

LUMINA STUDY OF MALE STUDENT SUCCESS

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke



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Executive Summary



Nationally, men are less likely to attend and graduate from college than are women. This is particularly true for minority groups. This gender imbalance in college success rates holds true at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP). However at UNCP, unlike at other universities, minority men tend to outperform Euro-American men in terms of retention and graduation rates. Funded by a grant from the Lumina Foundation to the minority-serving institutions within the University of North Carolina system, a study was conducted in the fall of 2012 to investigate what factors may lead male students to be successful in their educational pathways at UNCP as well as what factors may hinder that success.

Invitations to participate in either a focus group or an online survey were sent via e-mail to all American Indian, African American, and Euro-American male students at UNCP. A total of 115 men participated: 71 in focus groups and 44 via the online survey. In both modes by which information was gathered, students were asked similar questions about how they defined success and what has aided or hindered their success at the university.

When asked about personal definitions of success, participants most commonly included comments related to setting/accomplishing goals or doing well academically. Defining success in this way was particularly likely for American Indian men. Other differences in definitions of success among racial groups included a greater emphasis on financial security and having good careers among Euro-American men and an emphasis on non-academic campus engagement and self-fulfillment for African American men.

The most common responses to the question of what has helped these men be successful at UNCP were (1) personal characteristics/qualities; (2) family & friend support; and (3) university personnel, especially supportive faculty. African American men were more likely than the other two groups to attribute their success at UNCP to extracurricular engagement. "Personal characteristics/circumstances" was also the category of response that was most frequent when participants were asked what has hindered their success at UNCP. Examples included distractions of college life as well as personal traits such as lack of motivation, procrastination, and poor time management. The second most common set of responses to this question related to class/university features such as difficulties with office staff or faculty although African American men were less likely than the other two groups to cite this as a hindrance. Class/major availability was mentioned more often by Euro-American and African American than by American Indian men and finances was commented on more frequently by minority than by Euro-American men.

Research has identified a number of factors related to college success and students were asked to comment on any of these they felt had impacted their own success. Eight factors were discussed and the top few (in terms of frequency of comments) for each racial group is listed below. There are interesting commonalities and differences among these groups of men.

- African American men
 - Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising
 - High school preparation
 - Family support
 - Personal goals
- American Indian men
 - Personal goals
 - Family support
 - Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising
 - Seeing your culture reflected on campus/in courses
- Euro-American men
 - Family support
 - Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising
 - Personal goals
 - Finances

Finally, students were asked what activities/strategies they were aware of at UNCP intended to promote student success, what they thought UNCP does best in terms of promoting student success, and what they would change about UNCP given the chance. All racial groups frequently mentioned the following activities/strategies: Tutoring, the Writing Center, and Supplemental Instruction. African American men included extracurricular activities as one of their top activities/strategies whereas American Indian and Euro-American men included the Career Center. Euro-American men also included helpful instructors. Euro-American as well as African American men thought that employing good people (helpful, supportive, and dedicated faculty, staff, and administrators) was the number one thing that UNCP does best whereas for American Indian men, it was Supplemental Instruction. As for what they would change, each racial group had a different first place item. Euro-American men would increase campus safety; African American men would increase school spirit; and American Indian men would increase standards for students, not only in terms of admission and academics but also in terms of professional dress and behavior.

Conclusions and recommendations are given in the discussion section of the report.

Background

In October of 2009, the Lumina Foundation for Education announced grants totaling almost \$4.5 million to support models of success among minority-serving institutions (MSIs). A half million of that funding went to The University of North Carolina General Administration to increase the retention and graduation rates for students of color, especially male students of color, at all six MSIs within the University of North Carolina system. Of these six, UNCP is the only historically Native American-serving institution.



The goal of the Lumina Foundation for Education is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by identifying and supporting effective practice, through public policy advocacy, and by using communications and convening power to build public will for change (www.luminafoundation.org).

Context

Nationally

In the United States, women outnumber men nearly 3 to 2 in the college population.¹ Women are also more likely than are men to complete college. As of 2010, 36% of women ages 25 to 29 held a bachelor's degree or better versus only 28% of men in the same age group.² Minority men are particularly outnumbered. African American women earn two-thirds of the degrees awarded to African American students and American Indian women earn 60% of the degree earned within their racial group.³



At a more local level, there are gender and racial disparities in college success within the University of North Carolina system as evidenced by the most recently available data. Whereas for women, the retention, four-year graduation, and six-year graduation rates are 83.6%, 42.7%, and 61.8% respectively, for men, these rates are 80.3%, 30.5%, and 56.3%. Table 1 displays rates for three racial groups of students: American Indian, African American, and Euro-American.

Table 1. Retention, 4-year graduation, and 6-year graduation rates for 3 racial groups within the University of North Carolina system

	American Indian	African American	Euro-American
Retention (2010 first-time full-time cohort)	70.5%	77.8%	83.8%
4-year graduation (2007 first-time full-time cohort)	27.3%	22.0%	43.4%
6-year graduation (2005 first-time full-time cohort)	39.5%	45.8%	65.3%

¹ de Vise, D. (2010, Oct. 10). *College completion rate among men stalls*. Washington Post.

² U.S. Census Bureau.

³ College Board. (2010). *The educational crisis facing young men of color*.

At UNCP

The three largest groups of students at UNCP, in terms of race, are Euro-American, African American, and American Indian. An analysis of first-time, full-time freshman cohorts within these groups indicates that, on average, American Indian males, African American males, and Euro-American males lag behind their female counterparts in rate of retention from first to second year, rate of retention from second to third year, rate of graduating within four years, and rate of graduating within six years. Unlike at other Minority Serving Institutions within the UNC system, African American and American Indian male students are more successful in terms of retention and graduation rates than are Euro-American male students.

Methodology

Participants in this study were male students, age 18 and over, whose race was indicated (in the university's database) as American Indian, African American, or Euro-American. (The three racial groups were selected based upon their large numbers within the UNCP student body. Male students account for approximately 37% of UNCP's study body; of these, around 89% belong to these three racial groups.)

Participants were recruited in several ways. The primary method of recruitment was through e-mail invitations. E-mail addresses for all male American Indian, African American, and Euro-American students at UNCP were obtained from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. In the e-mail invitations, students were told about the purpose of and protocol for the study; they were then given the opportunity to volunteer to participate and to link to an online form on which they could sign up for specific focus group sessions. Information about the study was also made available via flyers distributed throughout campus and an ad in the PineNeedle (UNCP's student newspaper); the flyers and ad described the purpose of the study and gave contact information for the principal investigator. Finally, because American Indian students are less well represented within UNCP's student body than are African American and Euro-American students, additional American Indian participants were recruited by way of invitation to UNCP's American Indian fraternity, Phi Sigma Nu.

Focus groups were used as the primary means of data collection for this study. Twelve focus group sessions were available on a variety of days and times during the Fall semester, 2012; students were allowed to choose sessions that best fit their schedules. Three focus groups were designated for American Indian males only; three for African American men only; and three for Euro-American men only. The remaining three were open to all. Incentives were provided to participants in the form of meals (lunch or dinner, depending upon session times) and gift cards. Each individual participant received a \$25 Wal-mart gift card. For encouraging its members to participate, Phi Sigma Nu received a \$100 Wal-mart gift card. Each student (and the fraternity president) signed, upon receipt of a gift card, a sheet of paper (for auditing purposes) indicating that the cards were not actually gifts but rather were given in exchange for the student's time and participation in the study.

It was explained to students at the beginning of each focus group session that their attendance would be taken as consent to participate. They also were informed that they were free to leave at any time and could refrain from answering any questions with which they felt uncomfortable. Responses within focus groups were recorded by use of letters assigned to participants and no names were recorded; students were assured that their



responses would be confidential. Each focus group session lasted approximately 75 minutes; at the end of each, students received their gift cards and an information sheet which included contact information for the primary investigator, the focus group facilitator, the study coordinator, and the chair of UNCP's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The focus group script and questions are included in Appendix A.

Several students who were contacted to participate in focus groups e-mailed the primary investigator to say that they would like to do so; however, they were distance education students and could not make it to campus to participate. Therefore, an online survey was created utilizing the same questions as were asked within focus group sessions. All men who were sent an e-mail inviting them to participate in focus groups were sent another e-mail letting them know that, if they could not participate in an on-campus focus group, there was a survey available through which they could provide similar input. The average completion time for the survey was 12 minutes. The survey questions are included in Appendix B. Men who completed the online survey were provided an incentive in the form of a \$25 Wal-mart gift card which they could pick up at an on-campus location or which could be mailed at their request. Each of these participants also signed a paper (mailed, if necessary) indicating that he completed the survey in exchange for a gift card.

IRB approval was obtained for all aspects of the study.

Results

Participants

The goal was to obtain between 8 and 10 participants for each of 12 focus groups (between 96 and 120 total). One focus group session was canceled as it had been inadvertently scheduled during fall break. Many more students signed up for the remaining 11 focus group participation than actually showed up for the sessions; the show rate was approximately 40%. On average, each focus group had six participants (with a range of one—for the focus group scheduled on the day before fall break began—to ten). By race, 22 men participated in an African American-only focus group; 15 in an American Indian-only focus group; and 19 in a Euro-American-only focus group. Fifteen additional men participated in “mixed” groups. Forty-four individuals completed the online survey (13 African American men; 8 American Indian men; and 23 Euro-American men). Thus, a total of 115 men participated in the study.



Table 2 (on the next page) indicates the breakdown among participants in terms of race as well as how this breakdown compares to that of all men in these racial categories in the UNCP student body as a whole.

Note that the participants from “mixed” groups are excluded from the numbers/calculations in this table. As focus group participants were identified in responses by letter only and no demographic information was collected in those sessions, the only way that race could be determined for focus group participants was through focus group designation—that is, determining whether men signed up to participate in an American Indian-only, African-American-only, or Euro-American-only focus group.

Table 2. Number and percentages of study participants

	American Indian	African American	Euro- American	Total
# focus group participants	15	22	19	56
% focus group participants*	27%	39%	34%	100%
# online survey participants	8	13	23	44
% online survey participants	18%	30%	52%	100%
# all participants	23	35	42	100
% all participants	23%	35%	42%	100%
# men, UNCP student body**	313	759	1001	2073
% men, UNCP student body	15%	37%	48%	100%

*Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

**Three major racial categories only, Fall 2012

Responses

Responses from focus groups and the online survey are presented below organized by question. For each question, number of responses is indicated when appropriate along with some indication of overall frequency and comparison among men of different racial groups. Total number of responses may exceed the number of participants as multiple responses were possible per question. Comparisons among groups are made utilizing percentages within groups; in other words, to answer a question about which group of men gave a particular response (or category of response) most frequently, percentage within the group is used for comparison rather than the absolute number of men.

● **At UNCP, we define student success as graduating students who are prepared for rewarding careers, postgraduate education, leadership roles, and fulfilling lives. How do you personally define student success?**

There were 121 total responses to this question. The least frequent response was to simply agree with the study definition of success and not offer a personal one (3%). Among personal definitions, seven general themes were noted. Fewer than 10% of responses included comments related to financial security (6%), non-academic campus engagement (6%), or careers (e.g., having a reliable job, a dream job, or being workforce ready; 7%). However, for those that did, there were some differences in frequency among racial group responses. Euro-American men were more likely than were minority men to include financial security or career comments in their personal definitions of success whereas African American men were more likely than the other two groups to mention non-academic campus engagement (e.g., extracurricular involvement, making friends, improving social skills, making changes on campus).

Between ten and twenty percent of responses included comments related to other people (12%) and self-fulfillment (17%). Other people were included in personal definitions of success in several ways: being well-regarded by others as a leader or role model, supporting one's family or community, being a productive member of society, etc. Similarly, there were several different paths to self-fulfillment: knowing oneself, continual learning, having no regrets, becoming a better person, fulfilling one's needs, and being proud of or happy with oneself). American Indian and Euro-American men were much more likely to include other people in their personal definitions of success than were African American men. African American men were the most likely to include self-fulfillment and American Indian men, the least likely.

The types of statements more frequently included in personal definitions of success by participants in this study were in the categories of academics (21%) and setting/accomplishing goals (27%). "Academics" included statements about making good grades, taking good classes, selecting the right major, coming back to school after an

absence, and graduating. American Indian men were much less likely than were either African American or Euro-American men to include academics in their personal views of success. African American and Euro-American men were about equally likely to include academic statements and both groups included academic statements about as often as statements related to setting/accomplishing goals. American Indian men, however, were much more likely to include setting/accomplishing goals in their personal definitions of success than to include statements regarding the importance of academics. Some of the phrases used by respondents as they defined success through goal setting and accomplishment were: having a sense of purpose, achieving a goal “you never knew you had,” doing things “you thought you couldn’t do,” performing well at anything, investing fully of oneself, and doing what one sets out to do.

What has helped you be successful at UNCP?

There were 137 total responses to this question and the responses could be sorted into seven general categories. By far, the least frequently mentioned category was financial assistance. Only one African American man and one Euro-American man mentioned financial assistance as something that has helped them be successful as a student at UNCP; this response did not appear at all for American Indian men. Two other categories contained fewer than 10% of all responses each: extracurricular activities (e.g., fraternities, clubs, organizations; 6%) and class characteristics (e.g., extra credit, small classes, faculty/student ratio; 9%). African American men were more likely than were men in the other two groups to cite extracurricular involvement as important to their success; African American and Euro-American men were about equally likely to cite class characteristics (and both more likely than American Indian men). Fourteen percent of responses included references to facilities and resources at UNCP that aided in student success. African American men were most likely to mention resources followed by Euro-American men and then American Indian men; however, the differences among groups were not pronounced. Specific resources mentioned were (in no particular order): the writing center, the library (and databases), the career center, tutors/tutoring, freshman seminar, Disability Support Services, and Supplemental Instruction.

Finally, three categories contained 20% or more of responses related to what has helped students be successful at UNCP: family and friends (20%), university personnel (23%), and personal characteristics/qualities (26%). The “family and friends” category included comments about how important the advice, guidance, and support of friends, teammates, and other students can be as well as the value of family. Interestingly, students mentioned that family is important not only for their support but also to provide models of what not to do. As one young man observed, “[I am] motivated to do better than my family did.” African American and Euro-American males were more likely than were American Indian men to mention family or friends as having contributed to their success as students. Although approachable staff were mentioned within the “university personnel” category, the

bulk of responses in this category had to do with faculty—who are available, supportive, and “want you to succeed.” Euro-American men were twice as likely as minority men to cite university personnel as having contributed to their success while at UNCP.

The category containing the greatest number of responses to this question was “personal characteristics/qualities.” The men who gave these responses felt they were responsible for their own success. Some of the characteristics/qualities mentioned specifically were: strong work ethic, dedication, good time management skills, self-motivation, studying hard, being prepared, commitment, hunger for success, self-discipline, and good organizational skills. African American and Euro-American men were about equally likely to claim responsibility for their own success and both groups more likely to do so than American Indian men.

Do you think that any of the factors that have helped you be a successful student at UNCP are unique to your race or gender?

Fewer than one-fifth of respondents answered this question affirmatively. Of those who did, over half were African American. Euro-American men more frequently referred to gender (e.g., there is more social pressure and higher expectations for men to succeed than for women to do so) and less frequently referred to race than African American or American Indian men. African American males spoke of stereotypes and how disproving those stereotypes was an impetus for their success. As one young man indicated, “As an African American male, people stereotype us as non-intellectual and troublemakers. I hate being in those statistics, so it is important to the African American males to show the world that we can do what anyone else can. Therefore, I strive to be the best that I can be with limited resources.” Other men commented that seeing others like themselves on campus was motivation for success. There was also an indication in remarks made by African American students that gender and race interact in ways that may contribute to (or hinder) their success. The implication (which needs to be addressed more fully in future studies) was that, within black culture, males are less encouraged than females to attend and be successful in college.

Please describe any obstacles or challenges that have potentially limited your success at UNCP.

Eighty-nine responses were given to this question (81 from students whose race was identifiable from the data) and could be categorized in four major areas: finances, class & major availability, personal characteristics/circumstances, and class/university features. For all racial groups, the most frequently cited obstacle (about half of all comments in each group) was in the category of personal characteristics and circumstances. “Distractions of college life” were often cited as being obstacles. Some students were distracted due to family responsibilities or because close friends were someplace other than UNCP. Several men

recognized that they spent too much time partying or were too involved socially or with extracurricular activities such as clubs or sports. One student acknowledged that “college is a wonderful place to grow. One just has to know ‘when to do’ and ‘how to do.’” Students also readily acknowledged their own characteristics that created obstacles or challenges to being successful in college. These characteristics included laziness, procrastination and poor time management, irresponsibility, immaturity, inability to handle stress, and lack of motivation.

The second most frequent response category, for Euro-American and American Indian men, was “class/university features.” (This was actually the least frequently reported for African American men.) Several responses in this category were idiosyncratic; that is, they occurred only once. Examples are: difficulty getting into bravemail, school “politics,” lack of interactivity in courses broadcast to distant sites, challenging courses, too little academic advising, and lack of open study spaces in the library. Two types of responses, however, occurred more frequently; these had to do with instructors and university offices. Several students (all Euro-American) complained about interoffice communication at UNCP (the “Lumbee runaround”) or about difficulties working with office staff (e.g., in getting credits transferred). An even greater number of students found some teaching methods and teacher characteristics challenging; the most frequently mentioned one had to do with the difficulty in understanding instructor accents. Almost all of the responses about the challenge of understanding instructors were given by American Indian men.

Some interesting comparisons can be made regarding the least frequently given response across racial categories. No Euro-American participant cited finances as a challenge; in contrast, 17% of responses from African American men and 11% of responses from American Indian men concerned finances. No American Indian man mentioned class or major availability as a challenge; however, 18% of responses to this question from Euro-American men fell into this category as did over 30% of responses from African American men. For example, several men noted that classes were offered at the wrong time of day for athletes, that students weren’t always notified promptly about schedule changes, and that needed classes filled up too quickly during registration. Unavailability of classes and problems with course scheduling comes up frequently at UNCP when talking with students; this topic warrants additional investigation.

🐼 Do you think that any of the factors that have limited your success at UNCP are unique to your race or gender?

As with factors that aided student success, few students (about 14% of those who responded) thought that factors which may have limited their success were unique to their race or gender. Of those who did, more than half were Euro-American students. Their responses included: difficulties understanding professors, males being less likely to get work/study positions at the university, and white students being less likely to receive federal

financial aid than minority students. Their responses are instructive in terms of perceived inequalities.

Research in higher education has identified a few things that seem to be related to student retention and graduation.

- **Focus group version:** Let me mention a few of these and see if you have any comments about their relationship to your success.
- **Online survey version:** Listed below are a few of these. If you have any comments about their relationship to your academic success, please enter those comments in the appropriate text boxes.

Table 3 contains the quantitative information about the percentage of the total sample of men within each of the three major racial groups who gave responses for each of the factors. (Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and “total sample” includes those whose race could not be identified in the data.) Some tentative conclusions can be reached about the importance of each factor to the men within each racial group by reviewing the numbers included in this table. An additional way of evaluating the importance of the factors to students’ academic success is to rank the factors from those that elicited the most responses within groups to those that elicited the least. Table 4 presents the factors in this way for racial groups. Following the tables, a paragraph for each factor will highlight the major qualitative findings.

Table 3. Percentages of study participants who gave responses for each factor.

	% total sample who chose to respond to this factor	% African American men	% American Indian men	% Euro-American men
High school preparation	44%	51%	22%	40%
Finances	45%	37%	43%	43%
Family support	51%	49%	57%	50%
Feeling connected to campus/other students; campus involvement	36%	46%	30%	24%
Course curriculum/ faculty teaching methods/ advising	51%	57%	52%	45%
Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general	29%	34%	26%	19%
Personal goals	48%	49%	65%	45%
Seeing your culture reflected on campus/in courses	31%	31%	48%	12%

Table 4. Ranking of factors by number of responses within groups.

African American men	American Indian men	Euro- American men
Course curriculum/ faculty teaching methods/ advising	Personal goals	Family support
High school preparation	Family support	Course curriculum/ faculty teaching methods/ advising (tie)
Family support (tie)	Course curriculum/ faculty teaching methods/ advising	Personal goals (tie)
Personal goals (tie)	Seeing your culture reflected on campus/in courses	Finances
Feeling connected to campus/other students; campus involvement	Finances	High school preparation
Finances	Feeling connected to campus/other students; campus involvement	Feeling connected to campus/other students; campus involvement
Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general	Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general	Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general
Seeing your culture reflected on campus/in courses	High school preparation	Seeing your culture reflected on campus/in courses

- *High school preparation*

Almost half of study participants indicated that high school preparation was related to their academic success in college and this was true as well for both African American and Euro-American men. Fewer American Indian men gave responses related to high school preparation. Some comments provided by participants indicated a positive relationship between high school preparation and college success; that is, students who had taken AP or honor's courses in high school or attended specialized schools (e.g., School of Sciences and Math) felt they were well-prepared for higher education. Students also felt that taking "block" classes in high school helped prepare them for longer college courses. Those who are well-prepared have difficulty understanding how under prepared students make it to college. As one African American man noted in response to this question in the online survey: "I have had classes with students who didn't have...basic knowledge. There was a sophomore in one of my classes who asked what language was spoken in Germany. How did that individual graduate high school?" Other comments reflected respondents' own under preparation and the time they had to spend "catching up" especially in the areas of written communication and study techniques. One Euro-American man stated that college instructors expect their students to come in knowing certain things and "if you are not prepared, then you will not succeed."

- *Finances*

Almost half of participants provided responses on the relationship of finances to student success. Although African American men were slightly less likely to provide responses here than were men in the other two major racial groups, there were not substantial differences across groups in the number of responses provided. Students recognized the importance of finances not only in college success but also in college access. As one student stated, “Finances can be a determining factor on if a person can even attend college.” Commuter students spoke of the impact of gas prices on their attendance with one student indicating that if it were not for courses offered at distance sites, he “would not be able to attend UNCP at all.” Several students noted that the path between one’s financial state and one’s academic success is not a direct one but rather is mediated by time constraints and stress. Students are grateful for low tuition and financial aid; to quote another student, “Affordability is the key to success at the college level.” However, financial aid may not always be sufficient to meet the students’ needs and, therein, lies a catch-22. To go to school, one must work but the time spent at work detracts from the time needed to be successful in school. Similarly, if a student is worried about paying bills, his stress level is inversely correlated with his probability of academic success. One man indicated: “Very few things will distract more” than the stress associated with “financial distress.” And another stated: you can’t focus on your schoolwork when there’s “no money in your pocket.” Although, for some students, finances are always a struggle, several study participants recognized a silver lining to this struggle. A couple of men stated that they thought they tried harder at academics because they were paying their own way and several pointed out the necessity of working hard to keep scholarships.

- *Family support*

“Family support” garnered responses from more than half of this sample of men. The importance of family support in the lives of these men is reflected in the words they used when describing it—adjectives such as *absolute must*, *critical*, *key*, and *essential*—and their belief that students who do not have family support are going to struggle. One student summed it up by saying, “Family has everything to do with success.” Family support can instill self-confidence and provide a safety net when times are tough. Student statements reflecting these roles of family support included the following: (1) “Having those that believe in you helps me believe in what I’m doing. Just to have that one person that believes in you helps,” and (2) “They all have my back.” The most fundamental role of family support in the lives of these participants, however, was one of motivation.

Here are some student comments that reflect that role:

- Family support is a “big thing. If they don’t care, you will not be motivated. You know they are checking up on you [and you] don’t want to disappoint them.”
- “Family drives me.”

- Family “can push you” but they are “on your side.”
- “I want to make my family proud.”
- “I would let my family down if I did not graduate.”
- “If family checks up on you, you are motivated.”
- “My Mama stays on me.”

One insightful young man noted that parents have to learn to be supporters rather than care-takers; these roles are different and moving from one to the other implies letting go and letting one’s child do for himself rather than doing for him. Students also recognize that family motivation can be positive (such as those examples cited above) or negative. For example, one man observed “...when family members say ‘you’re not going to finish,’ that motivates me” while another one said, “When they are supportive, it helps, but even when they are not, it makes me want to prove them wrong.” One first-generation college student was motivated by not wanting to be like his family.

- *Feeling connected to the campus and other students/campus involvement*

In the ranking of factors related to student retention and graduation by number of responses they elicited, this one did not rank very highly although it elicited more responses from African American men (46%) than from either American Indian (30%) or Euro-American men (24%). Overall, about a third of participants responded to this item. Students spoke of how easy it is to get involved on campus and how having so much to do on campus makes up for having little to do in the surrounding community. One man, when commenting on how much he loved UNCP, said that the campus is “just small enough and big enough to be perfect—if you want to be involved, you can.” Being involved is also a necessity; you need to connect with others. As one African American man observed: “...being a loner is hard...[you] can’t do it all by yourself.” Several students commented on the positive consequences of feeling connected. Campus involvement makes you feel less of an outsider, keeps you “on top of your game,” leads to opportunities such as study groups, prepares you for the working world, reduces stress, helps you “stick to school better,” “keeps you out of trouble,” and, if a student belongs to an organization that emphasizes school performance, can even help boost GPA. With all of the benefits of involvement, why would students not seek out campus connections? Two reasons were cited by the study participants: (1) Commuter students do not see opportunities for them to be involved on campus; and (2) Students are not committed to UNCP because they intend to transfer. One Euro-American young man explained:

- “I have noticed that some of the students I talk to are just here to transfer to a ‘better’ school with a ‘better’ name. There’s a lack of commitment to the university. [These] students didn’t score high enough on the SAT to get into any other school so they come to Pembroke to get their grades up and then they want to transfer. Most people want to identify with the school they go to and I don’t believe students want to identify with Pembroke because of its image.”

- *Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising*

This is a very important factor in students' success as evidenced by the number of responses it generated. This category ranked first for African American men (57%), second for Euro-American men (45%), and third for American Indian men (52%). Overall, more than half of participants responded to this item. Most responses clustered into two general themes: the importance of advising and inconsistency across faculty/teaching methods. Interestingly, whereas American Indian men gave responses in both of these areas, there was a clear demarcation for African American and Euro-American men with responses from the former being entirely related to advising and responses from the latter being entirely related to consistency of faculty/teaching methods. Good advising has been key to the success of some students while poor advising has hindered the success of others. What makes for "good advising" according to these students? In short, good advisors are those who are knowledgeable, not only about their own departments and disciplines but also about the university as a whole and the students they advise. One student, who stated that he had had bad experiences with advising, said "You know that there is a problem when you come out [after seeing your advisor] with the same questions you went in with." Good advisors are not only knowledgeable themselves but also they share knowledge with their advisees; for example, one American Indian man commented that he loved his advisor who tried to keep him on track and sent e-mails to remind him of important dates and events. Another student observed, "It is difficult to advise if you don't know the student." Other men echoed this sentiment; they felt that advisors need to understand more about the whole student, not just what courses he will be taking in the upcoming semester. Students want advisors who know what their goals are and helping them achieve those goals; they want advisors who help point them in the right directions, both within the university and on their career paths. As one African American man stated: "Advising needs to be good or you can get lost easily." Students discussed the difference between "good and bad" instructors, just as they had the difference between "good and bad" advisors. "There's an obvious commitment to making sure as many students as possible succeed here [at UNCP]" stated one student, but there is inconsistency among courses in the quality of instruction as well as in the supportiveness and responsiveness of individual faculty members. Students want instructors to be clear and up front about their classroom and office hour policies and to stick with those policies—not to "say one thing and do another." They also want instructors who are engaged with their classes and who use active instructional methods rather than lecture only. This is true for both online and face-to-face classes. Here's a quote from an online student: "I find that, in online classes, the teaching methods make a difference. The teachers who are actively involved made success easier than those who post the information and you do not hear from them again." And from another from a student taking face-to-face classes: "The instructors make a big difference. Until this school year, I would purposely enroll in extra courses so that classes with unbearable instructors could be dropped."

- *Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general*

Although important to several participants, this factor did not generate a great many responses overall (29% of men responded to this item). By racial group, more African American men (34%) had comments related to commitment than did American Indian (26%) or Euro-American men (19%). The importance that some students place on being committed to UNCP and/or education in general is exemplified by the following comments:

- “Being committed is critical; half the battle is showing up. Having a positive attitude toward school will improve your grade significantly.”
- “The more I put in, the more I get out. I learned in one class that it was not the smartest kid who did well; it was the one who prepared for the test. If I wanted to do better, I had to commit.”
- Regarding student success, commitment has “everything to do with it.”

Several students distinguished between commitment to education and commitment to the university. These men indicated that UNCP was not their first choice of school and some originally (and/or still) planned to transfer elsewhere. Here are comments from two of those students:

- UNCP “does not have the glitz and glamour” of some other schools. Some people are “not excited to say” that they attend UNCP. I “don’t mind being associated with UNCP...[but]...my friends acted like there was a death in the family when I tol them I was coming here.”
- “Nobody [is] committed to UNCP....[I] planned to transfer after my first semester but after taking some classes and realizing I was able to talk to my advisor, I have decided to stay.”

- *Personal goals*

Almost half of the men in this study offered a comment related to the relationship of personal goals to student success. Judging by number of elicited responses (65%), American Indian men considered this the number one factor influencing their success. In terms of ranking for the other two groups of men, “personal goals” tied with “family support” in third place for African American men and tied with “curriculum/teaching methods/advising” in second place for Euro-American men. Several students spoke of the motivational influence of having goals. Their advice for other students was to have multiple goals so that some will be met and to set high standards but have “mini-goals” that would provide stepping stones to the large ones. One young man pointed out that it is impossible not to have some goals. He said: “People come to college with different perspectives on what it is they want to get out of college. Some come to learn; others come to get away from home. We all have some goals whether we realize it or not.”

- *Seeing your culture reflected on campus and in courses*

Perhaps not surprisingly, this factor was the one least responded to by Euro-American men (12%) and, for these men, ranked far below the response rate for African American (31%) and American Indian (48%) men. Within the entire group of participants, 31% responded to this item. One African American man stated that he did not see a great deal of black culture on campus, pointing out the difference between black culture and Black people (who constitute about a third of the UNCP student body). Students spoke of the motivational importance of seeing your culture on campus, that it “makes you feel like a part of the community,” “drives you to succeed,” and “helps you relate [so you don’t leave].” An African American man commented on how encouraging it is to see other black men his own age in college and defying stereotypes. Although American Indian men often saw their culture reflected on campus, they thought the university could do more to make sure that all students were family with this history of the institution. Several suggested that American Indian studies courses include more information about the Lumbee tribe and one student thought that “a Native American class specific to Lumbee Indians should be required” of all students.

What sort of activities and strategies are you aware of here at UNCP that are intended to promote student success?

This question was not intended to determine which resources at UNCP students used, but rather those they were simply aware of, whether they had used them or not. Around 35 different activities and strategies were mentioned by participants; in terms of frequency, there at least one clear demarcation by racial group. The number one set of activities and strategies called to mind by African American men were extracurricular in nature, that is, clubs, organizations, sports, campus events, and Greek Life. More than one-third (12) of African American male participants mentioned something within this category contrasted with only one American Indian man and two Euro-American man. The other most frequently mentioned activities/strategies were more similar across groups. Table 5 lists these.

Table 5. Top ranked student success-related activities/strategies at UNCP by group.

	African American	American Indian	Euro-American
1	Extracurricular activities (34%)	Writing Center (22%)	Tutoring (29%)
2	Tutoring (17%)	Tutoring (13%, tie)	Supplemental Instruction (19%)
3	Center for Academic Excellence (14%)	Supplemental Instruction (13%, tie)	Writing Center (12%, tie)
4	Writing Center (11%)	Center for Academic Excellence (9%, tie)	Career Center (12%, tie)
5	Supplemental Instruction (9%)	Career Center (9%, tie)	Helpful professors (7%)

What are the things that UNCP does best in supporting student success?

Responses in this category were even more varied than those to the previous question so much so that it was difficult to identify top response categories. However, it was clear that both African American and Euro-American men believed that it is in employing good people that UNCP is most likely to contribute to student success. (Fourteen percent of both groups indicated that “people” are what UNCP does best.) Students appreciate all the staff members who show that they are willing to help and the administrators that maintain an open-door policy. Faculty were described as supportive, fantastic, and exceptionally dedicated. “People” as a category did not show up among the most frequent responses for American Indian students. Their most frequent response (at 13% of American Indian participants) was Supplemental Instruction. Several other things were mentioned by almost 10% of American Indian men: the Center for Academic Excellence, the Writing Center, and the Career Center. Almost 10% of all three groups included tutoring in their comments. One other difference among racial groups was that both African American and Euro-American men included small classes and a good faculty/student ratio frequently as things that UNCP does best to promote students success while this particular response did not appear in the list of top responses for American Indian students.

What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success?

The last question asked of both focus group and online survey participants was “What are the things that UNCP does best in supporting student success?” The list of responses was long and varied but a few items were mentioned by more than five percent of the sample: greater class availability (more classes offered more often, 10%), improved campus safety (more lighting, safe way to cross Prospect, more vigilant campus police, better cameras, 9%), more & better communication with students (timely communication from offices such as financial aid, prompt responses from instructors, more navigable student handbook & catalogs, 7%), better food & more choices in the dining hall (7%), higher student standards (7%), and more school spirit (6%). The category of “higher student standards” included comments not just about higher admission and academic standards but also about promoting professionalism in students. One young man commented that UNCP “needs to enforce students acting and representing themselves in a mature way.” This would include emphasizing class punctuality, not “babying” students by waiving course policies, and not permitting pajamas to be worn in the classroom. Men in all three racial groups desired greater class availability but it was not the most frequently given response for any one group. The number one response for Euro-American men was greater campus safety (14%); for American Indian men, it was higher student standards (17%). Only African American men indicated a desire for greater school spirit and it was the most frequently mentioned item for

this group (20%). Two other racial differences were apparent when looking at the top three response categories per group. Only Euro-American students had “more parking” in the list of top three responses and only American Indian students had “lower prices—for books and tuition—and increased opportunities for financial aid” in the top three.



Discussion

What conclusions can we reach about factors that promote or hinder male student success at UNCP as a result of this study? For the participants overall, personal success was defined as setting goals and achieving them and doing so in the area of academics was one major factor to which they attributed their success at UNCP. They also emphasized the role of good teaching/advising and the support of family/friends. Participants commonly cited personal characteristics as contributing to or hindering academic success. Although a number of these characteristics would not be amenable to intervention (e.g., work ethic, immaturity), others could be targeted in order to increase the success rate of male students. A focus on teaching good study habits, organization, time/stress management, and other “soft” skills would be positive additions to UNCP’s retention/graduation toolbox. Several national studies have indicated the importance of non-academic factors in college success.⁴



Assuming that the resources of which participants were aware are the ones that they use, continuing the availability of tutoring, writing assistance, and supplemental instruction are warranted by the results of this study. UNCP’s practice of hiring excellent faculty and student-centered staff should also be continued as well as enhanced by whatever resources are available. In this as well as other studies conducted by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, students comment frequently on the difficulty of getting the courses they need. This may have more to do with poor planning than with the actual unavailability of courses; however, it is a topic that should be investigated and addressed.

Themes that emerged for different racial groups could also provide the basis for targeted interventions. For example, African American men continually emphasized the importance of extra-curricular engagement and school spirit to their college success. Thus, involving African American men in their first year of college in sports, clubs, organizations, events, and other non-academic activities may assist in their being retained through to graduation. Based on the observation that, at UNCP, African American men generally have higher retention rates than do Euro-American men, it could be that campus engagement needs to be more strongly promoted among this latter group of men. Of course, students should be made fully aware of both the positive features (support) as well as the potential dangers (distraction from academics) of their involvement. Although the current study didn’t

⁴ For example, see Lotkowski, V. A., Robbins, S. B. & Noeth, R. J. (2004). *The role of academic and non-academic factors in improving college retention*. ACT policy report.

specifically address the topic of developmental courses, it is worth noting that African men particularly thought that lack of high school preparation had hindered their college success.

Financial considerations weren't high on the list of success-related factors; however, it is worth noting that minority men were more likely than were Euro-American men to cite financial considerations as possible success hindrances. Conversely, Euro-American men were more likely than the other two racial groups to cite financial/career security as important to their personal definitions of success. The differential importance of finances to these groups of men warrants further investigation. Another topic for future study is the interaction of race and gender. For example, it would be helpful to know if, as implied in the current study, minority men receive less encouragement than do their female counterparts to participate in higher education.

Finally, note should be taken of the particular concerns of American Indian men at UNCP. They were the group most likely to comment on the difficulty of understanding instructors who had "accents." Although the assumption is that the students were referring to faculty members for whom English is not their first language, this may or may not be the case. Additional ways of gathering information on this topic should be devised. American Indian men were also quite concerned that American Indian courses at UNCP did not include a sufficient amount of information related to the Lumbee tribe and that students at UNCP were not receiving sufficient education about this group of American Indians. Given UNCP's status as not only a historically American Indian-serving institution but also as one whose history is entwined with that of the Lumbee tribe, this concern deserves particular consideration and possible corrective action.

Appendix A: Focus Group Script & Questions

Lumina Study of Male Student Success at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

“Hello and welcome to today’s focus group. [Introduce facilitator/assistant.] At UNCP, we believe it is crucial to hear what students have to say about their educational experiences. Our discussion today will center around what you feel are the factors that lead students to be successful in their educational pathways and factors that may hinder that success. We are particularly interested in what our African American and Native American students have to say because historically, they stay at UNCP past the freshmen year at a higher rate than do Euro-American students.”

“Before we begin our discussion, however, let me provide some details about how the focus group will work and see if you have any questions. Your participation in today’s focus group is completely voluntary. Your attendance here today implies your consent to participate; however, you may end participation, at any time and for any reason, without penalty. You may also choose to withhold comment if there are topics addressed with which you are uncomfortable. There are no anticipated costs or risks associated with your participation and, in my experience, most student focus group participants appreciate the opportunity to have their “voice heard” and enjoy the discussion that takes place. An additional benefit to you is the receipt of a UNCP bookstore card as our way of saying “thank you” for participating. Before you leave today, you will receive that gift card and an information sheet containing my e-mail address and phone number in case you have any questions after our session ends. Also included on that sheet is contact information for the chairperson of UNCP’s Institutional Review Board, a committee that works to protect the rights and welfare of research volunteers.”

“In a good focus group, participants not only answer questions posed by the facilitators but also talk among themselves. Keep in mind that this is your group and you should feel free to bring up and/or discuss anything on your mind. We ask that you not share anything that is said in today’s session with anyone outside of this room. The facilitator and note taker(s) will also make sure that your participation is confidential. Focus group attendees will not be identified in any report or publication about this study and no identifying information (other than gender and race) will be collected. On the table in front of each of you is a placard on which is a letter. The note taker(s) for today’s session will be summarizing statements made by members of the focus group; however, we will be using the letters to identify you in these notes and you do not need to reveal your names.”

“Does anyone have questions at this time?”

“Let’s get started. As a reminder, our general theme today relates to factors that contribute to a successful educational experience at UNCP.”

- At UNCP, we define student success as graduating students who are prepared for rewarding careers, postgraduate education, leadership roles, and fulfilling lives. But how do you personally define success?
- What has helped you be successful at UNCP?
- Do you think that any of these factors are unique to your race or gender?
- Are there any obstacles or challenges that have limited your success at UNCP? That is, are there factors that might lead students to leave the university or to struggle while here?
- Do you think that any of these factors are unique to your race or gender?
- Other research has identified a few things that seem to be related to student retention and graduation. Let me mention a few of these and see if you have any comments about their relationship to your success:
 - High school preparation
 - Finances
 - Family support
 - Feeling connected to the campus and other students/campus involvement
 - Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising
 - Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general
 - Personal goals
 - Seeing your culture reflected on campus and in courses
- What sort of activities and strategies are you aware of here at UNCP that are intended to promote student success?
- What are the things that UNCP does best in supporting student success?
- What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success?

[Make sure to allow enough time for students to think and then respond. For all questions, be aware of time and gently bring students back on task if their discussion becomes tangential reminding them of the limited time allotted for their session. Follow up on topics as clarification or elaboration is needed. Time allotted per focus group = 75 minutes; make sure to end promptly after 75 minutes or before; thank students profusely for their time and thoughtful input. Give each student a bookstore card and an information sheet.]

Appendix B: Online Survey

Lumina Study of Male Student Success at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Introduction: At UNCP, we believe it is crucial to hear what students have to say about their educational experiences. This survey is intended to find out what you feel are the factors that lead students to be successful in their educational pathways at UNCP and factors that may hinder that success. We are particularly interested in what our male students have to say because historically, they have been less likely than our female students to stay until graduation.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may choose to answer all of the questions or only some of the questions; any information you provide will be beneficial. Your responses will be confidential and we encourage you to be as candid as possible in your replies.

Questions:

1. At UNCP, we define student success as graduating students who are prepared for rewarding careers, postgraduate education, leadership roles, and fulfilling lives. How do you personally define student success? [Textbox]
2. What has helped you be successful at UNCP? [Textbox]
3. Do you think that any of the factors that have helped you be a successful student at UNCP are unique to your race or gender? [YES, NO; if Yes, please explain--- branched from Yes.]
4. Please describe below any obstacles or challenges that have potentially limited your success at UNCP. [Textbox]
5. Do you think that any of the factors that have limited your success at UNCP are unique to your race or gender? [YES, NO; if Yes, please explain—branched from Yes.]
6. Research in higher education has identified a few things that seem to be related to student retention and graduation. Listed below are a few of these. If you have any comments about their relationship to your academic success, please enter those comments in the appropriate text boxes.
 - a. High school preparation [Textbox]
 - b. Finances [Textbox]
 - c. Family support [Textbox]

- d. Feeling connected to the campus and other students/campus involvement [Textbox]
 - e. Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising [Textbox]
 - f. Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general [Textbox]
 - g. Personal goals [Textbox]
 - h. Seeing your culture reflected on campus and in courses [Textbox]
7. What sort of activities and strategies are you aware of here at UNCP that are intended to promote student success? [Textbox]
 8. What are the things that UNCP does best in supporting student success? [Textbox]
 9. What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success? [Textbox]

Thank you message: Thank you for taking the time to provide information related to student success at UNCP. If have any questions or comments related to this survey, please don't hesitate to contact the Primary Investigator, Dr. Beverly R. King, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness at UNCP. Her e-mail address is beverly.king@uncp.edu.