberate historical effort of white supremacy to underfund students of color (Mujtaba, 2023). The education funding gap that exists is due to the sustained withholding of resources from Black and Brown students (Ansell, 2020; Love, 2023).

Synthesis of Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

Black Males and Persistence

A preview of the studies on the ecological and sociological factors that contribute to Black male college student persistence reveal that feelings of hypervisibility and disconnection on campus lead to lower education attainment (Smith et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2004). Many students also experience challenges navigating the college system and balancing multiple roles (Kim, 2014).

The extant literature was initially grounded in the works of Tinto (1975), Pace (1984), and Astin (1984). Tinto's social and academic integration model implies that students who have positive experiences at college (in academic performance, social interactions, and peer-group interactions) are more likely to persist and ultimately graduate. Tinto's model emphasizes the importance of both social and academic integration in developing a student's sense of belonging within the college community. Tinto attributes this to positive experiences in academic performance and peer interaction fostering a sense of commitment and attachment needed to persist on their journey. Similarly, Astin (1984) theorized about student involvement in their own achievement and attributed success to student activities and organizations. Comparably, Pace (1984) created the College Student Experiences Questionnaire to assess the quality of students' efforts associated with their academic achievement and satisfaction with college (Groccia, 2018). According to Pace's findings, students gained more from their college experience when they invested more time and energy in

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[1] Equity Diversity and Inclusion

studying, interacting with their peers and teachers about substantive matters, and applying what they are learning to concrete situations and tasks.

Researchers acknowledge the *environmental* factors that minorities (especially Black males) experience at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Terrence Freeman's study of 1,708 Black male students at a community college resulted in his BPS Model (Figure 2). Freeman (2003) identified nine factors that contribute to persistence including demographics, environmental pull, social integration, and educational aspirations. More recent theories involve the use of established inventories along with culturally relevant tools like the (RIAS-B) Racial Identity Attitude Scales (Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995).

Cruce et al. (2006) and Kuh et al. (2007) have contemporaneously revealed that engagement carries compensatory implications for historically underserved and minority students. After they controlled for factors such as prior academic achievement and other variables, their findings indicate that with an increase in engagement, African American and Hispanic college students demonstrated higher levels of achievement and persistence compared to their white counterparts.

"Swigart and Murrell (2001), for example, find that African American community college students reported personal, social, and academic gains that were greater than their White counterparts' as a result of putting more effort into class assignments, involving themselves in class discussions, and using college services such as the library and computer technology" (Greene, 2008, p. 517). In their study comparing African American and White university students DeSousa and Kuh (1996) attribute greater African American gains to greater social and academic-related effort. This effort deserves additional inquiry and we intend to identify specific areas of frustration that impede or support the psychological wellbeing of Black male students at Nashville State during their pursuit of a completed credential.

Community College Engagement

"As research in this area has demonstrated, student demographics (Gibson & Slate, 2010), the activities students choose to engage in (Saenz et al., 2011), and the unique institutional cultures of individual community college settings (Dudley et al., 2015) can influence student engagement and its resulting effects." (McCarrell & Selznick, 2020, p. 406)

Student engagement has been defined through a variety of lenses (Angell, 2009; Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010). Kuh (2001) defines student engagement as the effort (both time and energy) committed to "educationally purposed activities as well as the institutional conditions that encourage students to engage in such practices" (Greene, 2008, p. 514). Kahu (2013) theorized that student engagement was an evolving construct encapturing institutional practices and student behaviors and associated with student satisfaction and achievement (McCarrell & Selznick, 2020). These practices include time on task, social and academic integration, and teaching practices. For the purpose of this study, engagement encompasses the multifaceted aspects of how students perceive, participate in, and are involved with their experiences and interactions as members of the Nashville State campus community. This includes but is not limited to their level of involvement, emotional connection, satisfaction with campus activities, academic integration, and the use of provided student resources.

The CCSSE[2] is a survey instrument established in 2001 at the University of Texas to obtain annual information about community college student participation in educational activities while in college attendance (McClenney, 2007). The following five benchmarks were assessed through the survey: (a) Active and Collaborative Learning, (b) Student Effort, (c) Academic Challenge, (d) Student-Faculty Interaction outside the classroom, and (e) Support for Learners through college services (McClenney, 2007). In 2007, more than 3.4 million students were administered the survey across 548 different community colleges. Major findings of the survey were that Active and Collaborative Learning is linked with higher grades, credit hours completed, long-term persistence, and completion. Similarly, the survey results indicated that the Student-Faculty Interaction benchmark is a consistent predictor of success and persistence. An outcome of the survey is the recognition that community colleges experience significantly higher attrition rates during the first term and first year that student's attend (McClenney, 2007).

Johnson and Stage (2018) concluded that engagement associated with the range of institutional practices mentioned above does not necessarily indicate an increased completion rate. However, it is important to note that their conclusion did not account for the fact that high-impact practices can vary from institution to institution. Kuh and Kinzie (2018) emphasize how the depth and robustness of high-impact practices are as important as the practice simply existing as part of the institution's mission.

Bomia et al. (1997) examined the motivational theories and models associated with intrinsic motivation and high impact practices for teachers. Their findings suggest that self-concept, self-esteem, and social/emotional needs drive student engagement.

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[2] Community College Survey of Student Engagement

Also, that autonomy, expectancy, instrumentality, effort, interest, satisfaction, and self-efficacy can have a positive effect on intrinsic motivation (Biddle, Goudas, Underwood, 1995). Keller (1979, p. 31) theorized that "in order to have motivated students, their curiosity must be aroused and sustained; the instruction must be perceived to be relevant to personal values or instrumental to accomplishing desired goals; they must have the personal conviction that they will be able to succeed." Bohlin, Milheim, and Viechnicki (1993) found that increased flexibility in the instruction and learner control over content improved student engagement for adult learners.

The findings suggest that for Black males and other less privileged groups approaches must take into consideration the agency, familial capital, and community in conceptualizing their resilience (Yosso, 2005; Clegg, 2011). A teacher who approaches teaching through the dominant perspective may interpret cultural differences as discipline issues, or a lack of student interest or ability. The Danielson Framework (Danielson, 2013) explicitly states that teachers and students should co-create a classroom environment that is inclusive of diverse ways of being in the world and that effective educators conduct formative assessments during the learning.

There are also colleges that have deemed it equitable to waive high stakes testing requirements for admission and have implemented authentic assessments. Culturally responsive teaching spread to many schools during the 1990s, replacing an approach that solely blames students and families for low achievement (Mensah, 2021).

Landscape and External Context

Nashville

Today, Nashville's population is increasing at a rate of almost double the US average of 7.4% (Kenworthy, 2021). Top employers are predominantly from the healthcare, finance, insurance, and education sectors. The city is known for many institutions of higher learning and is also referred to as the 'Athens of the South'.

Metro Nashville's Spatial Organization of Communities & Schools

By design, Nashville has been a city shaped by generations of policies, like *intelligent zoning*, adopted for the purpose of sidestepping federal pressure to desegregate schools. *Intelligent zoning* allowed for the creation of school zones with residential segregation patterns and formally concentrated white students in more suburban and affluent schools while Black students attended under-resourced schools (NPEF, 2022).

As it is done in many southern cities across the US, Black areas have historically seen less investment and often lack the resources available in more affluent white communities (Figure 3). Redlining, white flight, and the demolition of Black neighborhoods through urban renewal exacerbated and reinforced the segregation in Nashville that is still present to this day (NPEF, 2022). These practices impact and restrict the Black male students who are potential attendees at Nashville State Community College before they have an opportunity to set foot on its campuses.

Opportunity gaps present themselves as advantages or disadvantages passed on from one generation to the next. In spite of Nashville being the home of multiple HBCUs[3], Black males in Tennessee face a staggering education attainment gap. "Compared to their counterparts, Black men are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education, less likely to continue in their studies, and less likely to graduate." (THEC, 2021, p.3). In 2019, the college attendance rate for Black males graduating from Tennessee public high schools was 13 percentage points lower than any other student demographic category. The overall enrollment for Black male undergraduates at Tennessee public colleges and universities decreased by 16 percent from Fall 2015 to Fall 2020.

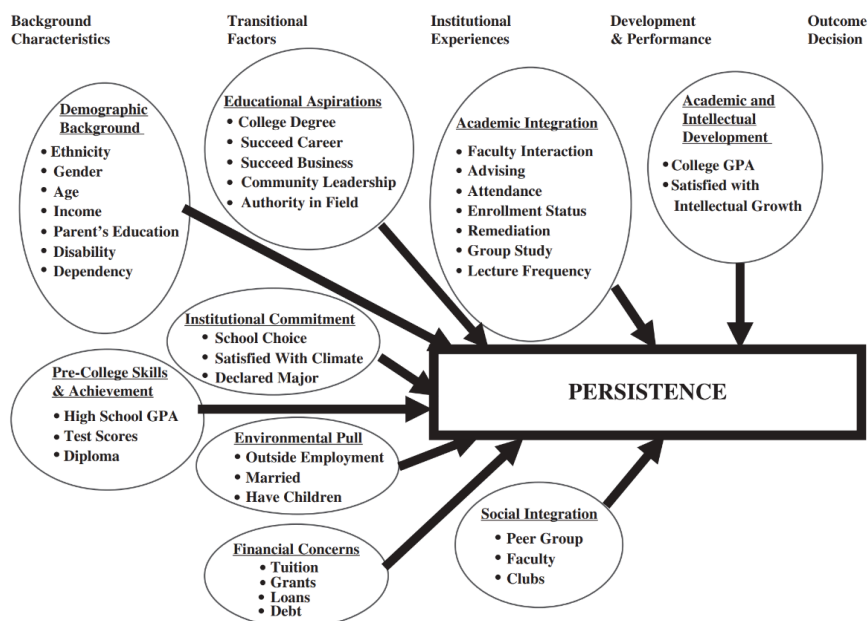Figure 2 - Freeman's Community College Persistence Framework (2003)

Fig. 1. Longitudinal BPS Model (Conceptual Framework; Freeman, 2003).

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[3] Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Figure 3 - Nashville School Construction Targeting White Residents
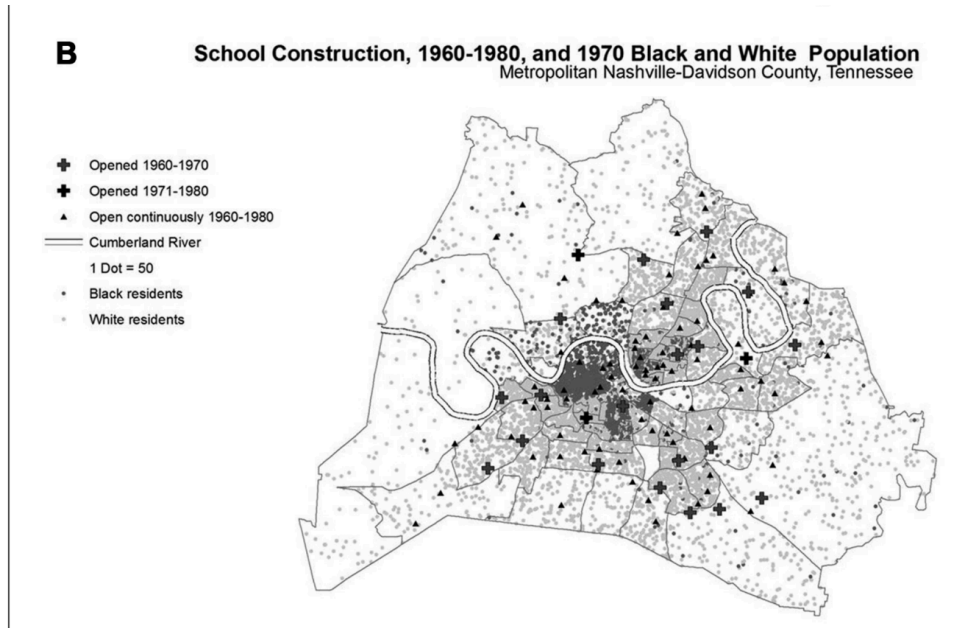
Erickson, A. T. (2012) Building inequality: The Spatial Organization of Schooling in Nashville, Tennessee, after Brown. Journal of Urban History.

Logic Model and Stakeholder Analysis

Program Theory

Our study centers around Black male students at Nashville State Community College and their experiences. Since NSCC is committed to designing and implementing a program to support Black male students through graduation, we articulated and mapped out the intended outcomes of their institution in our Logic Model. The Program Theory (Figure 4 below) features student advising. NSCC provides an extensive selection of services to support their goal of graduating students to enter family-sustaining wage jobs. Our review of the extant literature on Black males suggests

that strategic support in the form of student advising can neutralize the psychosocial dynamics that arise from the sense of "onlyness" encountered in education. A qualitative research study's findings also reveal that Black college men rely heavily on peers, campus groups, fraternities, and family members for social support (Goodwill et al., 2022). When students who have experienced difficulty with academic achievement during high school do not have these supports it can be more difficult for them to persist.

Figure 4 – Program Theory

Program Theory

1	2	3	4	5
STRATEGY	THEN...	THEN...	THEN...	GOAL
Consistent execution of Culturally Responsive Advising	Black male college students will feel supported by faculty and staff	Black male college students will feel seen and valued in the college community	Black male college students will feel less hypervisible as the population of Black males sustains and increases	Increased 3-year graduation rate of Black males to 30%

The institution's current rate for Black males is 7%.*

Logic Model

The Logic Model (Figure 5 below) represents Nashville State Community College's current interventions and services aimed at fostering their goal of increasing the 3-year graduation rate of Black male students to 30%. Key activities and outputs in their model include financial aid, textbook assistance, and academic advising. Our study is designed to inquire from primary stakeholders if there are levers within the logic model that are in need of enhancement.

Transportation is included in our Logic Model because our client expressed the belief that it was an issue for students and wanted to know more about it from the

student perspective. NSCC has a partnership with WeGo Transit that provides semester-length bus passes at no cost for students while pursuing their degree or technical certification. There is a question as to whether the current WeGo routes are available in the areas of the city where some of the matriculating Black male students reside. GIS (geographic information systems) maps and key qualitative details from the interviews can provide answers to questions that are not observable in the quantitative data.

Figure 5 – Logic Model

Nashville State Community College Logic Model
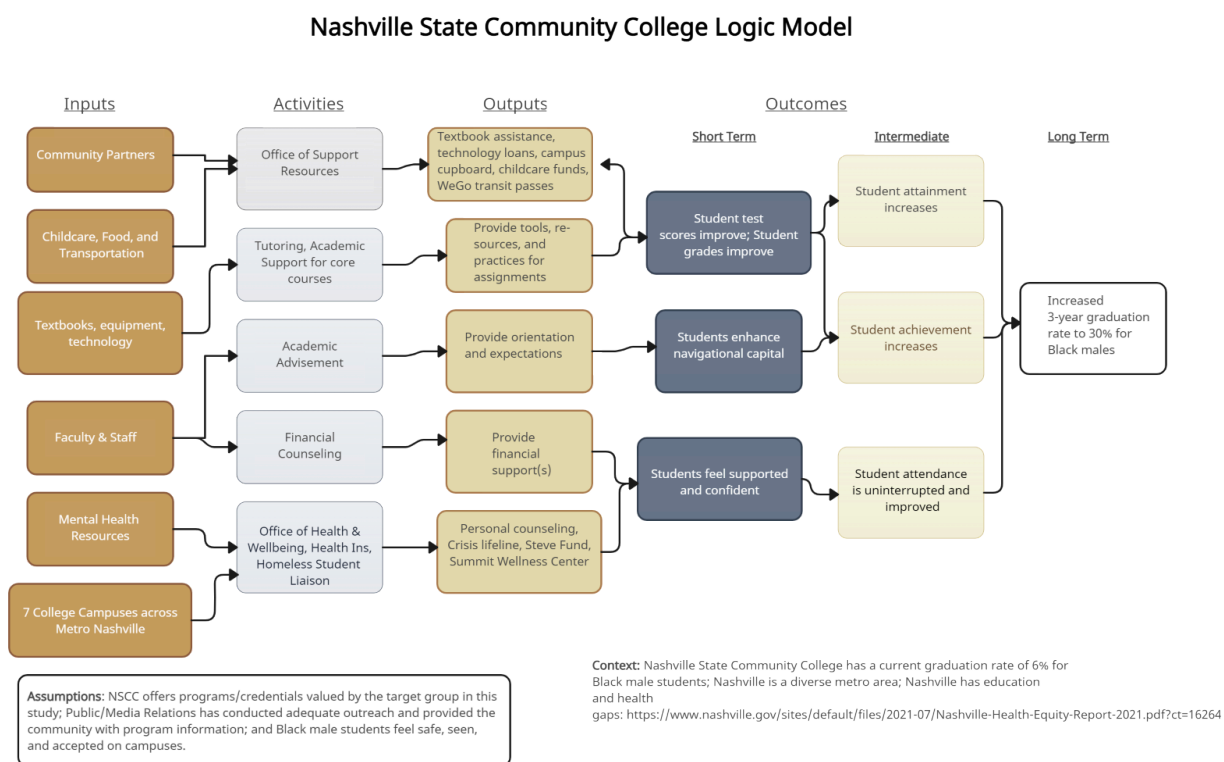
Key community partners throughout Nashville play a pivotal role in elucidating the imperative for collective impact strategies, supplementing our Logic Model (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Jackson et al., 2018). These partners encompass a diverse spectrum, spanning from private industry stakeholders to advocates invested in the academic and professional success of Black males. Former community college students might offer

invaluable and timely insights, guiding current students through the maze of academic hurdles, while exposing them to novel career trajectories and opportunities. Educational leaders, in turn, underscore the virtues of resilience, strategic networking, and the pursuit of both academic and vocational aspirations. Moreover, leveraging the rich experiences of accomplished Black professionals will aid in cultivating a profound sense of identity and belonging among Black male students, thereby facilitating resonance that extends beyond the confines of traditional learning environments.

Similarly situated community colleges in Tennessee, Pellissippi State and Southwest Community College, are engaging students in affinity groups that allow Black males the opportunity to attend specially designed programs and connect with mentors on campus. At Pellissippi State Community College, the (ABSA) Active Black Student Association gives Black students at the college an opportunity to plan and coordinate programs fostering the connections that students enjoy having to their institution (Neve, 2023).

Stakeholder Analysis

Our primary stakeholders (Figure 6) are the college students, faculty/staff, TN Board of Regents, and TN Higher Education Commission. We also include families, MNPS (Metro Nashville Public Schools), Legislators, the Mayor, Governor, and the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce. Some of our stakeholders are designated with active roles and our research design includes planned engagement with them through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. We interviewed the Executive Officer of Equity and Diversity of Metro Nashville Public Schools, the Chief of Staff and Administration of WeGo Transit, as well as prominent Black male leaders who can provide details about the social context of the city of Nashville.

Figure 6 – Stakeholder Influence Diagram
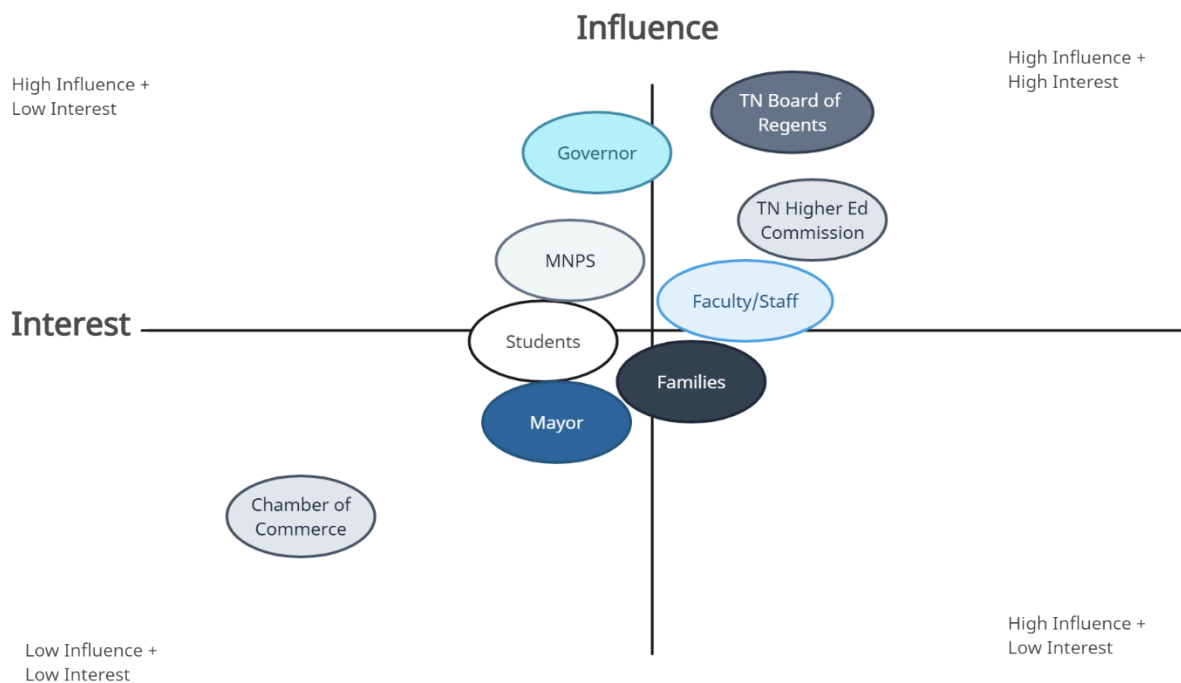
Once we identified the stakeholders and important individuals involved in our research problem, analysis was conducted to determine their influence and level of interest in the success of Black male students in community college.The stakeholders diagrammed above were incorporated into our research design to provide a 360° view of our problem from multiple positions in the Nashville community.

Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework below (Figure 7) was adapted from the Terrence Freeman 2003 model included in our review of the literature (Figure 2). We incorporated all nine of the factors from Terrence Freeman's study of community colleges and factors impacting persistence. These factors included: Demographic Background, Educational Aspirations, Academic & Intellectual Development, Academic Integration, Social Integration, Institutional Commitment, Pre-College Skills & Achievement, Environmental

Pull, and Financial Concerns. We added Transportation as a factor specific to the context of our research study, as this was mentioned as a concern during our data collection. Thus, there are ten factors appearing in our framework.

Figure 7 - Conceptual Framework for Our NSCC Research Project
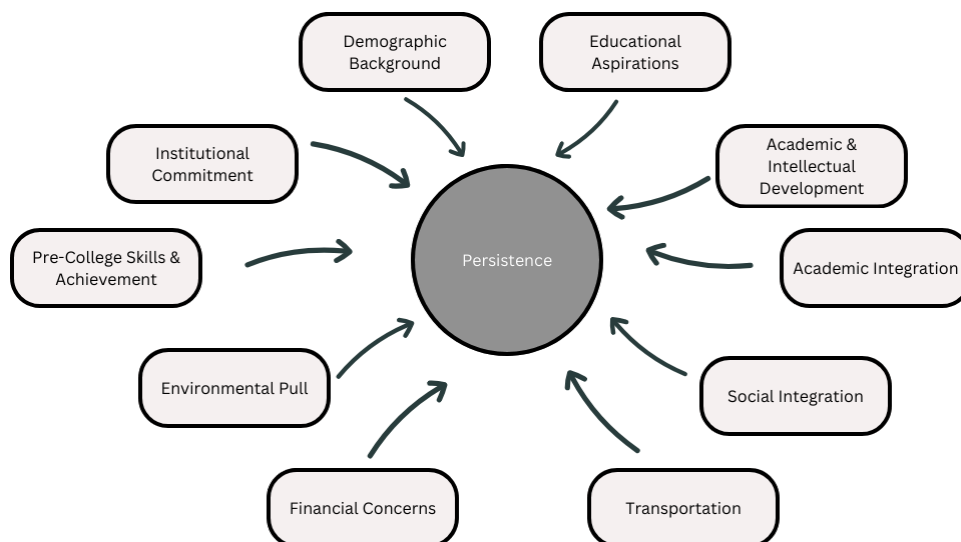
Adapted from the Freeman Longitudinal BPS Model, 2003

In order to confidently utilize this adapted framework we created a tool to analyze the 10 factors that have been identified. This tool for further analysis of these factors can be found in our Findings section. Our analysis tool lists each of the 10 factors and all of our sources of data as a cross section that we color-coded to indicate when these factors were present. Our chart of these factors (Appendix A) organizes them to allow us to clearly observe what impacts persistence as indicated in our sources of data during this study. The questions used in our focus groups, surveys, and interviews were designed to extract responses that would implicate the most impactful factors of persistence for Black male students at Nashville State Community College.

Project Questions

To identify the external and internal factors that impact the persistence of Black male students and make recommendations to increase the success of Black male students at Nashville State Community College we formulated the following research questions:

R1   What do Black males need to persist on NSCC campuses?

R1a   What is the perspective of Black male students regarding persistence and their experiences at NSCC?

R1b   What concerns do the campus community and community partners have about how to best support Black male students at NSCC?

R2   Do the graduation rates of Black male students differ from other groups at NSCC? If so, what are the differences?

R2a   What are the social and ecological factors that contribute to the success of other subgroups at NSCC?

Leadership at Nashville State Community College has also expressed a great deal of interest in learning more about transportation as a factor that might be an issue for some of their Black male students. In addition to analyzing student-level data, our study observes the physical locations of the college campuses, student zip codes, and public transit routes using GIS as a tool for proximal measurement.

Project Design

DATA

"better understanding the needs of the community from the community" was critical to priority-setting…" (Jackson et al., 2018, p. 113)

We adopted a transformative approach for our research to provide guardrails that provided a picture of our target population's human capital and other assets to their community (as opposed to a deficit framing). With this vital data as a guide, a sustaining program could be designed that reflects both the extant literature and the current social context of the city of Nashville.

The voices of those in the community who have not been included in policy and community decision making were centered and prioritized in our data collection (see Data Collection Plan Figure 8).

Figure 8 – Data Collection Plan [Aligned to Research Questions]
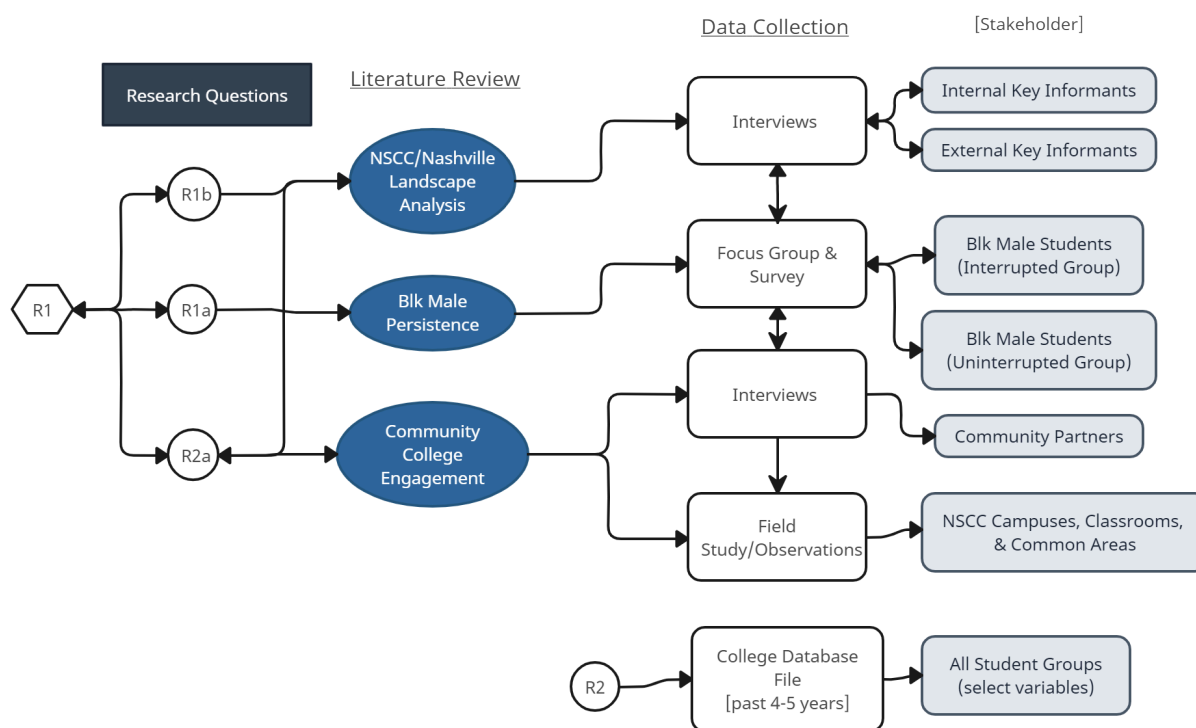
Interviews

Data collection began in the Fall of 2023 with a series of 15 stakeholder interviews. The interviewees represented three categories: (1) internal to NSCC, (2) external to NSCC, and (3) the community partners. The internal interviewees consisted of staff and administrators employed at NSCC who interacted with Black male students directly (Figure 9). The external interviewees consisted of stakeholders and professionals who worked in organizations in Nashville connected with education or

services that impact Black males at NSCC. The community partners were selected from a group of professionals across Nashville who attended quarterly meetings at Nashville State Community College as part of a Black Male Student Initiative that was formed by the college president, Dr. Shanna L. Jackson.

Figure 9 - Internal, External, and Community Partner Interviewee Roles/Titles

EXTERNAL INTERVIEWEES

- EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF EDI, METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
- CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, WEGO TRANSIT
- CEO TENNESSEE EDUCATORS OF COLOR ALLIANCE
- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF LEADERSHIP, VUMC
- MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY/BOARD CHAIR NSCC STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- FORMER FISK BOARD MEMBER AND VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY FACULTY
- PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER, MEHARRY MEDICAL COLLEGE
- CAPTAIN, METRO NASHVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT
- MANAGER, DELIOTTE [NSCC FINANCE ALUMNI]
- INSTRUCTOR & PROGRAM COORDINATOR, MEHARRY MEDICAL COLLEGE

INTERNAL INTERVIEWEES

- DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SUCCESS/NSCC STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER
- DIRECTOR OF NSCC WELCOME CENTER & CAREER SERVICES
- DIRECTOR OF NSCC DONOR RELATIONS & PROGRAMS/GEMS METRO AREA
- NSCC STUDENT RESOURCE MANAGER/ SOCIAL WORKER
- DIRECTOR OF GEMS CLARKSVILLE & STUDENT SERVICE SPECIALIST II

Focus Groups

We conducted two Focus Groups with Black male students at Nashville State Community College. These Focus Groups were attended by a total of 18 students who provided valuable details about their experiences at NSCC. The Focus Groups were conducted on two different campuses; the White Bridge Road Campus, and the Southeast Campus. These are the two campuses that have the highest number of Black males in attendance.

Surveys

During the Focus Groups with Black male students on Nashville State Community College campuses, a survey was distributed to collect additional details about the participants (i.e. employment, age, major, and utilization of college support

services). Additional survey data was collected from Black males on other campuses during our visits to enhance our landscape analysis and observations.

NSCCs Student Information System

Deidentified data from NSCC's Student Information System was provided for quantitative analysis. Using the variables shown in Appendix B, we observed what (descriptively) NSCC's student body looks like over a five-year period. Essential in this data were the GPAs of all students for statistical analyses of the differences of the mean GPAs of groups by race/ethnicity. In addition, the zip codes, high school GPA, income level, and marital status provide layers to inform us about the students in attendance in relation to their academic performance.

Landscape Analysis & Observations

We intended to conduct formal observations on each campus in public spaces (classrooms, student centers, and common areas) as a means of obtaining data on student engagement. We created an observation tool based on the CCSSE but Nashville State provided us with a copy of their survey results compiled from the most recent semester (spring 2023). The CCSSE survey provides data that measures how well Nashville State Community College is doing in the area of student engagement compared to other community colleges and includes very specific ratings of the outputs provided by the college from the perspective of their students.

Another aspect of our landscape study involved providing a comparison of the services and academic achievement levels of Black male students at similarly situated colleges in Tennessee.

METHODS

We conducted a mixed-methods study collecting data from Black male students, experts from our stakeholder groups, and multiple sources who work in proximity with Black male NSCC students. A transformative paradigm is an approach used in studies involving marginalized communities and centers their experiences. Transformational research is also utilized to analyze power differentials that lead to marginalization and provides recommendations for actions intended to mitigate disparities (Jackson et al., 2018).

Analysis of all quantitative and qualitative data in our study involved using triangulation as a methodology (Figure 10 below) to confirm trends in our data observed

from two or more different sources. Interview data triangulated with NSCC Student System data, and Focus Group data strengthens the validity of our findings. Therefore, to answer our first research question (our culminating research question) we used data collected from all sources about all NSCC campuses.

Qualitative research was recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai software. Otter.ai was also used as a tool to analyze the repetition of words and phrases for observable patterns in the data collected. Transcripts were coded using matrices to analyze and identify quotes and details that match the criteria of academic concepts from extant literature. During this process, the research team met in person to read and reread the transcripts for a thorough evaluation.

Triangulation Methodology

Use of Primary and Secondary sources

Study of the main bibliographic sources

Synthesis of Evidence

Primary Factors impacting persistence & Recommendations *

Analytics of NSCC Student Information data & Survey

Quantitative data
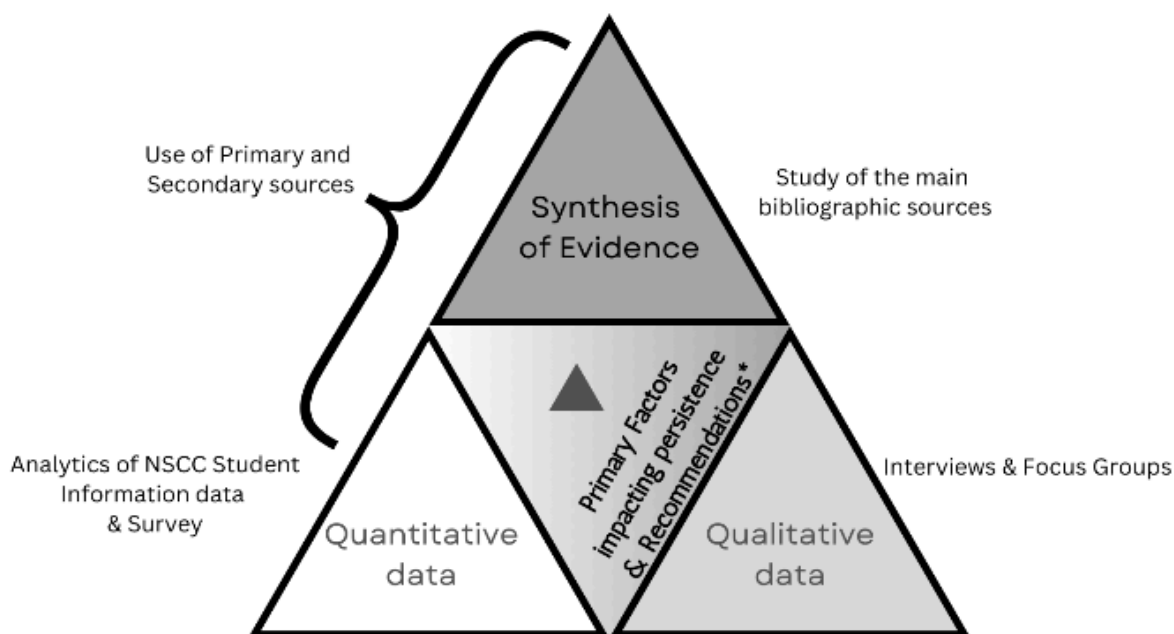
Qualitative data

Interviews & Focus Groups

Figure 10- Adapted from 'Evaluation and Program Planning' (Atutxa et al., 2021)

Quantitative data obtained from the Student Information System was cleaned and assorted before running T-Tests (Figures 15 and 16 in the Findings section) and Chi Square estimates. Zip codes were analyzed by first observing students in the data file to

produce a list of the areas in Nashville where most of the college's Black males resided. Once the list was produced, we utilized GIS to create a layered map of the WeGo bus stops and routes in proximity to the top four zip codes.

Survey data collected from Black male students was used to interpret student data from this smaller sample for deeper background data in connection with the data from the discussions of our focus groups. In keeping with our statement of confidentiality, a 6-digit code was used to connect each survey to our focus group forms that students used to write comments to answer each question that was also discussed. Both interview and focus group protocol tools were composed to align directly with three specific aspects of our study: Black males and Persistence, Interventions for NSCC, and our Landscape & Ecological Analysis (Figure 11).

Figure 11 – Focus Group Questions [for Black male students with Interruptions in Attendance]

Stakeholder	Ecological & Landscape	Black Male Persistence & Success	Interventions for NSCC

Black Male NSCC students [Interrupted Group; White Bridge Campus & Southeast Campus]			
	2. What three words or phrases would you use to describe Nashville State Community College?	3. What does success look like to you?	1. NSCC wants to learn how it can best support its Black male students while they are applying to, attending and graduating from the college. Knowing that is their goal, how do you think they can succeed in the future? Is there anything that they could improve?
	4. What does 'persistence' mean to you? Or How do you define persistence?	7. What capital [skills or experience] do you feel you already possessed prior to enrolling at NSCC?	
	9. What do you think keeps Black men from attending Nashville State?	8. If you have experienced a pause in your enrollment at Nashville State Community College, what was the cause of the pause?	5. What attracted you to Nashville State Community College?
	10. From an academic standpoint, do you think you belong at Nashville State?	14. What do you think keeps Black men from completing their degree or certification at Nashville State Community College?	6. What do you think attracts other Black men to Nashville State Community College?
	11. From a social standpoint, how much do you feel you belong at Nashville State?		13. Has Nashville State hindered you from feeling like you belong academically or socially? Please provide specific examples.
	12. Do you feel that you have opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities at NSCC?	15. What have you done to help yourself feel like you belong academically?	15. Imagine that later today you talk to a Black male student at Nashville State. He is thinking he will drop out and asks you for help. What advice would you give him? What resources in the community would you point him to?
	16. Did you attend high school in Nashville?	18. In order from greatest impact to least impact, rate the factors that affect you the most:[] Social Integration [] Financial Concerns [] Environmental Pull [] Institutional Commitment [] Pre-College Skills []Educational Aspirations [] Background, Race & Gender [] Academic Integration [] Academic Intellectual Development	
	17. In what ways do your experiences at NSCC differ from your experience during high school?		

One question [question 18] was an opportunity to gain a keen understanding of which internal and external factors were the most impactful on their persistence. We used the Freeman BPS Model (Figure 2) from our review of the literature to provide this list of options. Additional protocol tools used for our other stakeholders (Appendix C, Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F) were organized in this same structure.

A final question that we asked during the Focus Groups was concerning transportation. We instructed students to use the focus group form (Appendix G) to write their opinion of transportation as our last prompt asking if there was anything that we did not mention that they would like to discuss.

LIMITATIONS

Sample Size

Survey data include responses from 22 Black male students from three of the seven campuses we visited during this study. Most students respondents were first year students [19 out of 22]. Our initial research plan set out to recruit an equal number of students who experienced interruptions and students who had not experienced interruptions. Looking at the data from a macro level, we observe that not many Black males are still matriculating after their second year at NSCC and locating these students presents a challenge overall for the college. As such, our findings are primarily inclusive of reporting perceptions of factors that impede persistence for Black male students in their first few semesters at NSCC. The distribution of ages attending NSCC over the past 4 years (Appendix H) reflects the ratio of student participants in our focus group and survey. This increases the generalizability of our sample as a smaller representative of the students enrolled.

Regional Differences

Each of the seven campuses of Nashville State Community College are located in distinct communities separated by 50 miles or more and sometimes in completely

different cities. On the campuses located in suburban areas (Clarksville for example), Black male students said they did not have any issues with transportation because they all owned a vehicle. At the White Bridge campus, the students were more likely to use ride apps or WeGo Transit. On the Clarksville and Southeast campuses, Black male students were more likely to say they had supportive families. The Black males on the White Bridge campus expressed that their families were an added responsibility. Having less variance in our findings that was based on the specific campus the students attended would have increased the generalizability of our study.

Current Transit Routes

We acknowledge that the WeGo Transit map we obtained was created on August 14th, 2023, and does not include bus routes that have been discontinued over the past five years. The current bus routes were layered with a map using GIS that shows the four zip codes with the highest numbers of Black male students in matriculation at NSCC over a period of five years (Figure 17). This means that it is possible there were additional routes in the past that existed during this timeframe that have been discontinued. The bus stops include the park and ride locations in RTA participating counties. The rail stations of the WeGo Star are also included.

Findings

Research Question 1: What do Black males need to persist on NSCC campuses?

Our questions asked during the focus groups provided more depth into this research question. However, our internal interviewees [who worked at Nashville State Community College] were extremely helpful in providing details that were validated by the Black male students who provided insights about their experiences.

28

Throughout data collection, we observed four major factors impacting persistence at NSCC; Environmental Pull (Financial Concerns), Academic Integration, Academic Achievement [Intellectual Development], and Pre-College Skills. Although Transportation was also mentioned often as a factor, it only impacts Black male students at certain NSCC campuses. The Chief Administrative Officer at WeGo Transit confirmed our findings that certain corridors of Nashville are better for public transit than others.

Black male students expressed an interest in "learning something new and careers to explore" and specified in their written responses during focus groups that NSCC should "add more programs like the big colleges where students can learn more about their job field". One student even wrote that the college should provide internships for Black students. In essence, they are not interested in *social* engagement, but they are more interested in engaging in exploratory and developmental activities and training that would make them more competitive as they enter the workforce.

Figure 12 below illustrates how we were able to observe and analyze the factors from Terrence Freeman's adapted model by looking through the evidence collected over the course of the study. Using the tool below we coded the factors that were evident from each source as most impactful. As defined by Freeman's model, Environmental Pull arises from outside employment, marriage, and having children/dependents (Figure 13). Environmental Pull and Financial Concerns were so closely linked in our study that we combined them into a single factor. The specific circumstances that participants described as an Environmental Pull were financial in nature or could be easily resolved by financial means. Students mentioned the drain of having to leave work and spend money to travel to campus via Uber and how having other outside responsibilities to others in their families (children) interferes with their ability to focus on their studies. Additional finances could afford them access to resources such as their own vehicle or childcare and resolve this pull from their external environment.
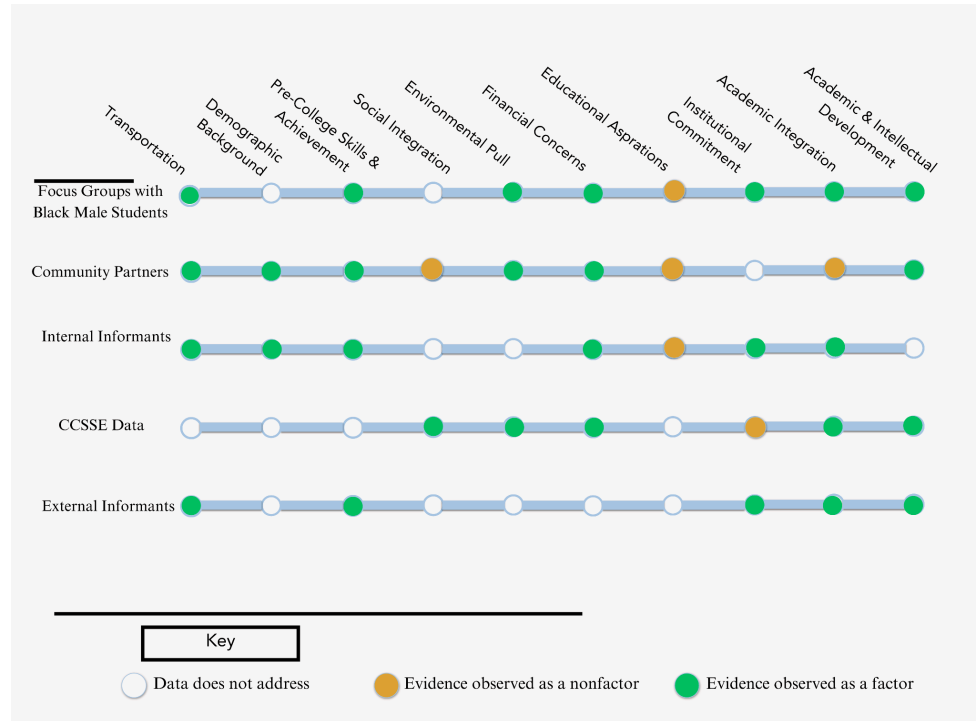
Figure 12 - Factor Analysis Tool

Figure13 - Definitions of the Freeman BPS Model Concepts

Definitions of Concepts from the Terence Freeman Model (2003)

- Academic [Intellectual Development] Achievement - college GPA, satisfied with intellectual growth
- Pre-College Skills & Achievement - high school GPA, test scores, diploma
- Institutional Commitment - school choice, satisfied with climate, declared major
- Environmental Pull - outside employment, married, have children
- Financial Concerns - tuition, loans, grants, debt
- Academic Integration - faculty interaction, advising, attendance, enrollment status, remediation, group study, lecture frequency
- Social Integration - peer group, faculty
- Demographic Background - ethnicity, gender, age, income, parent's education, disability, and dependency
- Educational Aspirations - college degree, succeed career, succeed business, community leadership, authority in field

As a testament to the precision and depth of Terrence Freeman's model, all of the factors above were found in our data. We also observed a pattern of which factors resurfaced most frequently in our interviews, focus groups, and quantitative resources like GPA analyses, the 2023 CCSSE survey, and our survey in Qualtrics.

When asked in our survey (Appendix I and Appendix J) if additional engagement activities or services would have prevented the Black male students in our focus groups from taking a break in enrollment, all students who this scenario applied to said, "Yes." When we asked the Black male students if they would like to see additional coursework or activities offered at NSCC, eighty-five percent said, "Yes." As we encouraged them to expand on these two questions, they specified greater interest in additional coursework than activities. When we asked them if they would want to have more visits from guest lecturers or experts in their field to answer questions and mentor them, they unanimously agreed.
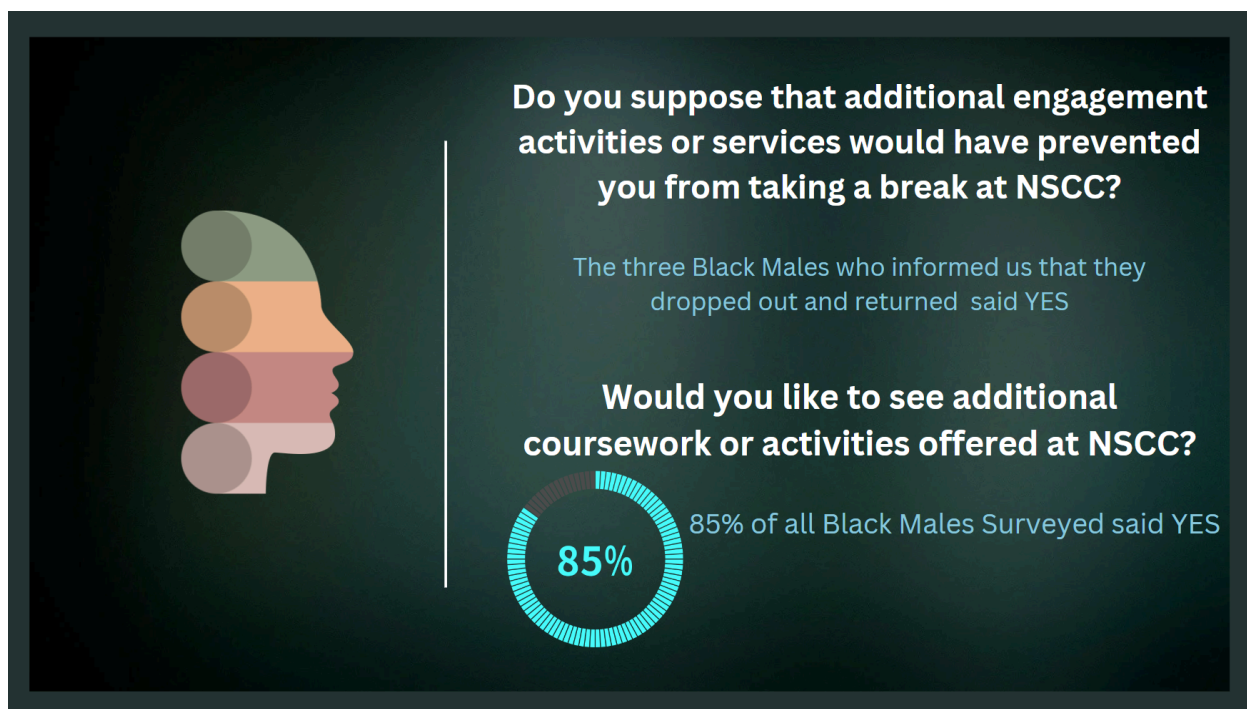
External interviewees expressed concern about a variety of challenges faced by Black male students in the education system. A local expert at VUMC highlighted systemic inequities and a lack of alignment between high schools and colleges. Another local expert noted that persistence and staying organized are key to achieving goals, especially for African Americans. He stated, as a parent of Black males, that it is important to fully understand what Black males need at NSCC before giving advice or connecting them with resources.

Several students expressed a lack of comfort with asking for help. One student wrote, "But I feel like a lot of us Blacks don't like to ask for help or don't like to use help." This is evidence that Black males may require a more enhanced introduction to the support services provided at NSCC. As first generation college students, many of them are not aware that students at other local institutions do not have a food pantry and other services that are available at Nashville State.

Research Question 1a: What is the perspective of Black male students regarding persistence and their experiences at NSCC?

Focus Groups

During the focus groups, participants expressed concern about the value of college and skepticism about the return on investment. Black male students

"I feel like our Community College... it's a little harder to belong"

Student Focus Group Participant

expressed the unique challenges that go along with being a first-generation college student, including learning to balance work, school, and family responsibilities. Students

suggest improving the campus experience by providing more activities and events, expert lectures, and better orientation and welcoming events. Black male students shared their appreciation for help provided by professors, but also shared their mentality [as Black males] of self-reliance and determination to succeed despite limited support in other areas.

The statements made by students in our three focus groups on Nashville State Community College campuses were coded and resulted in three major themes connecting primarily with community college engagement, challenges to persistence, and additional social/ecological factors.

Community College Engagement

"We'll just come for classes and leave and go to work, or go home."
Student Focus Group Participant

NSCC students who participated in focus groups stated a sense of disconnection from the college and disconnection from their prospective careers. Many students expressed feelings of reduced social cohesion and expressed interest in more programs that would demystify some of the day-to-day aspects of the majors they selected at Nashville State Community College.

When we asked students to elaborate on the types of activities they were interested in, they also mentioned food and additional opportunities to connect in a group setting. One student said, "And

"I feel like that's one of the big things is that a Community College does not have enough involvement."
Student Focus Group Participant

most of the time, even if everybody's not on the same kind of aspect as you... coming to school most of the time y'all got the same environmental things going around you so that's what you can also bond on." During the time we spent on the campuses we observed students arriving in their vehicles with small lunch bags from home or gas stations nearby.

The evidence suggests that while most Black male students have very little extra time for activities outside work, school, and their other responsibilities, they flourish when given opportunities for interpersonal connections on campus (Dudley et al, 2016; Goodwill et al, 2022). Could these opportunities be integrated into college courses and programs to enhance how students are learning? And that their well being includes their psychosocial health?

> "We don't know what to do when we get burned out, when we have financial problems we just try to thug it out and when it don't work we go back home."
>
> Student Focus Group Participant

Challenges to Persistence

The evidence from our focus groups also suggests that Black male students at NSCC are not comfortable with asking for help. They also reported knowing about the support services provided by Nashville State Community College but fewer than forty percent of the students we surveyed actually utilize those support services. When one student voluntarily mentioned that he was accustomed to just going it alone instead of asking for help, the rest of the students vocally announced that this was also common behavior for them. While Black male students who participated in our focus groups said that they appreciate their professors and admitted that they received the additional support from them, as needed, in their academic course content, they are not always

Do you know about NSCCs Support Services?

87%

87% said YES
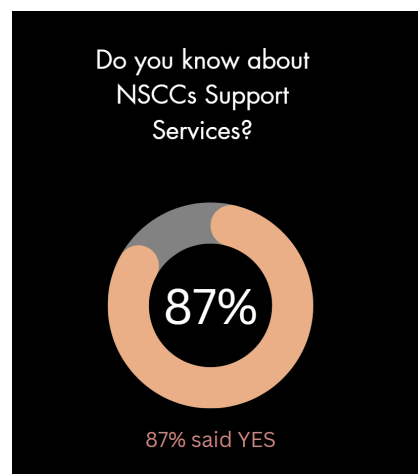
comfortable with opening up to them when they have a problem that the college resources might be able to resolve.

Social & Ecological Factors

The students who reside closer to the downtown Nashville area expressed that they experienced more obstacles relating to Environmental Pull and Financial Concerns. However, this was not voiced as an issue at the Clarksville campus which is an example of how although Black male students share a lot of the same experiences, they are not monolithic and should also not be viewed primarily

> "Have kids, have bills, have other important things to do"
>
> Student Focus Group Participant

from a deficit framing. We used our research questions as an opportunity to also celebrate these students for their resilience and acknowledge their strengths.

Survey Results

Our survey provided relevant background data and direct questions regarding the use of support services, knowledge of support services, employment, age, interaction with professors, and college majors. These questions were used to help us make important connections between the background and environment of the respondents and some of their answers during our focus groups.

While eighty-seven percent of respondents said that they are aware of NSCC support services like textbook assistance, childcare, and bus passes, only sixty-one percent of those same students utilized those services.

Majors of the Black Male Students we surveyed:

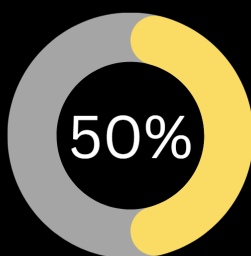|		
Computer Programming	Business Administration	Business Management
Mechanical Engineering	Computer Science	Visual Communication
Computer Engineering	Marketing and Business	Accounting
Civil Engineering	General Ed	Finance
Cybersecurity	Civil Engineering	

The majors listed above that were reported as selected by the Black male students who participated in our focus groups (Appendix K) reveal a great deal of ambition. These are not the majors of students who just want to scrape by. This further supports the evidence that Black male students who are enrolled at NSCC value their education and aspire to do big things in spite of what the GPA data communicates.

Do you interact with faculty or staff outside the classroom at NSCC? [during office hours]

50%

50% of Black male students at NSCC surveyed said YES

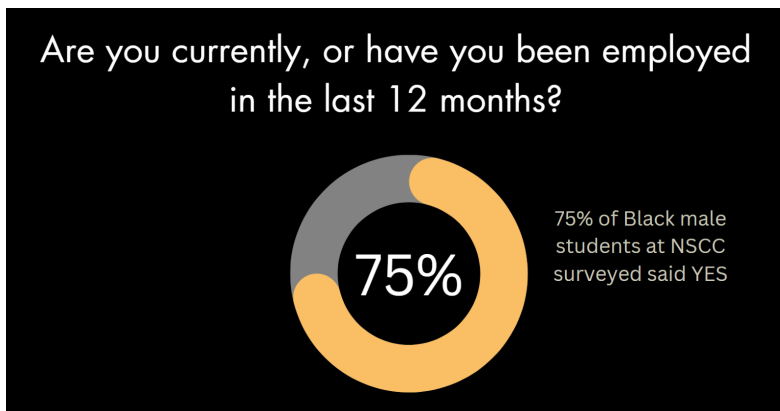When asked about their interactions with NSCC faculty and staff, fifty percent of Black male students surveyed stated they take advantage of this resource. To find out exactly how many of these same students might have the additional time in their schedules to spend after the conclusion of their classes we asked if they were currently employed. Seventy-five percent of the

Black male students we surveyed at NSCC were employed at the time of the survey or in the past 12 months.

One of our external interviewees, the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness at VUMC[1], emphasized the fact that persistence requires responses from those in the environment of students who are working to overcome challenges and noted that many male students of color work 20-30 hours a week while pursuing their education.

Are you currently, or have you been employed in the last 12 months?

75%

75% of Black male students at NSCC surveyed said YES

Research Question 1b: What concerns do the campus community and community partners have about how to best support Black male students at NSCC?

Major concerns of Community Partners and staff were that the Student Center had difficulty connecting with Black male students, leading to delayed registration and potential loss of enrollment opportunities. The campus community members intimated that Black male students are brilliant but unaware of their potential, with many facing challenges in academics and career development. Another campus partner opined that Black males will be more attracted to Nashville State if they can see the value in the programs offered and have a clear understanding of their career goals. Ultimately, it was suggested by respondents that NSCC could help students navigate general education requirements and reach their desired classes if structured pathways for students were implemented.

"…seeing an end goal, seeing what if I go to Nashville State, what does the career path look like?… What are the career options for me?… we need more people who they trust to come in and say hey, have you thought about this kind of job or this kind of career and we can get you to this place"

The quote above, by Nashville State's Director of the Welcome Center & Career Center validates the students survey responses and statements during the focus groups.

Research Question 2: Do the graduation rates of Black male students differ from other groups at NSCC? If so, what are the differences?

Our analysis for this question consisted of T-Tests to observe the differences of means for overall GPA between Black Males and Other Comparison Groups for each cohort (Figure 14 and 15). Note that the students who self-identified as both Black and mixed with Latinx were added to the Black racial group. This was a small number of students [less than 190] from our data sample of about 2000 Black male students.

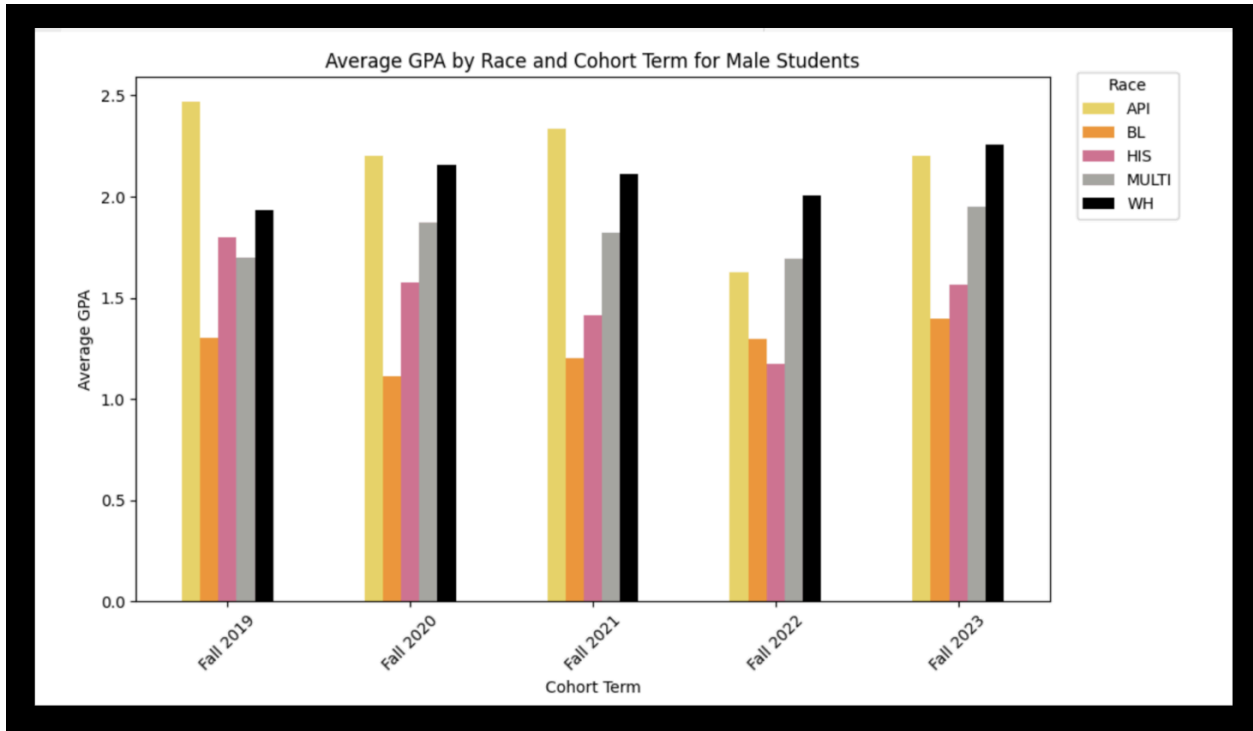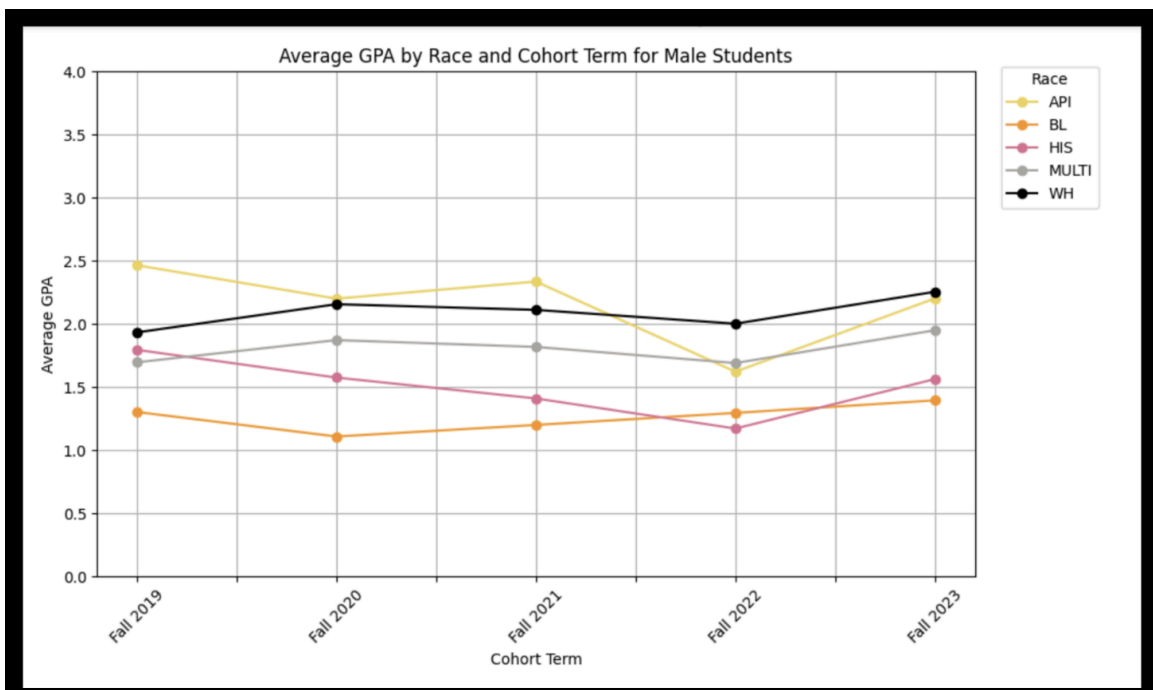Figure 14 - Average GPA by Race and Cohort Term for Male Students at NSCC

Figure 15 - Average GPA by Race and Cohort Term for Male Students at NSCC

While Black male students were the group with the lowest GPA from 2019 to 2021, the GPA of Hispanic males dip just below them during the Fall of 2022. By the next year, in the Fall of 2023, the GPA of Black male students decreased again (this is more visible in Figure 15). Also noticeable is that the GPA's of both the API students and Hispanic students decreased in 2022, then went back up in the Fall of 2023. We were later informed that the college initiated small groups meetings for Black males called CORE during this time.The meetings were discontinued over time and NSCC is planning to resume a program soon.

We also compared the mean GPA of Black males to additional subgroups at NSCC, including Black females (Appendix L). We observed that Black females have higher GPAs than Black males on average over the same period of 5 years. Black females have a GPA ranging from 1.47 to 2.0 while Black males range from 1.11 to 1.51 during this time period (2018 - 2023). Hispanic females [1.91 to 2.93], API females [2.43 to 2.54] and Multiracial females [1.93 to 2.35] also have higher GPAs than Black male students on average.

Research Question 2a: What are the social and ecological factors that contribute to the success of other subgroups at NSCC?

The staff at NSCC, community partners, and students stated the following three reasons as explanations of why other minority groups were able to persist at higher rates at NSCC:

- Family support systems
- Skill set adequate for college
- And Socially mobile cliques

Other subgroups at NSCC are said to have one or more of the above factors at their advantage upon arrival, or develop some form of these during their attendance in college. The most current literature regarding Latinx [particularly Mexican] students indicates that while they are traditionally family-oriented, they are becoming more assimilated and by the third generation 'familism' begins to decline as they become more individualistic depending on various factors (Landale et al, 2006).

Discussion

Our study finds that the primary factors impacting the persistence of Black male students are: Environmental Pull (Financial Concerns), Academic Integration, and Pre-College Skills & Achievement (Academic & Intellectual Development). While some students identified transportation as an issue, others outright said it was not an issue. This depended on where the students resided in Metro Nashville. GIS mapping and analysis of WeGo bus routes layered with the zip codes of Black male students in Nashville reveals that there are very few bus routes in southwest Nashville where a larger number of the students of color reside. Due to the remote distances that some of the campuses are located from the downtown area, students do not largely depend on WeGo for transportation to access their campus(es).

Figure 16 - Conceptual Framework Highlighting the Factors Impacting Persistence at NSCC
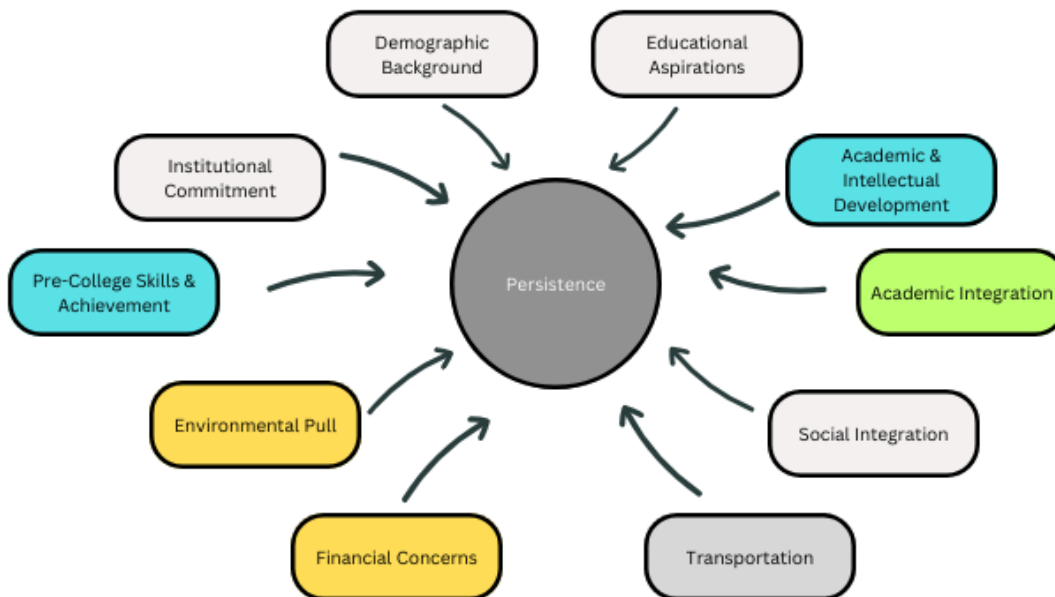
Adapted from the Freeman Longitudinal BPS Model, 2003

Factors and Linkages

Academic Intellectual Development and Pre-College Skills & Achievement largely overlap in their focus on GPA (high school GPA leading to college GPA) and the level that Black males are "satisfied with intellectual growth" (Fierson, 2009, p.244). We used the same colors for these factors in Figure 16 where we indicate the top persistence factors for Black males. Although our students expressed a sense of belonging at NSCC, they selected Academic Development as one of their highest factors impacting their persistence.

Environmental Pull and Financial Concerns also overlap. When we asked what do you think keeps Black males from attending NSCC most students answered stating "financial reasons" and "personal struggles". The reality for the Black male students we spoke with was also that the factors in their environment with pull were financial factors. One student who had experienced an interruption in his attendance revealed that he "Had a child and had to start bringing in more income" during focus groups. Transportation connects with financial concerns for the students who expressed they were spending money on ride apps and clocking additional time after work to travel to classes. Although NSCC does provide ample financial assistance for students with significant needs, we were informed that issues arise when students do not submit their applications and documentation for financial aid with enough time to receive their aid before the semester begins.

Academic Integration was the factor that received the most attention during our discussions with students and with Black male leaders in Nashville. The students expressed concern for their professional development and expressed strong interest in academic programming that included work-based learning opportunities. Many students responded in their answers included in our focus group packets that they were "just here to get my education" and that engagement and "class options" might be the reason that Black males are not attracted to Nashville State Community College.

NSCC Staff and students also expressed concern about the level of engagement overall that gives students an opportunity to form a connection with the college when they are on campus. When we asked how Nashville State Community College can help students feel they belong here one student wrote in their focus group answers that they would like to "have some events that grab our interest." Another student said, "it can be boring sometimes." Some students mentioned that there were "better colleges around" that might seem more appealing to Black males here in Nashville. Some of them

suggested adding sports or activities like basketball. There is a court on one campus but the students complained that the goal needed to be repaired.

Some of the data suggests there could be a need for NSCC to expand marketing and promotion across specific communities. When asked what keeps Black males from attending Nashville State, one student answered "not knowing the benefits". Another student shared that students might not want to "do school all over again". Nashville State could benefit from also highlighting some of the education-employer partnerships they have in place and making sure prospective students are aware of their variety of program options.

Transportation

NSCC Staff and students agreed that transportation was an issue, but not public transit [WeGo] because most of the students used ride apps or their own vehicles. Issues that were reported with ride apps were more about the inconvenience of waiting and paying for multiple trips. These students were primarily on the White Bridge campus. Looking at current WeGo transit bus routes layered over the highest populated zip codes (Figure 17) you can see why some students do not use WeGo transit. For students living in the 37042 zip code there are only one or two routes available. The 37042 zip code is one of the top four zip codes for Black male students currently matriculating at the college. The yellow circles on the map indicate where the four highest zip codes are located. The purple dots are bus stops and the blue lines are WeGo bus routes.

Figure 17 - WeGo Bus Routes with Zip Codes of Most Black Male NSCC Students

NUMBER OF STUDENTS	ZIP CODE
N = 1480	37013
N = 880	37042
N = 807	37211
N = 574	37040
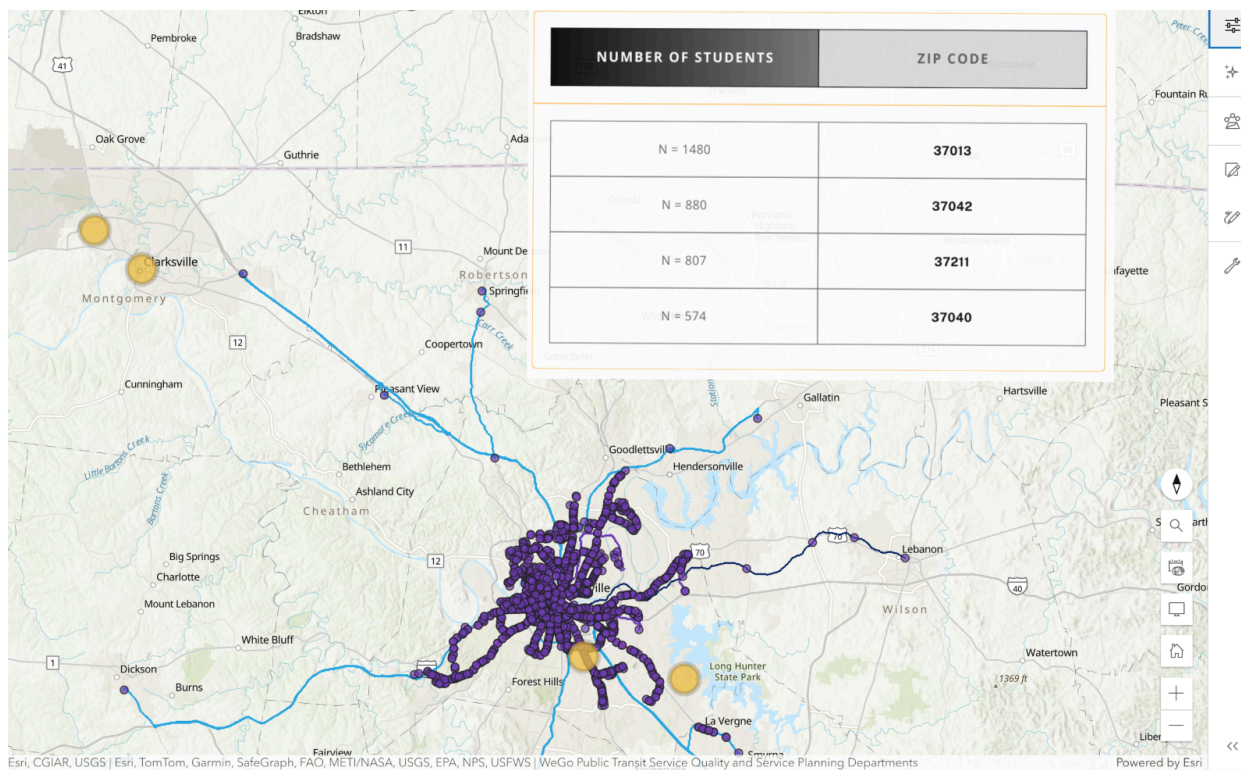
The Clarksville campus is serviced by the Clarksville City Transit System comprising eight bus routes. There are no WeGo Transit routes there and the Black male students who we encountered on Clarksville's campus have their own cars.

Additional Observations

Additional quantitative analyses that we found important to note were observed in a graph that we created of the Metro Nashville High Schools attended by Black male students currently matriculating at Nashville State Community College (Appendix M). The high schools with the highest number of Black males is Cane Ridge High. This informs NSCC of which feeder schools are graduating Black males who are evidenced as a good fit for their college. However, we do not intend to deter their outreach efforts across the city.

Also, we created a graphic to depict the numbers of first-generation students by subgroups attending Nashville State Community College (Appendix N). This figure provides a visual comparison. Surprisingly, there are more first-generation students who are from the Latinx [70.5%], API [58.7%], and Multiracial [53.3%] subgroups than Black [47.3%] or white [40.2%] student groups.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we recommend that Nashville State Community College consider the following:

I.   Career-based mentoring programs on NSCC campuses

Both internal and external informants underscored the importance of providing Black males at NSCC with opportunities that are aligned with career or vocational exploration as a means of increasing persistence. Career-based mentoring can help students connect their education to real-world career opportunities, motivating them to persist and complete their programs of study. An added benefit would be that NSCC students would be linked with mentors in their field of interest, which may turn into opportunities for internships, future employment, and the development of time-management, communication, and better study habits - all of which are vital for academic success. These skills will also prove to be helpful for transitioning from a job to a career - particularly since seventy-five percent (75%) of Black males students surveyed stated they have been employed in the last 12-months. By addressing the unique needs of Black male students at NSCC, a robust mentoring program can improve persistence and increase the likelihood of Black male students successfully completing their degrees or certificates.

II.   Increase collective impact strategies and corporate partnerships

Increasing collective impact strategies and corporate partnerships can greatly benefit Black male students at NSCC by providing a forum for holistic support and the exposure to career paths that may not appear to be within reach. True collective impact strategies convene various stakeholders, including community organizations, educational institutions, businesses, and governmental agencies to move the needle on important topics like persistence and retention for underrepresented and under-resourced populations facing significant obstacles along their educational

journeys. Corporate partnerships can provide NSCC with funding for a multitude of programmatic opportunities, which can enhance student support service, academic programs, career readiness initiatives, immersive learning experiences, apprenticeships, and collaborative projects with industry leaders that align with the ever changing needs of the local economy and workforce. Thus, with the successful implementation of collective impact strategies and corporate partnerships, a more robust ecosystem and job pipeline will be available for Black male students enrolled at NSCC.

NSCC does a great job of creating internships, externships and apprenticeships for students in various industries, including but not limited to healthcare, health services, computer science and paralegal studies. Black male students can benefit from the hands-on experience in their field of study and allow them to apply the skills learned in school to practical experience. This is especially important for the Black male students when the opportunities are paid and lead to future career opportunities.

III.   Enhanced orientation and onboarding for Black male students

An internal stakeholder suggested that Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) was the biggest feeder of students into NSCC, and implied that NSCC is an attractive option for Black male students. The transition from K-12 to post-secondary school can be a challenge for all students, so there should be multiple pathways to integrate students that will spark interest for students during their first visit to campus.For example, NSCC and MNPS could co-host events with Persist Nashville to signify the transition from high school to college prior to graduating from high school. Persist Nashville coaches could use text-based coaching to send reminders and notes of encouragement to students to ensure enrollment in the fall.

NSCC could develop an orientation program specifically designed to address the needs and challenges of Black male students at NSCC. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the Black male students surveyed knew about NSCC's support services, but less than half used any of those services. An opportunity exists where NSCC could convene this student demographic for social activities so that the stigma can be detached from using helpful support services. As a collateral matter, orientation leaders and staff can be trained on how to understand the unique experiences and backgrounds of this population while ensuring that resources and services are culturally competent.

IV.   *"Intrusive"* Student Advisement

After orientation, it is vitally important for NSCC to offer ongoing support while navigating challenges associated with belonging as a college student. An external informant introduced "intrusive advising" as a concept to bolster the success of Black male students at NSCC. This concept is akin to how athletes are held accountable by the institution and typically showcase higher persistence and graduation rates than nonathletes. The informant opined that the university benefits greatly from students having a higher degree of accountability, attention, and focus from an advising vantage point. By implementing these strategies, NSCC can better support Black males who need the same kind of intensity to help them cross the graduation stage and enter into family-sustaining wage jobs.

We also have the following secondary recommendations:

V.   Transportation

Nashville's transit and transportation system is considered to be one of the worst systems in similarly sized cities in America due to the lack of dedicated funding. Although some focus group participants mentioned that they occasionally rode the bus to NSCC locations, it was apparent that riding a bus to campus could be laborious and frustrating. It is, however, important to note that the focus group participants in Clarksville, TN, mentioned that they could not attend school if they did not have reliable transportation due to the lack of options in that region. The bus routes in Nashville and in Clarksville are attenuated and often require the willingness to fight the elements and time constraints.

We recommend that NSCC offer similar stipends for ridesharing services for NSCC Black male students because ridesharing services typically offer more flexible scheduling options compared to fixed bus routes (Figure 18). Uber provides vouchers for colleges and universities as a safe subsidized alternative for students. Parameters, of course, would have to be implemented to ensure that the funds are used to assist individuals who need assistance and for those who share rides with fellow passengers. Thus, many students may use ridesharing options for ingress and egress to campus because the trips make for shorter travel times during off-peak hours, which may in turn increase persistence.

VI.   Commuter-friendly lounge areas with food options

Commuter friendly lounge areas are vitally important to students at NSCC because there are few organic opportunities for community on transient college campuses. In addition to having opportunities for camaraderie, students could benefit from more structured opportunities and access to food because many may not have time to prepare meals at home or travel off-campus to grab food. Focus group participants acknowledged and appreciated the presence of food trucks, but insisted that a vibrant food vendor could help foster a sense of community and belonging amongst students. It can also enhance the overall student experience if there is consistency of food options with affordable pricing. In fact, food vending systems were prevalent on campuses prior to the arrival of Covid-19. However, vendor pricing has increased due to supply and demand.

Figure 18 - Alignment of Persistence Factors and Recommendations

Primary Persistence Factors at NSCC   **Recommendations**

Pre-College Skills/Academic Intellectual Development → I. Career-based mentoring programs

Academic Integration → II. Increase collective impact strategies and corporate partnerships [Expansion of employer partnership programs]

Environmental Pull/Financial Concerns → III. Enchanced orientation and onboarding

Transportation → IV. 'Intrusive' Student Advisement

V. Rideshare & Uber Vouchers

Conclusion

Our research study with Nashville State Community College has the potential to elevate the discussion and implementation of career-based mentoring programs and supports specifically tailored to their student's needs. With the rich qualitative data we received from Black male students and professionals across the Metro Nashville area

we have obtained a nuanced understanding of the primary etiologies of our client's research questions. Black males at NSCC face challenges caused by a lack of connection, prerequisite knowledge, and participation in the 'hidden curriculum' of navigating college.

Addressing disparities in community college completion rates at Nashville State Community College requires rigorous collaboration between Black male students, community partners, and NSCC Staff using ongoing participatory improvement methods. The cultivation of meaningful partnerships between researchers and community colleges to produce workforce development initiatives collectively constitutes pivotal strides toward turning persistence and retention rates around. Stakeholders aspire to dismantle the entrenched systemic barriers that have historically hindered the persistence of Black males through scholarly insight and strategic interventions.

The data indicates that fifty percent (50%) of all African American and Latino students in the United States are in the community college system (Frierson et al, 2009). Community colleges are positioned in a manner that provides them with a unique opportunity to engage in finding a solution to this research problem. Nashville State Community College is looking forward to being at the forefront of expanding and scaling existing interventions to make progress towards their goal to improve completion rates among their Black male students.

Attending to the career development of Black males requires a reevaluation and augmentation of extant college workforce development endeavors to ensure their alignment with unique groups of students and prepare them with the requisite acumen for academic and vocational success. Nashville State Community College is on the verge of making significant changes to improve student success, with a focus on academic advisement and building a groundswell of support from various stakeholders. A career-based mentoring program conducted via group mentoring on multiple campuses could provide the Black male students in our focus groups with the support systems, resources, and guidance that they identified as most impactful to their persistence.

Lastly, our work serves as an iteration of inquiry that NSCC can and should replicate annually with groups of Black male students from multiple campuses. As NSCC welcomes new cohorts, it will be important for Student Services to understand each cohort's views on the reach and efficacy of their Student Success Initiative(s).

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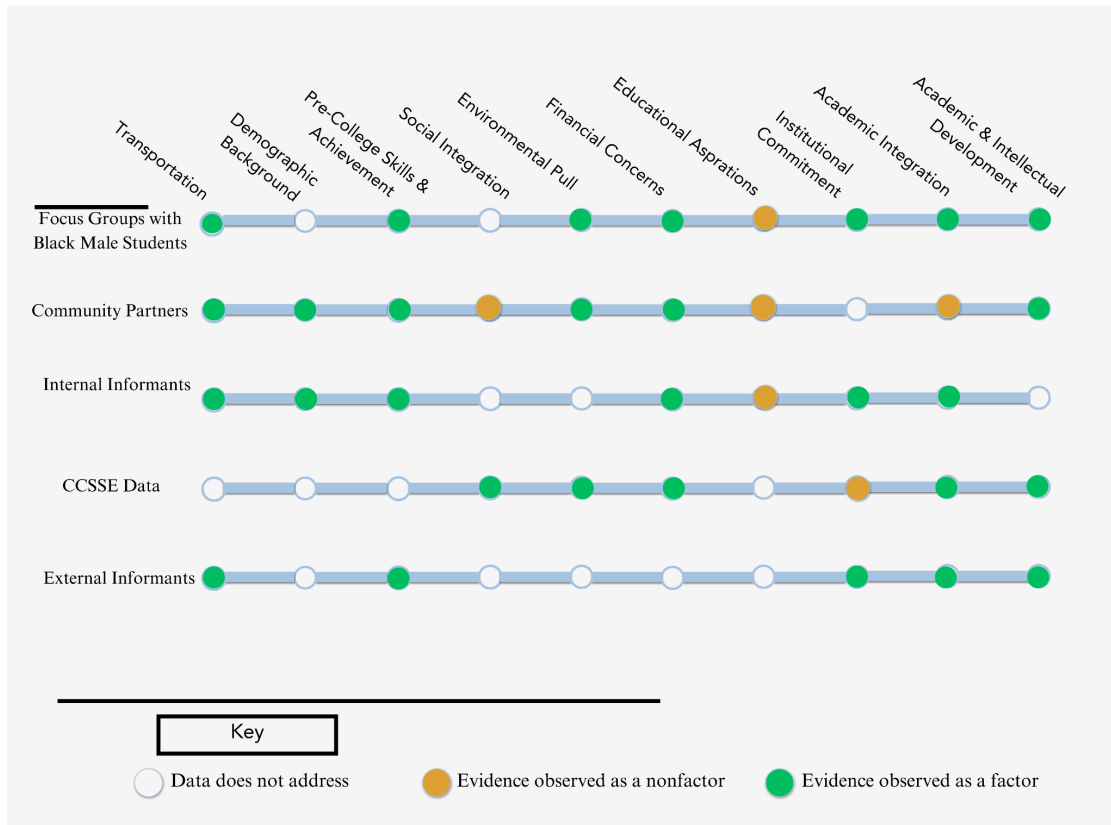
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Appendices

Appendix A - Factor Analysis Tool

Appendix B - Data Dictionary

Data Value	Data Type	Data Definition
STUDY_ID	String	Generated ID value that NSCC can crosswalk to student identifiers.
COHORT_TERM	Fall 2018, Spring 2019, ...	The fall or spring term where the student first enrolls at NSCC. If the student's first term is in the summer, they will be included in the fall cohort.
STUDENT_TYPE	Undergraduate/Transfer/Special Credit	The student type in their cohort term.
CRED_LEVEL	AA, AS, AST, AFA, AAS, CRT1, CRT2, NDUG	The credential the student is seeking in their cohort term. AA/AS are standard transfer degrees. AST is an AS in Teaching. AFA is a transfer degree in fine arts. AAS is an applied associate degree and is not a transfer degree. CRT1 is a certificate program of less than 15 credits. CRT2 is a certificate program that requires between 15 and 30 credits.
RACE_ETH	String	The race/ethnicity of the student in the cohort term. There is a hierarchy to this assignment: International, Hispanic, Multi-racial, Single race.
GENDER	Male/Female	Binary value. Same as sex.
AGE	Integer	Age on the census date of their cohort term.
ZIP_CODE	String/Outside USA	The 5-digit zip code of the student's permanent address. If the student has a permanent address outside of the USA, then the value is Outside USA.
ST_COUNTY	TN-Davidson/.../Outside USA	The two digit state hyphen the name of the county. This is provided for all 50 states. If the student has a permanent address outside of the USA, then the value is Outside USA.
ESOL_TEST_FLAG	Y/N	Flag that indicates the student tested into requiring at least one level of ESOL courses.
OVERALL_GPA	Decimal	The college-level GPA of institutional and transfer courses. Excludes developmental courses. This is the standard GPA NSCC uses to assess graduation requirements.
INST_GPA	Decimal	The college-level and developmental GPA of institutional courses. This is the GPA that NSCC uses to assess probation and suspension.
UG_GPA	Decimal	The college-level GPA of institutional courses. This is not a commonly used GPA calculation.
HIGH_SCHOOL	String	Name of the high school the student most recently attended.
HS_GPA	Decimal	High school GPA. Tennessee does not have a minimum requirement to complete high school.
MNPS_FLAG	Public/Charter/N	Flag that indicates the high school is part of the Metro Nashville Public School system. If it is, the flag indicates if the school is a public school or a charter school.
CMCSS_FLAG	Public/Charter/N	Flag that indicates the high school is part of the Clarksville-Montgomery County School system. If it is, the flag indicates if the school is a public school or a charter school.
LOW_INCOME	Y/N	Flag that indicates that the student completed a FAFSA and has an EFC (Expected Family Contribution) lower than the maximum value for which a student can be awarded a Pell Grant. This threshold is set yearly by the Federal Government. If the student does not complete a FAFSA, this indicator is set to N.
FIRST_GEN	Y/N	Flag that indicates that the student completed a FAFSA and has not indicated that either parent has completed a bachelor degree or higher. If the student does not complete a FAFSA, this indicator is set to N. If the student only answers for one parent, only that response is considered. If the student marks unsure for either or both parents, that response is counted as not completing a bachelor degree.
MATH_DE	Y/N	Flag that indicates the student tested into developmental math.
ENGLISH_DE	Y/N	Flag that indicates the student tested into developmental English.
READ_DE	Y/N	Flag that indicates the student tested into developmental reading
FALL_2018	Y/N	Flag that indicates enrollment in that term.
SPRING_2019	Y/N	Flag that indicates enrollment in that term.
SPRING_2023	Y/N	Flag that indicates enrollment in that term.
CRED_TERM1	Fall 2018, Spring 2019, ...	The first term that any credential (certificate or degree) was earned.
DEGREE_TERM1	Fall 2018, Spring 2019, ...	The first term that any degree was earned.
MARITAL_STATUS	Divorced, Married, Separated, Single, Unknown	If the student completes a FAFSA, this is the value selected by the student for their martial status.
HAS_DEPENDENTS	Y/N	If the student completes a FAFSA, this flag indicates that the student has dependents.

Appendix C - Community Partners Interview Questions

Stakeholder	Ecological & Landscape Analysis	Black Male Persistence & Success	Interventions for NSCC

EXPLORING PERSISTENCE FACTORS FOR BLACK MALE STUDENTS AT NSCC

Robert Taylor, MPA – Instructor/Program Coordinator @ Meharry Medical College; Wesley Murray – Deloitte Manager; Dr. Lou Outlaw – Former Vanderbilt University/ Fisk Faculty; Captain Raymond Jones –Metro Police Department; Dr. Elizabeth Stewart – Principal Researcher @ Meharry Medical College	2. What two words or phrases would you use to describe Nashville State Community College? 4. What does persistence mean to you? Or How do you define access? 5. In your opinion, does NSCC provide opportunities for diverse interaction? [social integration?} 7. Nashville State provides students with free transportation, childcare vouchers, and mental health services. Do you think that Black males in the Nashville community are aware of this? 8. What systems or resources do you think Nashville State Community College should have in place to help support Black male students? 10. From an academic standpoint, what type of student do you think belongs at Nashville State? 11. From a social standpoint, what type of student do you	3. Tell us about the Black male students who you interact with on campus. In what areas are they doing well? What marketable skills do they possess? How are they succeeding? 14. What do you think keeps Black men from completing their degree or certification at Nashville State Community College?	1. NSCC wants to learn how it can best support its Black male students while they are applying to, attending and graduating from the college. Knowing that is their goal, how do you think they can succeed in the future? Is there anything that they could improve? 6. Do you think Black men are attracted to Nashville State Community College? 9. What do you think Nashville State Community College could do to look more attractive to Black males? 12. What do you know about the recruitment practices at Nashville State Community College? Do you think they are targeted in a manner that would reach a population of Black males who are best fit for the college? 13. What do you think students who are non-residential could do to help them feel like they belong on a community college campus?

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	think belongs at Nashville State? 16. Are there any systems or structures in place in the greater Nashville metro area that would be a hindrance for Black males in their ability to succeed during college?		15. Black male students currently graduate at a rate about 20 points lower than other subgroups. What do you think students from other subgroups might be doing to help them persist and graduate at higher rates at NSCC? 17. Imagine that later today you talk to a Black male student at Nashville State. He is thinking he will drop out and asks you for help. What advice would you give him? What resources in the community would you point him to?

Appendix D – Internal Informant Interview Questions

Stakeholder	Ecological & Landscape	Black Male Persistence & Success	Interventions for NSCC

NSCC Admin NSCC Staff & Faculty			
	2. What three words or phrases would you use to describe Nashville State Community College?		1. NSCC wants to learn how it can best support its Black male students while they are applying to, attending and graduating from the college. Knowing that is their goal, how do you think they can succeed in the future? Is there anything that they could improve?
	4. What does persistence mean to you? Or How do you define persistence?		6. Do you think Black men are attracted to Nashville State Community College?
	5. In your opinion, does NSCC provide opportunities for diverse interaction? [social integration?}	3. Tell us about the Black male students who you interact with on campus. In what areas are they doing well? What marketable skills do they possess? How are they succeeding?	9. What do you think Nashville State Community College could do to look more attractive to Black males?
	7. What systems or resources do you think Nashville State Community College should have in place to help support Black male students?		12. What do you know about the recruitment practices at Nashville State Community College? Do you think they are targeted in a manner that would reach a population of Black males who are best fit for the college?
	8. What do you think hinders Black men from attending Nashville State?	15. What do you think keeps Black men from completing their degree or certification at Nashville State Community College?	
	10. From an academic standpoint, what type of student do you think belongs at Nashville State?		13. What do you think students who are non-residential could do to help them feel like they belong on a community college campus?
	11. From a social standpoint, what type of student do you think belongs at Nashville State?		14. Have you seen other Black men do things to help them feel like they belong while attending college in Nashville (in general)?
	18. Are there any systems or structures in place in the greater Nashville metro area that would be a hindrance for Black males in their ability to succeed during college?		16. Black male students currently graduate at a rate 20 points lower than students in other subgroups. What do you think students from other subgroups might be doing to

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			help them persist and graduate at higher rates at NSCC? 17. Imagine that later today you talk to a Black male student at Nashville State. He is thinking he will drop out and asks you for help. What advice would you give him? What resources in the community would you point him to?

Appendix E – External Informant Interview Questions

Stakeholder	Ecological & Landscape	Black Male Persistence & Success	Interventions for NSCC

| Ashford Hughes – Executive Officer EDI @ MNPS; MNPS, Dr. Battle TBR, Diarese George, EdD. - CEO, TN Educators of Color Alliance; Vince Malone, J.D. - Chief of Staff and Administration, WeGO Transit; Jeffrey Norfleet, Ed.D. - Health & Equity Expert, VUMC | 2. What three words or phrases would you use to describe Nashville State Community College?

4. What does 'persistence' mean to you? Or How do you define persistence?

5. In your opinion, does NSCC provide opportunities for diverse interaction? [social integration?}

6. What systems or resources do you think Nashville State Community College should have in place to help support Black male students?

7. What do you think hinders Black men from attending Nashville State?

9. From an academic standpoint, what type of student do you think belongs at Nashville State?

10. From a social standpoint, what type of student do you think belongs at Nashville State?

16. Are there any systems or structures in place in the greater Nashville metro area that would be a hindrance for Black males in their ability to succeed during college? | 3. Tell us about the Black male students who you interact with on campus. In what areas are they doing well? What marketable skills do they possess? How are they succeeding? | 1. NSCC wants to learn how it can best support its Black male students while they are applying to, attending and graduating from the college. Knowing that is their goal, how do you think they can succeed in the future? Is there anything that they could improve?

8. What do you think Nashville State Community College could do to look more attractive to Black males?

11. What do you know about the recruitment practices at Nashville State Community College? Do you think they are targeted in a manner that would reach a population of Black males who are best fit for the college?

12. What do you think students who are non-residential could do to help them feel like they belong on a community college campus?

14. The 3-year graduation rate for Black male students at NSCC is 6%. What do you think students from other subgroups might be doing to help them persist and graduate at higher rates at NSCC?

15. Imagine that later today you talk to a Black male student at Nashville State. He is thinking he will drop out and asks you for help. What advice would you give him? What resources in the community would you point him to? |

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Appendix F – Focus Group Questions [for Black male students without Interruptions in Attendance]

Stakeholder	Ecological & Landscape	Black Male Persistence & Success	Interventions for NSCC
Black Male NSCC students [Uninterrupted Attendance]	2. What three words or phrases would you use to describe Nashville State Community College? 4. What does 'persistence' access mean to you? Or How do you define persistence? 7. Was there anything that didn't appeal to you about Nashville State Community College? 9. What do you think hinders Black men from attending Nashville State? 10. From an academic standpoint, do you think you belong at Nashville State? 11. Do you feel that you have opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities at NSCC? 12. From a social standpoint, how much do you feel you belong at Nashville State? 17. Did you attend high school in Nashville? 18. In what ways do your experiences at NSCC differ from your experience during high school?	. What does success look like to you? 8. What capital [skills or experience] do you feel you already possessed prior to enrolling at NSCC? 14. What do you think keeps Black men from completing their degree or certification at Nashville State Community College? 15. What have you done to help yourself feel like you belong academically? 19. In order from greatest impact to least impact, rate the factors that affect you the most:[] Social Integration [] Financial Concerns [] Environmental Pull [] Institutional Commitment [] Pre-College Skills []Educational Aspirations [] Background, Race & Gender [] Academic Integration [] Academic Intellectual Development	1. NSCC wants to learn how it can best support its Black male students while they are applying to, attending and graduating from the college. Knowing that is their goal, how do you think they can succeed in the future? Is there anything that they could improve? 5. What attracted you to Nashville State Community College? 6. What do you think attracts other Black men to Nashville State Community College? 13. How can Nashville State help Black men feel like they belong here? 14. Has Nashville State hindered you from feeling like you belong academically or socially? Please provide specific examples. 16. Imagine that later today you talk to a Black male student at Nashville State. He is thinking he will drop out and asks you for help. What advice would you give him? What resources in the community would you point him to?

Appendix G – Focus Group Questions [Interrupted Group]

FOCUS GROUP [Interrupted Protocol]

1. Scan the QR code and complete the quick survey:

2. NSCC wants to learn how it can best support its Black male students while they are applying to, attending, and graduating from the college. Knowing that is their goal, how do you think they can succeed in the future? Is there anything that they could improve?

3. What three words/phrases would you use to describe Nashville State Community College?

4. What does success look like to you?

5. What does the word 'persistence' mean to you? Or how do you define 'persistence'?

6. What attracted you to Nashville State Community College?

7. What do you think attracts other Black men to Nashville State Community College?

8. What capital [skills or experience] do you feel you already possessed prior to enrolling at NSCC?

9. If you have experienced a pause in your enrollment at Nashville State Community College, what was the cause of this pause?

10. What do you think keeps Black men from attending Nashville State?

11. From an academic standpoint, how much do you feel like you belong at Nashville State?

12. From a social standpoint, how much do you feel you belong at Nashville State?

13. Do you feel that you have opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities at NSCC? [social integration]

14. Has Nashville State hindered you from feeling like you belong academically or socially? Please provide specific examples.

15. What do you think keeps Black men from completing their degree or certification at Nashville State Community College?

16. Did you attend high school in Nashville? If so, which high school did you attend?

17. In what ways do your experiences at NSCC differ from your experience during high school?

18. In order from **greatest** impact to **least** impact, rate the factors that affect you the most:

[ ] Social Integration [ ] Financial Concerns   [ ] Environmental Pull [ ] Institutional Commitment   [ ] Pre-College Skills   [ ]Educational Aspirations [ ] Background, Race & Gender   [ ] Academic Integration   [ ] Academic Intellectual Development

19. Is there anything that we have missed that you would like to address or discuss about attending NSCC?

Appendix H - Distribution of Ages of Students at NSCC [2019-2023]
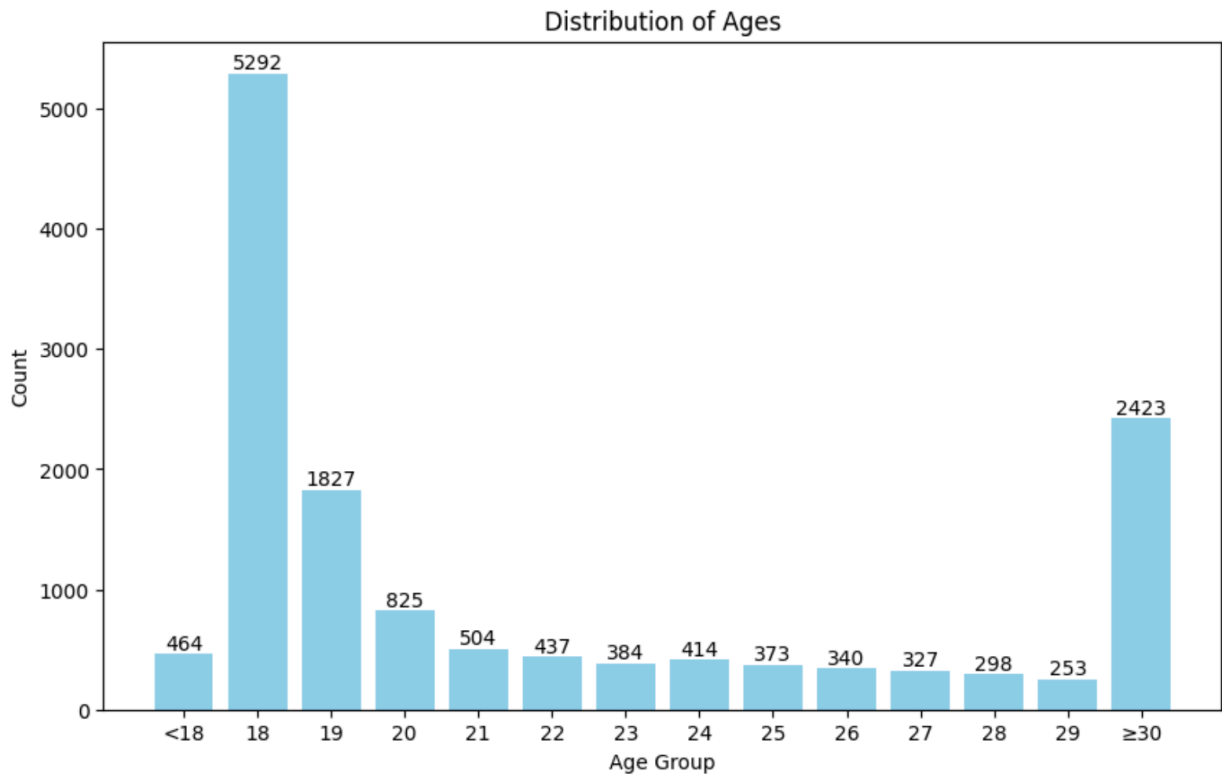
Appendix I - Survey Protocol

Survey: Black Male Students @ NSCC (Interrupted Group)

Background

Nashville State Community College (NSCC) serves approximately 7,000 students across seven campus locations in the Metro Nashville area. Approximately 40 percent are adult learners over the age of 25. Nearly 40 percent (37.2 percent) identify as Black or Hispanic. NSCC[4] currently has a goal of supporting persistence and completion among students of color, in particular male

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[4] Nashville State Community College

students of color. This is a top priority for all community and technical colleges governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents across the state and for Tennessee's higher education policymakers. Black male students at Nashville State persist and complete at rates lower than any other demographic group.

Rationale and Aims

Under the leadership of President Shanna Jackson, Nashville State Community College is committed to designing and implementing a program to support Black male students through graduation. NSCC will work to provide resources and opportunities that will support more Black male students to graduate and enter into family-sustaining wage jobs.

Our capstone project with Nashville State Community College will allow us to inquire what the antecedents are that prevent Black male students from persisting to completion of their programs and determine what actions Nashville State Community College can take to best support their Black male student population. The scapegoat commonly used to explain this data often involves academic unpreparedness of Black students. However, extant research strongly suggests that academic concerns are not the primary cause of the high attrition of Black students and also not the sole reason for their premature departure from campuses (Steele, 1999; Davis et al, 2004).

Our research will use a transformative framework and the design will incorporate a form of sequential mixed methods which will begin with receiving student data from the university, incorporate interviews with key informants, and data from Focus Groups with 40 Black Male students in attendance on NSCC campuses.

Administration

The research plan includes two Focus Groups which will be conducted on campus at Nashville State Community College during the Fall semester of 2023. Each Focus Group will engage 20 Black male students who attend NSCC. Brief surveys will also be administered to these same students. The data collected from this survey will be used to help us to observe any correlations within the Focus Group (ie. Major of study, Age, distance from campus(es), engagement, and perceptions of the college) that would point to key factors associated with success for Black males at NSCC.

Our Research Questions:

R_1 **What do Black males need to persist on NSCC campuses?**

R_{1a} What is the perspective of Black male students regarding persistence and their experiences at NSCC?

R_{1b} What concerns do the campus community and community partners have about how to best support Black male students at NSCC?

R_2 Do the GPA's of Black male students differ from other groups at NSCC? If so, how do they differ?

R_{2a} What are the social and ecological factors that contribute to the success of other subgroups at NSCC?

Survey Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your major?
3. What is your zip code? [of your home/residence in Nashville]
4. How many semesters did you attend NSCC before taking a break?
5. Have you attended any other college, university, or technical school/program since you left NSCC?
6. Why did you select NSCC?
7. Have you interacted with any faculty or staff outside of the classroom at NSCC?
8. Do you suppose that additional subjects or activities would have prevented you from taking a break at NSCC?
9. Did you interact with other Black males on NSCC's campus at any point? If so, where did you see Black males?
10. Did you discuss taking a break from NSCC with any other Black male students? If so, do you think that decision could have influenced another student to take a break?

REFERENCES

Davis, M., Dias-Bowie, Y., Greenberg, K., Klukken, G., Pollio, H. R., Thomas, S. P., & Thompson, C. L. (2004). "A fly in the buttermilk": Descriptions of university life by successful black undergraduate students at a predominately white southeastern university. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75(4), 420-445.

Jackson, K. M., Pukys, S., Castro, A., Hermosura, L., Mendez, J., Vohra-Gupta, S., & Morales, G. (2018). Using the transformative paradigm to conduct a mixed methods needs assessment of a marginalized community: Methodological lessons and implications. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *66*, 111-119.

Sims, J. (2020). *Black Male Persistence in a Graduate School of Education* (Doctoral dissertation).

Steele, C.M. (1999, August). Thin ice: "Stereotype threat" and black college students. Atlantic Monthly, 44–54.

Appendix J - Survey Protocol 2#

Survey: Black Male Students @ NSCC (Uninterrupted Group)

Background

Nashville State Community College (NSCC) serves approximately 7,000 students across seven campus locations in the Metro Nashville area. Approximately 40 percent are adult learners over the age of 25. Nearly 40 percent (37.2 percent) identify as Black or Hispanic. NSCC[5] currently has a goal of supporting persistence and completion among students of color, in particular male students of color. This is a top priority for all community and technical colleges governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents across the state and for Tennessee's higher education policymakers. Black male students at Nashville State persist and complete at rates lower than any other demographic group.

Rationale and Aims

Under the leadership of President Shanna Jackson, Nashville State Community College is committed to designing and implementing a program to support Black male students through

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[5] Nashville State Community College

graduation. NSCC will work to provide resources and opportunities that will support more Black male students to graduate and enter into family-sustaining wage jobs.

Our capstone project with Nashville State Community College will allow us to inquire what the antecedents are that prevent Black male students from persisting to completion of their programs and determine what actions Nashville State Community College can take to best support their Black male student population. The scapegoat commonly used to explain this data often involves academic unpreparedness of Black students. However, extant research strongly suggests that academic concerns are not the primary cause of the high attrition of Black students and also not the sole reason for their premature departure from campuses (Steele, 1999; Davis et al, 2004).

Our research will use a transformative framework and the design will incorporate a form of sequential mixed methods which will begin with receiving student data from the university, incorporate interviews with key informants, and data from Focus Groups with 40 Black Male students in attendance on NSCC campuses.

Administration

The research plan includes two Focus Groups which will be conducted on campus at Nashville State Community College during the Fall semester of 2023. Each Focus Group will engage 20 Black male students who attend NSCC. Brief surveys will also be administered to these same students. The data collected from this survey will be used to help us to observe any correlations within the Focus Group (ie. Major of study, Age, distance from campus(es), engagement, and perceptions of the college) that would point to key factors associated with success for Black males at NSCC.

Our Research Questions:

R_1 **What do Black males need to persist on NSCC campuses?**

R_{1a} What is the perspective of Black male students regarding persistence and their experiences at NSCC?

R_{1b} What concerns do the campus community and community partners have about how to best support Black male students at NSCC?

R_2 Do the GPA's of Black male students differ from other groups at NSCC? If so, how do they differ?

R_{2a} What are the social and ecological factors that contribute to the success of other subgroups at NSCC?

Survey Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your major?
3. What is your zip code? [of your home/residence in Nashville]
4. How many semesters have you attended NSCC?
5. Have you attended any other college, university, or technical school/program?
6. Why do you think you have continued to persist at NSCC?
7. Are you aware of any existing student support services at NSCC? If so, have you used any of those services at NSCC?
8. Do you frequently interact with faculty or staff outside of the classroom?
9. Would you like to see additional subjects, coursework or activities offered at NSCC?
10. Do you interact with other Black males on NSCC's campus? If so, where do you normally see other Black males at NSCC?
11. Why do you think some Black males persist at NSCC and others do not?

REFERENCES

Davis, M., Dias-Bowie, Y., Greenberg, K., Klukken, G., Pollio, H. R., Thomas, S. P., & Thompson, C. L. (2004). "A fly in the buttermilk": Descriptions of university life by successful black undergraduate students at a predominately white southeastern university. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *75*(4), 420-445.

Jackson, K. M., Pukys, S., Castro, A., Hermosura, L., Mendez, J., Vohra-Gupta, S., & Morales, G. (2018). Using the transformative paradigm to conduct a mixed methods needs assessment of a marginalized community: Methodological lessons and implications. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *66*, 111-119.

Sims, J. (2020). *Black Male Persistence in a Graduate School of Education* (Doctoral dissertation).

Steele, C.M. (1999, August). Thin ice: "Stereotype threat" and black college students.

Atlantic Monthly, 44–54.

Appendix K : Recruitment for Focus Groups at Southeast and White Bridge Campuses

Mon 11/27/2023 4:55 PM

Nashville State Students,

I hope you had a great Thanksgiving break! As President of Nashville State, I am always interested in learning how we can better support you in your educational journey. This Wednesday and Thursday, you will have the opportunity to share your opinions about what you need to succeed with two doctoral students from Vanderbilt University who are researching how colleges can better support Black male students. More information and a link to sign up is below.

I encourage you to sign up, enjoy a meal with friends, and share your thoughts and experiences.

Dr. Shanna L. Jackson
President

Please join us for honest, confidential conversations about how you feel Nashville State has supported you and what the college can do to improve.

What's in it for you? Lunch will be provided by Slim and & Husky's Pizza Beeria (@ Southeast Campus) and a provider (to be announced) for our White Bridge Campus. If you are unable to make these dates but are interested in providing input, please RSVP and check the 'contact me about another date" box.

RSVP here: https://forms.office.com/r/MC8BnyPXQa or use the QR Code above.

- White Bridge Campus – November 29th @ 12 PM
- Southeast Campus – November 30th @ 11 AM

We hope you will participate in this important study! Information gathered will help colleges, including Nashville State Community College, design and implement solutions to increase the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of their students. Both focus groups are led by researchers from Vanderbilt University.

Have questions in the meantime? Contact Latesia.d.coleman@vanderbilt.edu or Dr. Jackson's assistant natalie.olsen@nscc.edu. We hope to see you there!

Regards,

Latesia D. Coleman & Alfred Degrafinreid II

Ed.D. Candidates - Higher Education, Leadership and Policy Org

Peabody College of Education

Vanderbilt University

This research is being carried out under the auspices of Vanderbilt University.

Dr. Shanna L. Jackson

President

Nashville State Community College

Office (615) 353-3236 • Cell (615) 574-8047
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Nashville State
Community College

Appendix L - Difference in Mean GPA by Subgroups at NSCC

Cohort Term	Comparison Group	t-statistic	p-value	Mean GPA Black Male	Mean GPA Comparison Group
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. WH F	-14.432	0	1.35	2.49
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. BL F	-3.438	0.001	1.35	1.64
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. WH M	-10.617	0	1.35	2.26
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-7.276	0	1.35	2.16
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. API F	-9.547	0	1.35	2.78
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-4.561	0	1.35	1.95
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. HIS F	-0.612	0.65	1.35	2.22
Fall 2018	Black Male vs. API M	-4.827	0	1.35	2.42
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. WH F	-14.212	0	1.31	2.5
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. WH M	-6.955	0	1.31	1.95
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. BL F	-1.776	0.076	1.31	1.47
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. API M	-5.242	0	1.31	2.47
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. HIS F	-4.227	0	1.31	2.1

Fall 2019	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-6.26	0	1.31	2.03
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-2.543	0.012	1.31	1.7
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. HIS M	-2.492	0.017	1.31	1.8
Fall 2019	Black Male vs. API F	-8.019	0	1.31	2.6
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. WH F	-11.927	0	1.11	2.34
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. BL F	-4.285	0	1.11	1.57
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-6.101	0	1.11	2.03
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. WH M	-8.954	0	1.11	2.16
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. API F	-6.772	0	1.11	2.54
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. API M	-4.208	0	1.11	2.2
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-4.5	0	1.11	1.91
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. HIS F	-4.376	0	1.11	2.14
Fall 2020	Black Male vs. HIS M	-1.695	0.099	1.11	1.58
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. WH F	-11.358	0	1.2	2.39
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. WH M	-8.029	0	1.2	2.11
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-5.233	0	1.2	1.99
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. BL F	-2.512	0.012	1.2	1.48
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. API F	-7.297	0	1.2	2.65
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-3.191	0.002	1.2	1.82

Fall 2021	Black Male vs. API M	-4.25	0	1.2	2.34
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. HIS M	-0.899	0.374	1.2	1.41
Fall 2021	Black Male vs. HIS F	-4.035	0	1.2	1.92
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. WH F	-11.02	0	1.3	2.47
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-4.568	0	1.3	1.93
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. WH M	-6.299	0	1.3	2.01
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-2.596	0.011	1.3	1.8
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. API F	-5.338	0	1.3	2.43
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. BL F	-2.194	0.029	1.3	1.54
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. HIS M	0.748	0.456	1.3	1.17
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. HIS F	-4.775	0	1.3	2.03
Fall 2022	Black Male vs. API M	-1.468	0.149	1.3	1.62
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. BL F	-2.546	0.012	1.4	1.9
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. WH F	-6.783	0	1.4	2.63
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-3.626	0	1.4	2.35
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. WH M	-5.051	0	1.4	2.41
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-0.607	0.548	1.4	1.61
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. API M	-0.748	0.463	1.4	1.69
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. HIS F	-1.247	0.227	1.4	1.91

Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. API F	-4.652	0	1.4	2.94
Sprg 2021	Black Male vs. HIS M	-1.273	0.237	1.4	2.08
Sprg 2022	Black Male vs. WH F	-4.176	0	1.51	2.41
Sprg 2022	Black Male vs. WH M	-3.098	0.002	1.51	2.25
Sprg 2022	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-2.327	0.023	1.51	2.18
Sprg 2022	Black Male vs. API M	-1.013	0.325	1.51	1.98
Sprg 2022	Black Male vs. BL F	-2.105	0.038	1.51	2
Sprg 2022	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-1.074	0.29	1.51	1.91
Spng 2022	Black Male vs. HIS F	-3.472	0.002	1.51	2.73
Spng 2022	Black Male vs. API F	-4.233	0	1.51	2.91
Spng 2022	Black Male vs. HIS M	-0.958	0.398	1.51	2.11
Sprg 2023	Black Male vs. BL F	-1.854	0.066	1.38	1.77
Sprg 2023	Black Male vs. WH F	-5.536	0	1.38	2.52
Sprg 2023	Black Male vs. MULTI F	-3.211	0.002	1.38	2.3
Sprg 2023	Black Male vs. WH M	-3.999	0	1.38	2.25
Sprg 2023	Black Male vs. MULTI M	-1.363	0.181	1.38	1.89
Sprg 2023	Black Male vs. API F	-3.705	0.001	1.38	2.72
Sprig 2023	Black Male vs. HIS M	-4.616	0	1.38	2.78

| Sprg 2023 | Black Male vs. HIS F | -3.422 | 0.026 | 1.38 | 2.93 |
| Sprg 2023 | Black Male vs. API M | -0.972 | 0.398 | 1.38 | 2.26 |

Appendix M - Counts of Persistence by Metro Nashville Public High Schools
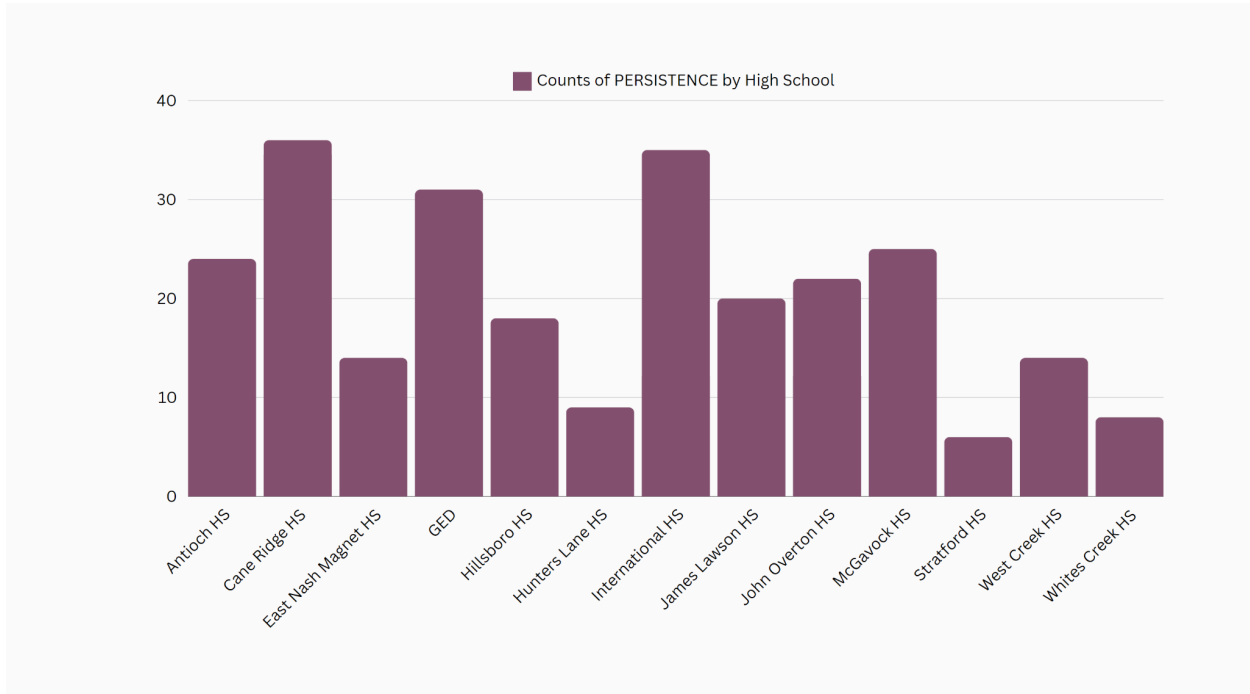
Appendix N   – Counts of Students at NSCC by Race and First Generation Status [2019-2023]

Counts of Students by Race and First Generation Status