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**CSUMB Capstone Project**

**Abstract**

*Studies show that black males persist to college graduation at low rates as compared to other demographics in this country. There is a significant amount of research into both why this is the case and solutions to these “achievement gaps”. In the essay below, I highlight some of the explanations to both the historic and contemporary barriers to academic achievement for black males and solutions to the problem. I commentate on these seminal studies with the findings from my own qualitative research. The methods of my research were a focus group with three members of the CSUMB black community, nine black CSUMB students via a Google form survey, a one-on-one interview with counselor Steven Goings, and personal testimony/journalistic investigation. The purpose of my own research was to compare my findings to the scholarship hitherto, to investigate the experience of black males on this campus, and to find whether CSUMB is a positive space for black males to succeed.*

**Historic and Contemporary Educational Barriers**

Informing young people that a college education is important is borderline cliché now. But it can not be stressed enough, a college degree equals more earnings potential. According to a 2018 report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Elka, 2018), the median weekly salary for people with a bachelor’s degree was $1,173, while those with a high school diploma and no college experience earned $712 weekly. Further, only those with college degrees had an unemployment rate less than the national average. The unemployment rate for those with only a high school diploma was twice that of bachelor’s degree earners.

 Obtaining a post-secondary education means higher earnings and wealth attainment, which correlate to better health. Greater incomes mean superior health insurance--or having health insurance at all--and greater access to premier healthcare.  People with less education and wealth also lead more stressful lives, and stress is linked to increased risks of cardiovascular diseases. A National Center for Biotechnology Information (Woolf, 2007) study found higher mortality rates among individuals with “inadequate” education. The study opined that societal investments in education would save more lives than investments in medical advancements, and that “spending large sums of money on such advances at the expense of social change may be jeopardizing public health”.

The disheartening fact about the United States though, is that, historically, African Americans’ access to educational opportunities have been inadequate. It was illegal in many states prior to the Civil War to even teach black Americans how to read or write, whether they were slaves or “free negroes or mulattoes,” as Virginia’s 1819 anti-literacy law put it (Simkin, 1997). After emancipation, black people began to form their own schools, but these schools were woefully under-resourced (Span, 2002 as cited in Golash-Boza). From 1896 to 1954, the years between *Plessy v Ferguson*--which effectively turned blacks into second class citizens--and *Brown v Board of Education*, it was legal for states to deny African Americans access to public schools (Wollenberg, 1974 ). In 1931, more than three-quarters of school districts in California (Wollenberg) were segregated de jure, and in Texas, ninety percent of schools were segregated  (Godfrey, 2008 as cited in Golash-Boza). The prevailing idea was that these schools were “ separate, but equal”. But local governments were spending less money on the education of black children than white children. On average, spending on black students was less than two-thirds that of spending on white students before 1950.  Expenditure in Clarendon County, South Carolina for 1951 was $44.32 per black student, and $166.45 per white student. White students also had the luxury of receiving free school materials, while black students paid for theirs (Anderson & Byrne, 2004 as cited in Golash-Boza).

The ruling in *Brown v Board of Education* officially ended segregation in schools, but it did not extinguish educational inequality. Many schools, especially in the south, took a contentious stance towards segregations’ ending. In Prince Edward County, Virginia, all public schools were closed in order to avoid desegregation until they were forced to reopen by the Supreme Court (Orfield & Lee, 2004 as cited in Golash-Boza). In response to only two percent of medical students being black in 1965, the UC Davis medical school set aside sixteen of it’s one hundred slots for underrepresented minorities. This was part of a nationwide movement, enabled by Title VI of the 1968 Civil Rights Act, to promote diversity on college campuses, which became known as affirmative action. In the 1970s, courts began to force K-12 schools that were still segregated, to bus children in from neighboring communities to desegregate.

But these policies were met with resistance, and short lived. In the 1978 *Regents of the University of California v Bakke* case, the Supreme Court ruled that affirmative action was unconstitutional. In 1996, with the confirmation of Prop 209, California banned the consideration of race in university admissions. The effects of this ban were felt immediately, with admissions of underrepresented students at UC Berkeley and UCLA plummeting sixty-one and thirty-six percent respectively by 1998. Today, we are witnessing the consequences of that decision, in 2012, just twenty seven percent of UC freshmen were underrepresented minorities, despite accounting for fifty-four percent of high school graduates in California (Murphy, 2013).

In the 1991 *Dowell v. Oklahoma City* case, the Supreme Court ruled that school districts did not have to enforce desegregation by busing. Since then, schools have reversed and become more segregated, with nearly one in five schools being ninety percent nonwhite in 2013 (Orfield et al., .2016 as cited in Golash-Boza).

There is no wonder then, that disparities in educational outcomes persist in America to this day. Only twenty-three percent of African Americans had a bachelor’s degree in 2015, much lower than the thirty-three percent that the country as a whole has (U.S Department of Education, NCES 2016). In 2012, only sixty-three percent of black high school graduates enrolled in college, the lowest percentage for a racial group in the country (Fry & Taylor, 2013). According to NCES reports, only sixteen percent of black males graduate from college within four years, and only twenty-three percent of black males over the age of twenty-five compared to the thirty-five percent national figure (2016).

There are a number of cultural and socio economic explanations that sociologists offer for these disparities.

One of the more prominent of these, though it has since been criticized and essentially debunked, was the oppositional culture thesis proposed by Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu in 1986. They posited that blacks do not achieve in school because they equate school success with “acting white”, and that black children respond to the discrimination that they face by rebeling against white culture, and thus school success. The study received an excessive amount of media exposure at the time, and gained wide acceptance and publicity.

*The participants in my focus group, who were high-achieving throughout high school, attested that there were people who called into question their blackness as they were growing up. None of the criticism was based on their academic achievement however, only that their behaviors were seen as “acting white.” Richard said, “I would go home and they noticed how developed my speech skills were, or how eloquent I was speaking, they would say, "Wow, you sound like a white boy. Wow, why are you so white?.’” My experiences growing up were similar to Richard’s, I never heard from any of my peers that my academic success was a negative thing in any way, but certain times for me growing up, my mannerisms and speech were criticized. There is an interesting duality for many African Americans who deal with striving for academic achievements, and feeling as though their achievements make them less black. The scholarship on this does not draw a clear line that these accusations have caused a hindrance to black achievement in school. A 1998 sample of seventeen-thousand students found that black students had a more positive attitude towards school than white students (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998 ). Also, none of my focus group participants were wearied by these “acting white” epithets. Dr. Burkett had very interesting commentary on this, on the ability of African Americans to achieve and speak eloquently deemed acting white, he said, "Yo, you sound X, Y, Z (white)." That's fine. Doctor Martin Luther King sounded X, Y, and Z, so did Rosa L. Parks, so did Garrett Morgan, so did George Washington Carver, so did X, Y, and Z. So all of our prominent scholars and brilliant [sic]...what? Did they sound white, or did they sound educated and black?” It was a powerful moment for the young black men in the room.*

Another explanation for the academic achievement gap, is the fact that nonwhite students are more likely than white students to be placed in low-ability groups (Kao & Thompson, 2003). Also, schools that are predominantly white are more likely to have advanced placement classes than predominantly black schools. The schools that black males are more likely to attend, are less likely to prepare them for the rigors of college. They also tend to have limited information on the college process in general (Thayer, 2000). *My focus group reflected this, Miles stated that it was “Challenging to understand what to do for the application and scholarships.”The assistance I received with the application process, and choosing a community college was from friends who were a year older.* This has a lot to do with the fact that many of these students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and the schools they attend are more likely to be underfunded. In a study that tracked high school students who were sophomores in 1980, more than half of youth from the top twenty-five percent of incomes had graduated from college by 1990, as compared to only seven percent from the bottom twenty-five. *The low-income neighborhood I grew up in is full of first-generation college students. I will be the first person on my mother’s side of the family with a bachelor’s degree.*

Another explanation, correlating with socioeconomic status, is the lack of social and cultural capital, that many black students lack access to. Social capital refers to *who* you know, and cultural capital refers to *what* you know (Golash-Boza, 2009). Put simply, black students are less likely to have someone in their family, neighborhood, or social circle with college experience, and thus guide them through the college experience, this constitutes a lack of social capital. Most higher education institutions are usually run, and attended by members of the dominant culture, i.e middle class white people, not black. Therefore, the standards of these institutions are set by the dominant culture, and the transition into these institutions are made more difficult if you are not of the dominant culture, i.e lack cultural capital.

Separate, but relating to cultural capital, is what some education scholars call a hidden curriculum (Golash-Boza, 2009). They argue that schools are designed to create cultural hegemony and reproduce the status quo, unfortunately the status quo is not black and it has produced racial inequality. One way that schools do this is with punitive actions starting in elementary schools. These punitive actions often involve excluding the students from class activities, causing the student to fall behind. Black students, beginning in preschool, are three times more likely than white students to be suspended from school. Black students are also two times as likely to be subject to school-related arrest (U.S Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). *My little brother was suspended from school multiple times before first grade. I was once suspended from school with no deliberation from the dean, there was no action taken to resolve the dispute I had with a fellow student.* There has also been a rise in the policing of schools and arrests made at schools. Some scholars call this punitive system the school-to-prison pipeline, a set of practices that leads to children being funneled from public schools into the juvenile and criminal justice system (Golash-Boza, 2009).

Unfortunately, when faced with these institutional and systemic barriers, scholars note that black males may sometimes adopt a “cool pose” persona— nonchalant, tough, hostile, emotionless, and uncaring—to save face and to cope with external pressures and oppression (Majors & Billson 1992, as cited in Whiting) and Tatum (2005, as cited in Whiting). By adopting this persona, black males are less likely to open up about their emotions and well-being to figures who can help them. According to Whiting (2009), black males may “avoid institutions and activities that are considered “uncool”—schools, libraries, bookstores, museums, and churches”. Whiting  (2009). posits that “the Black male’s potential and growth are thwarted because of his refusal to assimilate or to otherwise become involved in experiences that could help broaden his personal, social, and political consciousness”. This may all be a part of the larger issue that Black Americans overall seek mental health services at much lower rates than their White American counterparts . Dr. Burkett theorizes *obstructed use,* as the explanation for this. *Obstructed use* is the theory that the four theoretical concepts of historical trauma, environmental toxicity, culturally bound economic insecurity, and cultural mistrust, are definitive obstacles to accessing and therefore, receiving mental health services (Burkett, 2017).

These internal and external phenomena contribute to the academic underperformance of black males in this country.

**Breaking Down Barriers**

Though they are unfortunately fewer and farther between, black males do succeed in college. And the numbers are trending in a more positive direction. Black Americans are continuously marching a little further up the ladder in all aspects of American life compared to previous generations. So when black males have succeeded, what are the reasons why? What leads to their success?

Black males are born into an American society that disfavors them, and more likely than not, born into circumstances that will impede upon their success. It is thus paramount that the remedy for endemic academic failure is a systematic and comprehensive one (Whiting 2009). A solid educational infrastructure must be in place. All academic faculty-administrators, teachers, counselors- must promote policies and philosophies that allow black male students to develop the attitudes, behaviors and values that allow them to succeed in their academics and society at large (Lee, 1991). The focus of these policies must be to elevate the self-esteem of black students, according to Whiting, students with high self-esteem- including a positive self-concept and racial identity- are less likely to engage in self-destructive and self-defeating behaviors.

A *Career Development Quarterly* report (Owens et al., 2010), suggests that educators working to understand the experiences that black males have in this country may contribute to an  improvement of their academic prospects. These experiences include inadequate educational preparation, traumatic life experiences, and historic systemic oppression. Because of this, and the fact that in many institutions there will only be a small percentage of black males, many of them first generation, there may be a need for special support programs to provide for the unique needs of black males in a college setting (Owens, et al., 2010). Educators must work to create an environment that is nurturing and supportive of black males, that promote high self-esteem.

The report offers a number of ways that college counseling departments can effectively assist black males in college. These include recruiting African American role models to speak about their careers and what it takes to enter their professions. Encouraging black males to find mentors who are in their same field of study. Hiring more African American faculty who can serve as role models and encourage young black men to seek counseling and the support networks to succeed. Implementing outreach programs because African Americans tend to seek and receive counseling and health services reluctantly. Addressing and acknowledging the unique burdens of black students; financially, socially and educationally. And connecting with black student organizations.

*The black community at CSUMB has worked to create such an infrastructure and environment for young black men to succeed. “A lot of the things that have been done to create a black community, and support and a sense of belonging, have been done by the students themselves, or particular staff and faculty”, said Steven Goings MSW, a counselor at the Personal Growth and Counseling Center.*

*Here on campus we have the Harambee African Heritage Men's Group, which is, “a support group for Black male students to foster pride in their African heritage through celebration of accomplishments and community”. The group is led by Goings, who revived the group, which had originally been created in 1999 by Mel Mason, former city council member and counselor at the counseling center. According to Goings, the group’s purpose was to create community among black male students. Harambee is based on a Maasai village model, meaning instead of the traditional therapist-students dynamic, the students are supported by black staff and faculty and black community elders. “The hope of it is that black male students will be more connected to each other, that they will form connections with the black staff and faculty on the campus and that they’ll know a little more about what's going on in the community”, Goings said.*

*Some of the other resources we have on campus are the two black Greek letter organizations on campus, the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, which are part of the Divine Nine, historically Black Greek letter organizations that make up the National Pan-Hellenic Council, there is also a Pan-Hellenic Council nearby. The Black Students United club, which works to promote social and cultural awareness, and advocate for black students. There is a Monterey County branch of the NAACP-which formerly had a chapter here on campus. There is the neighboring city of Seaside, home to what once was the largest black community between Los Angeles and Oakland, but still has a strong black presence. There are a number of historically black churches in the Seaside area. There is a “Black Folks Calendar”, that keeps students up-to-date with all the events happening on and off campus that involve black people*

*Some events on campus that bring together the black community include the All Black Gala, an annual, formal event to celebrate Black history and culture. The Gala has featured the likes of civil rights activist Angela Davis and screenwriter Kevin Willmott, prominent African American keynote speakers who can serve as role models and inspirers. Black Grad, which offers a more intimate commencement ceremony, that gives more individual appreciation to black student achievements, and brings members of the greater Seaside-Monterey black community to the ceremony. There are the many Black History Month programs offered on campus, through the NAACP and the Otter Cross Cultural Center. Super Saturday, a community forum which looks to improve the preparation and graduation rates of African Americans in the CSU system . The BSU hosts events such as Black Wednesday and Black People Meet.*

*According to Goings, there are plans for a bimonthly black coalition meeting so that there can be a sustained engagement between CSUMB and the black community. He believes that the state of the black community should be pulsed year round, instead of just a few weeks during black history month.*

**Scholar Identity Model**

Whiting posits that educators must create an environment that is able to foster in black males what he calls the *scholar identity.* He defines the scholar identity as one in which Black males perceive themselves as academicians, as studious, and as intelligent or talented in school settings (Whiting, 2009). He says that this should be done by using a “culturally specific” counseling in school. This counseling should not only develop positive attitudes and behaviors, but should allow for a critical analysis of the black male image, and appreciation for the historical and cultural impact of black males. It calls for broadening the scope of belief of what a black male can be because black male role models have historically been athletes, musicians and actors. For Whiting, developing the scholar identity should enhance how they see themselves academically and intellectually.

There are nine characteristics of the scholar identity: Self-Efficacy,Willing to Make Sacrifices, Internal Locus of Control, Future Oriented, Self-Awareness, Need for Achievement, Academic Self-Confidence, Racial Identity, and Masculinity.

In this model, self-efficacy is the foundational quality for all of the other traits. Self-efficacy breeds, resiliency, confidence, self discipline and a grasps of what it takes to accomplish goals and succeed. Students with self-efficacy seek academic challenges and reject stereotypes imposed on them (Whiting, 2009). *Akil Reece, a graduating Human Communications major, said, “ Self motivation helped me the most. I'll be the first to graduate from college in my family. I wanted to set an example.”*

Black males with a scholar identity understand that sacrifices have to be made in order to succeed. They are more likely to sacrifice their social life for the sake of achievement in school (Whiting, 2009). *Sengan Harding, a graduating Human Communications major, said, “ Keeping a level head has helped me succeed in college. It’s okay to have fun but it was always key to remember why I was here in college, to gain a better education.”*

Locus of control is a person’s belief about the causes of their success or failure. A person with an internal locus of control  believes that their own actions (studying, doing homework) directly affect the outcomes of their academics (grades, test scores). Black males with this trait are more optimistic, they are participatory, believe that their work ethic will carry them through, and are not afraid to ask for assistance when they need it. However, they should continue to be aware of outside pressure and social injustices (Whiting, 2009).

Black males who are future oriented keep their eyes on the prize, so to speak, and understand that their actions today affect their life tomorrow, and they think about their present behavior and decisions in relation to their future. They set realistic goals and are not too concerned with instant gratification (Whiting, 2009). *Kyle Smith, a graduating Kinesiology major, said, “Having a goal beyond college has helped me succeed. If I didn't know what I wanted to do with my degree, i would probably go into class half-heartedly and do the minimum amount of work.*

A keen self-awareness is necessary for black males to develop a scholar identity. Black males must be able to understand their strengths and weaknesses and find ways to alleviate their weaknesses in school, by reaching out for help when needed.

Black males with a scholar identity, have a strong need for achievement because they understand that academic excellence will mean a better life for themselves. Achievement-oriented people desire to do well and consistently try to find ways to do their work better. Having a high need for achievement means putting school first, and above social life.

Scholars argue that self-confidence is crucial to academic success. Students who are self-confident are more likely to persist. Black males who are academically self-confident do not feel inferior in school, and are more likely to show pride in their academic ability, rather than hide or play down their abilities (Whiting, 2009).

Black males with a strong racial identity are proud of their blackness. Their pride and racial self-awareness does not get in the way of them adapting to foreign environments and being multicultural. They do not see their intellectuality and academic achievement as “acting white”. They refuse to be defined by stereotypes or injustices, or adhere to the status quo for black males in school (Whiting, 2009).

In Whiting’s model, masculinity means not equating being intelligent or studious as feminine. Black males should believe that men can be intelligent. He challenges black men to challenge the scholarship out there that says that black men equate being smart with being feminine. He says that a destructive masculinity should not be allowed to develop in young black men (Whiting, 2009).

**My Road to College/CSUMB Perspective/Focus Group**

On a cold and wet Sunday in March, I conducted a focus group at Cal State Monterey Bay’s Tanimura & Antle Library. It was the first extended rainy weather in Monterey in nearly a year, and the campus was slowed and emptied. Compoundly, all school events, including classes, had just recently been suspended, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic ferociously unfurling before our very eyes. We exchanged fist bumps instead of handshakes, and laughed at the fear and mayhem that a microbe can cause. I had been a tad bit worried that my invitees would cancel. It seemed like my entire senior year was going to be canceled--spring break plans, commencement, summer trips celebrating commencement. I was relieved to see them there, enthusiastic and ready to participate. I brought refreshments for the group, chips and salsa, and cinnamon buns; I was looking to ace this research session. With campus feeling so eerie, I was hopeful the sugar and chips and dip I brought would lighten the mood around us.

I had invited three members of the CSUMB community: Dr. Christopher A. Burkett, who received his PhD in Social Work and Social Welfare Research from Portland State University, Richard Connell, a senior getting his bachelor’s in Environmental Studies this spring, and Myles Purnell, a third-year Human Communications major. I myself am a Human Communications major, with a concentration in Media Studies and Journalism. We were there to speak about black male success in college and the black male college experience at CSUMB. We were also discussing how we, as black males, had succeeded in college. I think we all recognized the significance of our meeting that day, we were part of one of the rarest demographics in all of American higher education: we were black men. I was there to compare the findings of that focus group to the academic literature on the African American educational experience, specifically black males in college settings. I wanted to know and show what the road to college was like for us, how we succeeded in college, and how had CSUMB fostered our success?

The California State University at Monterey Bay is nestled between the shores of the north Pacific and the lush, bounteous valleys of central California. Gentled green (when California is not in drought) rolling hills, dotted by herds of unassuming cows, line the highways to and from the campus. Vibrant, colorful succulents of various red, yellow and green hues paint the sand dune beaches that lie just a five minute walk away. To the south is Big Sur, an immense piece of nature, marked by an abundance of wildlife and breathtaking coastal views, Big Sur is home to the colossal Redwoods as well. The school was built on the grounds of the old Fort Ord army base, which closure in 1994 opened the door for the construction of a brand new Cal State University to serve the central coast region. Located in the towns of Seaside and Marina, the two create a tranquil, suburban, All-American feel, with nearby Monterey serving a dash of eccentric and cosmopolitan flavor that touristy California beach towns tend to deliver.

    The placidity of CSUMB was a welcomed culture shock for me coming from my hometown of Gardena, in the south bay region of Los Angeles County. I was exchanging the urban sprawl and bustle and automobiles of the second largest city in the country, for wild turkeys, ground squirrels, bobcats and deer. A city that never sleeps, to a town where you’re unsure if it ever wakes up. Monterey was a good place to press the refresh button on my academic career, and I sure needed it.

Growing up, I was the learn in solitude type of student. I read a lot on my own, I read the textbooks for class, I read novels, I read the newspaper. But I didn't do my homework, I did not study for tests, and I failed a lot of classes because of it. My best GPA in high school was a 2.0, that I only got during my senior year because I was trying to play football. Because of my habits, I was a late graduate from high school. Instead of walking the stage with my cap and gown, and all of my classmates in June, I checked into summer courses to complete my final three classes to obtain my diploma, which I attained that November. There were too many distractions in my hometown. I loved my friends, but we were not good for one another academically. That continued throughout my first three years at Cerritos College, where I was looking to attain my associate’s. I failed my first college course, Psychology 101, I dropped five or six courses ( I was afraid of English 100, I hated the idea of long essays), and I racked up W’s. My financial aid was terminated in my third semester, and for two years, I went without aid (besides a fee waiver), and I got a job to pay for books. Receiving my associate’s degree was not because I excelled, I see those years as a war of attrition, I survived more than I strived.

What made matters worse, was the breakneck pace of life, especially as a commuting student. I chose a community college that was an hour away from home by public transit, so two hours out of my day I was in the city hustling and bustling around. I also took public transit to work, and I worked four or five days a week. So finding the time to study, along with avoiding distractions, was difficult. In Los Angeles, sometimes life is a whirlwind, you never really keep up, you just find yourself one step behind, there’s beauty and wickedness in it.

 Coming to CSUMB allowed me to catch my breath. Everything seemed to come into focus. As Dr. Burkett put it when he arrived on campus,”it was like time stopped.” I had been searching for the words to describe what made CSUMB unique and different and better for my education than Los Angeles, and I found them: “Time stopped.” CSUMB brought me clarity that I didn’t realize I needed so badly. My mind, body and spirit are healthier today than they have ever been. CSUMB’s motto’s “Fresh air, Fresh thinking”, and “Open Space, Open Minds” are true. CSUMB has made me more environmentally conscious, and more conscious of the social injustices around me, in all the forms they take. I lived in a city, and within urban life in America unfortunately, injustices are all around you. And I knew this, but I had to come three hundred miles away to recognize all of it, recognize my position in society, and recognize my responsibility. The same was true for all of us in my focus group.

Richard shared similar thoughts on what coming to CSUMB has done for him, “I never realized how sheltered we were...It's really shown me issues that our communities face. It's real, first and foremost, and it's not something that you have to go and get a history textbook to read about, or something that you have to look up. It's something that you can go outside and see for yourself.”

    With seven thousand students, CSUMB is small as compared to most other public universities in the state. Most students, especially within departments, know each other-- or at least recognize each other from crossing paths at the dining commons everyday for a few years. For some, the small close-knit community of CSUMB is a reason why they succeeded. Kyle Smith opined that, “A great thing about CSUMB is the size of the school. It allows you to befriend classmates that you'll likely see in multiple classes. This helps for making great study groups or study partners”. Timothy Vance, a senior Environmental Studies major from Los Angeles, said, “ In my first year, staying in a dorm hall with people I had most of my classes with was very helpful”.

Part of the culture shock for me here as a student was the lack of black students around me. My schools back home were nearly one-hundred percent minority, and all of the six K-12 schools I attended were at least one-third black, so being only a tiny fraction of the population was, for me….odd. Richard, Miles and I, with all of us being from the Los Angeles area, all felt a little culture shock about the school demographics. However, we all responded positively to it, Miles expressed that being here gave him more of an appreciation of his blackness, “being away from black taught me what it really meant to me... I'm thankful for CSUMB for giving me that lack of access to black people. Now I yearn for it”, he said. Maybe the lack of black students here, makes us connect more. Sengan said, “ There aren’t many black people on campus so it feels like I can’t relate to many people. But I try to find as many black people to make friends with as I can.”

    For me, it was a welcome challenge. I saw it as an opportunity to show that black males succeed in college, and that we are more than just athletes or musical artists, or comedians. We can be intellectuals as well. I started to make sure that I spoke up in class about all issues, especially issues regarding the Afrian American experience or social injustices. I made sure to be concise and eloquent in my speech. For all I know, this might be the first and last time that some of my classmates will interact with a black male. I had to leave them with a positive impression. Other black males I interviewed around campus, felt ambassadorial on campus as well. Akil Reece, said,” I feel like I'm setting a positive example within the black community. It feels like I'm breaking boundaries everyday and showing the black community that we're more than capable of succeeding down this path.”

    How each of us reacted to the campus environment actually goes counter to what the scholarship on black males in higher education says. According to academia, we generally falter in these foreign environments. In an article released published in *Career Development Quarterly* (Owens et al., 2010), it states:

“...many [first generation minority males] who continue on to college also encounter a conflict between the college environment and the cultures in which they were raised (Thayer, 2000). In particular, their home communities are perceived as welcoming because of the familiarity with the environment, whereas the college environment is not. Individuals within these home environments often share similar ethnic characteristics and interests. Furthermore, the home environments where many ethnic minority first-generation college students are raised both provide and reinforce their cultural identity, which is not typically the case on many college campuses. There is a tendency for ethnic minority students, such as African Americans, to experience resistance, alienation, and a culture that is dissimilar to the one to which they are accustomed (Hurd, 2000). As a result, they lack a sense of belonging. This lack of belonging presents a challenge to achievement of their scholastic goals and to their graduation.”

Though it was true that we walked into unfamiliar settings, we turned our environments into something positive, and we thrived because of it. This obviously is not the case for all men of color. I believe that our success is a testament to not only our resiliency, but to the loving, nurturing environment that we created for ourselves here at CSUMB. We here at CSUMB have forstered a sense of belonging.”When I run into other black men on campus, it is a great powerful feeling”, Tim Vance said.

**Conclusion**

There have historically been many systematic barriers that black males must hurdle in order to achieve in school, and thus achieve in life. Because these hurdles have been systematic, the solution must therefore be systematic and institutional. It is an external and internal challenge for black males. Internally, we must strive to work hard, and because of our environments, social injustices and stereotypes about us, we usually will have more than just exams to overcome. We must recognize this challenge, and embrace this challenge in order to succeed.

My research has highlighted the community that has been built by black people on the campus of Cal State Monterey Bay. The community is a foundation that has and can continue to help black males succeed at CSUMB. Steven Goings believes a few improvements he thinks should be made to help black males succeed:

1. A black resource officer, a liason of sorts for all issues of importance to the black community
2. A page on the school website that is devoted entirely to the black community, that contains all of the information pertinent to the black community
3. A greater effort to retain black faculty
4. Black student success center; which has been advocated for

My research on campus has shown me that black males who have succeeded, intrinsically live the scholar identity lifestyle. It is therefore up to us who do succeed, to become the role models and leaders that our brothers, nephews, cousins and sons will look up to. The torch has been passed to us by the great black intellectuals of the past, and we must protect that flame.

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