

**Sustaining Enrollment of Black Men in College: The Positive Effects of Student  
Support Services**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to an extraordinary woman who encouraged me to strive for greatness throughout my life! Thank you, Mom, for the unconditional love and support that you continuously show me. You have always been my sunshine through every storm, light through the darkness, and inspiration to get me through tough times. Thank you for constantly challenging me to strive for greater even when I am content with the status quo. Thank you for always listening and providing me with words of wisdom when I need them the most. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader throughout my life. Thank you for instilling in me the meaning of education to end the cycle of systematic poverty. I would not be where I am today without your love and determination in seeing me live a better life by stressing the importance of higher education. Your lessons on self-discipline, fortitude, persistence, and focus helped me achieve this significant milestone in my life. I am thankful more and more every day for the many important lessons you taught me!

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## Abstract

Sustaining Enrollment of Black Men in College: The Positive Effects of Student Support Services **Purpose:** For many years, researchers have examined how to effectively improve retention rates and student success outcomes for black male students. This study will examine the importance and benefits of student support programs that focus on improving retention for black male students as they matriculate through college to graduation. Programs such as these can complement students' classroom experiences. The study uses Aston's theory of involvement to examine campus climate and student perceptions of student service effectiveness. In this single-case approach, a single Hispanic serving institution that also is considered a major research university is the focus. **Method:** This quantitative study analyzes data from the target institution for black male students. The data included outcomes related to academic performance and demographics, sense of belonging and engagement, and best practices used to engage and retain black male students. The data sources included institutional data and the University's climate survey. Descriptive statistics, and visual representations of the data were used to respond to the research questions posed. **Results and Discussion:** Some key findings from this study included:

- 1) Black male retention rates were lower compared to White, Asian, Hispanic and International retention rates and on average, earned fewer credits each semester than their total credit hours attempted each semester.
- 2) The institution offered several services that support all students, specifically minority students that help with positive educational outcomes.

- 3) Black men were somewhat less satisfied with their experience at the institution, averaged a slightly lower sense of belonging, and were more likely to consider leaving the institution because of concerns about diversity and inclusion.

Several recommendations on how to improve students' success for Black males include:

- 1) Conducting additional studies that at predominately White institutions and historically Black colleges and universities to understand the trends at different types of institutions.
- 2) Conduct quantitative longitudinal research to examine the impact of the implementation of specific student support services on Black male retention over time.

*Keywords:* Black male, student success, retention, student support services, engagement, sense of belonging

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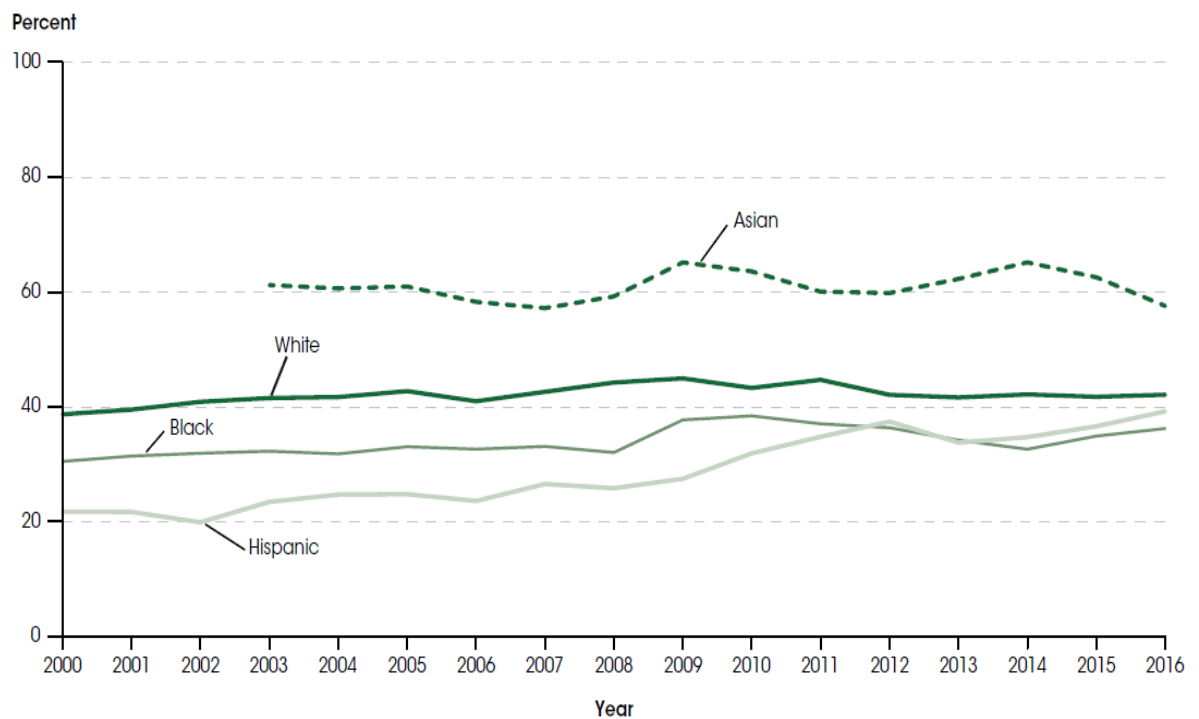
## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

For over 60 years, Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) have addressed various aspects of student success, including access, choice, affordability, retention, and persistence to graduation. Education is the backbone of any modern, thriving society. According to Malcolm X, “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” In line with that assertion, higher education has attempted to produce positive educational outcomes that focus on a sense of belonging and student engagement that increases retention of students for researchers for many years (Hearn, 2006). In the 1970s and 1980s, education experts primarily focused on access issues and reducing intrinsic and external factors that prevented students from entering a higher education institution (Levielle, 2006). By the mid-1990s, the discussion evolved from a conversation and legislation around access to issues of choice, affordability, and persistence to a degree (Tinto, 1993). In the mid-1970s, retention research shifted its focus from student variables to institutional factors influencing retention. This line of research was pioneered by the work of Spady and popularized by Tinto, who found that students who engaged in formal and informal integration with the academic and social systems of a university were more likely to be retained (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 2006). Research on retention and student support has often been presented through separate avenues of investigation within higher education. In the 1990s, college student retention research moved from a student-centered focus to an institutional priority. The issue of retention has been a persistent problem in higher education, particularly for students of color. For decades, the Black-White achievement

gap has persisted in secondary education (Braun et al., 2010). While higher education enrollment rates (access) for students of color are at levels similar to those of White and Asian students (Figure 1), students of color have not realized the degree production rates (retention and graduation) of their White and Asian counterparts. Today, students of color earn degrees at a ratio of 1:2 (compared with White students) and 1:3 (compared with Asian students) (Swail et al., 2003, 6).

**Figure 1. Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college, by race/ethnicity: 2000–2016**



*Note.* These data are built on sample surveys of the American civilian population that was not institutionalized. Separate data for 18- to 24-year-old Asians were not available before 2003. After 2002, persons who identified as two or more races were excluded from individual race categories. Additionally, race categories excluded persons who self-identified as being of Hispanic ethnicity. Data from U.S. Department of Commerce,

Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October 2000 through 2016. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 302.60.

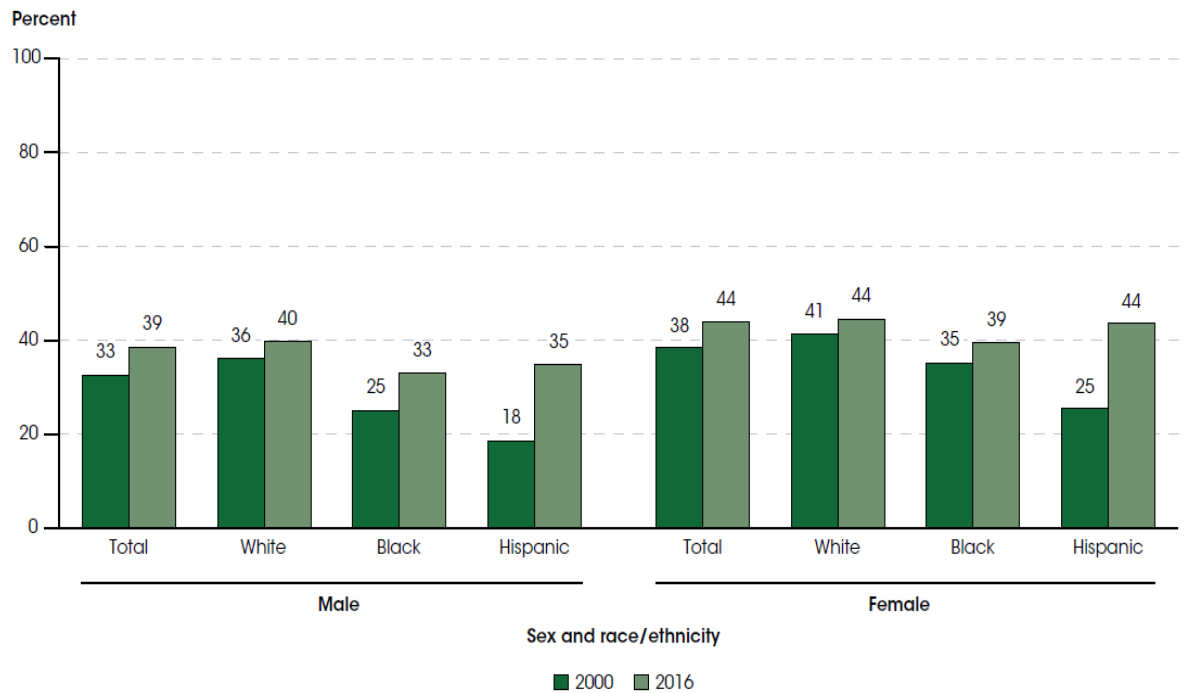
### **Student Success**

A key component of student success is how the overall student environment contributes to that success. Environmental factors that can affect student outcomes both positively and negatively include parental influences; available resources; services available to students both inside and outside the classroom; accessibility of faculty, administrators, and mentors that mirror student demographics at the institution; and the feeling of comfortability from a student's perspective. Most of this paper will attempt to provide a workable solution to address environmental concerns for Black male students. The higher education crisis confronting Black males is one of the most urgent and pressing issues in postsecondary education. Black men remain one of the most at-risk populations in higher education regarding retention and program completion (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019). Black males are almost twice as likely not to attain a degree once they are enrolled in a program than are White male students (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019). *The Journal of Higher Education* indicates that the national college graduation rate for Black students is about 43%, while White students' graduation rate is about 63%. The completion rate for Black males stands at 36% compared with 46% for black female students. Black men account for just 4.3% of the total enrollment at all four-year postsecondary institutions in the United States (Harper, 2006).

Furthermore, Black males (Figure 2) are underrepresented in higher education, accounting for less than 6% of the entire U.S. undergraduate population in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In 2014, less than one-third of African American men

of the 18- to 24-year-old age group were enrolled in higher educational institutions. There is a stark difference between Black male and Black female enrollment in college. The number of Black female college students nearly doubled that of black men in 2016 (66% vs. 34%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

**Figure 2. Percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college, by sex and race/ethnicity: 2000 and 2016**



*Note.* This data are based on sample surveys of the American civilian population that was not institutionalized. These totals include other racial and ethnic groups not otherwise separately shown. In 2000, data for individual race categories included persons of two or more races. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates. Data from U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October 2000 and 2016. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 302.60.

Research has yielded wide-ranging solutions with mixed success for increasing Black male retention rates. African American male retention rates have improved somewhat over the past decade; however, so have retention rates of other subgroups. A recent study from the Education Trust indicates that the gap between Black and White students is rapidly widening. The report found that of the public institutions that improved overall retention rates from 2003 to 2013, 53% saw an increase in the gap between black and white students, resulting in a growing and widening gap between the numbers of black and white students who graduate. Also, only one-third of colleges and universities involved in the study improved black male retention rates overall (Education Trust, 2016).

Several research studies have indicated that the way to remedy academic disparities is through academic support offices and programs that focus on the holistic student. Academic supports are programs and strategies that schools use to increase students' academic achievement, particularly for students who may be at risk of diminished academic achievement. These academic support systems are particularly vital to the academic success of students of color. (Peterson et al., 2014). This study seeks to examine the relationship between retention and academic support services, such as tutoring, learning assistance, counselor services, mentorship, on-campus living, and supplemental instruction. This study also will attempt to measure students' perception of the effectiveness of these support services concerning their academic success. A review of significant research on retention reveals that not many studies have investigated the direct impact of support services on Black male students. The primary goal of this study is to examine the availability of support, the effectiveness of academic support on Black

male students, and the relation of the supports' perceived effectiveness to academic success.

While there have been significant student retention and persistence advancements since Tinto first published his student integration model (1975), students of color, particularly Black males, do not graduate at the same rate as their peers. This study further seeks to build on previous similar research to help better serve this marginalized student group. First, the project will discuss retention related to student support services through past literature about this topic. Second, the project will answer the research questions by examining student support services offered at the University of Houston through an analysis of institutional data. Historical accuracy centered on access to a valuable education, societal expectations, a sense of belonging, and lack of active engagement play an important role in why Black males tend to not perform as favorably in higher education settings as other groups, and all are valid reasons. Other studies have examined the role universities play in Black male retention. When considering the support systems needed for all students to succeed, such as family relationships, faculty and staff mentors, and external community members, Black males are more resilient. (Hargrove, 2014).

Several research studies have been done over the past couple of decades to help address the disparity in Black male retention numbers. Extensive prior research has concluded that Black males have better scholastic outcomes in higher education when universities offer adequate student support services. These students need help outside the classroom to succeed academically (Wood & Harris, 2015). Satisfactory student support services, such as programming, cultural spaces, and hiring faculty and staff of color,

make a tremendous difference in student retention and attrition. Also, the development of social clubs helped create lifelong bonds as students navigated college (McClain & Perry, 2017). Most recently, higher education improvement science researchers have conducted studies examining black male student success at Hispanic-serving institutions.

Researchers looking at Hispanic-serving institutions have implemented successful strategies and patterns ranging from successful developmental support programs, personality traits of successful Hispanic-serving institutions, enrollees, intentional engagement initiatives, and the various lived experiences of underrepresented students (Hargrove, 2014). The theoretical framework of this paper will be Astin's theory of involvement, which emphasizes the involvement of students as essential to their overall student success. Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience (Astin, 1999).

The study will investigate the connection of retention rates to student support services offered at the University of Houston, specifically for Black men. The study's first goal is to discover how student support services increase retention rates among Black male students. Further, the study will show the imperative importance of the designed intervention that catered to these students' needs and provided the support services needed to address retention issues. Another primary focus of the study is ultimately to develop a living-learning model that fosters purposeful holistic interaction between faculty, staff, and other university partners, specifically for Black male students at a Hispanic-serving institution, such as the University of Houston. The program that will be developed will help Black males be retained in college to be more successful in life overall.



**Research Questions**

RQ1. What is the retention rate for Black male students at the University of Houston, and how does it relate to the retention rates of other demographic groups at the University of Houston?

RQ2. What are the support services available at the University of Houston to help support Black male students?

RQ3. How do supports connect with Black male perceptions of support and Black male academic performance (grades, retention, and graduation)?

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

This review of selected literature is presented in four general sections. The first section presents a historical analysis of selected literature on Black and other ethnic minority students' participation in higher education and how stereotyping has changed the black student's positive perspective on educational attainment to a negative one. The second and third sections review literature through a critical lens on the student engagement and sense of belonging that affect retention rates of Black male students in higher education. The fourth section focuses on the vital role that higher education student support services play in retaining Black male students. The fourth section concludes with descriptions of retention programs designed to develop the holistic student and increase Black male retention through voluntary educational programs that are integrated into the whole development of student learning. As stated in Chapter I, the theoretical framework of this research is rooted in Astin's involvement theory. According to Astin (1999), an example of a highly involved student is one who

- devotes considerable energy to studying,
- spends much time on campus,
- participates actively in student organizations,
- frequently interacts with faculty members and other students.

The theory is made up of five core postulates:

1. Involvement can be generalized, such as the entire student experience, or more specific, such as studying for an exam.

2. Involvement occurs along a distinct continuum for each student at a given time.
3. Involvement can be quantitative or measured, such as the number of hours spent studying, or qualitative, such as whether the student comprehends the reading assignment.
4. The amount of learning and personal growth associated with any educational program is directly proportionate to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. “The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.” (Astin, 1999, p. 519)

Involvement is indeed a crucial component of the college experience. A longitudinal study of college dropouts performed by Astin (1999) showed that the factors that contributed to students persisting in pursuing a degree suggested involvement. In contrast, those components that contributed to the students dropping out inferred a lack of involvement. Another theory critical to this study is Vincent Tinto’s interactionist theory. Tinto’s theory focuses on institutional impacts on students’ development (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Alan Seidman (2005), who wrote a book on college student retention, explains that “Tinto views student departure as a longitudinal process that occurs because of the meanings individual students attribute to their interactions with the formal and informal dimensions of a given college or university” (Seidman, 2005). These interactions occur between the student and a college or university's academic and social systems (Seidman, 2005). Tinto posited that an increase in social and academic

integration would increase students' commitment to their goals and the institution, subsequently increasing retention rate (Harper & Quaye, 2009).

### **A Historical Overview**

Over the last several decades, significant concerns about the retention of Black students, particularly Black male students, have been persistent in postsecondary settings. The inability of institutions to respond effectively has hindered this population from substantial growth in retention rates (Palmer et al., 2014; Harper, 2014; Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Several issues have contributed to the continuance of Black male retention issues: (1) the preparedness of African-American students for matriculation in higher education; (2) the sociopolitical and economic factors that affect African-American students' performance and success in college; (3) the institutional obstacles to African-American student failure or success; and (4) the inherent social and economic problems of African-American students (Bryant, 2015). The above issues are not all factors contributing to lower retention rates in black males. Still, they indeed represent substantial barriers to the retention of students of color.

A study done by Linda Cobb (2017) on Black male preparation for college illustrates the struggles this special population experiences in preparing for post-secondary education. Cobb writes that a problem exists because Black male students aspire to attend college. Still, they are not being equipped for several reasons, including lack of resources, environmental factors, location of their middle and high schools, and their lack of knowledge about college preparation (Valentine-Cobb, 2017). A problem for Black students includes not

receiving adequate training for postsecondary education. Several researchers explored the following topics which affect Black students' lack of preparation for secondary school: stereotypes (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) engagement (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011) sense of belonging (Wood & Harris, 2015).; and student support (Charles & Mertler, 2002).

### **Stereotypes**

A 2012 study on stereotypes by Nicole Johnson determined the unique role that racial stereotypes play in the retention of black students in the higher education system. Johnson describes stereotypes as a gross generalization applied to a group of people with generally the same shared characteristics (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Black male participants overwhelmingly experienced racial stereotypes in the form of preconceived notions about their intelligence. Johnson's study explores how these constructs manifest in a college environment. The study analyses explicitly campus climate and how college campuses can reinforce negative stereotypical behavior. The study, which includes the personal testimonies of Black students, asked them several questions about their perceived feelings about the campus' racial climate. The research on campus racial climate has reaffirmed and expanded much of what we know about ethnic environments and students' academic lives. It is also evident that a hostile campus racial climate causes Black and Latinos to experience extreme psychological distress. They report that they consistently feel marginalized and anxious, and they do not feel a sense of belonging or connectedness to their campus community (Solórzano, 2000). These perceived

stereotypes hinder black student retention rates. The study concluded that racial stereotypes caused many faculty members to have low expectations of black students and discouraged them from pursuing specific careers and majors. Additionally, these stereotypes have caused black students to experience stereotype threats and motivated faculty not to build supportive relationships with them (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013).

On the other hand, research also highlights the benefits of a positive campus racial climate to undergraduate students. A positive racial environment that supports interracial interactions can decrease racial divisions and enhance students' psychological and emotional well-being (Pike & Kuh 2006).

According to Maya Gordon's study, consistent with media effects theories, frequent exposure to and strong identification with stereotypical Black media portrayals were negatively correlated with academic outcomes in this sample of Black youth (Gordon, 2015). Those youth who watched more television, listened to music more often, and identified more strongly with stereotypical media personalities also had lower grades in their classes, lower perceptions of their ability to do well in science, and less interest in careers that required a college education (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013). Gordon studied the achievement gap in Black students and the unique role that the media play in reinforcing negative, untrue stereotypes of Black and Hispanic people. Gordon emphasizes the notion that the media have driven a false narrative about black people for centuries that has affected the way white Americans look at black people and how black Americans look at themselves through a negative lens. Gordon argues that more than 150 years after the legal end to slavery, American media continue to present variations of the stereotypes

that were once used to justify the enslavement and oppression of Black people (Gordon, 2015). These media portrayals include stereotypes that ignore academics and education as an arena where blacks can achieve. Racist and stereotyped images have dominated the way media have depicted Black people for hundreds of years (Bogle, 2001). These images were created to justify the sexual and economic exploitation of Black people during slavery and the acts of violence and denial of civil rights that occurred post slavery. Televised images of blacks continue to be dominated by portrayals of violence, crime, domestic labor, and sexual objectification (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). Gordon's study examined connections between media use and academic achievement in a group of African America high school students. Her research hypotheses were that greater media use would be associated with lower academic performance, lower intellectual self-perceptions, and less interest in careers that require a college education (Gordon, 2016). Through Gordon's research, the hypotheses were generally supported.

### **Engagement**

According to Alrashidi, Phan and Ngu (2016), academic engagement refers to students' degree of participation in academic-oriented activities. Studies have concluded that more academically engaged students tend to be better retained than those not in a university setting. Various research studies have continuously shown that Black men are the least engaged student population on a college campus. Harper (2009) suggests that Black men experience more limited levels of academic engagement than their female peers. However, he situates disengagement as a byproduct of societal norms and institutions themselves, suggesting that lack of investment in Black male success leads to lower levels of engagement. Black men are the least likely to use student support

services, even though they are more likely to require faculty-campus support services Harper (2009). Harper also states that Black men in colleges experience lower levels of engagement in college due to institutional climates that can be rife with discrimination. This notion is also evident in the general engagement literature (Quaye & Harper, 2007). Harper's research (2009) found five forms of engaging students to be effective:

1. Active and collaborative learning, participating in the classroom with faculty and peers and through out-of-class joint activities (e.g., service projects, tutoring)
2. Student effort, reflective of "quality of effort" measures for completion of work and time taken to ensure the job is of quality
3. Academic challenge, students' engagement in intellectually challenging analyses/syntheses, experiences, and activities
4. Student-faculty interaction, intensity, and quality of interactions between students and instructors
5. Support for learners, students' use of campus support services and resources to further their learning and overall academic experience

Researchers found that Black students benefit more from educationally purposeful activities, including, but not limited to, studying, doing the reading for class, asking questions, meeting with professors to discuss grades, and working with other students on projects (Kuh et al., 2008; Shappie & Debb, 2019). Researchers investigated factors influencing student engagement and success among black students on the West Coast. This study involved nine focus groups that accessed the student's barriers to success (McDougal, Cox, Dorley & Wodaje, 2018). The study surveyed forty-one students from



several universities. The study focused on various areas that inhibit positive retention efforts in the black student population. Fifty-six percent (23/41) of the participants mentioned the importance of having a more equitable and responsive pedagogy. Students described effective teaching styles as passionate approaches from engaging professors who are involved in ensuring that students understand the information and who are sensitive to diverse learners. Some students expressed their desire to have more hands-on learning assignments, more community-engaging assignments, and the opportunity for discussion (McDougal, Cox, Dorley & Wodaje, 2018). Also, the study found that 51% (21/41) of the participants explained that they only feel comfortable around Black peers. These students explained that they feel a unique sense of family and community in their relationships with other Black students that they do not find in their relationships with non-Black peers.

The importance of a sense of community within and outside of the Black community is a running theme that influences the retention of black students. The study further determined that interactions with fellow black students were much more positive than with white students (McDougal, et al., 2018). Finally, the study also determined that faculty-to-student interactions were a vital component of retention within these institutions of higher learning. McDougal et al. (2018) found that 46% (19/41) of the student respondents described unsupportive and unwelcoming experiences with their professors. These students described their professors as unsupportive teachers who show no interest in getting to know them or understanding them on a personal level. The study also documents several testimonies from students that highlight black male struggles in higher education. Isac, an 18-year-old freshman male, states:

Like when we go to class, and we're getting our work done versus a professor knowing your name. I know for sure I go to class and I do all my work in that class. The professor just collects your work, everything, then there's multiple other people who aren't my race and the professor's talking to them, knows their name, calls their name out in class, all that stuff. So, I mean, personally it doesn't bother me because I know, obviously, I'm getting my work done. I'm getting this A, so I'm not tripping about it. But still, for people may want that recognition, that's going to be tough for them because they're not really going to continue like that because they're like—I'm not going to say they're expecting you to be lower than everybody else, but they're not holding you to the same pedestal when you are doing the stuff that they want you to do. . . . I would say that if you have an advisor or a counselor, they need to ask you questions. You shouldn't be the one asking all the questions. They should be asking questions that they need you to know the answer to. Because that will help you—it would help directly to wherever you're trying to go or would help clarify some things that you didn't even know how to ask. (McDougal et al., 2018).

A final important conclusion from the study is the importance of faculty of color. The students described the essential need to have faculty who look like they do. Their presence gave these students a sense of hope and validation of their academic identity at the university. These students described Black faculty as instructors who make it known that they were there to help them. There are several ways they do this, according to student descriptions. Black faculty go out of their way to connect them to resources and opportunities (i.e., campus services, scholarships, jobs, etc.). According to the

respondents, Black faculty are typically willing to have conversations with them about the school, their lives, and their professional futures. They described Black faculty as going out of their way to check in with them regarding their academic performance or general well-being and letting them know they care (McDougal et al., 2018).

### **Sense of Belonging**

Researchers have insisted that a sense of belonging is an essential component of students' feeling welcomed on college and university campuses to help with retention efforts. A sense of belonging produces positive educational outcomes (Strayhorn, 2008). Strayhorn states that a sense of belonging is both cognitive and affective. The concept of a sense of belonging in higher education has been expressed in various ways. Schlossberg's (1989) theory of "mattering," which examines how students feel their presence in the college setting mattered to others, has a direct link with a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging has been determined as a more effective way to measure student connectedness than Tinto's social integration model (Wood & Harris, 2015).

Researchers suggest that as traditionally measured, social integration fails to accurately assess the subjective perspectives of connectedness that students have with an institution. In contrast, most literature on social integration examines students' connectivity to the campus environment using markers of their participation in campus clubs, sports, student government, and college-sponsored events (e.g., fine arts) and going places with friends (Maestas, 2007). Wood and Harris (2015) used the relationship between students and faculty and staff to measure a sense of belonging in their study. The study used three separate questions to measure a coded scale that consisted of items that ranged from "a sense of alienation" to "a sense of belonging." The results of the study

focused on two essential questions. First, the study examined the relationship between black male college students' sense of belonging and retention. The study determined that student engagement measures, such as faculty-student interaction, exposure to diversity, and usage of support services, all played a vital role in students' perceptions of belonging and integrating into the campus community. Second, the study found that active collaborative learning and engagement led to a higher sense of belonging. The study further indicated that the more faculty-student engagement, the more students felt a part of the campus community, which led to higher retention rates in black male students (Wood, Palmer & Harris, 2015). The study also examined the effect student support services had on students' sense of belonging. Wood and Harris write,

Given the impact of the use of campus services in fostering a sense of belonging for Black men, college personnel must create greater awareness of available services. For instance, academic administrators can encourage faculty members to list campus resources in their syllabi, identify the purpose of each service, and provide information on how to access them. Faculty can also discuss the importance of specific support services (e.g., career counseling, skills labs, academic advising) throughout the semester.

Further, student support services personnel can make classroom presentations throughout the academic year to discuss the type of support they offer. For courses that require written work, faculty can provide credit or require students to visit campus writing labs to receive feedback and support on their papers. A similar approach can be employed for students in math classes who access campus math labs. Campuses can also encourage students to meet with academic

advising and career counselors during a specified timeframe (e.g., each semester, each year) to maintain good academic standing.

A study done at Cityville University, an urban commuter university, analyzed structural problems that undermine persistence and degree completion, sense of belonging, and academic achievement for Cityville's Black students (Harper et al., 2016). The researchers found several factors contributing to the school's students' lack of attachment to the university. Undergraduates interviewed made clear there was a significant shortage of spaces in which Black culture was acknowledged, celebrated, and affirmed. Black students felt there were no spaces on campus they could call their own. Although some mentioned a single room in the Multicultural Affairs Office, few had been there. Students commented on Cityville University's being an HSI. The participants gave specific examples of how the university demonstrated care for Latino students and how Hispanic culture predominated the shared Multicultural Affairs Office space. This signaled to Black students that their culture was unimportant and, therefore, geographically confined to off-campus locations (Harper et al., 2016).

"If you are White, they treat you with more respect, they expect you to succeed. But if you're Black, they don't expect much at all from you." When one student shared these sentiments in a focus group conversation, others affirmatively nodded their heads and followed up with confirmatory examples of their own. One woman talked about a chemistry professor calling her stupid in front of the whole class and shaking his walking cane in her face. "I was afraid he was literally going to hit me with his cane." She added, "But this didn't shock any of

the Blacks in the class because we already knew that he thought we were all stupid. In one way or another, he expresses that to every class session." (pg 000).

### **Student Support Services' Effect on Retention**

This literature review has demonstrated that black students need to be actively engaged and feel a sense of belonging to overcome negative historical stereotypes that have been reinforced by society their entire lives. The literature review also highlights the need for student support services on college campuses to facilitate more faculty-student interaction and more active learning outside the classroom to supplement a more holistic development of men of color. Several studies have addressed the effects that student support services have on positive educational outcomes for all types of students. University administrators have been struggling for years to understand the impact of student support services on the academic success of college students. Success indicators, such as student test scores, high-grade point averages (GPAs), and retention and graduation, have produced better insight, which has led to an improved understanding of their impact on academic success (Charles & Mertler, 2002). Fike & Fike (2008) found that one of the strongest predictors of fall-to-fall student retention was participation in student support services.

In a separate study, Chaney et al. (1998) found that when student support services programs are linked to specific student services at the same institution, the retention rate of students was seven percentage points higher than it was at schools with other student support services programs that did not link to specific services. A finding consistent with other studies examining academic support programs was the positive effect peer tutoring had on retention and college GPAs. Student support services participants had GPAs 7%

higher in the first year, 5% higher in the second year, and 4% higher over three years than were GPAs in similar students who did not participate in student support services.

Students also earned 6% more credits in their first year, 4% more in the second year, and 4% more in the third year than similar students who did not participate in student support services (Chaney et al., 1998). Thirteen students who participated in student support services instructional courses and workshops were retained at a higher rate than were students who did not participate in these services. The findings indicate that student support services programs provide skills to participants that help them integrate during their first year at college and remain successful until degree completion. The researchers suggested a need for studies of student support services at individual institutions (Chaney et al., 1998).

Another study by Ryan Wilson from Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) focused on how several student support services offices positively or negatively impacted retention rates. Wilson's study aimed to determine the level of effect the NOVA program (a program designed for first-generation black students) at EKU had on its participants' academic success. NOVA students rated the NOVA advisor as having the most positive impact on their decision to enroll at EKU in Fall 2013. Specifically, 82.1% of students responded "strongly agree" or "agree" that the NOVA advisor significantly influenced their decision to return to EKU (Wilson, 2014). However, the self-reported positive effects on retention that participants attributed to the NOVA advisor—career counseling, leadership development, and peer leader modeling—had no measurable differences in retention. NOVA students planned on returning to EKU at a 72% rate, while the control planned on returning at a 61% rate ( $p = .096$ ) (Wilson, 2014).

In another study, researchers from the U.S. Department of Education published a report that was conducted over five years of the effects that student support services had on the educational outcomes of the student participants. The full report discusses five academic outcomes, including retention (Chaney et al., 1998). The study illustrated several essential findings of the importance and value that student support services add to the educational experience.

The research on how stereotypes have had an adverse effect on black male retention and the impact of engagement measures on a sense of belonging served as a conceptual lens for the examination. This study attempts to address these gaps in the literature by assessing black male student perceptions through the University of Houston Campus Climate data using empirical evidence of connections between Black male retention, student engagement, and a sense of belonging in black male students at the University of Houston. Based on Astin's theory of involvement, this study will address multiple dimensions of student support services and their effectiveness in increasing black male student retention rates at the University of Houston. This study will specifically address the benefits of student engagement and a sense of belonging centered around the University of Houston's climate survey that asks direct questions about student support services. The questions will focus on who has access to additional student support services outside the classroom, the knowledge of these services by black male students, and how these services are used at the university to increase retention rates in black males. Guided by these notions, the methods employed in this study are described in the next section.



## **Chapter III**

### **Method**

This chapter discusses the study's purpose, the research questions and design, the sample of Black male students, data collection and analysis, and limitations. As discussed in the previous chapter, many factors contribute to Black male university enrollment retention rates being lower than those of other student groups. As outlined throughout this text, the factors include the complex history of segregation and disenfranchisement of Black people for hundreds of years, the lack of educational resources available to communities of color, societal pressures and norms, and a myriad of institutional factors that can reinforce an imbalance in the higher education system.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study explores the environmental factors that ultimately can have a negative effect on Black male retention rates. The study provides a framework for Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) to address the retention issues in the Black male community by providing a strategy to effectively transition Black male students into the higher education system that considers the unique challenges the Black male community faces. The data collected has been analyzed to develop a living-learning curriculum specifically for Black males to help increase the overall student success of this particular sample. By measuring or looking at student outcome variables, such as retention and attitudes toward the University of Houston, from which the data were drawn, this study delineates student support services' success in retaining Black male students. Findings could help the University of Houston and other comparable institutions to take corrective actions to increase retention. The study relied on institutional and university climate survey data for

the independent and dependent variables and took an in-depth look at how institutional policies and procedures contributed to the retention of Black men. The study focused on the institutional barriers, such as resources and institutional environment, that can contribute to retention rates of Black males at university. The study was designed to provide answers to the following three questions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What was the retention rate for Black males at the University of Houston for the 2017–2018 academic school year, and how does it compare with that of other demographic groups at the University of Houston?
2. What were the support services available at the University of Houston to help support Black male students?
3. How do perceptions of support services of Black male students compare to the overall perceptions of support services of all students as summarized in the University of Houston climate report?

### **Research Design**

This quantitative study was based on an archival design selected to identify some ways to increase Black male retention rates at the University of Houston. Specifically, the study aimed to connect the impact of student engagement, students' sense of belonging and support, and resources provided by an institution to Black male retention rates. Various factors that condition lower retention rates in the Black male sample were of particular interest. The study analyzed the student sample profiles and institutional resources that contribute to Black male retention rates at the University of Houston using the climate survey, data administered by the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment

Services at The University of Houston. The study explored data from Black males at the University of Houston and retention data from freshman to sophomore year of institutional data of the 2017-2018 academic school year.

Founded in 1927, the University of Houston is a four-year HSI nestled in urban Houston, Texas. The University of Houston is a national leader in attracting diverse student talent. It was selected because of its high enrollment of Black male students and its unique student success programs. These programs were strategically crafted using in-house historical data to increase student success in Black students over the past five to ten years. The Black student population is about 10% of the student body (University of Houston, 2019). The University of Houston is also one of the 31 research universities within the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. In this study, the variables of interest are student retention and student achievement (i.e., average grade point average [GPA], overall and per semester; enrolled hours; credits earned; and student satisfaction data).

### **Research Sample**

Black male students at the University of Houston were the study's focus. For Research Question 1 (RQ1), the sample size was based on the Fall 2017 archival records of full-time Black male enrollment of first- and second-year students at The University of Houston's main campus. The participants were freshmen- and sophomore-age students who self-identified as Black males. All had enrolled as full-time students at the University of Houston in Fall 2017. Most participants were from Texas, specifically Harris County, where Houston serves as the county seat. The participants came from various backgrounds and various income levels.

## Data Collection

There were three parts to the study: (a) for the first research question, the sample included archival record data for the demographics and academic outcomes for all Black male students attending the University of Houston in Fall 2017 (sample size, 1,896); (b) for the second research question, the sample included the University of Houston website pages that connect with the Office of Student Affairs; and, (c) for the third research question, archival data for Black male students in Fall 2017 who completed the University of Houston climate survey and attended the University of Houston was used, including de-identified responses for 48 students and overarching findings. These three samples could not be connected by linking variables and were treated separately throughout the analyses. The University of Houston Student Affairs and Enrollment Services and the University of Houston Institutional Data provided the data sets.

These offices regularly maintain the data sets, and any personally identifiable information was removed before distribution to secure the anonymity of the students in the sample. The University of Houston website is open access, and materials to be reviewed are available for view by the general public. Participants in the climate survey were undergraduates who (a) were enrolled at the University of Houston, (b) entered as first-year freshmen, and (c) self-selected to take the survey.

As indicated in the sample section, RQ1 of this study focused on Black male student retention rates at the university. The institutional data collected from the Office of Institutional Research included the following eight variables:

1. Cumulative 2017–2018 freshman GPA
2. Fall 2017 GPA

3. Spring 2018 GPA
4. Total student enrolled hours for Fall 2017
5. Total student enrolled hours for Spring 2018
6. Total student credits earned for Fall 2017
7. Total student credits earned for Spring 2018
8. Retention of students from Fall 2017 to Fall 2018

In response to RQ2, the study reviewed the student service offices that offered outside-the-classroom support for Black male students and developed a list of services focused on support for Black students at the University of Houston. Some of the current student services offices are listed in the two columns below:

Admissions	Parent and Family Programs
Campus Recreation	Scholarships and Financial Aid
Center for Diversity and Inclusion	Student Centers
Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life	Student Health Center
Center for Student Involvement	Student Housing and Residential Life
Cougars in Recovery	UH Wellness
Counseling and Psychological Services	University Career Services
Dean of Students Office	University Registrar
Integrated Enrollment Services	Urban Experience Program
International Student and Scholar Services	Veteran Services
LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer] Resource Center	Women and Gender Resource Center

Answering RQ3 required using the following items from the university climate survey to canvass a sample of Black male students at the University of Houston:

1. Q001. Perceptions of Institution—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? This institution is welcoming.
2. Q007. Perceptions of Institution—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Students at this institution are treated fairly regardless of their race.
3. Q012. Visibility—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? This institution has faculty from diverse backgrounds.
4. Q013. Visibility—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? This institution has staff from diverse backgrounds.
5. Q020. Co-Curricular Environment—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? The student activities offered by this institution enhance my ability to interact with people who are different from myself (i.e., race, gender, beliefs, etc.).
6. Q023. Co-Curricular Environment—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Student organizations at this institution are welcoming.
7. Q079. Overall Learning—As a result of my experiences at this institution: I have felt challenged to think more broadly about diverse issues.
8. Q083. Overall Satisfaction—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at this institution.
9. Q084. Overall Satisfaction—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? I belong at this institution.

10. Q088. Overall Satisfaction—To what extent do you agree with the following statements? I have considered leaving this institution because of an issue related to diversity, inclusion, appreciation of differences, etc.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, quantitative data were collected in an archival design. The instruments used in the study to collect and organize the data consisted of institutional data and the university climate survey. The first research question was investigated using ANCOVA in SPSS software (v. 00). The determinant for significance was at the .05 level. Inferential statistics were utilized to determine if the data collected by the researcher during the study was found to be significant.

Data collected to answer RQ2 were selected to identify the student support services programs that impacted the students' decision to return the following academic year. The goal of RQ3 is to determine the perception of student support services programs among those who participated in the climate survey. Results of the two groups using the Climate Survey Executive Summary and using a comparison of means. A statistically analysis was conducted due to the difference in sample sizes. The analysis of the data addressed the research questions that guided the study. The following two chapters present findings, implications, and recommendations.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

This research aimed to investigate the impact that student support services had on black male retention at institutions of higher learning. This study examined those Black males enrolled at the University of Houston during the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semesters. First, the researcher studied the retention rates of Black male students compared to other subgroups at the University of Houston. Next, the researcher reviewed the student support services offered by the University of Houston to assist students outside the classroom. Finally, the researcher reviewed factors that influence students' persistence toward degree completion, including perceived connection and perception toward the university support services, and if those connections related to students' overall persistence. The researcher also wanted to determine the perception of Black male students of support services and compare it to the general perceptions of student support services of all students. Demographically, all the participants in this study were Black males who were first-time first-year students. The information in this chapter gives insight into Student Support Services and the overall perception of the effectiveness of these programs based on student achievement and retention. The following research questions guided the research:

1. What is the retention rate for Black males at the University of Houston for the 2017–2018 academic school year, and how does it compare with retention rates of other demographic groups at the University of Houston?



2. What are the support services available at The University of Houston to help support Black male students?
3. How do perceptions of support services of Black male students compare with the overall perceptions of support services of all students as summarized in the University of Houston Campus Climate Report?

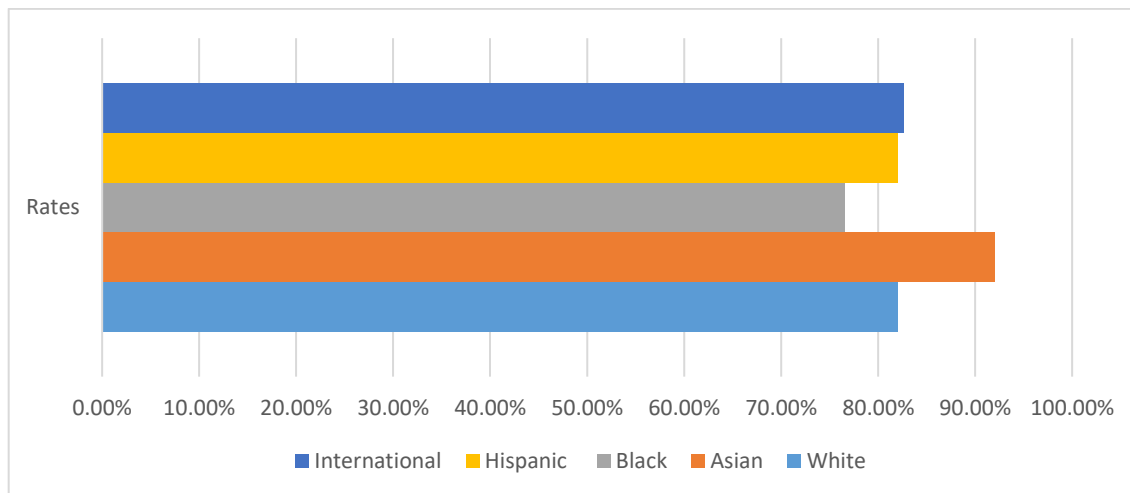
## **Findings**

### ***Research Question 1***

**What is the retention rate for Black males at the University of Houston for the 2017–2018 academic school year, and how does it compare with retention rates of other demographic groups at the University of Houston?** Two hundred and forty-three Black men began their education at UH during the Fall semester of 2017. By the Spring 2018 semester, 228 Black men (93.8%) continued at UH; by the Fall 2018 semester, 186 Black men (76.5%) remained enrolled. Figure 4.1 illustrates the institution's 2017–2018 retention rates. The graph illustrates that Black male retention lags every other demographic group at the University of Houston, with some (Asian students) being retained more than 92% and others (Hispanic, White, and international students) retaining about 80%.

**Figure 4.1**

*University of Houston Retention Rates of Male students by Race or Ethnicity*

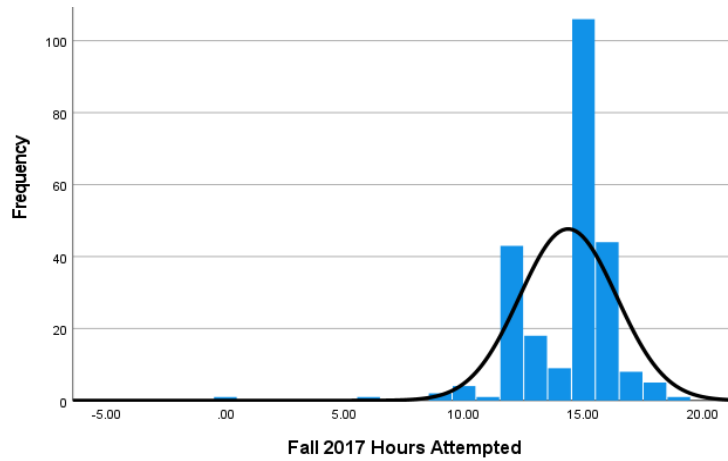


*Note:* Data from University of Houston. (2017). Retrieved from <https://uh.edu/>.

Considerations of retention must incorporate quantifying how many credits were attempted. "Credits enrolled" (i.e., credits attempted) are the number of credit hours students attempted at the beginning of the semester. In the Fall of 2017 and Spring of 2018, Black male students attempted 0–19 credits (Figures 4.2 and 4.3), with most students attempting 12–16 credits. Students identified as attempting zero credit hours began the semester with attempted credits but dropped courses early in the semester.

**Figure 4.2**

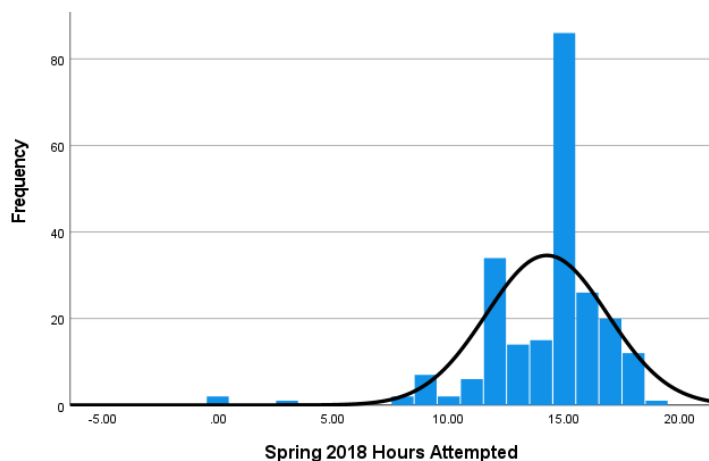
*Distribution of Hours Attempted by Black Male Students in Fall 2017*



*Note.* Two hundred forty-three Black male students attempted up to 19 hours in Fall 2017 ( $M$ , 14.36 hours;  $SD$  = 2.03). Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

**Figure 4.3**

*Distribution of Hours Attempted by Black Male Students in Spring 2018*

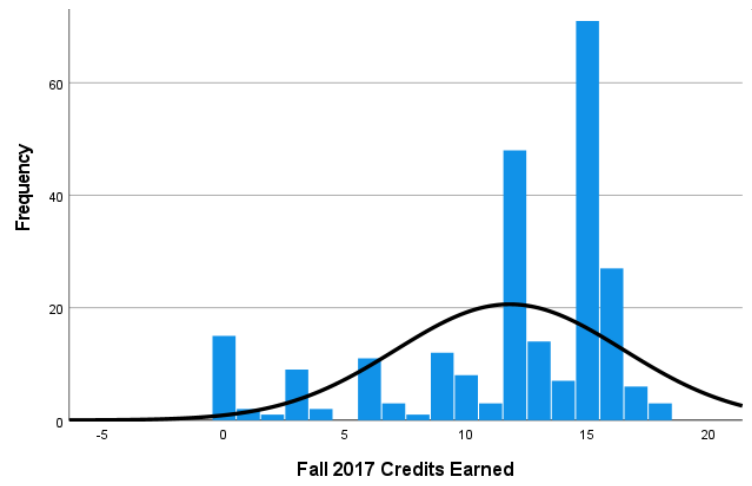


*Note.* Two hundred forty-three Black male students attempted up to 19 hours in Spring 2018 ( $M$ , 14.25 hours;  $SD$ , 2.63). Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

While credits enrolled are significant, credits earned are an additional milestone on a student's path to retention. Figure 4.4 shows the distribution of Black male credits earned in the Fall 2017 semester, and Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of Black male credits earned in Spring 2018. Credits earned ranged from zero to 18, with most students earning nine to 16 credits.

**Figure 4.4**

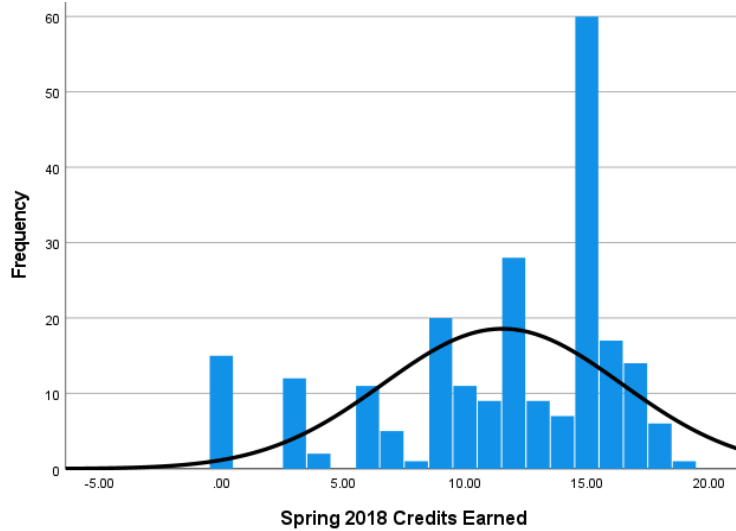
*Distribution of Hours Earned by Black Male Students in Fall 2017*



*Note.* Distribution of hours earned by 243 Black male students in Fall 2017 ( $M$ , 11.79 hours;  $SD$ , 4.70). Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

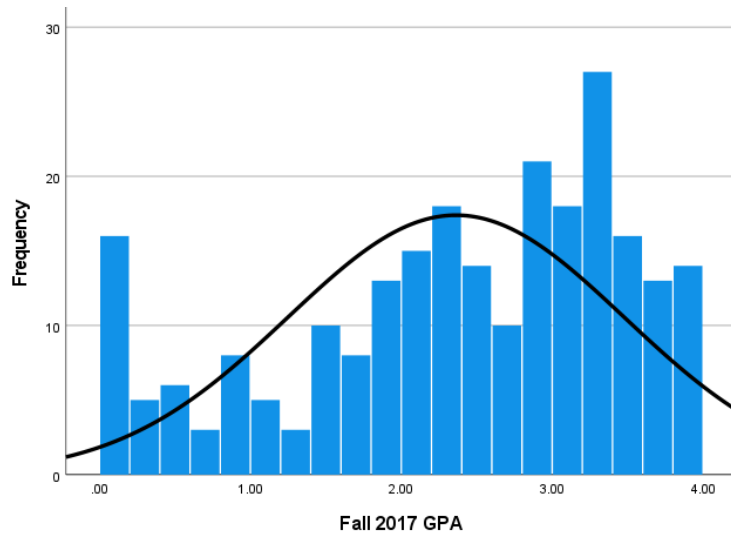
**Figure 4.5**

*Distribution of Hours Earned by Black Male Students in Spring 2018*



*Note.* Two hundred twenty-eight Black male students in Spring 2018 earned fractionally fewer hours than did Black male students in Fall 2017 ( $M$ , 11.54 hours;  $SD$ , 4.90). Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

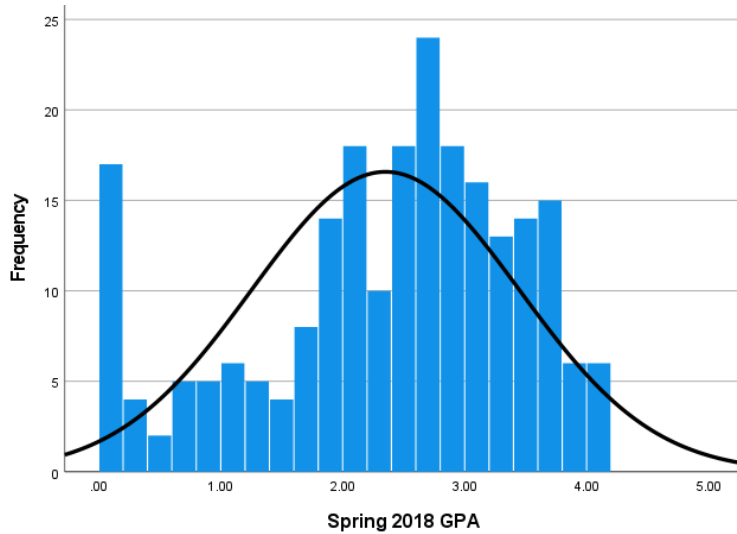
Credits earned provide an understanding of progress to degree, essentially the count of credits earned. Additionally, the quality of those credits can be important to retention efforts. Consequently, student GPAs were reviewed. In Fall 2017, the mean GPA of Black male students was 2.36 (range, 0–3.98;  $SD$ , 1.12), and in Spring 2018, the mean GPA of Black male students was almost unchanged at 2.35 (range, 0–4.0;  $SD$ , 1.10) (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). When the Fall 2017 GPA of Black male students was correlated with Spring 2018 GPA,  $r = 0.632$  ( $p < .001$ ;  $r^2 = 0.399$ ).

**Figure 4.6***Distribution of GPAs for Black Male Students in Fall 2017*

*Note.* Distribution of the GPAs for Black male students in Fall 2017 ranged from zero to 4.00. Overall, mean GPA was practically identical in both semesters (Fall 2017, 2.36 [SD = 1.12]; Spring 2018, 2.35 [SD = 1.10]). GPA, grade point average. Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

**Figure 4.7**

*Distribution of GPAs for Black Male Students in Spring 2018*



*Note.* GPAs for Black male students in Spring 2018 ranged from 0 to above 4.00.

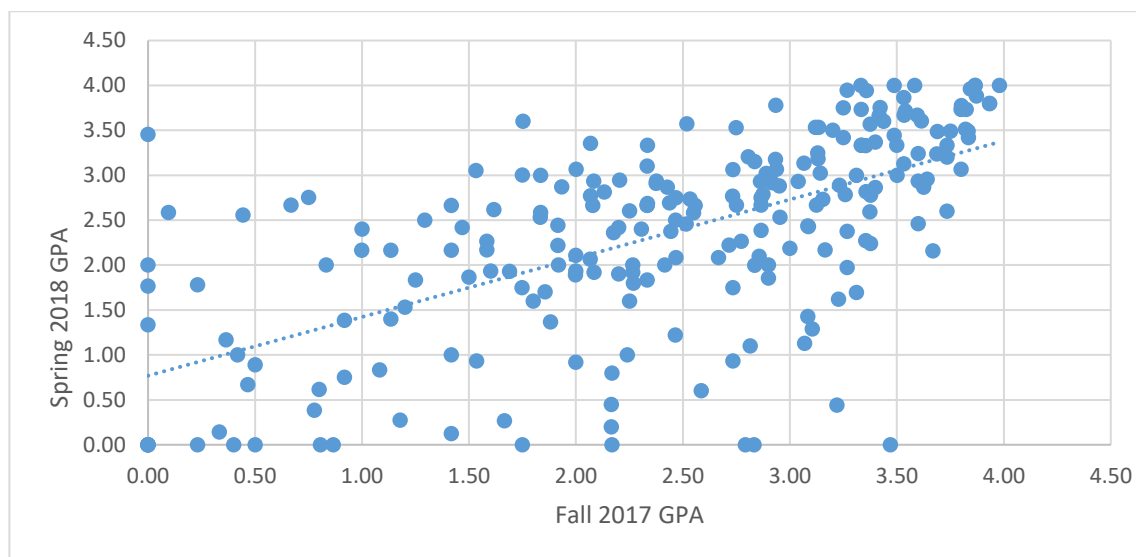
Overall, mean GPA was practically identical in both semesters (Fall 2017, 2.36 [ $SD = 1.12$ ]; Spring 2018, 2.35 [ $SD = 1.10$ ]). GPA, grade point average. Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

Students who did well in the Fall 2017 semester were more likely to do well in the Spring 2018 semester. Students who struggled in the first semester were likely to struggle in the second, as illustrated by Figure 4.8.



**Figure 4.8**

*Comparison of Black Student GPA from Fall 2017 to Spring 2018*



*Note.* Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11). Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

Extending beyond semester-to-semester GPA, by the end of the Spring 2018 semester, the cumulative GPA of Black male students who were retained to the Fall of 2018 was higher than those who exited from the institution. Specifically, the average cumulative GPA for those who remained was 2.62 ( $SD = 0.84$ ) and for those who left was 1.54 ( $SD = 0.98$ ). Retained students earned an average grade of C+, while those who left were generally earning an average of a D or an F, as illustrated below in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1***Mean Spring 2018 GPAs of Black Male Students Retained in Fall 2018*

Black male students	<i>N</i>	Spring 2018 cumulative GPA		
Retained in Fall 2018		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Retained	184	2.6204	.84665	.06242
Not Retained	44	1.5404	.97902	.14759

*Note.* GPA, grade point average. Data from University of Houston. (2021, November 11).

Retrieved November 13, 2021, from <https://uh.edu/>.

## **Research Question 2**

**What are the support services available at the University of Houston to help support Black male students?** The literature about the student support services available at the University of Houston and a visit to the University of Houston Student Affairs and Enrollment Services website prompted the compilation of a list of various programs and offices provided on campus to help develop the holistic learners at the institution. The institution's most vital programs for generating student success for all students, including Black male students, encompassed the following:

- *TRIO Student Support Services*—academic services and service-learning projects that ensured persistence through graduation for first-generation or low-income students or students who had disabilities.
- *Minority Male Learning Community*—a mini cohort of minority male first-year students equipped with survival skills for academic success through this community that integrates social and cultural learning to promote retaining these students.
- *First-Generation College Students Learning Community*—a mini-cohort of first-year students who are a part of a mentoring program that provides advocacy, intervention, mentorship, and support to students who need assistance in being successful at the University of Houston through one-on-one intervention, leading academic initiatives, and sharing campus resources.
- *Center for Diversity and Inclusion*—an organization that fosters an inclusive community by providing services, programs, and support that engage, empower, and educate a highly diverse student population and campus community and lead to student success.
- *Center for Student Involvement*—an organization that creates an inclusive and accessible environment that provides meaningful and diverse learning and involvement opportunities to impact student success. Students gain a sense of self and strong leadership skills while becoming responsible and engaged citizens in their community.
- *Counseling and Psychological Services*—an assistance program, known as CAPS, that offers a dynamic array of services intended to meet students' needs. From

single-session therapy and short-term individual and couples counseling to workshops and group therapy, CAPS strives for a solution that best meets students' needs.

- *LGBTQ Resource Center*—an organization created to cultivate safe spaces on campus while empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer students to develop their authentic identity and become proud, successful, engaged members of the UH community.
- *Parent and Family Programs*—a collection of programs striving to create an environment where parents and family members are informed and involved with their student's college careers. Establishing and building a positive relationship with parents and family members are essential for the university and the continued success of a student.
- *Urban Experience Program*—an umbrella program embracing multiple initiatives, including the Black Excellence Scholars Training Program. This program seeks "to provide academic support and professional development to African American students" across all majors "and empower them with the necessary tools and resources for success" (University of Houston, 2022).

The University of Houston has established various programs to help students of color get help outside the classroom to increase the retention of marginalized student groups such as Black men. The above list provides a framework for some of those services offered at the University of Houston.

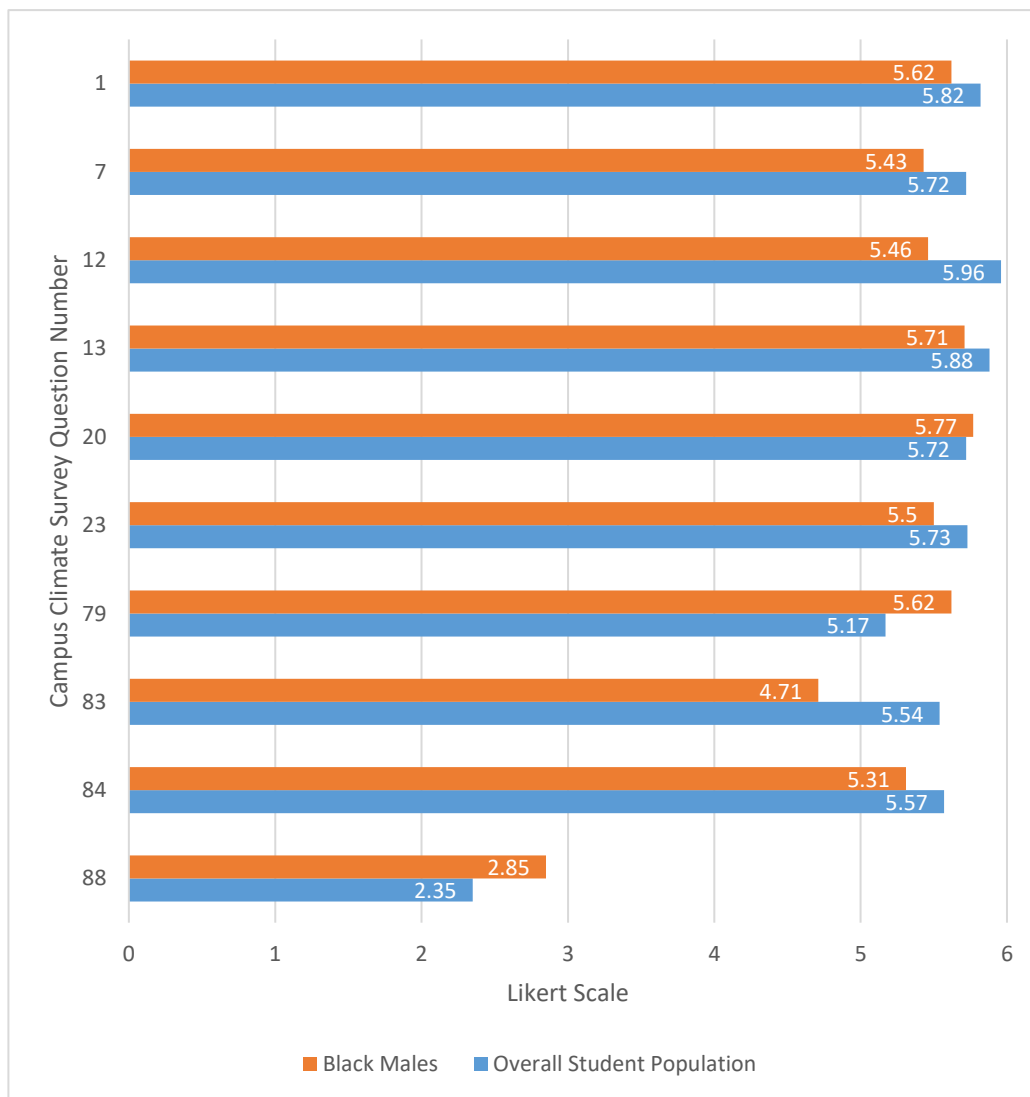
### **Research Question 3**

**How do perceptions of support services of Black male students compare with the overall perceptions of support services of all students as summarized in the University of Houston Campus Climate Report?** The EAB Campus Climate Survey is an online survey instrument administered by the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at the University of Houston. All respondents remain anonymous. The survey assesses students' perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and experiences about diversity, inclusion, and equity on campus. The survey consists of a core section and three optional modules (Community Behaviors, Community Attitudes, and Relationship Dynamics).

The survey was administered in Fall 2017 campus-wide and included enrolled undergraduates at the University of Houston. Of 456 respondents, 14 of those respondents self-identified as Black men. These students' responses to 10 selected questions are presented in Figure 4.9.

**Figure 4.9**

*Selected Campus Climate Survey Responses by Undergraduates Overall and Subset of Black Male Students—Fall 2017*



*Note.* Data adapted from EAB Campus Climate Survey, by the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, 2017, University of Houston (URL).

Results of the two groups using the Climate Survey Executive Summary and using a comparison of means to determine the mean scores of several survey areas, including Perception of the Institution, Visibility, Co-Curricular Environment, Overall Learning, and Overall Satisfaction. Significant differences ( $p \leq .05$ ) were detected between the groups in several survey areas. All but one question (Survey Question 79) fell under the overall question, "To what extent do you agree with the following statements?" (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, Climate Survey Data). Students responded on a Likert scale.

*Perceptions of Institution. Survey Question 1 asked students to gauge how welcome they felt: "This institution is welcoming" (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.1. Climate Survey Data). A rating of "0" denotes more negative perception, while a rating of "7" represents a more positive perception. Of the 456 students who answered this question, 14 students identified themselves as Black males. On this question, the mean score for the entire sample was 5.82, higher than the mean score of Black males, 5.64.*

Students also responded to Survey Question 7: "Students at this institution are treated fairly regardless of their race" (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.2. Climate Survey Data). Of the 449 students who answered this question, 14 students identified themselves as Black males. The mean score for the entire sample was 5.72, which was higher than the 5.43 mean score of Black males. Visibility. For the

first of two questions reported here regarding visibility (Survey Question 12)—"This institution has faculty from diverse backgrounds" (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.2. Climate Survey Data). —respondents included 447 students who represented the undergraduate student body and a subset of 13 students who identified themselves as Black males. The mean score for the entire sample was 5.96, which was statistically significantly higher than the 5.46 mean score of Black males.

On the second question of visibility (Survey Question 13)—"This institution has staff from diverse backgrounds" (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.2. Climate Survey Data). —448 students overall took the survey, and a subset of 14 students identified themselves as Black males. The mean score for the entire sample was 5.88, higher than the 5.71 mean score of Black males.

*Co-Curricular Environment.* Survey Questions 20 and 23 were included in this section. The first was "The student activities offered by this institution enhance my ability to interact with people who are different from myself (i.e., race, gender, beliefs, etc.)" (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.4. Climate Survey Data). The mean score for the entire sample of 420 on Survey Question 20 was 5.72, which was slightly lower than the 5.77 mean score of Black males. The second question—"Student organizations at this institution are welcoming"(Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.2. Climate Survey Data). was answered by 420 students, including 14 students who identified themselves as Black males. The mean score for Survey Question 23 for the entire sample was 5.73, higher than the 5.50 mean score of Black males. Overall Learning. To Survey Question 79, "As



a result of my experiences at this institution: I have felt challenged to think more broadly about diverse issues" (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.8. Climate Survey Data), 444 students overall and a subset of 14 students who identified themselves as Black males responded. The mean score for the entire sample was 5.17, which was lower than the 5.36 mean score of Black males.

*Overall Satisfaction. The first of three questions about overall satisfaction was, "Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at this institution" (Survey Question 83) (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.8. Climate Survey Data). Four hundred fifty-five students took the survey overall, and a subset of 14 students identified themselves as Black males. The mean score for the entire sample was 5.54, which was statistically significantly higher than the 4.71 mean score of Black males. The second question of interest from the Overall Satisfaction section was "I belong at this institution" (Survey Question 84) (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.8. Climate Survey Data). Four hundred forty-six students answered the survey question, including 14 students who identified themselves as Black males. The mean score for the entire sample was 5.57, higher than the 5.31 mean score of Black males. The last question of interest from the Overall Satisfaction section was " I have considered leaving this institution because of an issue related to diversity, inclusion, appreciation of differences, etc." (Survey Question 88) (Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, UH, 2017, p.8. Climate Survey Data). Four hundred forty-six students answered the question; of these respondents, 14 students identified themselves as Black males. The mean score for the entire sample was 2.35, which was statistically significantly lower than the 2.85 mean score of Black males.*

The campus climate perceptions reported by the overall population and by black males alone are illustrated below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Campus Climate Perceptions by Overall Student Population and Black Males Alone—  
2017

Numbered questions by section		Mean responses	
		Overall ( <i>N</i> = 455)	Black males ( <i>N</i> = 14)
<b>Perceptions of institution</b>			
1	This institution is welcoming.	5.82	5.62
7	Students at this institution are treated fairly regardless of their race.	5.72	5.43
<b>Visibility</b>			
12	This institution has faculty from diverse backgrounds.	5.96	5.46
13	This institution has staff from diverse backgrounds.	5.88	5.71
<b>Co-curricular environment</b>			
20	The student activities offered by this institution enhance my ability to interact with people	5.72	5.77

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	who are different from myself (i.e., race, gender, beliefs, etc.)		
23	Student organizations at this institution are welcoming.	5.73	5.50
Overall learning			
79	I have felt challenged to think more broadly about diverse issues.	5.17	5.36
Overall satisfaction			
83	Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at this institution.	5.54	4.71
84	I belong at this institution	5.57	5.31
88	I have considered leaving this institution because of an issue related to diversity, inclusion, appreciation of differences, etc.	2.35	2.85

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*Note.* Questions on perceptions of the institution, visibility, the co-curricular environment, and overall satisfaction measured agreement with the statement ("To what extent do you agree with the following statements?"). The question on overall learning was introduced differently: "As a result of my experiences at this institution, . . . ." Number of overall respondents varied 420–455; number of respondents who were Black males varied 13–14. Values (low to high) represent a scale from 0 to 7 data from EAB Campus Climate Survey, by the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, 2017, University of Houston (URL).

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

This archival record research project was undertaken to gain insight into how student support services affect the retention of the Black male population at the University of Houston and the influence that support had on the students' perceptions and overall achievement and persistence toward degree completion. The research design implemented in this study complemented existing studies that focused on the influences that affect Black student retention and persistence. It also contributed to the limited body of knowledge regarding students' perceptions of student services by analyzing engagement assessments and a sense of belonging. Institutions of higher learning are striving to improve retention and increase graduation rates. To increase retention in minority populations, colleges and universities must acknowledge the culture of today's higher education student body and create and implement programs that align with students' needs.

The research set out to investigate three questions. First, the study compared the retention rates of black men compared to other subgroups and the retention rate of the overall student population at the University of Houston. The data demonstrated a lag in Black male retention rates compared with rates of every other group included in the study. The results align with prior research that has repeatedly demonstrated that retention of Black male students tends to lag behind rates of other groups. Again, the issue concerning Black retention rates, mainly Black male retention rates, has been an issue in higher education for decades (Braun et al., 2010). Digging further into the data indicated some of the reasons behind these retention lags.

When credits attempted were reviewed, Black males attempted between 12 and 16 credits on average each semester. Conversely, when credits earned were reviewed, Black male students earned between 9 and 15 credits in both the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semesters. In essence, Black male students, on average, earned fewer credits each semester than their total credit hours attempted each semester. Black men who did not pass the course did not remain in their classes or earn grades. Black men retained from Fall 2017 to Fall 2018 represented 81% of those who began in Fall 2017. Specifically, the data show that 184 Black male students were retained from Fall 2017 to Fall 2018, and 44 Black male students left the University during the same period. The percentage of Black male students who left the University that year is disproportionately higher than the exit rates of any other subgroup in this study. For those retained during this timeframe, the average cumulative GPAs for Black male students at the University of Houston were 2.62 (low B to high C). For Black male students who separated from the University during the same period, the average cumulative GPA was 1.54 (a low C to high D). Essentially, many of these Black men had attempted full-time enrollment over the year, but one in five earned limited to no credit with averages in the low C to D range.

While it is heartening to find that almost 80% of Black males returned for another year of study, the average GPA of 2.62 prompts questions about what is being done to support their success. The University of Houston Black male retention issue is reminiscent of scenarios reported in previous studies that have provided various explanations for the reasoning for lower retention issues in this population. These have included the lack of preparedness of Black males who enter higher education, the social

obstacles encountered by this particular population, and the institutional barriers that can hinder Black men from achieving college success (Ford & Moore, 2013). The next step in this project was to review the support available to students.

The second phase of the study investigated student support offices available on The University of Houston's campus to assist with Black male retention. A list of descriptions of services was compiled from the University of Houston website. The website descriptions provided a practical resource for Black men to get help outside the classroom and supplement their education. The list illustrates the student services that the University of Houston has provided Black students to help them with academic achievement. Student support services, such as academic support centers, living-learning communities, counseling services, and other student support services can help students succeed in higher education (UH, 2021). Academic support services allow universities to accept students with a broader range of ability levels and provide valuable holistic learning for students.

Research on higher education policy has identified three actions universities can take through successful student support services to impact educational outcomes positively (York & Thomas, 2003).

- increasing the number of students participating in higher education
- widening the diversity of students participating in higher education
- improving retention rates within higher education

Student services can have a central role in assisting students in academic practices, social integration, funding issues, and personal support. The University of Houston offers several services that support all students, including minority students. The specialized

living-learning communities are especially relevant to this conversation. The living-learning communities are designed to enhance minority students' collegiate experience and improve their retention rates at the University. Other offices such as the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, TRIO Support Services, and the Center for Student Involvement are designed to increase the number of students participating in higher education by offering students several ways to get engaged at the University. As this text has emphasized, Black students feel connected to a university by actively engaging outside the classroom because it increases their sense of community. That sense of belonging improves retention (McDougal et al., 2018).

In its last phase, the study used the University of Houston Campus Climate Survey to examine and assess Black males' responses in several areas, including perceptions of the institution, visibility, co-curricular environment, engagement, sense of belonging, overall learning, and overall satisfaction. The climate survey was administered in 2017, and about 450 students participated in the survey. Fourteen of the 450 students (3%) who took the survey identified themselves as Black men. This study examined ten questions and the differences in the average scores of the entire survey population and of Black men who were respondents. When items about Black male perceptions toward the University were explored, Black men averaged slightly lower scores on both responses to the institution's level of welcoming and fair treatment regardless of race than the entire group of respondents. The lower scores indicated less positive attitudes on these issues than those of the undergraduate population overall.

When visibility at the University was the focus, the diversity of both faculty and staff was rated slightly lower by Black men than these items were rated by the overall



sample. As this text has demonstrated, a significant factor of retention in Black males is having faculty, staff, and mentors on campus who look like them (McDougal et al., 2018). When the focus was on student activities that were offered at the institution to enhance a student's 'ability to interact with people who were different based on race, gender, and beliefs, results showed that Black males scored the institution's efforts at a higher level than did the entire sample. Conversely, when the focus was on the welcoming nature of student organizations at the campus, the overall sample scored this more highly than the Black male subgroup. Throughout this text, the emphasis has remained on how engagement is essential in higher retention in Black male students (Quaye & Harper, 2007).

In line with McClain and Perry's assertion (2017) that when the focus was on how Black men felt challenged to think more broadly about diverse issues on campus, Black men at the University of Houston believed more than the undergraduates overall that they were challenged to think more broadly about diverse issues on campus. Black men were somewhat less satisfied with their experience at the institution, averaging a slightly lower sense of belonging, and were more likely to consider leaving the institution because of diversity and inclusion issues.

### **Recommendations and Implications**

This study has highlighted the critical influence of student support services on improving retention and improving retention and prevention of the dropping out of Black male students in higher education. These findings highlight the disparity in retention rates among black male students and other student groups, perceptions about belonging, and staff diversity at the university, emphasizing the value of connecting with faculty and

staff, specifically through engagement. The literature review stressed the importance of making meaningful connections with campus services and student engagement and how that engagement aids retention efforts. Findings from the study provided an understanding of the positive impacts of adequate student support services on educational outcomes. The study emphasizes fostering faculty and staff relationships as a critical predictor of successful navigation of the university setting by young Black men. The findings in this study suggest that retention of Black male students is a persistent issue that remains a challenge for institutions, and strategic interventions are required to meet students' needs. The study also explored Black men's perceptions in several key areas that affect student retention. The perceptions of engagement, sense of belonging, and positive co-curricular environments were lower in black men than in the entire study sample. Black men did not feel as connected to the university, and administrators need to understand why this is the case.

Additionally, these findings highlight the importance of university support services offered to students to impact student achievement positively. Services such as tutoring, academic advising, and mentoring can encourage the accumulation of educational capital and positively impact achievement. The university would need to ask more direct questions to get to the answer of linking student support services to positive educational outcomes. A critical question for the university to answer is what services would increase retention efforts in black men? A study or an assessment that asks Black male participants to quantify the effectiveness of different services and offices on campus would get to the bottom of that question.

The study focused on participants attending The University of Houston, a public Hispanic-serving institution. It would benefit a researcher to conduct additional studies with both private and public institutions that are predominately White institutions and historically Black colleges and universities to understand the trends at different types of institutions. Another recommendation would be to conduct a qualitative study with interviews and focus groups to further this conversation by examining how student support services can enhance outcomes. Another recommendation should be to conduct quantitative longitudinal research to investigate the impact of the implementation of specific student support services on Black male retention over time. The study should follow a set of Black men, connect them to support services, and examine which support services benefited the participants the most.

Student support services continue to provide support for Black male students. The connection is critical in students' persistence toward degree completion. Support services should focus on Black men gaining a sense of belonging and feeling connected to the university through such involvement and engagement. Support services should help black male students excel academically and socially. These are predictors that Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) also believed influenced student persistence toward degree completion almost three decades ago. It is certainly time to act upon the outcomes of this study and the influence of prior research.

### **Limitations**

The broadest limitation of the study is that it is restricted to the University of Houston. In most universities, student support services by nature can tend to be organized, structured, and operated in highly customized forms specific to the campus on

which they are located. The findings may not be generalizable to other locations. Therefore, while the results of this study are specific to only the University of Houston, how student support services impact Black male retention rates must be extrapolated with caution from the data analysis at the University of Houston to systems of support and retention at other university campuses across the nation.

Another limitation is that impact of student support services on Black male retention rates was assessed solely based on gender and race and was not further broken down into subgroups of the sample to compare retention rates based on study participants' socioeconomic status, standardized test scores, and educational capital. This work has sufficient information to support the institution's next steps.

### **Recommendations**

A focus on campus supports demonstrates the importance of the ability to access campus supports throughout the day and across the academic year. Proximity to campus and student engagement have been shown to support improved student outcomes. Consequently, the next section of the project introduces the concept of Living Learning Communities as a potential solution to improved engagement and sense of belonging for Black men on college campuses.

### **Living Learning Communities**

One of the main conclusions from this research is to emphasize engagement by connecting student support services to their experiences on the campus. One of the most effective ways to do that has been to design a living-learning community on a campus. Residential living-learning communities combine academic and living experiences to

create a smaller and more intimate environment. Residential learning communities often collaborate with multiple campus units, such as academic affairs, advising programs, and first-year experience programs. Additionally, residential learning communities combine educational and living experiences to create students' smaller and more academically intense environments. (Inkelas et al., 2018). Over the past 20 years, several studies confirm the positive effects of living-learning communities. Consequently, colleges and universities have developed residential learning communities on their campuses to keep up with best practices (Brower & Inkelas, 2010). In 2018 Graham et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between proximity to campus and student engagement. Subsequently, Graham stated that it is essential for practitioners to understand the effects of on-campus living, such as programming and resources provided that create a special experience for students (Graham et al., 2018). The proliferation of living-learning communities is largely due to the reported benefits of participation, such as a greater capacity for critical thinking and improved academic performance that can lead to higher retention rates (Inkelas et al., 2006).

Several research studies have determined that living-learning communities provide more social interactions and academic engagement outside the classroom (Inkelas et al., 2006). Brower and Inkelas (2010) conducted a five-year study of living-learning programs. Their analysis produced 24,000 responses from students enrolled at thirty-four postsecondary institutions. Their study obtained an extensive amount of data on living-learning communities. The study confirmed positive benefits for living-learning program participants compared to characteristically similar students who had not participated. The study indicated that participants in the living-learning community-

produced higher retention rates and more positive educational outcomes. The study further indicated that participants benefited from social and civic interaction as a direct result of being a part of a living-learning community. Finally, the study's scope and depth of Brower and Inkelas' study provided very high confidence that living-learning communities were worth the time, effort, and resources needed to develop and improve them (Brower & Inkelas, 2010).

Another study facilitated by 2018 Inkelas et al. found students, on average, had a stronger sense of community, increased peer interaction, and more access to academic advising, tutoring, and other programming catered to their academic and career interests.

"In 2018 Inkelas introduced the Living-Learning Communities Best Practices Model (BPM). The BPM—based on a decade of research from the National Study of Living Learning Programs and practice, and modeled after Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in which basic needs must be satisfied before more complex needs can be met—outlines four levels of residential learning community structure, including: (a) infrastructure, (b) academic environment, (c) co-curricular environment, and (d) what they call the "pinnacle"—the integration of the previous three" (Graham et al., 2018).

The Living-Learning Communities Best Practices Model differs significantly from other on-campus living options due to its design in its intentionality with programmatic efforts involved in these specialized communities. Living Learning communities are often highly recognized because it "explicitly seeks to support and augment student learning and development" (Inkelas et al., 2018).

## **Chapter VI**

### **Action Plan**

Research has demonstrated that Black male students need to be actively engaged and feel a sense of belonging to overcome negative historical stereotypes that society has reinforced their entire lives. This study's data collection, analysis, and reporting inspired an effort to add knowledge and breadth to improving student success factors for Black male students. This chapter focuses on assessing the need for student support services that provide more holistic education outside the classroom.

A significant part of any plan is strategic thinking and action (Fink et al., 2011). University officials must strategize to increase Black male retention, including selecting key people as emerging leaders, using resources to support the most productive activities for coaches and mentors, using social capital, and strategically placing coaches and facilitators. Once the scope of the strategic initiative has been determined, a significant portion of the planning time involves design. This phase requires strategizing different ways of designing an intervention to connect Black students to valuable resources on campus to help improve their grades and retention levels. When designing interventions, researchers must keep several points in mind (August et al., 2010): (a) the level of support or opposition from stakeholders in the environment that is external to the organization that is focused on adopting and implementing the intervention; (b) the adequacy of funding, staffing, and leadership within the organization that is focused on adopting and implementing the intervention; (c) the complex effort required to implement the intervention; and (d) the perceived need for and buy-in of the interventionist related to the intervention being adopted and implemented"

This proposed intervention focuses on supporting students in achieving their educational goals in higher education. Specific aims include (a) providing more exposure to students who may be underinformed about what student services at an institution can provide to support their progress, academic viability, and potential for success. The main focus of the action plan is to engage with students who will be provided the opportunity to participate in a residential living learning community. An essential factor of this research intervention will be creating a shared lived experience that will include Black faculty and staff as mentors to the participants involved in the living-learning program.

#### **A Sample Community: The Black Male Initiative**

Residential learning communities combine academic and living experiences to create a smaller and more intimate environment. Residential learning communities often collaborate with multiple campus units, such as academic affairs, advising programs, and first-year experience programs (Inkelas et al., 2018). The plan would involve having students live on a single floor of an on-campus first-year residence hall at the University of Houston. All participating students would have a set semester curriculum focused on personal development, financial awareness, academic development, and career services.

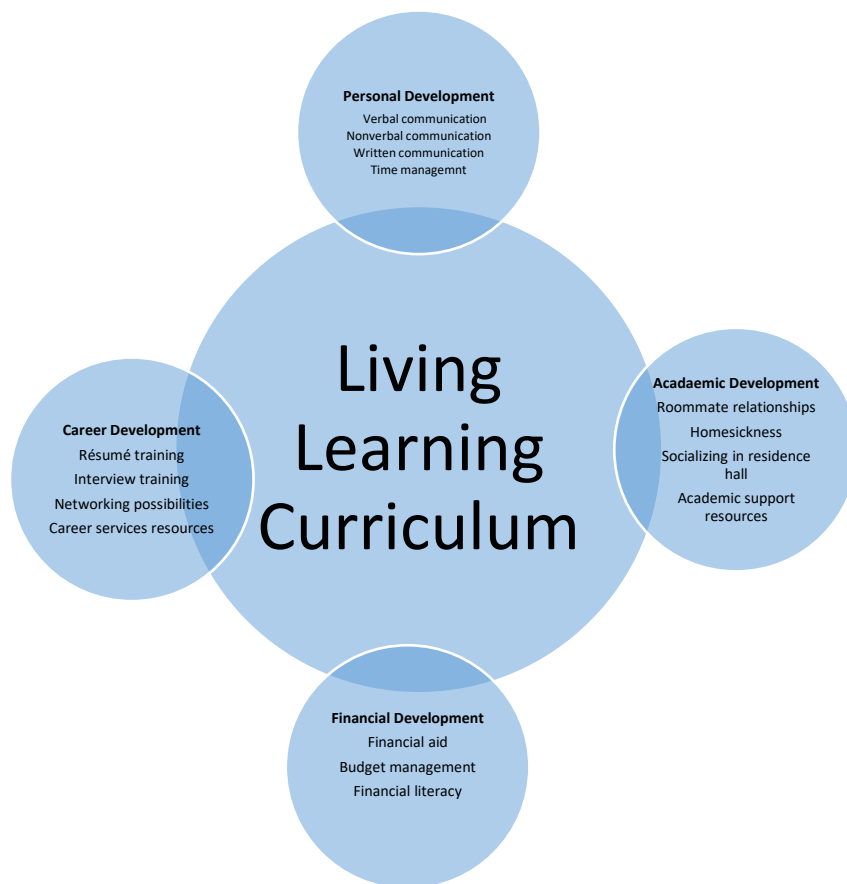
The University of Houston could sponsor such a program, which could be called "The Black Male Initiative." It would offer students with similar interests the opportunity to live together and participate in programs that catered to their academic, social, and personal needs. Students living in the community would have the opportunity to partake in educational experiences with their peers and interact with faculty, enjoying the benefits of being part of a diverse community that shares scholarly interests. Students also would have the chance to explore the greater Houston area with their peers. The community



would focus explicitly on Black first- and second-year male students. The community would seek to break down institutional barriers, such as resources or institutional environments that proved to be averse to higher retention for Black males at institutions of higher education. The living learning community would focus on university services that the institution provided that promoted academics and retention, such as counseling services and tutoring services outside the classroom.

### **Design**

The Black Male Initiative would require constant evaluation of the living learning community goals and outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the program. In other words, improvements will be ongoing through intrusive advising techniques administered by faculty and mentors within the living learning community. The curriculum will emphasize the potential positive impact and benefits of student support services on all individuals, including participants, mentors, and faculty and staff who participate in the living learning community. It will help increase retention efforts in this marginalized group. The community will further illustrate the importance of orchestrating professional learning. The living learning community will also have a standard curriculum that will focus on several areas: personal development, financial responsibility, academic development, and career development (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1***The Four Components of the Black Male Initiative Living Learning Curriculum***A Standard Living Learning Curriculum**

The Black Male Initiative, which will incorporate a standard living learning curriculum, will be broken down into four major learning areas: personal development, academic development, financial development, and career development. Each significant learning area will have three to four learning outcomes that can be measured through formative assessment practices. These learning areas will help provide structure to the

living learning community that will center on the holistic student experience. The aim is to encourage these students to have a sense of belonging on campus to help increase their retention in the University of Houston community. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that having a sense of belonging to a university is essential to retention rates. Wood and Harris stated that a sense of belonging had been determined to be one of the most effective ways to measure student connectedness to a college or university (Wood et al., 2015). Further, a sense of belonging is a vital aspect of students' feeling welcomed on college and university campuses and helps with retention efforts. Without question, students with a sense of belonging produce more positive educational outcomes than students who feel alienated from a university (Hagerty et al., 2002).

### **Curriculum Topics, Objectives, and Outcomes**

*Personal Development. The curriculum component on personal development will have the following learning objectives:*

- Students will learn how to communicate effectively using verbal and nonverbal methods of communication.
- Students will learn about their self-discipline techniques and how to handle themselves.
- The initiative will provide resources about communication styles, time management skills, and self-discipline techniques.

*Academic Development. The curriculum component on academic development will have the following learning outcomes:*

- The initiative will investigate how each resident is adjusting to life in the residence hall.

- The initiative will determine to what degree the resident is experiencing homesickness, and the program will provide resources.
- The initiative will provide resources to facilitate making a connection in the residence hall.
- The initiative will learn about the resident's relationship with any roommate or suitemate.

*Financial Development. The curriculum component on financial development will have the following learning outcomes:*

- Students will learn about various types of financial aid offered through the University of Houston.
- Students will learn how to create a budget.
- The initiative will provide resources about financial literacy, budgeting, and financial aid.

*Career Development. The curriculum component on career development will have the following learning objectives:*

- The initiative will connect students with University Career Services on campus.
- The initiative will determine what areas students would like to focus on developing
- The initiative will help students start developing a career plan and thinking about their futures.

## Evaluation

The community will gather knowledge through an action plan survey (see sample questions in Figure 5.2) of the effectiveness of the Black Male Initiative living learning community. The survey will focus on four areas that all mentors and teachers will take after successfully integrating into the program. The survey will assess the effectiveness of not only the curriculum, but also the professional learning experiences, technology services, critical thinking, and culture and context.

### Figure 5.2

#### *A Sample of Selected Survey Questions for Program Evaluation*

##### Level 1. Effective Professional Learning Experiences

1	The living learning curriculum content was informative. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2	The living learning curriculum delivery was engaging. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3	The living learning curriculum session(s) were appropriate given my previous level of knowledge. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4	The living learning curriculum sessions(s) supported me to reflect on and understand the use of feedback within my own teaching practice. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5	The resources used within the living learning curriculum session(s) were appropriate to support my understanding of feedback.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### Level 2. Academic Development Technology

.1	I am experienced in teaching and learning online.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2	I am experienced in use of learning management systems.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3	I am familiar with threaded discussions and their use in teaching and learning.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4	I am familiar with blogs, wikis, podcasts, and their use in learning.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5	I have a clear philosophy of what it means to learn.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6	I have a clear philosophy of what it means to teach.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7	I am aware of social media platforms that students use to increase learning.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8	Learning online reduces the quality of communication between learners.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9	Learning online is beneficial to students.
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
<i>Figure 5.2—Continued on next page</i>	

## Level 3. Critical Thinking

1	I have learned more about this special population while working with this living learning community. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2	I have improved ability to judge the value of new information. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3	I have learned how to analyze the key issues facing this community. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4	I have learned the importance of thinking critically working with is community. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5	I have developed a more focused and systematic way of thinking. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6	I have developed a more systematic way of thinking. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7	I have developed a greater understanding of the curriculum. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8	I have seldom found myself actively engaged in thinking about complex issues. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9	I challenged my students to think critically about complex issues. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10	I used campus resources to get students connected. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11	The curriculum has stretched my intellectual abilities. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12	The curriculum forced me to explore my own ideas and procedures related to outside learning. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13	I value the new information I learned in teaching the curriculum. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
<i>Figure 5.2—Continued on next page</i>	



## Level 4. Culture and Context

1	This curriculum actively promotes diversity. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2	I think that the curriculum should require courses in multicultural diversity. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3	Diversity enriches the educational experience. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4	Diversity promotes personal growth and a healthy society. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5	Diversity strengthens this living learning community. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6	Diversity enhances the communities' competitiveness. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7	Recruitment of minority students is an institutional priority. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8	I am aware of the content of my university's diversity plan. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9	I am aware the living learning community faces unique challenges. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10	The faculty at this institution are sensitive to diversity issues. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11	What are the benefits or advantages (if any) to diversity? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12	What are the drawbacks or disadvantages (if any) to diversity? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## **Conclusion**

The target audience is Black male freshmen. The effectiveness of the utilization of student support services can and will increase retention rates within this unique population. This living learning community, where students share the same living experience and participate in active learning outside the classroom, is designed to foster a more holistic educational understanding. This outside-the-box learning environment is expected to affect these students' GPAs and their retention as students by the university positively. The initiative intends to combat gaps in retention and persistence between these students and those of other groups. The aim of the initiative is threefold: assist with the transition to the University of Houston, provide seminars that are geared to connect participants to university resources, and further enhance the student experience through leadership development seminars that allow participants to learn more about themselves and how they can find their place within the university.

The Black Male Initiative mentorship will be overseen by professors who will work with leadership teams and mentors to develop the initiative's programs. The goal is to help attract, train, nurture and retain the diverse campus population—administration, faculty, staff, and students—the University of Houston needs. It is a perfect example of how the university is at the forefront of transforming the on-campus experience. This program and living learning opportunities are innovative approaches to holistic learning that student affairs professionals champion. The University of Houston Student Housing and Residential Life office is at the forefront in providing creative solutions so that students feel a sense of belonging and not only survive but also thrive at the university.

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