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Stephanie Jones

California State University

Kimberley Gordon-Biddle

California State University

Julianna Raskauskas

California State University

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Promoting Academic Success Among African American and Hispanic College Students

Stephanie Jones, California State University, Sacramento, USA
Kimberley Gordon-Biddle, California State University, Sacramento, USA
Julianna Raskauskas, California State University, Sacramento, USA

Abstract: *This study investigates the significant types of social support being offered to Black and Hispanic students attending a diverse institution of higher education with low Black and Hispanic student enrollment. The sample consists of 43 Black and 30 Hispanic students. Results indicate that both Black and Hispanic students believe close-friendship, faculty, and classmate support to impact their academic achievement. Results from this study support previous research and can benefit trainers, administrators, and instructors.*

The lack of achievement and retention among African American and Hispanic students is preventing these populations from attaining higher education and achieving fulfilling job opportunities. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics reported that merely 13.1% of African American and 11.4% of Hispanic students enrolled in a degree-granting institution in 2007 compared to 64.4% of Caucasian Americans. In order for educational researchers and policy-makers to enforce policies in our school systems, it is important to examine the social predictors of persistence and achievement among African American and Hispanic students. This descriptive study examined the importance of faculty and peer support on the academic achievement and persistence of African American and Hispanic college students. In addition, this study looked at African American and Hispanic students' self-reporting on the importance of social support. This study was conducted at a diverse institution of higher education with low African American (9%) and Hispanic (14%) student enrollment; which, in comparison to the overall California population, is below average for the Hispanic/Latino (36%) population, and slightly above average for the African American (6.2%) population.

Tardy's model (1985) on social support describes the important dimensions of social support and how they effect the achievement of students. Tardy's model explains that it is imperative for students to give and receive support in order to excel academically. In other words, students need to feel as though they can easily access all of their support system as desired in order to reach their fullest academic potential. In addition, the quality and quantity of support given to students makes an impact on their educational attainment. Students need to be given support in all facets of life; including receiving, financial support, feedback and advice from mentors, and a caring attitude from faculty/staff.

In compliance with previous research, this study found social support to play a vital role in the academic achievement and persistence of African American and Hispanic college students. The descriptive findings from the *Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale* (CASSS) by Malecki, Demaray, Elliot, & Nolten, (1999) found that African American and Hispanic students find close friendships to have the greatest impact on their academic achievement; followed by faculty support, then classmate support.

Valuable characteristics of faculty, classmate, and close friend support were found from African American and Hispanics students self-reporting on significant components of social support, which could all benefit new instructors, trainers, and administrators. It was found that African American students value faculty who make it easy to ask questions and explain things well, value classmates who give good advice, and value close friends who help out when needed. Valued characteristics for Hispanic students were faculty who show students how to do things, classmates that give praise to each other for doing a job well done, and close friends that help out when needed. These findings suggest that it is important for faculty to adjust their teaching orientation to meet the needs of their students and for peers to have more opportunities to positively collaborate with each other, while offering constructive feedback and praise.

This analysis is in compliance with Tardy's model on social support. Tardy explained that the five dimensions of social support are the foundation for understanding the achievements of students. Unlike previous research on social support, the current study adds to the field as it examines students attending a diverse institution of higher education with low African American and Hispanic student enrollment. Educational administrators, trainers, and faculty can utilize the current study to create programs and policies in our school systems to promote achievement and persistence among African American and Hispanic college students.

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