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**RETENTION OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS
ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES**

SUSAN L. TIDD

RETENTION OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS
ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Susan L. Tidd

May 1992

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of the group, FOCUS, on black male student retention rates and grade point averages. The hypotheses under investigation suggested that enrollment in this group would increase a student's persistence in college and his grade point average. Twenty-two men who were members of FOCUS and enrolled in undergraduate classes at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, volunteered to participate in this study. The retention rates, grade point averages, and ACT scores of these individuals were correlated with those of black, first time freshmen who were not members of FOCUS in the corresponding years. There was no significant difference found between the ACT scores of the members and non-members of FOCUS. In the 1989 FOCUS I group a significant difference was found between members and nonmembers grade point averages after one year of college although there was not a significant difference in retention rates. There was no significant difference found in the 1990 FOCUS I group grade point averages or retention rates when correlated with non-members. However, a significant difference was found in FOCUS II members' retention rates and grade point averages when compared with other sophomores who were not members.

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by
Susan L. Tidd

May 1992

To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Susan L. Tidd entitled "Retention of Black Male Students on College Campuses." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in clinical psychology.

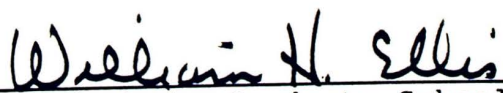

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and
Research Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In our society, attending colleges and universities provides opportunities for individuals to enhance their academic abilities and begin professional careers. For black Americans, it offers even more, it is an effective means of attaining equality in the United States. Traditionally, blacks have not had equal access to higher education. Recently, there has been an increase in the enrollment of blacks into colleges and universities however, there has not been an increase in subsequent degrees attained by these students (Carroll, 1988). Therefore, the retention of black students has become a priority for institutions of higher education. The American Council on Education (cited in Wilson and Melendez, 1986) reported a 3.3% decrease in the number of black students enrolled in higher education from 1980 to 1984. Furthermore, blacks constituted only 7.4% of bachelor's degree recipients four years later in 1984-1985. Whites, on the other hand, constituted about 82% of 4-year college enrollments but were 86% of bachelor's degree recipients.

More recently, the American Council on Education (Carter and Wilson, 1989) has reported that from 1976 to 1987 the number of black students earning a bachelor's degree fell 4.3% overall and 12.2% for black males.

Additionally, Kenner (1982) surveyed 13 accredited universities and found that there were 1150 black females enrolled compared to only 691 black males. It is obvious that the black male is at risk on college campuses.

Many researchers have studied the factors believed to influence the retention rates of black students such as grade point averages, counseling programs, and ACT scores (Carroll, 1988; Giles-Gee, 1989; Magner, 1989). For the purpose of this thesis, retention will be defined as consistent enrollment of a student from one fall semester to the following fall semester. Although there are many different opinions about the cause of dropouts, there appears to be a consensus that the students' level of comfort on the campus will affect their success. Burbank and Thompson (cited in Savitz & Walls, 1986) measured the level of alienation of 725 entering freshmen and found black students reported a significantly higher level of alienation than the other groups due to the following:

1. powerlessness - one's feeling of lack of control over one's life in a social system.
2. normlessness - one's feeling of loss of intrinsic values that might give purpose or direction to life.
3. anger/frustration - perceived university and community activities on a predominately white campus as directed toward white students.

The researchers contend if support services were developed that reduced these factors on campus then the students would not have as high levels of alienation and therefore would be more successful in college. They also suggest these support services should be available especially during the freshman year because this appears to be the most critical period.

Statement of the Problem

The black male college student is not succeeding in college at rates comparable to other students. At Austin Peay State University, the percentage of white students who graduate within four years of beginning college is significantly higher than black students who graduate within four years (The Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 1986). The Commission cites that in recent years the graduation rates for white students were approximately 30% compared to 16% for black students. Furthermore, the research indicated that females graduated at a significantly higher rate than males. The group at highest risk for not completing college was the black male student.

Based on this research, the need for additional support for the black male college student is evident. One such service has been formed at Austin Peay State University by the Department of Minority Affairs. The name of this group is FOCUS. This group was designed to help these students

adjust to their first year of college and to reduce the factors associated with alienation.

After a student has been a member of FOCUS for a year, he is eligible to participate in a continuation of this program, FOCUS II. The purpose of this group is to provide opportunities for sophomore black students to further identify and develop skills which will help facilitate success both personally and professionally through the establishment of campus and community activities designed to encourage personal involvement and effective networking with fellow students and the community at large.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Recruiting and retaining black students has become a major concern of institutions of higher education in the United States. Minorities represent 22% of the United States population but comprise only 17% of the total enrollment in higher education from 1980-1984 (Wilson & Melendez, 1986). More alarming is the Education Commission of the United States report that the minority population is growing and by the year 2025 it is expected to make up 40% of the college age (18-24) population. However, if the trend continues as it is now minorities will probably make up less than 15% of the total enrollment (Wyche & Frierson, 1990). Additionally, black students are far more likely to drop out of college than white students. According to Fleming (cited in Giles-Gee, 1989), 50% of newly enrolled freshmen white students in 1981 continued to be enrolled or graduated by the fall of 1985, only 32.1% of black students did the same. Thus, not only are black students not enrolling they are not staying.

Many colleges have attempted to aid these students. Early researchers contended that academic success of black students is influenced by pre-college factors and individual characteristics such as high school grade point

average, and SAT scores (Blanchfield, 1971). In Blanchfield's study, he found that high school grade point average was the best predictor of academic success. However, Stadler, Brooks, and Sedlack (cited in Carroll, 1988) found that pre-college factors were useful only in predicting freshman year grade point average not overall success in college. Litchman, Bass, and Arger (1989) found in their research at Wayne State University that high school grade point average and ACT composite scores did predict college performance but it was substantially more predictive for white students than for black students. In fact, recent research has indicated that standardized tests may be biased toward black students (Jordan, 1987). In his article, Jordan recommended that in order for tests to be fair the college must take the responsibility to provide the black student with a faculty support system, provide an advanced testing seminar, and evaluate the content, item type and format, and cognitive level of the standardized test. He further commented that until these factors are controlled the scores will not be successful in predicting the performance of these students.

Others (Collinson, 1988; Galicki & McEwen, 1989) suggested personal factors such as finances and residence contributed to retention rates. Galicki and McEwen (1989) found black students living in a residence hall during the first year of college increased the student's persistence

in college. However, it was noted, the level of racial tension felt by the student in the dormitory played an important role in retention. Those students who felt comfortable in their place of residence persisted whereas those who felt racially isolated tended to leave college. Collinson's (1988) research based on a two year study cites black students at private colleges and universities who report being extensively satisfied with their college experience still often drop out and transfer to state colleges and junior colleges in order to relieve some of the financial strain placed on their parents. He implies that this also occurs at the state schools. He recommends that black students obtain more information concerning loans and grants in order to continue their education. All of this research supports the idea that it is the individual who is responsible for academic success or failure rather than the college.

Conversely, Tinto (1975) indicated the background characteristics of the students must be taken into account to understand the students interaction with the environment of the college. He maintained the characteristics of the institution places limits upon development and integration of students within the institution. These characteristics include institutional type and quality, structural arrangement, resources, facilities, and composition of faculty and staff members. He concluded that the higher degree of

integration into the colleges academic and social system, the greater the student's commitment to the institution and the goal of college completion. Thus, it is the responsibility of the college to recognize these limits and attempt to change them.

Current research supports this approach. Robinson (1990) found the characteristics of students who did not graduate were based on differences in the college not due to pre-college characteristics. This researcher believes that it is the environment in which the student is placed and how the student adjusts to this environment that influences the success of the student at that college. Thus, it is the college's responsibility to implement programs to help these students if they want to retain them.

Many institutions have developed programs to attempt to aid black students. At St. Joseph's University, support services have been designed and offered to minorities. These services include counseling and career services, financial assistance, remedial courses, tutoring, and special cultural and social activities. They are designed to make the adjustment to college easier for the students. Savitz and Walls (1986) found that students who use these services are persisters at the university and have higher grade point averages than those students who do not use them. These results are consistent for students who lived both on and off the universities campus.

Carroll (1988) studied the effectiveness of counseling services used during the freshman year on black students at Edgar-Evans College. These services emphasized attitudinal, motivational, career, and effective studying features. These services were offered to all black students at the college. The results of this study were conclusive. High school grade point average did not consistently contribute the most to the prediction of academic success of black students instead perceived counselor guidance was the best single predictor. The students who felt their guidance counselor cared about them felt more integrated into the college environment and therefore persisted.

At Towson State University, retention rates for full time white students increased over the last several years from 83.3% in 1981 to 86.4% in 1986 (Giles-Gee, 1989). However, the universities black student population decreased from 12.7% to 8.5% during this same time period. As a result of this alarming discovery, an advising and study skills program was developed for the black student. Giles-Gee (1989) found that black freshmen who participated in retention related projects that emphasized academic advising, study-skills training, and the use of services significantly improved their grades compared with a previous cohort who did not have the benefit of this program. This program appeared to have the greatest effect on a particular range of students who had marginal grades

(2.0 grade point averages) but who were still able to make progress.

Since research indicates support from members of the campus community may be crucial for black students, other institutions have implemented mentorship programs for the minorities at their college (Mallinckrodt, 1989). These programs implemented the use of faculty and staff to aid in the retention of black students. Magner (1989) studied a program where minority students were paired with professors or other campus administrators of the same ethnicity as the student. The mentors advised freshmen on course work and personal matters. These students also enrolled in a mandatory one semester course to help freshmen adjust to college life. This program also had group meetings for all the students involved. The students tutored each other and provided academic counseling. This program provided administrative support and peer support. The researcher reported this program makes the minority student feel more comfortable and powerful on campus thus they continue in college and are more likely to succeed. Since the implementation of this program, the college has reported an 81% retention rate for their freshman class which is 92% non-white.

A similar program was developed at Glendale Community College (Mendoza & Samuels, 1987). At this institution, faculty members participated in a program which encouraged

the faculty to establish on going contact with assigned minority students and to act as personal mentors. The researchers then compared mentored and unmentored minority students and revealed the following: (a) faculty mentoring of minority students had a positive impact on student retention; (b) targeting a specific minority population made the best use of faculty resources; (c) the risk of dropping out was greatest for new, first time minority students indicating these students would benefit most from future mentoring/retention programs; and (d) faculty mentors recommend additional services be provided to minority students, such as community social services information, helping skills, program checklists, and financial aid orientation. Since this program was newly implemented, there were no results discussed concerning it's effectiveness.

All of these recent studies indicate that the use of programs which involve the faculty and staff in interaction and advising with the black students increase the probability of these students remaining in college. It appears that the first year has been found to be the most crucial period for minorities thus this is when the implementation of this program should begin. The most effective programs are those which not only promote improving academic performance but also concentrate on social skills and feelings of belonging.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research the effectiveness of one program, FOCUS, that combines counseling services and mentorships to assist male black students at Austin Peay State University. This program was designed to increase the retention of black students through the promotion of healthy attitudes both academically and socially. Students have the opportunity to participate in a series of lectures, discussions, and activities which aid in the development of self-confidence, as well as a greater sense of optimism regarding positive academic outcomes. Program facilitators include successful college graduates, accomplished professionals and respected leaders from the community. Members of the faculty and staff at Austin Peay State University also participate. Through successful interfacing of participants with these individuals, it is hoped that supportive relationships as well as professional mentor/role models will evolve. Additionally, the Department of Minority Affairs predict this will increase the retention rates of the students who participate. This program is divided into two groups, FOCUS I and FOCUS II. FOCUS I is for first-time, first-year, freshmen and FOCUS II is a continuation into the sophomore year for previous FOCUS I members. FOCUS II further elaborates on issues dealt with in FOCUS I and introduces materials concerned with other aspects of college life such as: interviewing,

professionalism, and graduate school. These men meet on a weekly basis with the group leaders to discuss issues that they face as a black college student.

Statement of Hypotheses

From information gathered about these groups the following hypotheses are postulated:

1. Members of FOCUS I will not have higher ACT scores than black male freshmen who are not members in the years 1989 and 1990.
2. Members of FOCUS I will have higher retention rates than black male freshmen who are not members.
3. Members of FOCUS II will have higher retention rates than black sophomores who are not members.
4. Members of FOCUS I will have higher GPA's than black male freshmen who are not members.
5. Members of FOCUS II will have higher GPA's than black male sophomores who are not members.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Subjects

During the summer of 1989 and 1990, all black males who were accepted to the University as first time freshmen received information about the group, FOCUS. The students were informed this program was designed to improve the success rate of incoming freshmen at Austin Peay State University. Austin Peay State University is a state supported, liberal arts university, located in Clarksville, Tennessee. There was no cost or obligation and their participation in the FOCUS group was on a voluntary basis. In 1988, fifty-three letters were mailed. Of these fifty-three students, eleven men joined the FOCUS program. In 1990, thirty-two letters were mailed and eleven men volunteered to participate.

Three members of FOCUS I in 1989 and two members of FOCUS I in 1990 were excluded from the study because they were not first time freshmen. The students in the study consisted of a total of fifty black males who were first time freshmen in 1989-1990 and thirty black males who were first time freshmen in 1990-1991. Twenty-two of the subjects were members of FOCUS.

A list of all black males who were first time freshmen in the fall of 1989 and 1990 at Austin Peay State University was obtained from the Department of Institutional Research. The Department of Minority Affairs supplied a list of men who were members of Focus I and Focus II during these years. A list of mailing addresses for the members of FOCUS was requested and received from the Department of Minority Affairs. A cover letter (see Appendix A) and a consent form (see Appendix B) were mailed to the members. A single mass mailing was made utilizing Austin Peay State University post office boxes for those students with an assigned box. For students who did not have a campus post office box, information by first class mail was sent to their local addresses. Completed consent forms were returned to a designated post office box or were delivered personally. One hundred percent of the consent forms were returned.

After permission was obtained, the ACT scores required for acceptance into Austin Peay State University were received from the Department of Records and Registration. This department also supplied the retention rates and grade point averages in the Fall of 1990 and 1991 for all black males who were first time freshmen in 1989. The same information was obtained for black males who were first

time freshmen in 1990. Only the grade point averages were included for 1991 for obvious reasons. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Analysis of Variance were used to analyze the data.

CHAPTER 4

Results

An Anova Analysis of Variance was utilized to determine differences between Focus members and non-members in the areas of ACT scores and grade point average. Table 1, lists the results for the ACT scores. In 1989 and 1990, the mean of ACT score for members of FOCUS and the non-members was not significant.

Table 1

ANOVA of ACT Scores.

Group	ACT Score mean	F	p
1989 FOCUS I Members	17.00	2.130	.151
1989 Non-members	15.46		
1990 FOCUS II Members	17.55	2.389	.133
1990 Non-members	18.84		

Differences between grade point averages are shown in Table 2. In 1990, the mean grade point average for members of FOCUS I was 2.58 (n=11). For non-members, the mean was 1.69 (n=39). This same group of subjects had the following mean in the year 1991: FOCUS II members mean equals 2.54 (n=9) and non-members mean equals 1.87 (n=18). In both

years, significant differences were found between the groups indicating members of FOCUS had higher grade point averages than non-members. For the group that joined FOCUS in 1990, the following grade point averages are reported for 1991: FOCUS members mean equals 2.42 (n=11) and non-members mean equals 1.91 (n=19). No significant difference was found.

Table 2

ANOVA of Grade Point Averages.

Group	1990 GPA mean	F	1991 GPA mean	F
1989 Members of FOCUS I	2.58	13.394**	2.54	15.389**
1989 Non-members	1.69		1.87	
1990 Members of FOCUS I	NA	NA	2.42	2.591
1990 Non-members	NA	NA	1.91	

Note: *=p<.05 **=p<.01 NA= Not available

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to correlate the retention rates. Table 3 and Table 4 list the results of the correlation of retention rates for black males who enrolled as first time freshmen in the years 1989 and 1990.

Table 3

Correlation of Retention Rates for Students Enrolling in 1989.

	1990 Retention	1991 Retention
1989 FOCUS I Members with Non-members	$r = -.1573$	
1990 FOCUS II Members with Non-members		$r = -.2964^*$
Note: $*$ = $p < .05$		

Table 4

Correlation of Retention Rates for Students Enrolling in 1990.

Group	1991 Retention
1990 FOCUS I Members with Non-members	$r = -.0346$

Results indicated that there was no significant correlation between members and non-members of FOCUS I in 1989. However, a significant difference was found with the students who had been enrolled in college for a period of two years. This correlation indicated that members of FOCUS had higher retention rates than non-members.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This study attempted to determine the effect of the program FOCUS on the retention rates and grade point averages of black freshmen. It further attempted to assess whether there were differences in ACT scores between members and non-members of this program.

The hypotheses that members of FOCUS I and FOCUS II would not have higher ACT scores than men who are not members was supported by this study. This implies that when these students began college, as a group, they were all equally capable of succeeding. This correlates with Robinson's (1990) study which indicated that success in college was due to differences in the college not pre-college factors.

The finding that there was not a significant difference between FOCUS members and non-members in retention rates during the first year of college in both FOCUS I groups does not support the hypotheses that this type of program increases persistence for college freshmen. However, there was a significant difference between FOCUS II members' retention rates compared to non-members which indicated participants were more likely to remain in

college than non-members. This finding suggests that the effects of this program are not as immediate as other programs previously researched (Carroll, 1988; Savitz & Walls, 1986) although it does indicate that these programs do help the black male.

Giles-Gee (1989) found that black freshmen who participated in retention related projects improved their grade point averages compared to others who did not have the benefit of these programs. The present findings were not consistent in this area for both FOCUS groups. The group which enrolled in 1990 did not have a significant difference between grade point averages when compared with non-members. However, there was a significant difference found in grade point averages for the group that began the program in 1989 in both year 1990 and 1991. These findings add to the complexity of the question of the effectiveness of this program for freshmen. Perhaps, as was found with retention rates, at least two years may be necessary before a significant difference is found for the 1990 group.

The data suggest that this program over a two year period has helped improve retention rates and grade point averages of black males who are first time freshmen at Austin Peay State University. Some may argue that the reason for the differences in grade point averages and retention rates can be attributed to the fact that the men who joined FOCUS were motivated to succeed in college.

These men volunteered their own time to learn how to adapt to college life. However, if this were true, one would expect the findings would be significant in all areas during the first year. This research indicates that it takes two years before the retention rates are significant. Thus, it appears that something implemented during this time is causing the change. Further research may indicate that FOCUS plays a role in this change since this program is designed to help the young black man become more motivated and committed to his college career. One reason this difference may not be seen until a period of two years is because of the way the academic probation system is designed at Austin Peay State University. Students who are placed on probation for poor grades are often allowed to have up to two semesters to attempt to raise his grade point average. Thus, in the case at point students may fail their courses the first and second semester of their freshmen year and be placed on probation but will not be asked to withdraw from the University until they fail their first semester during their sophomore year. This would indicate that at the end of the freshman year some students may still be enrolled in college even though they are not committed to achieving. However, during the second year the University has the authority to ask these students to withdraw who are not maintaining the requirements to remain

at college. This is one possibility for the finding of no significant differences in retention until the second year.

One must keep in mind the sample used for this study was extremely small and it appears it would be beneficial to replicate this study with a larger sample at another university. Since this program was newly implemented in 1989, there was no opportunity to include other subjects. However, it is recommended that these men continue to be followed through their college years to determine the long term effects of this program. Additionally, further research might attempt to replicate the findings with other male and female ethnic minority students. When replicating this study it may be helpful to use interviews and interpersonal surveys to identify what the members feel was responsible for their persistence in college. Additionally, factors such as financial aid, housing, and participation in athletics may also be beneficial to consider to determine their impact on the retention of the college student.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Sir:

I am conducting research concerning the group FOCUS. I need your help in order for my study to be successful. In my study I am comparing the grade point averages of black college men to members of FOCUS. Please sign the permission slip on the following page so I may access your grade point average, ACT scores, and retention rates. You will not be identified in this study and no one will have access to this material besides myself. Please help me prove that FOCUS does help the Black male at Austin Peay State University.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated,

Susie Tidd

APPENDIX B

FOCUS PROJECT
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The purpose of this investigation is to determine the effects special programs have on black college men. The areas that will be addressed specifically will be ACT scores, retention rates and grade point averages. This material will be obtained from the Department of Records and Registration at Austin Peay State University. At no time will you be identified nor will anyone other than the researchers have access to your responses. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

Thank you for your cooperation.

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mabry of the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. I agree to allow access to my academic records in order to obtain ACT scores, retention rates, and grade point averages. I have been informed, either orally or in writing, about the procedures to be followed and about any discomforts or risks which may be involved. The investigator has offered to answer any further inquiries I have regarding the procedures. I understand I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

Social Security Number