

Differences in 2-Year Persistence Rates by Student Institutional Status for Black Texas Community College Students: A Statewide, Multiyear Investigation

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Abstract: *In this investigation, the 2-year persistence rates of Black students in Texas community colleges were analyzed for the 2007-2008 through the 2013-2014 academic years. Of particular interest was whether 2-year persistence rates were higher for Black students who stayed at the same community college or for Black students who transferred to a different community college. Inferential statistical analyses did not reveal the presence of any statistically significant differences in the 2-year persistence rates of Black students in the 2007-2008 through the 2013-2014 academic years. The 2-year persistence rates for Black students who stayed at the same community college and for Black students who transferred to a different community college were consistently low, in the 20% range, in all 8 academic years. Clear implications were that Black students should be encouraged to stay at the initial community college in which they enrolled rather than transfer to a different one. Moreover, community college personnel should ensure they have programs available to assist with Black students who transfer to their community college. Researchers are encouraged to extend this study to other states as well as other ethnic/racial groups of students.*

Keywords: Black students; Texas community college; 2-year persistence rates; stayed; transferred; socioeconomics; equity; enrollment/retentions

Introduction

Student enrollment at 4-year institutions increased by 65% between 1992 and 2012. During the same time span, community college enrollment increased by almost 80% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The latest enrollment surge of community colleges was stimulated by the recent economic recession (Mullin and Phillippe, 2009). Community colleges are essential to the postsecondary education system because they provide open access to higher education, workforce development, and prepares students to transfer to 4-year institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). Furthermore, community colleges play a vital role in educating minority, low-income, and underprepared students (Morrice, 2011; Stuart, Rios-Aguilar, and Deil-Amen, 2014). These institutions

serve as access points for many underrepresented Black students who are first-generation college students (Cohen and Brawer, 2008).

College enrollment of Black students has increased substantially over the past 20 years because of successful federal, state, and institutional policies that were implemented to help increase enrollment (Bontrager and Hossler, 2014; Sandoval-Lucero, 2014; Wilson, 2014). In 1990, only 25.4% of Black students between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in college. This figure increased to 30.5% in 2000 and to 38.4% in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In terms of community colleges, more than 50% Black students are currently enrolled, equaling nearly one million students. In fact, roughly one-third of all degrees obtained by Black students are from community colleges (Morrice, 2011). In a recent study, Hamrick and Slate (2018) concluded that commitment to promote and foster diversity and equity are initiated by the states, which has increased the enrollments of Black students into the college and university.

Even though the college enrollment numbers of Black students have increased, persistence rates are still low for Black students (Fauria and Slate, 2014; Moss and Slate, 2015). Black students, as well as well as Hispanic students, graduate at a much lower rate than White students (Roach, 2013). To meet former President Obama's higher education goal, community colleges and universities must improve at educating an increasingly diverse student population (Carey, 2009). Former President Obama (The White House, 2009) stated the following at his first address to a joint session of Congress:

It is our responsibility as lawmakers and educators to make this system work. But it is the responsibility of every citizen to participate in it. And so tonight, I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country—and this country needs and values the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. (para. 66)

The persistence and graduation rates of Black students must drastically increase for the United States to take the lead in the global economy. New initiatives were implemented by former-President Obama to help community colleges in generating five million additional graduates by 2020 (Brandon, 2009).

Other organizations across the country have joined former President Obama by launching their own initiatives in support of college persistence and completion. The 2013-2016 strategic plan of the Lumina Foundation is to increase the percentage of American students with quality degrees to 60% by 2025 (Bontrager and Hossler, 2014). The goal of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is to help low income students by increasing the numbers enrolled

in postsecondary education by the age of 26 (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009). Third, the goal of the College Board is to raise the number of college educated adults from 39% to 55% by 2025 (Lee, Edwards, Menson, and Rawls, 2011).

Although many initiatives are currently in place to enhance student success, low persistence rates continue to be a problem at community colleges. Nearly one half of the students enrolled in community colleges leave before the end of the first year (Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon, 2004). Student success in college necessitates resilience, grit, and persistence to graduation. Advancement from the first year to the second year is essential for students on their journey of earning a college degree (Braxton et al., 2014). The College Board (2012) reported that 1-year to 2-year persistence rates ranged from 59.9% for first-time degree or certificate seeking students at community colleges but was substantially lower for part time students in the 2010 academic year. In 2011, the 3-year persistence rate at 2-year community colleges was only 23.9% (ACT, 2011). Kirst (2008) stated,

Fewer than one-fourth of community college students who begin college between the ages of 17 to 20 transfer or attain an associate's degree or vocational certificate. Only half of the students in 4-year broad access colleges obtain a degree within nine years. (p. 111)

In a recent investigation, Hongwei (2015) analyzed factors that contributed to student persistence at community colleges. Data were obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education System and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, using data on 1,950 students from 50 community colleges in the 2003 and 2004 academic years. Honwei (2015) determined that larger community colleges were more likely to have students drop out due to family obligations and child care responsibility than smaller community college campuses.

In another recent study, Davidson and Petrosko (2015) examined relationships among academics, demographics, work, and family with persistence rates to the next semester for students enrolled at a 2-year community college in Kentucky. In their study, data were used from students enrolled in six cohorts of Basic Algebra from the fall 2006 to spring 2009 semesters. Davidson and Petrosko (2015) documented that students were more likely to persist in face to face courses that had an online component than in courses that just met face to face. Increased online courses, particularly in developmental courses, may have a positive effect on student persistence.

In another investigation into student persistence, Shinde (2010) examined the connection between persistence from one fall semester to the next fall semester and types of student engagement at a southeastern public university. Records of first time freshmen who completed the National Survey of Student Engagement were analyzed to measure student engagement. Social engagement and overall satisfaction was revealed in the study as the top predictors of freshmen persistence. Shinde (2010) suggested student engagement has a positive effect on persistence rates and grades during the first and second year for all student groups.

In a qualitative examination, Escobedo (2007) evaluated persistence and retention of community college developmental students in a 3-year pilot study. Qualitative data were collected and examined for three fall cohorts from the 2001 academic year to the 2003 academic year. Escobedo (2007) concluded that the first year was critical in linking students to college resources and faculty and staff members who could help them succeed in college. Student persistence rates increased when institutions implemented early alert systems, and students completed education plans.

In a recent quantitative study, Moss and Slate (2015) examined the 2-year persistence rates of Black students enrolled in Texas community colleges during the 2000 and 2012 academic years. In particular, data on Black students who either stayed at the same community college or who transferred to a different community college in Texas were analyzed. The 2-year persistence rate of Black students who stayed at the same community college was 22% during the 2000 academic year and dropped slightly to 21% for Black students who transferred to different community college. In terms of the 2012 academic year, the 2-year persistence rate dropped to 20% for Black students who stayed at the same community college and dropped to 17% for Black students who transferred to a different community college. Moss and Slate (2015) documented that the 2-year persistence rates of Black students were not statistically significantly different when they stayed at the same institution than when they transferred to a different institution. In both situations, the 2-year persistence rates of Black students were abysmally low. Table 1 contains a summary of studies on differences in 2-year persistence rates of Black students.

Table 1 Summary of Studies on Differences in 2-Year Persistence Rates of Black Students

Author(s)	Year	Topic	Outcome
Hongwei	2015	Student persistence at community colleges	Students were more likely to drop out at larger community colleges than smaller ones
Davidson & Petrosko	2015	Relationships among academics, demographics, work and family with persistence rates	Students are more likely to persist in face to face courses with an online component
Moss & Slate	2015	2-year persistence rates of Black students enrolled in Texas community colleges during 2000 and 2012	2-year persistence rates of Black students were not significantly different when they stayed at the same institution than when they transferred

Author(s)	Year	Topic	Outcome
Shinde	2010	Connection between persistence from one fall semester to the next fall semester	Student engagement has a positive effect on persistence rates and grades during the first and second year
Escobedo	2007	Persistence and retention of community college developmental students	The first year is critical in linking students to college resources and faculty and staff members who can help them succeed

Student persistence is a major issue in higher education that must be solved (Bailey, Jenkins, and Leinbach, 2007; Esters and Mosby, 2007; Liao, Edlin, and Ferdenzi, 2014; Mertes and Hoover, 2014; Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), 40% of first-time college students drop out before they reach their second year. McIntosh and Rouse (2009) established that almost three-fourths of first-time in college students at 4-year universities persist to the second year, however, with respect to community colleges only 50% of students persist to the second year. In reference to Black student enrollment in community college, high levels of attrition adversely affect persistence rates and ultimately degree attainment (Strayhorn, 2012).

The community college experience of Black students is very different from the experience of students who attend 4-year universities (McIntosh and Rouse, 2009; Wilson, 2014). Black students are often the first individual in their family to attend college, and they are more likely to come from a single parent family (Strayhorn, 2006). In fact, many Black students graduate from high school without completing a curriculum that properly prepares them to be successful in college (Polite and Davis, 1999). As a result, a large percentage of Black students enroll in community colleges and struggle to persist to graduation (Thelin, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

Over the last four decades many theoretical frameworks have been offered to explain why student attrition happens at the community college and university level (Bean and Eaton, 2000; Nora, Barlow and Crisp, 2005; Swail, Redd and Pena, 2003; Tinto, 1993). One of the most popular frameworks is Tinto's (1993) model of student departure in which a focus is placed on student integration into college. According to this model, students should separate from their former communities to make an effective transition to college. The key focus is on the academic and social experiences of the student to help increase persistence and retention rates (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's model has been criticized for shifting the majority of the burden on the student and not the institutions that should be more responsible (Bensimone, 2007). Moreover, Tinto's model might not be the best indicator for Black student departure because it does not appropriately depict the experience of historically underrepresented groups such

as students attending community college and ethnic minorities (Bensimone, 2007; Cejda and Hoover, 2010).

A number of researchers (e.g., Bailey, Leinbach, and Jenkins, 2005; Braxton et al., 2004; Pascarella, Smart and Ethington, 1986) have examined student persistence and determined that social integration was a less important factor at community colleges. Community colleges should focus on tangible programs to help students with their academic needs (Stuart et al., 2014). Targeted initiatives such as learning communities, could help Black students become more involved in the classroom while providing courses at convenient times (Braxton et al., 2004). Academic advising, internships, and applied pedagogies are other aspects that could help improve Black student persistence at community colleges (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Throughout his term as President, Barack Obama placed strong emphasis on increasing the number of college graduates in the United States (Chen, 2015). In 2009 former-President Obama introduced the American Graduation Initiative to increase the number of postsecondary degrees and certificates awarded by universities and community colleges by an extra five million by the year 2020 (Kotamraju and Blackmon, 2011). Community colleges in particular were highlighted because less than one out of five community college students graduate in three years or less (Chen, 2015). To meet the 2020 American Graduation Initiative goal, community colleges will have increase graduation levels by adding approximately 250,000 more degrees per year (Kotamraju and Blackmon, 2011).

Community colleges can help former-President Obama increase the number of college graduates in the United States but persistence rates must improve considerably in order to accomplish this goal (Sutherland, 2011). The open door policy of community colleges provides access for students by offering affordable tuition, convenient locations, and resources to support minority and at-risk students (Bailey et al., 2004). However, access by itself is not enough for Black students because many Black students drop out of community colleges without earning a degree or certificate, especially during the first year (Dougherty, 1992).

Student persistence continues to be an issue for community colleges across the nation in spite of sophisticated efforts to help improve student success (Mangan, (2014). Unfortunately, persistence rates, and degree attainment are not keeping pace with enrollment for Black students (Mortenson Research Seminar, 2001). It is imperative that community colleges improve their student service resources such as academic advising, financial supports, and counseling for at-risk students (Price and Tovar, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the 2-year persistence rates of Black students in Texas community colleges from the 2007-2008 through the 2013-2014 academic years. In

particular, the 2-year persistence rates of Black students in Texas community colleges were examined as a function of their student institutional status (i.e., stayed at the same Texas community college or transferred to a different Texas community college) to determine the degree to which differences might be present. By analyzing data over this 7-year time period, any trends that might be present in the 2-year persistence rates of Black students by their institutional status (i.e., stayed or transferred) were identified.

Significance of the Study

Substantial gains have been made in terms of college access, but attainment gaps still exist across racial ethnic groups. Black students face educational issues at a very early age that first emerge in elementary school and expand all the way to higher education. When Black students underperform, they are not prepared for life after college and potentially face high unemployment rates and illiteracy. The repercussions of this cycle can leave devastating effects on the national economy of the United States (Palmer, Davis, Moore, and Hilton, 2010). Community colleges serve as a critical pathway for Black students to earn an associate and ultimately bachelor degree. However, persistence rates for Black students need to improve before graduation rates can increase. Information regarding the 2-year persistence rates for Black students in Texas community colleges was provided in this study. The results of this study may be used to help policymakers and higher education administrators improve persistence rates for Black students in Texas community colleges.

Research Questions

In this study, the following research questions were addressed:

- (a) What is the difference in the 2-year persistence rates by student institutional status (i.e., stayed or transferred) for Black students who were enrolled in Texas community colleges?
- (b) To what extent are trends present in the 2-year persistence rates by student institutional status (i.e., stayed or transferred) for Black students who were enrolled in Texas community colleges?

The first research question was repeated for the 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 academic years. The second research question involved results from all 7 academic years.

Method

Research Design

In this study a non-experimental causal-comparative research design was used (Creswell, 2009; Johnson and Christensen, 2012). The independent variable cannot be manipulated in non-experimental, causal comparative research. The archival data that were analyzed signify

events that had already transpired (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). The independent variable that was analyzed was the institutional status of Black students in each of the academic years of data analyzed herein. As noted previously, institutional status was whether a student stayed at the same Texas community college for two years or whether a student transferred to a different Texas community college after two years. The dependent variables that were present in this investigation were the 2-year persistence rates of Black students. A total of 7 years of data were available for analysis.

Participants and Instrumentation

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Interactive Accountability System was used to obtain archival data for the 2006-2007 through the 2013-2014 academic years on Texas community colleges. In Texas, 68 institutions are labeled as community colleges and nine institutions are labeled as community college districts within the Texas higher education dataset. Each of these community colleges and community college districts are required by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to report the 2-year persistence rates, along with other data, of their students by ethnicity/race. These data are then aggregated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and made publicly available at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Interactive Accountability System.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Interactive Accountability database was the source from which data were downloaded for this investigation. Although student persistence rate data are reported for multiple student characteristics, only the 2-year persistence rates for Black students were downloaded from this database for this article. Every community college in Texas has statistical data in a database maintained by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Every Texas public community college, with the inclusion of descriptive statistical data, is represented in this comprehensive database.

Results

Prior to conducting inferential statistics to determine whether differences were present in the 2-year persistence rates of Black students enrolled in Texas community colleges, checks were conducted to determine the extent to which these data were normally distributed (Onwuegbuzie and Daniel, 2002). Although some of the 2-year persistence rate data were not normally distributed, a decision was made to use parametric dependent samples *t*-tests to answer the research questions. Statistical results will now be presented by academic year.

For the 2007-2008 academic year, the parametric dependent samples *t*-test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the 2-year persistence rates, $t(69) = -0.46$, $p = .65$, between Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college after one year. The 2-year persistence rates were similar, 24% to 25%, for Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and for Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college. Readers are directed to Table 2 for the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for the 2-Year Persistence Rates by Institutional Status for Black Community College Students in Texas in the 2007-2008 Through the 2011-2012 Academic Years

Year and Institutional Status	<i>n</i> of community colleges	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2007-2008			
Stayed	70	23.83	13.69
Transferred	70	25.17	20.26
2008-2009			
Stayed	70	26.69	15.32
Transferred	70	26.93	19.43
2009-2010			
Stayed	71	23.24	11.55
Transferred	70	20.27	12.97
2010-2011			
Stayed	71	23.14	10.48
Transferred	71	28.21	25.54
2011-2012			
Stayed	71	22.94	15.58
Transferred	71	26.29	22.80

Concerning the 2008-2009 academic year, the parametric dependent samples *t*-test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the 2-year persistence rates, $t(69) = -0.08$, $p = .94$, between Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college after one year. The 2-year persistence rates were nearly identical, around 27%, for Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and for Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college. Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

With respect to the 2009-2010 academic year, a statistically significant difference was not present in the 2-year persistence rates, $t(70) = 1.39$, $p = .17$, between Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college after one year. Similar 2-year persistence rates, 23% to 20%, were present for Black students regardless of their institutional status. Revealed in Table 2 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

For the 2010-2011 academic year, a statistically significant difference was not revealed in the 2-year persistence rates, $t(70) = -1.62$, $p = .11$, between Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college after one year. Congruent with the previous three academic years, the 2-year persistence rates were similar, 23% to 28%, for Black students, regardless of their institutional status. Delineated in Table 2 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Concerning the 2011-2012 academic year, a statistically significant difference was not yielded in the 2-year persistence rates, $t(70) = -1.05$, $p = .30$, between Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and Black students who transferred to a

different Texas community college after one year. The 2-year persistence rates were similar, 23% to 26%, for Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and for Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college. Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

With respect to the 2012-2013 academic year, a statistically significant difference was not revealed in the 2-year persistence rates, $t(71) = -1.42$, $p = .16$, between Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college after one year. The 2-year persistence rates were similar, 22% to 26%, for Black students, regardless of their institutional status. Revealed in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for the 2-Year Persistence Rates by Institutional Status for Black Community College Students in Texas in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 Academic Years

Year and Institutional Status	<i>n</i> of community colleges	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2012-2013			
Stayed	72	21.92	13.08
Transferred	72	25.77	21.98
2013-2014			
Stayed	72	26.28	19.51
Transferred	72	26.17	22.31

For the 2013-2014 academic year, a statistically significant difference was not present in the 2-year persistence rates, $t(71) = -0.04$, $p = .97$, between Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college after one year. The 2-year persistence rates were similar, around 26%, for Black students regardless of their institutional status. Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for this analysis.

Figure 1 illustrates the trend analysis of black students 2 year persistence rate of stay/transferred from 2007-2014 academic years.

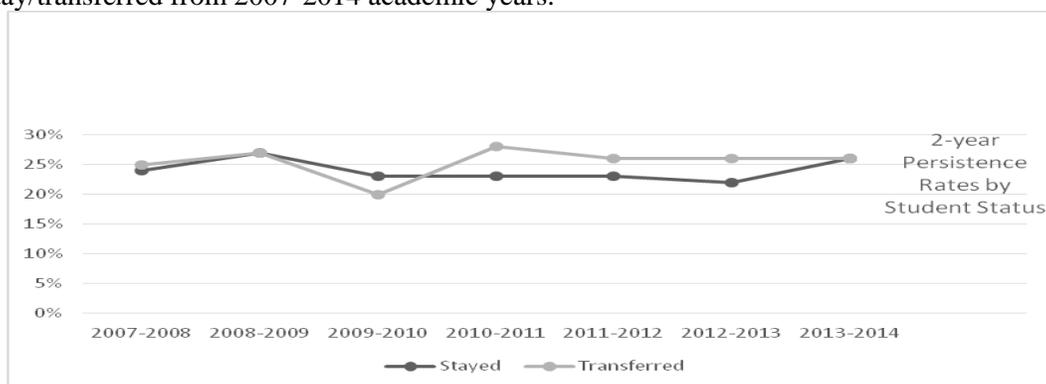


Figure 1. Trends in the 2-year persistence rates of Black students who stayed or transferred to a different Texas community college in the 2007-2008 through the 2013-2014 academic years

The final research question involving the degree to which trends were present in the 2-year persistence rates by Black student institutional status will now be addressed. As revealed in Figure 1, trends were present in the 2-year persistence rates by student institutional status (i.e., stayed or transferred) for Black students who were enrolled in Texas community colleges. The 2-year persistence rates of Black students who stayed at the same Texas community college and the 2-year persistence rates of Black students who transferred to a different Texas community college were congruent across the seven academic years of data analyzed herein. Over this 7-year time period, the 2-year persistence rates for Black students who stayed increased by 1% and the 2-year persistence rates for Black students who transferred increased by 2%. In both cases, the 2-year persistence rates of Black students were low.

Discussion

In this investigation, the degree to which differences were present in the 2-year persistence rates of Black students in Texas community colleges by student institutional status (i.e., stayed or transferred) was addressed. Seven years of archival data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Interactive Accountability System were obtained and analyzed. In this examination, 70 Texas community colleges provided data that were analyzed in the 2007-2008 through the 2008-2009 academic years and 71 Texas community colleges provided data that were analyzed in the 2009-2010 through the 2011-2012 academic years. For the 2012-2013 through the 2013-2014 academic years, 72 Texas community colleges provided data that were analyzed.

Table 4 Results for the 2-Year Persistence Rates by Institutional Status for Black Community College Students in Texas in the 2007-2008 Academic Year Through the 2013-2014 Academic Year

Academic Year	Effect Size	Higher Persistence Rate
2007-2008	N/A	Transferred
2008-2009	N/A	Transferred
2009-2010	N/A	Stayed
2010-2011	N/A	Transferred
2011-2012	N/A	Transferred
2012-2013	N/A	Transferred
2013-2014	N/A	Stayed

Of the seven academic years of data that were analyzed, statistically significant differences were not present in the 2-year persistence rates of Black students by their institutional status in any academic year. The 2-year persistence rates for Black students, regardless of whether they stayed or transferred, were consistently in the 20s in the seven academic years analyzed. Clearly, based upon the results of this investigation, the 2-year persistence rates reflect that too few Black students persist through the second year in community colleges in Texas regardless of their institutional status. Table 4 contains a summary of the results for the 2-year persistence rates by institutional status for Black community college students in Texas in the 2007-2008 through the 2014-2015 academic years.

Connections with Existing Literature

In a previous investigation, Moss and Slate (2015) analyzed the 2-year persistence rates of Black students enrolled in Texas community colleges in the 2000 and 2012 academic years. They determined that the 2-year persistence rates of Black students were not statistically significantly different when they stayed at the same institution than when transferred. In this multiyear, statewide investigation, results were congruent with Moss and Slate (2015) that 2-year persistence rates were similar for Black students who stayed at the same community college or who transferred to a different community college. Community colleges continue to suffer low persistence rates despite the student success initiatives that are currently in place (Braxton et al., 2004). As a result, almost one half of students leave before completing the first year.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

In this article, the model of student departure (Tinto, 1993) was used as the theoretical framework. Tinto (1993) contended that students needed to separate from their former communities to make an effective transition to college. Student retention and persistence rates were higher when students were engaged in the academic and social experiences of college than when they were not engaged in these experiences. However, some researchers (e.g., Bailey, Leinbach and Jenkins, 2005; Braxton et al., 2004; Pascarella, Smart and Ethington, 1986) determined that social integration was not as important at community colleges as 4-year institutions.

Stuart et al. (2014) noted that community colleges should be intentional in developing programs to help students achieve academic success. The results of this study are commensurate with the findings of these authors. Black community college students face many obstacles that impede their educational progress. By incorporating effective student success measures, community colleges can increase the persistence rates of Black students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Implications for policy and practice may be derived from the results of this study. First, based upon the low 2-year persistence rates of Black students in this multiyear analysis, programs and initiatives to support Black students at Texas community colleges are clearly needed. In this analysis, the 2-year persistence rates of Black students in Texas community colleges were similar when they stayed at the same community college or when they transferred to a different community college. Community colleges need to implement measures to audit the 2-year persistence rates of their Black students. According to Mangan (2014), persistence rates are still low at community colleges despite student success measures in place. Community colleges with low 2-year persistence rates should assess their programs to determine what changes need to be made. Academic advisors need to communicate with Black students to determine the best strategies to help them stay enrolled and achieve success. In addition, community colleges need to focus on programs designed to help students transfer.

Community colleges with low 2-year persistence rates need to make changes to their programs and implement new initiatives to help Black students succeed. Educational leaders must find solutions to help Black students persist past the second year. Many Black students face financial hardships while enrolled in school and, as a result, are unable to focus on their studies to be successful. Another factor in the low 2-year persistence rates at community colleges is that some Black students transfer to a 4-year institution after the first year or semester without ever making it to the second year. Community colleges must improve existing college readiness and retention programs for Black students. Retention of Black students in community colleges is a huge challenge for the entire nation. In the age of scarce and dwindling resources, this task is even greater. Community colleges should maximize the resources on hand by collaborating with local businesses, school districts, and community members to find viable solutions to help Black students stay in school and persist to graduation.

Recommendations for Future Research

For this study, differences in the 2-year persistence rates by student institutional status for Black students at Texas community colleges were examined. Given the low 2-year persistence rates of Black students revealed in this study, researchers should consider extending this study to other underrepresented student groups such as Hispanic students to determine the degree to which results from this investigation are generalizable to other ethnic/racial groups. In addition, the 2-year persistence rates of Asian, White, and international students should be investigated to determine the degree to which these two ethnic/racial groups persist in community colleges. Another recommendation is to replicate this investigation in other states to determine whether the results for Black students discussed previously are generalizable to other states. Because the data analyzed herein were from all the Texas community colleges, researchers are encouraged to examine each community college results to identify Texas community colleges that have higher 2-year persistence rates for Black students who stay and for Black students who transfer. Then qualitative and or mixed-methods research studies could be conducted to ascertain the reasons why these community colleges are successful. Researchers can gain insight from Black students, faculty, staff, and educational leaders on how Black students can improve persistence rates. Similar investigations could be conducted into the Texas community colleges with the lowest 2-year persistence rates of Black students. Lastly, more research is needed to understand the underlying reasons for the low 2-year persistence rates regardless of whether Black students stayed or transferred to a different community college.

Conclusion

In this multiyear analysis, the 2-year persistence rates of Black students in Texas community colleges were analyzed as a function of whether they stayed at the same community college or transferred to a different community college. Over the seven academic years of data analyzed, the 2-year persistence rates were low both for Black students who stayed and for

Black students who transferred to a different community college. As such, efforts are needed on the behalf of community colleges to address these low persistence rates.

Tinto's model of student departure (Tinto, 1993) illustrates the need for college students to become socially connected on their campus by fostering new relationships with faculty, staff, and classmates so that they may assimilate into their new higher education environment. The majority of new students at 4-year institutions are living away from home for the first time as they transition into a new era of independence. Tinto (1993) contended that students who were actively engaged and who cultivated new relationships on campus were more likely to have higher persistence and retention rates than students who remained to themselves. Although this model might work at the university level, it is not as effective for community college students. Most community college students return to their ecological systems of family, friends, neighborhoods, and jobs when they leave their community college campus each day. Many of these students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and struggle daily to survive and provide for themselves and their families. The relationships, resources, and comfort provided by the community college is a welcome oasis for students who must return to the grim reality offered to them in their community and neighborhood. Community college leaders and stakeholders must continue to discuss these issues to help increase the student success of community college students. Life factors must be considered when examining the persistence rates of community college students.

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