



ON THE PATH FORWARD: EXPLORING BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITHIN COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMS

FINAL REPORT



MARCH 2016



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ON THE PATH FORWARD: Exploring Black Student Experiences in Community Services Programs is a research report that presents the experiences of black students within three programs at George Brown College. The report focuses on the barriers and challenges that black students face during their studies within the Child and Youth Care (CYC), Social Service Worker (SSW) and Community Worker (CW) programs, and highlights in-college supports which they have identified as crucial to their academic success. In addition to student experiences, the report also reviews promising practices which lead to black student retention. The report is the result of consultations which took place over a three month period and engaged over 50 research participants.

The study was commissioned in response to surveys which revealed that black students have the lowest retention rates among racial groups within Community Services. The 2013 and 2014 Student Characteristic surveys also showed that black Community Services students have the lowest GPA after completing first semester. In addition to the surveys, concerns about black student experiences were also raised by several Community Services faculty.

The study revealed the following findings related to black student experiences within Community Services Programs:

Financial difficulty – A majority of research participants identified financial stress as one of the main barriers to academic success for black students.

Lack of academic preparedness - A large number of students indicated feeling overwhelmed by the rigors and demands of their programs.

Difficult relations with faculty - While most students reported having positive and valuable relations with their CS professors, a significant number of students spoke about their difficult relations and interactions with faculty.

Disconnection from existing student supports - While students are well aware of the various GBC student supports such as Student Success, Peer Leadership workshops and the Tutoring and Learning Centre (TLC), several research participants reported feeling a general reluctance to engage with such services.

Challenges with field placement – There is widespread dissatisfaction with the manner in which field placements are currently being managed across CS programs.

Challenges with group-based work and other modes of delivery - Students cite difficulties with group-based assignments as another area where program structure and mode of delivery presents significant challenges.



Lack of dedicated space to engage with other black students - Students feel that they have no dedicated space within the college where their identities, cultures and experiences are welcome, affirmed and celebrated.

Lack of black CS faculty - A majority of students and key informants believe a lack of black faculty in CS programs is a contributing factor to black student attrition.

Students identified a need for the following in-college supports:

- Culturally relevant curricula
- Culturally-specific academic counselling
- Black faculty who offer and voice support
- Dedicated space
- Formal and informal mentoring

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are organized across three major themes which emerge from the study's findings: 1) black student engagement 2) supportive services 3) institutional change

Recommendations regarding black student engagement:

1. Pilot a mentoring program for black students.

An overwhelming number of students who participated in the study shared a deep desire to be connected to individuals who can act as supporters, advice-givers, encouragers and role-models during their studies. GBC should therefore endeavour to design and implement a formalized mentoring program that would allow black students to be voluntarily matched with alumni, faculty, staff or external professionals who have an interest in supporting their academic success.

2. Create a dedicated space for black students.

On the basis of wanting to ensure all students feel welcome at GBC, the college should create a site-specific space that provides black students with culturally-rooted services and opportunities to engage meaningfully with their peers in a welcoming and familiar environment. The space would by no means be restricted to black students but would emphasize and be rooted in the experiences of black peoples as a historically disadvantaged group.

3. Implement a pre-college preparation program.

In many cases, black students are at risk of experiencing academic challenges before they even start their first class. The college should therefore implement a pre-college offering that would help to better prepare black students for college life. This could take the form of a targeted, multi-week orientation, intensive one-to-one counselling or a series of culturally-specific workshops.



Recommendations regarding supportive services:

4. Establish tailored financial aid opportunities for black students.

In order to address the most frequently mentioned barrier to black student success at GBC, the college should provide targeted financial assistance in the form of scholarships, bursaries and grants geared specifically towards black students. The college should also increase efforts to ensure black students are made knowledgeable of all existing financial supports and resources.

5. Customize existing GBC services to accommodate black student needs.

Existing GBC programs such as Peer Connect should be modified and adequately resourced to address black student retention. Peer Connect already has experience in catering its services to specific ethno-cultural groups, so developing a customized approach for black students could be done without undue hardship. Other services such as the TLC and Student Success should also be examined for opportunities to provide customized and responsive supports to black students.

6. Offer culturally-specific academic counselling.

Considering the low levels of black student engagement with supportive services, GBC should provide culturally-specific counselling services geared toward black students. As the study's findings show, black students want to access services that reflect who they are as racialized persons. Such services could have a significant impact on decision-making regarding program of study, managing school-life balance and maintaining enrollment.

Recommendations regarding institutional change:

7. Mandate anti-racism training for senior administration and faculty.

Given the large number of black students who cite difficult relations with faculty as a barrier to their academic success, GBC should mandate that all faculty participate in anti-racism training. Student responses suggest that their identity as black or racialized persons plays a significant role in how they are perceived and treated by faculty. As such, training focused on anti-racism, anti-black racism and other forms of race-based oppression could help to increase faculty members' knowledge of the impacts of racism, and decrease feelings of social exclusion and marginalization among black students. This training opportunity should also include GBC's senior administration, as they are responsible for recruitment and hiring of faculty.

8. Review hiring practices to ensure they are responsive to student diversity and needs.

Given the immense diversity found among GBC's student population, it is important that college faculty be reflective of those who purchase its educational services. As it stands, there is known to be only one full-time black faculty member in the CS division. Given the disproportionate number of black students within the division, this cannot in any way be seen as equitable or acceptable. As such, the college should commit to reviewing its hiring practices in order to attract and recruit qualified candidates who could help to fulfill GBC's often stated commitment to diversity.



9. Ensure field education approaches are equitable.

As purchasers of education services, black students wish to have fair and equitable opportunities to pursue academic success. As such, unsupported field placements place black students at an automatic disadvantage in a Canadian labour market fraught with discriminatory recruitment and hiring practices. GBC should review field placement approaches to ensure they do not adversely impact particular student groups. This may require programs to coordinate field placements on behalf of students, or at the very least, take an active role in assisting students to find and secure field placements.

10. Develop flexible course options.

GBC should commit to developing flexible and innovative course delivery options that may help black students to better manage school-life challenges. This should include increased online and blended courses. It may also mean exploring weekend classes which are integrated with childcare services. At the very least, courses should be offered at times that do not create significant access barriers.

11. Ensure diversity within course curriculum

GBC should ensure that program reviews include assessments of curriculum content. All students should feel that their courses are relevant and inclusive of their lived experience. Reviews of this sort may include selected text books, articles, theoretical frameworks, guest speakers and pedagogical approaches.



LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Student Characteristic Survey 2014 – Selected Student Demographics by Centre

Table 2: Student Characteristic Survey 2013 – GPA by Visible Minority Groups

Table 3: Student Characteristic Survey 2013 – Academic Performance & Retention by Selected Student Groups

Table 4: Student Characteristic Survey 2014 – GPA by Ethnic Group

Figure 1: Academic and Student Affairs Student Success Model

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

While the terms “Black” or “black” as references to people of African descent have been historically rooted in racism and colonization, the term “black” is used within this report to signify a more recent usage denoting collective identity, resistance and shared historical experience. The terms “Black African/Caribbean” are used in reference to GBC’s Student Characteristics Survey categories.

The following abbreviations are used throughout the report:

Community Services (CS)

Community Services and Health Services (CSHS)

Academic and Student Affairs (ASA)

George Brown College (GBC)

Child and Youth Care (CYC)

Social Service Worker (SSW)

Community Worker (CW)



INTRODUCTION (SECTION ONE)

1.1 STUDY OBJECTIVES

In October 2015, George Brown College's Academic and Student Affairs (ASA) office contracted with Neil Price to conduct research on the experiences of black students within the Community Services (CS) division. The goal of the research was to gather and examine the experiences of black students, with a particular focus on the barriers and challenges they encounter while pursuing academic success. In addition to student experience, the research also includes a review of promising practices which have been shown to lead to reduced college attrition among black college students in Canada, the U.S, and the U.K.

The study was guided by three broad research questions:

1. What barriers and challenges contribute to black student attrition?
2. What in-college supports are needed to help black students achieve academic success?
3. What are some promising practices which lead to black student success within post-secondary education settings?

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)

This study is grounded in a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework which examines the experiences and knowledge of racialized peoples.¹ CRT helps to investigate how the social construct of race directly and indirectly affect ethnic minorities. CRT examines racism as both a group and individual phenomenon that functions on many levels, and it offers a means by which to identify the functions of racism as an institutional and systematic phenomenon.²

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

This report is organized in six sections. Section one provides an introduction outlining the study's objectives, theoretical framework and background. Section two describes the study's methodology which adheres to a qualitative stakeholder consultation approach. The study's findings are presented in section three, while section four discusses and reviews promising practices which contribute to black student success in post-secondary education. Section five outlines recommendations based on the findings, while section six reviews some limitations of the study and suggestions for building on the study.

1 Delgado, R and Stefancic, J (2010). Critical Race Theory: An Introduction. New York University Press: Seattle University School of Law Research Paper No. 10-22. Retrieved from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1640643>

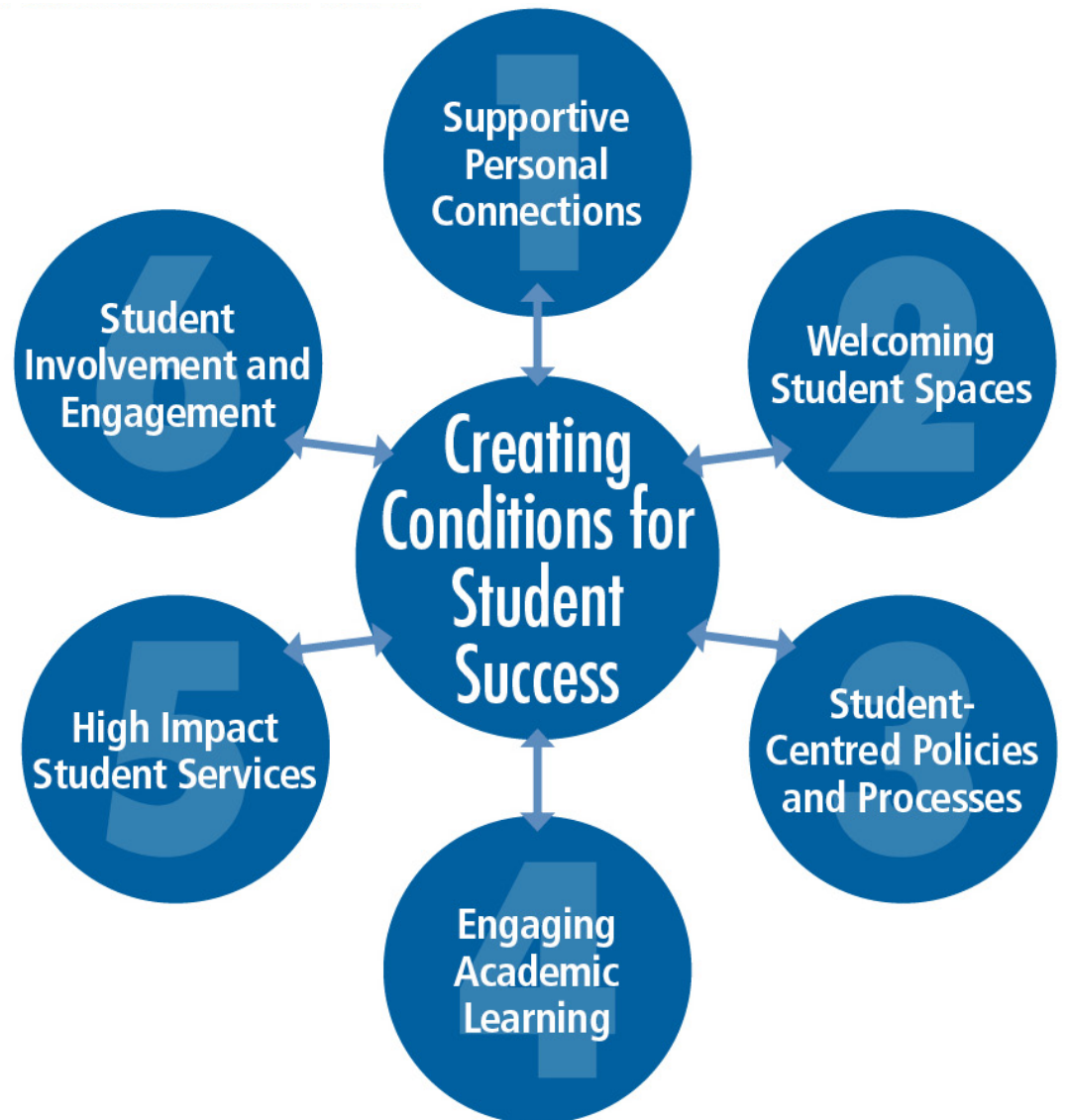
2 Stovall, D. (2005). Chapter Nine: Critical Race Theory as Educational Protest: POWER and PRAXIS. Counterpoints, 237, 197–211. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42978681>



1.4 BACKGROUND

In September 2013, GBC launched the first Student Characteristics Survey to collect data on student experiences. The survey was administered again in Fall 2014. The survey gathered demographic data and provided an opportunity to examine perceptions and attitudes towards college life and careers. The objective of the project was to gain an in-depth understanding of GBC's student population and the major risk factors that impact retention. The goal is to rationalize and deploy resources more strategically to support students at-risk and to develop an evaluation framework for measuring the effectiveness of these efforts. These interventions will align with GBC's Student Success Model (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Academic and Student Affairs Student Success Model



The Fall 2013 survey was completed by 3,553 full-time (99%) and part-time (1%) students (a response rate of 35.6 percent). The Fall 2014 survey was completed by 3,415 students, the majority of whom were enrolled full-time (99%), representing a response rate of 33 percent.



Table 1: Student Characteristic Survey 2014- Selected Student Demographics by Centre

	With Disability	Aboriginal	With PSE	Born in Canada	< 5yrs. since last attended HS	Top Ethnic Group
AD	13%	8%	43%	65%	73%	East Asian
BUS	7%	7%	46%	60%	59%	South Asian
CS	23%	7%	41%	70%	65%	Black African/Caribbean
HS	12%	5%	57%	58%	58%	Black African/Caribbean
CET	9%	9%	34%	56%	76%	South East Asian
HCA	8%	7%	40%	56%	69%	East Asian
PLS	24%	12%	42%	54%	61%	Black African/Caribbean
GBC	13%	8%	46%	57%	66%	East Asian

1 Percentage within centre.

Table 2: Student Characteristic Survey 2013 – GPA by Visible Minority Groups

	Mean	#	Standard Deviation
Japanese	3.81	2	0.27
Chinese	3.28	101	0.81
Korean	3.15	30	0.88
South East Asian (e.g. Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)	2.97	30	0.83
South Asian (e.g. East India, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)	2.93	115	0.87
Filipino	2.89	105	0.95
Multiple visible minorities	2.73	35	0.97
Arab/West Asian (e.g. Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)	2.72	28	1.21
Other	2.66	82	1.01
Latin American (e.g. Chilean, Costarican, Mexican)	2.43	48	1.30
Black (e.g. African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)	2.37	187	1.15

These surveys revealed that GBC students who indicated their ethnic background as being Black African/Caribbean have lower mean GPAs compared to other ethnic groups after completing the first semester. Also, while the persistence rate of all GBC students after the first semester is 89%, the retention rate of this group is 84%.

Table 3: Student Characteristic Survey 2013 – Academic Performance & Retention by Selected Student Groups

	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Visible Minority	Visible Minority	Without Disabilities	With Disabilities	Other	Internal Students
PERCEPTION SCORES (0-10)								
Academic capacity & preparedness	8.03	7.86	8.05	8.00	8.08	7.47**	8.03	7.87
Academic persistence	8.52	8.40	8.52	8.53	8.53	8.37**	8.54**	8.26
Program fit	8.17	8.11	8.18	8.18	8.17	8.11	8.23**	7.67
Negative perceptions	1.94	2.22**	1.94	1.94	1.94	2.15*	1.93**	2.29
ACADEMIC OUTCOMES								
Fall GPA	2.80	2.58	2.82	2.76	2.82	2.44	2.74	3.06
% Returned in winter '14	87.4	84.1	87.6	87.4	87.7	82.0	86.4	92.2
% On condition	14.6	21.1	14.1	15.5	14.2	23.1	16.6	6.4

*p<.05; **p<0.01



Table 4: Student Characteristic Survey 2014 – GPA by Ethnic Group

	GPA	N	SD
East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	2.99	444	0.96
Latin American (e.g. Chilean)	2.94	165	1.00
South Asian	2.85	283	0.93
South East Asian	2.80	330	1.00
West Asian (e.g. Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese)	2.70	94	1.15
Black African/Caribbean	2.45	316	1.12

The Centre for Health Sciences and Community Services had the highest number of students who completed the survey and who identify as Black African/Caribbean. The college total who indicate that their ethnic background is Black African/Caribbean is 20%, whereas the percentage in CSHS is 36%.



METHODOLOGY (SECTION TWO)

2.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research agenda for this study was guided by a qualitative stakeholder consultation methodology which engaged CS students, faculty and other stakeholders who offered insights into the experiences of black students. Due to the unavailability of disaggregated race-based data on the GBC student population, as well as the non-random nature of the research design, findings contained within the report cannot be generalized to all black CS students.

2.2 LITERATURE SCAN

The literature scan used a targeted approach that captured current academic and policy knowledge about college retention rates among black students in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. A full literature review includes primary literature (i.e., reports of individual research studies), and is a major undertaking. In contrast, this scan focused on credible online reports that summarized the evidence on relevant topics.

The literature scan consisted of three steps:

1. Review of background documents indicating the challenges black students face in higher education, and specifically why they experience lower retention rates than other student populations.
2. Searches on Google Scholar and on the general Web for relevant academic and grey literature.
3. Follow-up review of cited articles, going into more depth on the most promising methods for boosting black college student retention rates.

Review of Background Documents

The researcher reviewed background documents provided by the Academic and Students Affairs office which provided a general picture of the issues that black GBC students face, and the various interventions used to improve black student retention rates in colleges and universities. Documents reviewed also included GBC's Persistence and Retention Strategy and Student Characteristic Surveys for 2013 and 2014. The review of background literature helped to identify the major issues and practices related to the ways in which black students experience post-secondary education, which were then targeted in our systematic literature scan.



Google Scholar and Web Search

The researcher started with a general search string – ‘black student retention in higher education Canada,’ ‘black student retention college,’ ‘African-Canadian retention college,’ ‘black college student retention rates Canada,’ ‘black male/female retention rates university,’ ‘minority student college retention (UK, Canada, US),’ ‘black females /males community college,’ ‘black female student retention,’ – to get a feel for the vocabulary that is used in the research literature. This general search overview was useful to find out which search strings would be most appropriate. For example, relevant articles on this first go-around used the words ‘minority retention,’ ‘BME,’ ‘Underprivileged Youth,’ ‘identity’ and ‘cultural capital’ in their titles or abstracts.

The researcher used more focused search strings, including the terms above plus ‘racialized,’ ‘marginalized,’ ‘Black, Minority, Ethnic (BME),’ ‘student organizations,’ ‘intervention,’ ‘gender,’ ‘tuition costs,’ ‘leadership,’ and ‘initiatives.’

Following these initial searches, the researcher duplicated the search strings on a general Google web search to identify recent and highly cited articles that were not included in Google Scholar.

The researcher used Zotero, an academic reference manager, to share, track and categorize documents.

2.3 FOCUS GROUPS

Four focus groups were conducted between November 23 2015 and November 26, 2015 with CS students who self-identify as black. Focus group participants were recruited and referred to the project by CS faculty members, as well as through peer-to-peer referral. Designed to achieve a reliable convenience sample, the recruitment process ensured a cross-section of students from three CS programs (Community Worker, Child and Youth Care and Social Service Worker). A total of 34 students participated in the focus groups.

2.4 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who either have direct experience teaching black students within CS programs, were graduates of CS programs, have expertise in black student retention, or are senior administrative or support staff at GBC. The following is a breakdown of key informants who were interviewed for the study:

- Former black CS students - graduated (4)
- Current CS Faculty (9)
- GBC Senior Administration/Staff person (4)
- Subject Matter Expert (3)

A total of 20 interviews were conducted either by telephone or in person between November 30 and December 18 2015. Each interview was guided by an interview protocol and then transcribed and analyzed for recurring themes, convergent and divergent points of interest, as well as patterned information. Several key informants were recommended to the researcher by the ASA office. Using a “snowball sampling” technique, initial interviews often led to subsequent interviews with recommended key informants.



“Many black and other minority students face information barriers to higher education that prohibit their entry into college...”

RESEARCH FINDINGS (SECTION THREE)

3.1 BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Financial challenges

A majority of research participants identified financial stress as one of the main barriers to academic success for black students. These financial pressures are experienced in various ways. Students reported that everyday costs associated with living expenses, transportation, childcare and personal care created significant challenges during their study period. These findings are supported by the research literature which highlights financial strain and other external variables as having a significant impact on black student outcomes:

External environmental variables such as financial strain, a high level of familial responsibilities, and early educational goals (especially in relation to high school performance) often negatively affect black students' academic persistence. Many studies found that that delayed entry into post-secondary education after high school results in lower rates of completion and persistence in college for minority students.³

Several students shared that their access to financial resources is limited, as their family members are not in a position to assist them financially. Although most students receive some form of financial support through OSAP loans, the amounts received are, in many cases, not sufficient to alleviate financial stress.

In addition to limited financial resources, students reported a general lack of awareness about financial support services, bursaries and scholarships available at GBC. In many cases, students said they only became aware of these supports once they were well into their programs. The issue of finances is crucial because it often presents an ongoing dilemma that often forces black students to choose between maintaining tenuous and difficult program enrollment and abandoning their studies altogether:

Many black and other minority students face information barriers to higher education that prohibit their entry into college and interfere with their ability to complete their studies even when they do attend a college or university. “Information Barriers” refers to “a lack of necessary information about educational options, career paths and educational financing to pursue post-secondary studies.⁴

A majority of students reported the need to work while pursuing their studies. In some instances, students felt over-extended by the need to work full-time:

3 Wood, J. L., & Williams, R. C. (2013). Persistence factors for Black males in the community college: An examination of background, academic, social, and environmental variables. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, 1(2), 1–28.

4 Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. (2011, February). *Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Equal Access to Higher Education*. Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.ousa.ca/dev/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Breaking-Barriers.pdf>

When I enrolled, I had only been in Canada a short time, and I had no family, and I was not eligible for a lot of the bursaries and scholarships due to my immigration status. I didn't know where to turn. I had to work around the clock. ~

In some cases, having limited access to financial supports means going without materials and tools that would otherwise assist with learning. One student spoke of her inability to afford a much-needed computer for her studies:

I really do need it [laptop computer] in the classroom. With my learning disabilities, I need that thing in the classroom to help me succeed, and I don't have it. And it's really holding me back, and I'm worried. ~

While securing adequate funding is a primary challenge, weak money management skills are also a contributing factor to black student attrition. According to several key informants, black students often lack the necessary financial acumen to navigate the significant costs of college:

There is a lack of cultural awareness about money as it relates to the costs of post-secondary. Even if they are able to get grants, there is sometimes a thought process which creates reluctance about taking money. I see a lack of knowledge about financial planning as well, which leads to unrealistic expectations. ~

I think there is also an important financial literacy piece. Students often don't know how to apply for bursaries, and then there is the financial management. They don't know how to manage money. ~

Asked whether or not GBC was doing enough to support black students who have significant financial struggles, one key informant was unequivocal:

I don't think we [GBC] realize that these kids are coming from tough financial backgrounds. I'm certain many students are having a really hard time making it through. There is a lot more we can look at in this area. ~

Lack of academic preparedness

Another major area of concern for black CS students is their lack of academic preparedness. A large number of students indicated feeling overwhelmed by the rigors and demands of their programs. This often contributes to feelings of being disadvantaged or less capable than their peers.

Students cite their high school experience as the primary reason for feeling underprepared for college. They report not being taught fundamental skills that are now required of them. These include critical analysis, deep reading, essay writing and research skills. For some, this skills gap results in a lack of confidence, which in turn leads to contemplation of dropping out. More specifically, students blame poor high school teaching and low-expectations for putting them at risk for academic failure at college:

I feel like the teachers that are teaching in certain communities are teachers who are just coming out of school or something, so we basically get the worst. I don't want to say the worst, but we get inexperienced professionals...I feel like they [black students] were set up to fail, where we're getting inexperienced professionals and then we're basically competing with

“I don't think we [GBC] realize that these kids are coming from tough financial backgrounds.”



somebody that has the same values as in university. And I feel like we have to work three times harder just to get that knowledge that they would have received in certain high schools. ~

While some students are open about such challenges and are able to seek the appropriate remedial supports at GBC, many reported having a deep-rooted reluctance to discuss being underprepared for their studies. They fear disclosure of such difficulties will lead to further marginalization within the college environment. Choosing to remain silent in the face of mounting and compounding academic challenges often leads to a tremendous amount of anxiety and shame, resulting in consideration of an early program exit.

One key informant with teaching experience in CS programs indicated that this is a hugely overlooked issue within the division:

There are some real educational deficits that have come about through their educational careers. Proportionally speaking, a lot of my black students struggle with writing clearly and effectively. Not surprisingly, there is often a lot of shame, often there is denial. We need to understand where this is coming from. There are class and immigration implications here too. I also see interruptions to education and students who are bringing in a lot of trauma from educational experiences. ~

Another key informant sees unpreparedness as having a direct impact on the way black students view the college environment:

There are two sides to this issue: first students have to come into a classroom and figure out a lot of content that they've not been taught. Second, they have to figure out if the college will support them or not. It can be a real shock, and it takes a while to get comfortable given their prior experiences. ~

Conversely, black students who do possess the necessary skills to thrive in their program feel as though they are often singled out in ways that make them uncomfortable. For example, they describe situations where they are given more attention from professors than their black peers. They are also called upon to make oral contributions to class discussions. This leaves such students feeling like "ambassadors" for their racial group, a feeling they find both awkward and burdensome.

My teachers...I guess they expected little from me. So even the little bit I did do, it was like, 'Wow, you're so great!' ~

Difficult relations with faculty

While most students reported having positive and valuable relations with their CS professors, a large number of students spoke about difficult interactions with faculty. Not surprisingly, many view such interpersonal challenges as barriers to their academic success. Students said they believe some professors "look down on them". Others felt that their professors did not engage with them respectfully. Still others said that they have heard faculty members make comments that they view as racist or anti-black:

Some challenges I found [during my] second year were the micro-aggressions. Like my classmates and teachers, especially. I don't know if it's because of the education I received from last year that [made me] much more perceptive of it, but I'm finding it really hard to be in a class when people are just popping off with these anti-black statements. And then not feeling safe in the class to call them out, or sometimes like having to sit in a group with the same

“ *...they expected little from me. So even the little bit I did do, it was like, 'Wow, you're so great!'*



person who said these kinds of things. And sometimes even the faculty do; the professor's, they'll say stuff. ~

Key informants agree that interpersonal tensions between faculty and black students is a real albeit suppressed concern in the CS division:

Some of the major barriers are connected to black student's relationships with faculty. I think for many of them, it feels like a top-down relationship. I see them fear to challenge [professors] in a respectful way because of the experiences they've had. Both students and faculty come with their preconceived notions; there is not that coaching experience that white students seem more adept at creating with their professors. I sometimes reflect on the way that black students approach me – those abilities are hardly evident, so I tend to make an extra effort. However, I'm still viewed as part of my institution's [oppressive] environment. Many of our faculty seem stuck in the past. ~

I've seen and heard faculty openly questioning the capabilities of black students, their intelligence. And I've seen how this gets interpreted and internalized by our black students. There is little awareness [among CS faculty] of anti-black racism, they don't get this form of racism. ~

I think generally with our black student population, their past experiences with educators and authority figures has rightfully shaped their thinking about our faculty. So you see them sitting or talking at the back of the class, and it makes me think that I need to have other approaches to engage them. I may mix in more time to talk about their concerns, but there's no guarantee this will work. ~

There is little awareness [among CS faculty] of anti-black racism, they don't get this form of racism.

Students reported that strained relations with faculty results in a lack of desire to contribute in class. Several students discussed feeling they were perceived as “problematic” in the eyes of their professors. In some instances, students feel abandoned by faculty in the classroom. This is of particular concern when students discussed their experiences with group work, an area in which many feel faculty do not intervene adequately when issues of racism or social isolation arise.

For this program here, I love the program and everything. It's just so hard, sometimes even the professor or with staff members...when you go ask them something, they are like, 'Huh? Huh?' - so I don't feel like speaking. They'll just say, 'What did you say? Can you repeat that again?' I don't like it when they do that. It's like I just feel ashamed sometimes. I'm like, 'Okay. You know what? I'm just going to be quiet.' ~

Disconnection from existing student supports

While students are well aware of the various GBC student supports such as Student Success, Peer Leadership workshops and the Tutoring and Learning Centre (TLC), several students reported feeling a general reluctance to engage with such services. Asked why they do not use existing support services, some students said there is a lack of racial or cultural diversity among the support staff and peer leaders which causes them to feel uncomfortable about using such services. Others don't see the value in engaging with existing support services based on what they have heard from their peers:

I haven't gone, but I thought it was a joke [laughs]. I don't know, it's just like I know they're trying to help, but at the same time it's like you're not really being given that much. I've



heard from people who've gone, and they said that it didn't help them even when it comes to tests, and that they don't even know the things that are on the test. So, it's just like a waste of time. ~

Challenges with field placements

Students identified key program components as significant barriers to their academic success. For example, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the manner in which field placements are currently being managed across CS programs. Students reported feeling unsupported by their programs in finding and securing placements. Many shared that this is far and away the most stressful and disappointing aspect of their program.

As a key program requirement, students reported that they expected to receive direct support with finding placements. Instead, they feel they are placed at a significant disadvantage by having to compete with their non-black peers in a labour market fraught with racist and discriminatory hiring practices. Accordingly, they feel their programs do nothing to first recognize and then mitigate this disadvantage through an equity-based approach. In essence, they perceive this lack of support and the subsequent struggles it creates as a form of systemic discrimination.

I feel like we're just left out in the woods, like they [program staff] don't give a crap, it's unbelievable. I can't believe how this is being done. It's like they're pretty much saying, 'Go and ask anybody and see if you get it. ~

I was expecting something totally different when I came to George Brown. I thought somebody was going to help you with personally [meeting] your goals and whatnot. So now, we're competing with 800 or a thousand students for 1 placement, so I get lost in the shuffle. So, it's something I was shocked about. ~

Challenges with group-based work and other modes of delivery

In addition to feeling unsupported with field placements, students cite widespread difficulties with group-based assignments as another area where program structure and mode of delivery presents significant challenges. More specifically, students feel faculty members fail to intervene when group dynamics take on hostile or racist overtones.

Sometimes you are in a class and, especially when it comes to group work, some people - they're just totally disrespectful. They just look at you and assume that you're not the person that they want to be in a group, probably because they feel like you have nothing to bring to the table. So you could see, sometimes people flee away from the group that they're supposed to be in. So that's a challenge I have to deal with on a regular basis. ~

When we're having group discussions in class - and it's not only me from another country with an accent - I have noticed all the students [with non-Canadian accents] are complaining about the same thing, that when we have discussions and our accents are different, they look down on you. So you feel afraid to speak up - you don't want to talk. So that's the problem you're having [in] class. If you have an idea, they look down on you. They don't want to listen. ~

“ ...it's just like I know they're trying to help, but at the same time it's like you're not really being given that much.



Asked why they think such program-based challenges go overlooked, one faculty member suggested there is a lack of attention being paid to the micro-aggressions that take place during group assignments:

I've seen patterns where my white students more or less leave black students out of the group's conversation. From a faculty perspective, there is not enough oversight about group formation. ~

In addition to difficulties with field placements and group assignments, several students shared that early class start times and inflexible course delivery pose significant challenges for students who often have long commutes to campus. Students report that there seems to be a general lack of understanding for students who have family responsibilities which make it difficult to arrive for early morning classes:

I emailed my coordinator in June to let them know, you know, my situation with child care. And I did experience a challenge with a class where we had group presentations, and I felt like they kind of didn't understand or probably thought I was using it [childcare] as an excuse for why I couldn't make it for 8 AM. So I think that's difficult, and I felt like with my group, because they didn't have kids, they like, didn't understand and then well, like the past week; they're like stressing me. ~

One key informant suggests the college should look into a range of flexible program delivery options that might help students who have significant school-life barriers:

There could weekend offerings integrated with childcare, as well as increased online course options for students. Ultimately, they [black students] need ways to deal with life challenges and stay on track. There could be someone who they can dial-up when they need to problem solve quickly. It would be good to bring in some innovative ideas where student success, college resources and student retention is concerned. ~

Lack of dedicated space to engage with other black students

A key concern for black students in CS programs relates to their sense of having no dedicated space within the college where their identities, cultures and experiences are welcome, affirmed and celebrated. Students expressed the need for a space where they can go to be supported and share their experiences as black students. They feel the absence of such space makes it difficult to persist in their programs.

It's not related to segregation or anything of that sort. It's just that we can get together and have our discussions about what we need to do to succeed, how we can help each other, how we could be sympathetic with each other and especially with the language barriers. Personally, I know that we have so much to share with each other. And personally I think we are brilliant people, we are very smart and we are capable. ~

I noticed there was a black student association starting and I've made great plans to be a part of it, but I missed it. So, I don't know if that's been launched or what sort of supports they have. But I think an engagement, you know, active engagement in terms of getting black students in a community. You know, for those who want to participate, of course, but moving together in a community would help.

“ *I've seen patterns where my white students more or less leave black students out of the group's conversation.*



Black students in CS programs report being well aware of the informal places where other black students tend to congregate and interact on campus. Student Life, for example, is seen as having a particular value in terms of fostering a sense of community and cultural support for black students. However, students feel what is missing is a site-specific offering that would integrate and enhance the supportive interactions among black students which are happening organically in various locations across the college.

“*It’s all about seeing yourself in certain positions. There is not a lot of areas in the college where they can see what the future as working professionals might look like.*”

Lack of black CS faculty

A majority of students and key informants believe a lack of black faculty in CS programs is a contributing factor to black student attrition. Research shows that faculty relationships are crucial in both an educative and motivational sense for black students.⁵ Without having access to faculty who share, identify with and perhaps better understand their lived experience, black students believe they are placed at a significant disadvantage. In essence, faculty members are perceived as beacons of success for black students. While their white peers have the privilege of seeing people who look like them in positions of power and influence across the college, black students do not. In fact, students noted that low-wage and low-status positions (e.g., cleaning staff) at GBC seem to be occupied almost exclusively by black females.

Key informants agree that a lack of diversity within GBC staff is a serious concern:

It’s all about seeing yourself in certain positions. There is not a lot of areas in the college where they can see what the future as working professionals might look like. When they look around, they don’t see themselves. So where do they see the way forward? ~

They’re [black students] not being represented [among faculty]. One of the most basic things is for them to be reflected, to see their people. ~

3.2 NEEDED IN-COLLEGE SUPPORTS

Culturally relevant curriculum

When asked what in-college supports would improve their chances for success in CS programs, several students referred to a desire for culturally relevant curriculum content. Students appreciate the concepts, approaches and skills that are currently taught in their programs. In particular, they appreciate that CS programs are rooted in the anti-oppression framework. However, there is a general sense that curricula across programs do not speak to their experience as black persons. Students wish to engage with learning material that is “reflective of experience and communities where [they] live”. In short, they want relevant education that equips them to engage meaningfully as racialized individuals working anti-oppressively within diverse communities. Black students want an opportunity to bring their whole selves to their learning, and they want to feel as though their experiences are valued and respected throughout the learning process.

In one instance, a student shared her professor’s surprise in hearing from black students that disclosure about personal mental health issues was perceived differently in the black community than what was being explained in class:

⁵ Wood, J. L., & Palmer, R. T. (2013). Understanding the Personal Goals of Black Male Community College Students: Facilitating Academic and Psychosocial Development. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17(2), 222–241. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-013-9248-3>



Even in classes, it's [mental health] only shown one way. The teacher was surprised when I said that in our community it's not like that. It's very stigmatized to have mental illness, so a lot of people are not trying to self-disclose. And also you are told to, you know, be strong and pray about it or go to church, those kind of things. So a person maybe wouldn't want to disclose. Teachers are like, 'Oh my gosh, really?'

Key informants agree that more must be done in CS programs to bring the lived experience of black students into program curriculum:

There isn't really a reflection of that experience. The focus is not positive but deficit based. This seems to be the perception among black students. They have come in with expectations. I would say this relates to curriculum and interactions. One thing I've noticed over several years of teaching here is when I try to bring in their participation, people [black students] seem surprised by my attempts to bring in diversity. ~

Dedicated space for black students

Given the challenges that black CS students encounter, a majority of research participants desire a physical space where black students can interact and socialize with their peers. As noted above, these interactions are occurring organically across GBC. However, students wish to see a site-specific space that provides comfort, welcome and affirmation within a culturally supportive environment. As one student put it: "Black students need opportunities to love each other."

The following is a listing of supports and services that emerged when discussing what such a space would include:

- Culturally specific counselling
- Opportunities to discuss challenges that black students face
- Guest and motivational speakers
- Informal conversation
- Customized academic supports
- Mentorship

Key informants agree that culturally-identified spaces are important for students who are trying to push back against various forms of internal and external oppression:

Black students need a place where they can go, where someone with power and influence within the college will listen to them and champion their concerns. They need supportive people who can contradict the false narratives about their experience in the college. ~

Far from a need for segregation, students articulated a need for physical spaces that offer peace, calm and culturally relevant supports. Above all, they are looking for places where they can find care and concern from people who "get them".

You know, they'll speak your language. If there's older people that work there, they could sit down and really talk to students. And there's younger ones [staff] that could really relate to younger ones [students]. And then, even if the younger ones don't relate to the older ones, they're just a tight knit community too. Student Life has their own little family in there; and they share that love and respect with all the other students. ~

So, you might find that sometimes when you go [to Student Life] you just really, you're just there for the sake of socializing, but you're merely addressing, you know, the symptoms. You're not addressing the root causes. So maybe within that [imagined] space, we can kind of



create another space whereby you can like, let's get down into what is happening in your life... You know, we are healthy and happy, but what else is there? ~

It may not be a counselling thing. But, I'm thinking of maybe, a space where we can say, let's voice out, you know, our problems and concerns, you know? And then we can take it from there. Because really, for most of us Africans, the way we are socialized, we cannot just talk. Even if you have the counsellor there ready. You know, but it takes some time and a lot of consideration to say I am going to disclose what I'm going through. ~

“
...I'm
thinking of
maybe, a space
where we can
say, let's voice
out, you know,
our problems
and concerns,
you know?”

Culturally-specific academic counselling

Several students shared feelings of being confused about both their program choice and where the credential they were working toward was going to lead them to in the professional world. This is partly due to a lack of upfront information about their programs. Both students and key informants suggested there is a need for enhanced pre-program counselling and academic advising for black students.

Given the significant barriers that many black students must overcome to arrive at post-secondary education, there is a sense that a feeling of “just making it” overrides the need for sound academic planning, information gathering and decision-making. Put another way, the college may have to acknowledge and grapple with the fact that a large number of black students who gain entrance to the college have received inadequate levels of guidance in high school regarding their program of study, academic requirements and career planning.

Academic counselling needs to be tailored, if there is a disproportionate number of black kids in CS programs, we have to ask 'Where are these kids coming from? What communities do they come from? If you can understand where the students are coming from, maybe that's when you start to connect with those high schools. This allows you to start supports early, from the high school; guidance counsellors are supposed to be doing that job, and their reach is somewhat limited. This is what's needed, so it has to be targeted. ~

Research literature on black college student retention shows the central role that pre-program counselling plays in improving educational outcomes for black college students:

This counselling should not be limited solely to academic course work but should include issues of school-life balance. Counsellors should encourage students to consider the timeliness of their academic enterprises in relationship to their familial obligations. Further, students should be required to engage in discussions that require them to consider how they will avoid conflicting obligations. This will necessitate that students consider academic programs, degree intensity (part or full-time), and flexible offerings (evening, weekend, online, hybrid) that will allow them to balance personal and family responsibilities.⁶

⁶ Bates, M. A. (2012). From crisis to empowerment: African American women in community colleges. National Louis University. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/60/>



Formal and informal mentoring

Students shared a need for both formal and informal mentoring that they can access for support, coaching, advice and role models. In particular, they are interested in connecting with black alumni who have achieved levels of success in the social services sector. Students described mentoring in a variety of ways. For some, mentoring is thought of as an intensive relationship brought about through a voluntary matching process that includes regular (weekly) check-in sessions. For others, mentoring is less intensive and takes on a contingency role in their academic experience, a way to problem-solve with someone who has some familiarity with their personal college journey.

Research shows that mentoring can help to boost black student retention. The important point to remember is that anyone can be a mentor. Faculty, peers, college staff, friends and community members can all act as mentors.⁷

While mentoring can emerge organically, research suggests that any attempt to formalize such supports should be directed by the college:

Once a student enters the community college, the institution should establish formal or informal mentoring or role-modeling relationships. This necessitates that faculty and staff members as well as administrators establish personal relationships with students that go beyond social niceties. Institutional personnel must know their students' nonverbal and verbal communication patterns. Bonds must be established that allow mentors and role models to ask questions of students specific to school-life balance, to provide meaningful encouragement, and to refer students to resources as necessary. Once institutional affiliates (e.g., faculty members, administrators, staff members, students) become aware of personal, family, and other issues impacting students, a reporting mechanism should be in place to encourage the student to seek counselling services.⁸

Students described how mentors would help them navigate decision-making and career planning:

Someone who's older and who's been through the program and knows what to do... because I'm confused right now in this program. I don't know what to do when I'm done with this. Do you know what I mean? I'm confused. I'm worried. So, if there's an older person whose done it, gone through it, knows what careers are out there for me, and I can talk and sit down with him –that'll be awesome. ~

I would have a mentoring program, like with actual people who have graduated from the program, who are older, who are in their career, and who are doing stuff. So I know what's up ~

Yeah, they would break it down, what they went through in college; then they would break down what they had to do, what they overcame, and pretty much what they're doing now. I mean, how they're giving back to the community, and examples of what they're doing. Examples of the career that they're doing and what they're doing in that career. ~

“*Once a student enters the community college, the institution should establish formal or informal mentoring or role-modeling relationships.*”

7 Maher, J., & Bertin, A. (2013). Sustaining the Transformation: Improving College Retention and Success Rates for Youth from Underserved Neighbourhoods. *Journal of Global Citizenship & Equity Education*, 3(1), pg–102.

8 Wood, J. L. (2012a). Black Males in the Community College: Using Two National Datasets to Examine Academic and Social Integration. *Journal of Black Masculinity*, 2(2). Retrieved from <http://jlukewood.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Wood-2012-JBM-1.pdf>

Black faculty who offer and voice support

As noted above, the absence of black faculty in CS programs is perceived by black CS students as a significant barrier to their academic success. Students described numerous situations where they feel professors do not understand who they are as racialized persons. This often relates to curriculum content or discussions about lived experience, oppression or social exclusion. As such, students report a need for black faculty, preferably full-time, who may better understand their experiences and perspectives, and act as champions for their concerns within the CS division:

“I would have a mentoring program, like with actual people who have graduated from the program, who are older, who are in their career, and who are doing stuff. So I know what’s up .”

So I’ve been in the situation where I was only black kid in the class. And I just find the schooling even up until now, even while we’re in class talking about anti-oppressive [practice] –you’re hearing it from a whole bunch of white people. They’ll try to chime you in...but it is like, ‘Do any you guys really know?’ They don’t know what they’re talking about, but then you have a white teacher telling you about anti-oppressive [practice], and black neighborhoods, and asking you for your opinions. It’s like you’re trying to teach me about my lived experience. It’s like in the college you have different representations of different groups, indigenous, the deaf community, but there’s no real representation of us. We just kind of have to just fit in, and then when we get a little second, we could talk about our experience when they need us to chime in. Then we go back to everyone else’s problems. ~

It stinks, you know?...they’re talking about diversity and anti-oppression, but it’s not reflected in their [GBC] hiring practice, you know? So, it really makes the difference to see somebody who looks like you. ~

A recent GBC report that examined the importance students place on personal relationships underscores this desire for supportive faculty:

Students want to be recognized as individuals and to be actively engaged in the classroom. They value a personal connection with their teaching faculty through which they are personally accepted, respected and supported. The experience of recognition and belonging provides energy and motivation, contributes to positive mental health, encourages attendance and participation, and enables student learning.⁹

Research suggests that having an increased number of black faculty in CS programs may deepen the division’s ability to be responsive to diverse student populations in ways that do not stigmatize:

U.K. researchers suggest that the overall lack of awareness of student body diversity among faculty and staff is systematic. Staff and faculty are therefore unaware of attainment gaps and they do not fully understand the importance of promoting academic equality while also developing targeted program interventions that make minority students feel like they fit in. As a result, [black students] often lack the necessary preparedness to see college through until graduation. U.K. minority students recognize their disadvantages. They want more diverse support mechanisms, not just “minority specific” programs that made them stand out even more among their peers.¹⁰

9 George Brown College (July 2015). Expressions of “Connection” Put Forward by George Brown Students. Analysis and Verbatims from Focus Groups. 5-6.

10 Stevenson, J. (2012, October). Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment. The Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/bme_summit_final_report.pdf

“Students want to be recognized as individuals and to be actively engaged in the classroom. They value a personal connection with their teaching faculty through which they are personally accepted, respected and supported.”

FURTHER ELABORATIONS: PROMISING PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING BLACK STUDENT RETENTION IN COLLEGE (SECTION FOUR)

There are multiple, systematic problems that interact, intertwine, and combine to create educational barriers for black post-secondary education students in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. For example, a report produced by Dalhousie University notes that “challenges of exclusion due to hierarchies and bureaucracy are too often compounded by systemic misogyny, sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, colonialism, socio-economic disadvantage, ableism, ageism, sexualized violence, harassment, and discrimination.”¹¹ In short, black students experience an array of challenges which are particular to their lived experience within formal education institutions and settings. As such, any attempt to assist black students in achieving positive educational outcomes must first start with a thorough examination of their experiences, perceptions, attitudes, opinions and aspirations as they relate to their educational journey.

Historical factors and their legacy of systematic discrimination have hampered the educational achievement of black students.¹² Many black students who pursue a post-secondary education must first overcome obstacles such as low-income family backgrounds and status, being the first in their families to go to college, a lack of role models in their families and communities, financial difficulties, as well as inadequate access to important information and funding from colleges and universities. That said, there are a number of initiatives and interventions that have increasingly been used to boost the retention rates of black students in post-secondary education, and many thousands of black students have managed to overcome numerous challenges to attain academic and career success in their respective fields. Their stories of perseverance and persistence can help chart a brighter future path for other black students who struggle to find their place in colleges, universities and the professional world.

4.1 PROMISING PRACTICES

In-college supports for black students should come in a variety of packages and approaches, but they need to address general issues experienced by students who come from historically disadvantaged communities. These include enhancing a sense of belonging by fostering a campus climate that values diversity, providing access to facilities for dealing with stress and social support, developing activities and organizations that foster empowerment and leadership skills, offering tutoring to improve academic skills, promoting role model and mentorship programs, and providing better access to financial aid.

11 Bombay, A., & Hewitt, K. (2015, October 1). A Report from the Committee on Aboriginal and Black/African Canadian Student Access and Retention: A Focus on Financial support. Dalhousie University. Retrieved from <http://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/senior-administration/VPAP/reports/otherreports/Aboriginal%20and%20Black-African%20Canadian%20students%20-%20Final%20report%20Oct%201%202015.pdf>

12 Dei, G. (1995). Examining the Case for “African-Centred” Schools in Ontario. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Retrieved from <http://mje.mcgill.ca/article/viewFile/8239/6167>

Early Detection Programs

While in-college supports are essential to boosting black student retention rates, early detection programs that target at-risk youth populations before they enter college or university have proven to be valuable. The literature traces much of the low college retention rates among black students to lack of knowledge about post-secondary education. State-sponsored programs in the U.S. have successfully countered black students' information barriers by developing a broad range of early-detection programs that provide combinations of counselling/awareness, academic enrichment and support, incentives for increased parental involvement, personal enrichment and social integration, and mentorship and scholarship programs.¹³

State-sponsored early detection programs vary according to the state and local agencies that fund and administer them. The majority of the programs target students in middle school and high school. Overall, programs that have multiple components (such as college awareness and financial aid counselling combined with support services) have been the most effective. Tutoring, mentoring, and academic enrichment were also important components of the overall programs. Finally, timing is crucial: most programs try to tie the content and intensity of the programs to the students' respective ages and school levels.¹⁴

Moving from “retention” and “persistence” to emphasizing black students’ positive ability to overcome obstacles

Recent studies downplay emphasis on established negative indicators of black student retention and attrition rates and instead focus on what students are doing to persevere and succeed in their study programs.

For example, Conrad and Morris write that, over the past few years, “the term ‘persistence’ has shifted in meaning to refer to the ability of a student to continue PSE studies and ultimately graduate, regardless of switches between programs or institutions or even temporary absences from PSE altogether.”¹⁵ Knowing more about students' capacity to overcome obstacles, and understanding what factors contribute to this capacity will help improve retention rates among black students in post-secondary education.

Identifying retention risks that black students face at post-secondary institutions, and then understanding how some students successfully overcome these risks, will allow researchers to provide better support programs for black students overall. In other words, we need to study why some black students succeed in addition to why others fail.

For example, Shaun Harper writes about the need to reframe black male college achievement via a more affirmative and positive framework. He highlights a national study from the U.S. that interviewed engaged and successful black male student leaders in order to understand how they maximized their college experience. The study emphasized, “how black male achievers managed to

13 Cunningham, A., Redmond, C., & Merisotis, J. (2003). Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected US States. Millennium Research Series. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED475203>

14 Ibid.

15 Conrad, M., & Morris, K. (2010). Shifting from Retention Rates to Retention Risk: An Alternative Approach for Managing Institutional Student Retention Performance. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/RetentionReportENG.pdf>



gain admission to their institutions, overcome hurdles that typically disadvantage their peers, and amass portfolios of experiences that rendered them competitive for internships, jobs, and admission to highly selective graduate and professional schools.”¹⁶

Harper suggests that successful black students need to be interviewed about their paths in order to build frameworks for other black students who might not be as successful. There needs to be more known about how successful black students became successful and how they stayed engaged.¹⁷ The national study found that culturally relevant experience and mentor-peer access made big differences in shaping successful black students’ paths. In simple terms, access to good role models makes a huge difference. If black students cannot access adequate role models before they enter college, then they need access to them while they are attending college.

Kevin Gosine took a similar approach in his study of a sample of academically accomplished black Canadians. He found that it was problematic to search for a single, “authentic” black experience among black Canadian university students. While many of his interviewees did emphasize a desire to better the educational experience for their peers, they also noted that individual achievement and personal advancement were important motivating factors for them as black university students. Some of Gosine’s interviewees encountered racial discrimination in their respective university programs, and many countered the negative effects of such discrimination by serving as successful role models and mentors for other black students, becoming involved in black student organizations, and embracing their racial identity as a source of individual strength.¹⁸

“...we need to study why some black students succeed in addition to why others fail.”

Holistic Approaches to Post-Secondary Access

Because the problem of retaining black students is multi-faceted and complex, improving black student retention necessitates a series of holistic, interconnected interventions. These interventions should focus on a combination of the following:

- **Early outreach programs:** This constitutes engaging youth about the benefits and opportunities of higher education, and providing support for students to succeed in reaching and persisting through their programs of study.
- **Primary and secondary school outreach:** The formal school system should reach out and provide students with information about post-secondary pathways. But this need not be limited to the school system. Colleges and universities should also consider sending representatives to inform more black students about the benefits of post-secondary education.
- **Pathway mobility:** This refers to a student’s ability to switch programs from within a stream of study. There is a systematic problem within post-secondary institutions that make pathway mobility needlessly difficult, which in turn contributes to increased black student attrition rates. Streamlining pathway mobility through credit transfer, bridging programs, and other approaches will decrease the attrition rate of black and other minority students.

¹⁶ Harper, S. R., & Harris III, F. (2012). A role for policymakers in improving the status of Black male students in US higher education. The Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education. Retrieved from <http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=fharris>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gosine, K. (2007). Navigating the Canadian university system: An exploration of the experiences, motivations, and perceptions of a sample of academically accomplished Black Canadians. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2(1). Retrieved from <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE/article/view/558>



- **Financial Assistance:** Improving financial assistance programs, especially through “targeted,” non-repayable aid and stronger tuition regulation, is an essential step towards addressing the problem of black student attrition.
- **Institutional Support and Transformation:** Post-secondary education institutions themselves must work to create campus environments that encourages diversity and makes black students feel welcome in their university environment.¹⁹

At the community college level, where a large majority of black males have their first (and often last) post-secondary education experience, environmental variables, such as family issues, finances, and program dissatisfaction must be addressed to stem the attrition of black students. Because effective college preparatory experience is essential to college success, and because black students often lack adequate college preparation, researchers recommend four preparatory steps post-secondary institutions can take to better prepare black students for higher education:

1. **Mandatory Orientation:** community colleges should have mandatory orientation sessions that discuss the amount of time needed for completion of studies and methods to make such time dedication achievable for black students.
2. **Pre-Entry Counselling:** black students would benefit from university/college counselling that discusses both academic commitments and achieving the appropriate school/life balance.
3. **Formal and Informal Mentoring and Role Modelling:** faculty, staff members, and administrators should all establish personal relationships with students that can help them foster success in their academic careers.
4. **Early Warning Systems:** This is a tracking system that provides early warnings to staff and administration when a student is failing to make adequate academic progress. Early detection of academic problems can improve overall retention rates

Financial aid

Offsetting black student attrition can be done, in part, by offering them better access to financial aid. One way to do this is to increase the number of “targeted” (as opposed to “mainstream” financial aid that is available to the entire student body) scholarships and grants geared specifically towards black students. The funds should come from independent streams of money and meet the specific needs of these student groups. Some of these can come in the form of undergraduate entrance scholarships named to reflect the specific black student populations they target.²⁰

4.2 Black Student Engagement

The importance of “engagement” as a determining factor in black student college retention – especially in two-year community college programs – cannot be understated. The type of engagement matters,

¹⁹ Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. (2011, February). *Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Equal Access to Higher Education*. Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.ousa.ca/dev/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Breaking-Barriers.pdf>

²⁰ Bombay, A., & Hewitt, K. (2015, October 1). *A Report from the Committee on Aboriginal and Black/African Canadian Student Access and Retention: A Focus on Financial support*. Dalhousie University. Retrieved from <http://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/dept/senior-administration/VPAP/reports/otherreports/Aboriginal%20and%20Black-African%20Canadian%20students%20-%20Final%20report%20Oct%201%202015.pdf>



however. Researchers have found that excessive extra-curricular activities led more students to drop out of school. However, participating in intramural and non-varsity sports actually increased black student retention. Moreover, deeper on-campus engagement with faculty and advisors also led to higher retention rates. Interestingly, while many studies found that excessive student work hours hampers graduation rates, students who work in jobs relevant to their coursework and/or germane to their field of study actually persist in their post-secondary pursuits. Again, the type of engagement is what matters.²¹

Promoting engagement among black students, especially men, should ideally happen before they reach college or university. Studies show that younger students on average have higher retention rates. The importance of an early awareness of post-secondary goals bears out in the fact that black males who feel more capable of doing college work actually perform better in that work. This leads to a snowball effect, as black students who are confident in their college abilities tend to take more classes as full-time students, and being a full-time student correlates with greater retention rates. Black males who enter college with academic goals and who believe in their ability to achieve those goals will, in turn, take more classes and take those classes more seriously. When combined, these factors add up to greater retention rates. Grooming this engagement, however, should also begin before black students enter college.²²

Role of Faculty in Engagement

In-college engagement is also a two-way street, as faculty should do more to reach out to black students. Several studies note the importance black male students placed on increased attention and time from faculty. Researchers report that faculty who went out of their way to give black students personal attention with a welcoming demeanor, who listened intently to students' concerns and goals, who encouraged student success, and who checked up regularly on students' progress, made a significant and positive difference in the number of students who stayed in college.²³ Indeed, the role that attentive, concerned faculty play in boosting black students' success should not be underestimated.

Student engagement with faculty is part of the broader set of institutional characteristics that determine black students' retention rates. In this respect, the composition of faculty is quite important, as institutions with higher levels of part-time faculty tend to have lower rates of student completion and graduation. This makes sense given that full-time faculty are better compensated and tend to have more time to give black students the attention they deserve.²⁴ Moreover, hiring faculty with a background in working with underserved youth, or providing training for current faculty in ways to better serve these target groups would help improve the minority students' experience with faculty engagement. As youth participants in one focus group study noted, "in college no professor holds your hand...but they're [professors] not used to knowing that these are underserved children that might not even want to go to school so you have to do a little hand holding."²⁵

21 Wood, J. L., & Williams, R. C. (2013). Persistence factors for Black males in the community college: An examination of background, academic, social, and environmental variables. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, 1(2), 1–28.

22 Hagedorn, L. S., Maxwell, W., & Hampton, P. (2001). Correlates of retention for African-American males in community colleges. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 3(3), 243–263.

23 Wood, J. L., & Turner, C. S. (2010). Black Males and the Community College: Student Perspectives on Faculty and Academic Success. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35(1-2), 135–151. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2010.526052>

24 Urias, M. V., & Wood, J. L. (2014). Black Male Graduation Rates in Community Colleges: Do Institutional Characteristics Make a Difference. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38. Retrieved from <http://interwork.sdsu.edu/sp/m2c3/files/2012/10/Vasquez-Urias-Wood-2014.pdf>

25 Maher, J., & Bertin, A. (2013). Sustaining the Transformation: Improving College Retention and Success Rates for Youth from Underserved Neighbourhoods. *Journal of Global Citizenship & Equity Education*, 3(1), pg–102.



Black Student Leadership as Effective Intervention

The literature attests to the importance of black student leadership development at the college and university level. This is in no small part due to the complex and multi-leveled social, economic, and political issues that students of higher education must be prepared to face from a leadership standpoint after they graduate from college. Leadership development, however, does not happen in a vacuum. Leadership represents “a socially constructed phenomenon,” and it is therefore “directly influenced by other social constructions such as race.”²⁶ With this in mind, black students in higher education can benefit tremendously from student leadership programs that take into account how the lived experience of being black shapes students identity, and how this identity can be cultivated to nurture students’ leadership potential.

In-college engagement is also a two-way street, as faculty should do more to reach out to black students.

Impact of Race and Ethnicity on Student Leadership

Researchers frame the symbiotic relationship between leadership capacity and race/ethnicity through the lens of social identity theory, the process by which people develop a sense of belonging to specific social groups and a sense of difference from other groups.²⁷ Students who develop a healthy and positive sense of racial identity are better equipped to face resistance, reject stereotypes, and navigate hostile climates. These skills in turn promote a stronger ability in students to situate themselves as leaders within the broader context of a society that consists of racialized power structures delineated along majority/minority lines.²⁸ For minority students, cultivating a high degree of self-efficacy – the belief in one’s capacity to set goals and reach them (an essential quality of leadership) – correlates with strong leadership ability. Students who have the ability to set goals and see them through also have high levels of self-efficacy, which is an especially vital trait for black students who already face many negative challenges due to their status as racial minorities.²⁹

Black students benefit greatly from campus leadership organizations characterized by a social climate that identifies with their needs as black people. In other words, leadership organizations that have mission statements and role models with which black students can identify, and that conduct activities that provide student leaders with a sense of pride in their racial background are often more effective than student leadership organizations that are open to a more diverse range of students. In short, the personal values of successful black student leaders align with the organizational values of the student organizations to which they belong.³⁰

26 Dugan, J. P., Kodama, C. M., & Gebhardt, M. C. (2012). Race and leadership development among college students: The additive value of collective racial esteem. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 5(3), 174–189. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0029133>

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Baughman, K. N., & Bruce, J. (2011). The Unique Leadership Needs of Minority Student Populations: Crafting a Leadership Identity. Volume 10, Number 2–Summer 2011, 97.

30 Beatty, C. C., Bush, A. A., Erxleben, E. E., Ferguson, T. L., Harrell, A. T., & Sahachartsiri, W. K. (2010). Black Student Leaders: The Influence of Social Climate in Student Organizations. *Journal of the Indiana University Student Personnel Association*. Retrieved from <https://education.indiana.edu/graduate/programs/hesa/iuspa/archive/2010-06-Beatty.pdf>

4.3 Specific In-College Supports

Student Organizations

Getting involved with campus life, organizations, and activities has a significant positive impact on black students' ability to develop a sense of community and eventually graduate from their respective programs. This involvement fosters a sense of shared community and social recognition that improves minority students' overall sense of personal self-worth and sense of belonging in higher education.

On-campus student organizations that promote and foster black students' identity are critical tools in boosting retention rates among black students. Racial identity development is the process through which black students come to terms with, and accept, the implications of being black. Through this process, they develop a core inner peace and understanding of what it means to be black in a multi-cultural society. In other words, forging a strong identity as black people boosts students' self-esteem and their sense of worth within the broader society.³¹

Black students who participate in student organizations (of varying types and focus) that cater specifically to their needs develop an overall sense of empowerment in terms of their own identity. Black student organizations also offer the chance for cross-cultural engagement with other student groups, a process that helps prepare black students for life inside and outside of college where diversity is the norm. Because the nurturing of black students' personal goals correlates with a stronger persistence level in higher education, black student organizations can play a major role in aligning black identity with academic success.³²

4.4 Successful Intervention Programs

The Bridge Program: Humber College, Toronto, Ontario

Humber College's "The Bridge" program works with African/Black/Caribbean students to focus on student engagement, retention, and leadership development. It offers a number of student workshops that focus on self-identity, motivation and self-management, learning effective communication, developing leadership skills, community involvement, networking and mentoring, and academic and career development. The program supports "students through workshops and a mentorship program to encourage success and engagement."³³

31 Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(2), 127–144.

32 Ibid.

33 Humber College. (n.d.). The Bridge. Retrieved November 15, 2015, from <http://communityservices.humber.ca/support/mpower/thebridge>



Bridges to Ryerson, Tri-Mentoring Program and Road to Ryerson (Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario)

Ryerson University hosts three programs aimed at helping under-privileged students to access and thrive within university. The programs, Bridges to Ryerson, the Tri-Mentoring Program, and Road to Ryerson each focus on improving the engagement, retention, and success of students such as those from minority groups who often struggle in post-secondary education.³⁴

“Racial identity development is the process through which black students come to terms with, and accept, the implications of being black.”

- **Bridges to Ryerson:** This program aims to make college accessible to students who normally would not have a good chance of even getting in to a post-secondary school. It focuses on students from low-income communities, particularly Aboriginal students, New Canadians, and Second-Generation immigrants. Students enter the program on a part-time basis, where they receive “targeted academic and non-academic supports and financial aid as needed.” Those students who support the program requirements receive admission to select university programs. The Bridges to Ryerson program has proven successful at giving students a “second chance” because it specifically offers targeted support and counselling to students from troubled backgrounds. It helps them deal with neglect and abuse at home, marginalization at school, interruptions with their studies, and a general lack of academic and life guidance. Interviews with participating students confirmed that they found the program to be invaluable in helping them navigate home and university life.³⁵
- **Tri-Mentoring Program (TMP):** Centred on a non-assimilation framework, the TMP caters to the specific needs of first-generation college students, students from low-income backgrounds, and culturally and linguistically diverse students. It supports new students’ environmental needs by offering them support in spaces that “celebrate differences and diversity in an anti-oppressive environment.” The program pairs first-year students with trained, third-year student mentors to support new students’ orientation and transitions into university life. Second-year students enroll in a student leadership and education program, where they receive training in peer support, collaboration, and problem solving. Third-year students mentor the first-year students while exploring their own academic and employment options. Fourth-year students pair with a professional mentor in the students’ field of study. The mentor aids students in networking, employment searching, and skill building. The TMP has proven successful in helping students stay engaged in university, and it has particularly been adept at preparing them for a professional career.³⁶
- **Road to Ryerson:** This program is specifically for high-school students who missed the cut on getting into Ryerson due to a lack of prerequisite courses or an insufficient grade average. Road to Ryerson gives these students a “second chance” on their “first chance,” so to speak, of getting into Ryerson. Counsellors from Ryerson meet with students and establish what academic goals they need to meet in order to enter the university. The students then return to their respective high schools, where they take additional course to improve their grades. Students get access to Ryerson mentors and tutors who help with their high school work. The students also tour Ryerson and attend campus workshops to become familiar with the university environment. The students who participated in Road to Ryerson felt that they could not have achieved their goal of entering university without the program’s aid. Students said the program was especially helpful in orientating them with university life. (Malik et al. 2011: 5, 36)

34 Malik, S., Vetere, J., Abramovitch, R., & Guan, J. (2011). Access, Engagement, Retention and Success of Under-represented Populations at Ryerson University: Bridges to Ryerson, the Tri-Mentoring Program and Road to Ryerson. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Jarret/Downloads/NOISE%20-%20EvaluationRyersonPSEPrograms.pdf

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

Toronto Helping Youth Pursue Education (HYPE) Program (Centennial College, Toronto, Ontario)

Centennial College administers the HYPE program, which serves underprivileged youth in East Toronto. It offers a “taste” of college life with the goal of giving young people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attend college a chance to get an early start at post-secondary education. The program runs each summer and serves 150 youths. It allows them to sample academic content from multiple Centennial programs, as well to gain a realistic idea of the overall process of college admissions.

Key to the program’s success is its reliance on peer mentors and Community Outreach Program Staff as guides in the engagement process. In addition, actual college faculty deliver the academic content of HYPE, while outreach program staff work with college services to help youth identify and target the different pathways they can take for pursuing higher education.³⁷ The HYPE program’s success stems from its focus on engagement, which “stresses the building of a positive relationship with program participants whose earlier educational experiences did not often lead them directly from high school to college or university.” Program participants responded positively to the ways that HYPE demystified the college experience and the way it offered integrated support mechanisms.³⁸

U.S. State-Led Intervention Programs

Since the early 2000s, many states in the U.S. have played major roles in funding and administering early intervention programs to help minority and other underprivileged students get into college and succeed in their studies. Although the programs differ by state, each focus on a combination of the following interventions: counselling/awareness, academic enrichment/support, parent involvement, personal enrichment/social integration, mentoring, and scholarships. Several state-level programs exist, but a report by Cunningham et al. notes certain key factors that characterize successful program elements as revealed by program evaluation outcomes:

- Program structure and services: Effective programs include some forms of financial assistance, provide access to both challenging coursework and supportive academic enrichment activities, and establish peer groups for participating students. In addition, comprehensive programs seem to be more effective than those that rely on single-component strategies.
- Targeting of Students: Programs that provide services to students over a longer period of time and that take students’ cultural and linguistic diversities into account are more successful.
- Program administration: The most effective programs rely on a key contact person who guides students over a longer period. The best programs are also well integrated with K-12 schools and have effective links with colleges and universities.³⁹

37 Maher, J., & Bertin, A. (2013). Sustaining the Transformation: Improving College Retention and Success Rates for Youth from Underserved Neighbourhoods. *Journal of Global Citizenship & Equity Education*, 3(1), 102.

38 Ibid.

39 Cunningham, A., Redmond, C., & Merisotis, J. (2003). Investing Early: Intervention Programs in Selected US States. Millennium Research Series. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED475203>



RECOMMENDATIONS (SECTION FIVE)

The following recommendations are organized across three major themes which emerge from the study's findings: 1) black student engagement 2) supportive services 3) institutional change

Recommendations regarding black student engagement:

1. Pilot a mentoring program for black students.

An overwhelming number of students who participated in the study shared a deep desire to be connected to individuals who can act as supporters, advice-givers, encouragers and role-models during their studies. GBC should therefore endeavour to design and implement a formalized mentoring program that would allow black students to be voluntarily matched with alumni, faculty, staff or external professionals who have an interest in supporting their academic success.

2. Create a dedicated space for black students.

On the basis of wanting to ensure all students feel welcome at GBC, the college should create a site-specific space that provides black students with culturally-rooted services and opportunities to engage meaningfully with their peers in a welcoming and familiar environment. The space would by no means be restricted to black students but would emphasize and be rooted in the experiences of black peoples as a historically disadvantaged group.

3. Implement a pre-college preparation program.

In many cases, black students are at risk of experiencing academic challenges before they even start their first class. The college should therefore implement a pre-college offering that would help to better prepare black students for college life. This could take the form of a targeted, multi-week orientation, intensive one-to-one counselling or a series of culturally-specific workshops.

Recommendations regarding supportive services:

4. Establish tailored financial aid opportunities for black students.

In order to address the most frequently mentioned barrier to black student success at GBC, the college should provide targeted financial assistance in the form of scholarships, bursaries and grants geared specifically towards black students. The college should also increase efforts to ensure black students are made knowledgeable of all existing financial supports and resources.

5. Customize existing GBC services to accommodate black student needs.

Existing GBC programs such as Peer Connect should be modified and adequately resourced to address black student retention. Peer Connect already has experience in catering its services to specific ethno-cultural groups, so developing a customized approach for black students could be done without undue hardship. Other services such as the TLC and Student Success should also be examined for opportunities to provide customized and responsive supports to black students.



6. **Offer culturally-specific academic counselling.**

Considering the low levels of black student engagement with supportive services, GBC should provide culturally-specific counselling services geared toward black students. As the study's findings show, black students want to access services that reflect who they are as racialized persons. Such services could have a significant impact on decision-making regarding program of study, managing school-life balance and maintaining enrollment.

Recommendations regarding institutional change:

7. **Mandate anti-racism training for all faculty.**

Given the large number of black students who cite difficult relations with faculty as a barrier to their academic success, GBC should mandate that all faculty participate in anti-racism training. Student responses suggest that their identity as black or racialized persons plays a significant role in how they are perceived and treated by faculty. As such, training focused on anti-racism, anti-black racism and other forms of race-based oppression could help to increase faculty members' knowledge of the impacts of racism, and decrease feelings of social exclusion and marginalization among black students.

8. **Review hiring practices to ensure they are responsive to student diversity and needs.**

Given the immense diversity found among GBC's student population, it is important that college faculty be reflective of those who purchase its educational services. As it stands, there is known to be only one full-time black faculty member in the CS division. Given the disproportionate number of black students within the division, this cannot in any way be seen as equitable or acceptable. As such, the college should commit to reviewing its hiring practices in order to attract and recruit qualified candidates who could help to fulfill GBC's often stated commitment to diversity.

9. **Ensure field education approaches are equitable.**

As purchasers of education services, black students wish to have fair and equitable opportunities to pursue academic success. As such, unsupported field placements place black students at an automatic disadvantage in a Canadian labour market fraught with discriminatory recruitment and hiring practices. GBC should review field placement approaches to ensure they do not adversely impact particular student groups. This may require programs to coordinate field placements on behalf of students, or at the very least, take an active role in assisting students to find and secure field placements.

10. **Develop flexible course options.**

GBC should commit to developing flexible and innovative course delivery options that may help black students to better manage school-life challenges. This should include increased online and blended courses. It may also mean exploring weekend classes which are integrated with childcare services. At the very least, courses should be offered at times that do create significant access barriers.

11. **Ensure diversity within course curriculum.**

GBC should ensure that program reviews include assessments of curriculum content. All students should feel that their courses are relevant and inclusive of their lived experience. Reviews of this sort may include selected text books, articles, theoretical frameworks, guest speakers and pedagogical approaches.



FINAL THOUGHTS (SECTION SIX)

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Unavailability of race-based data

As is the case with most public institutions in Canada, GBC does not consistently collect disaggregated race-based data on its student population. While the Student Characteristics Survey provided students with an opportunity to self-identify as Black African/Caribbean, there is no established baseline that would allow contextualization of such data. Consequently, the study could not gather or examine information related to the current number of black CS students or the CS black student attrition rate.

Time Constraints

The researcher was given less than two months to complete data collection for this study. This was due to the ASA office wanting to move quickly toward solution-finding, as well as concerns that student availability to participate would decrease significantly after the holiday break. Despite the short time period, steps were taken to ensure that the study engaged as many participants as possible. For example, the researcher distributed e-flyers to all CS faculty, outreached to program coordinators, posted notification on message boards, and set-up a half-day information booth in the CS hallway corridor.

Faculty-researcher role

While participants were well aware that the researcher was a member of the CS faculty, it is not possible to gauge how this may have influenced their responses. On the one hand, familiarity with the researcher may have assisted with student recruitment and increased students' trust in the research process. On the other hand, there may have been adverse impacts on student responses stemming from apprehensions about sharing opinions with an active faculty member.



SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING ON THE STUDY

Collect race-based disaggregated data

The ability to track student experiences depends on the availability of benchmark data. While most public institutions in Canada do not collect data on race, this is starting to change. The Toronto District School Board and the University of Toronto have recently committed to collecting race-based data in order to better understand their student populations. George Brown College should therefore consider a similar college-wide commitment which would extend upon this research study.

Embed interventions within GBC's strategic planning process

There is general concern among research participants that this study will not lead to tangible results for black students at GBC. They worry that any interventions that follow will be ad hoc and decentralized in nature. To provide assurance that this study is the start of a long-term and focused commitment, the college should ensure that any interventions arising from this report are embedded within the college's strategic planning process. This will require the involvement and leadership of senior administrators who can guide this work and provide updates to faculty and students about its progress on a regular basis.

Study and compare experiences of black students across multiple programs and divisions

While the disproportionate number of black students enrolled within Community Services programs lends particular significance to this study, there may be greater value in conducting similar research across other GBC programs. A comparative research approach could examine and help to determine if factors related to field of study have an impact on black student retention.



APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A FOCUS GROUP

STUDY NAME George Brown College – Black Student Retention Project

RESEARCHER Neil Price, Community Worker Program

You are invited to participate in a research study on Black Student Retention in George Brown College's Community Services division led by Neil Price (Faculty, Community Worker Program).

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?

In 2013, George Brown College identified the need to explore ways to improve student retention across the college. Within the Community Services division, low retention rates were found to be particularly acute among black students. The college now wishes to gather insights on the experiences of black students in Community Services. By consulting with students, faculty and other key stakeholders, this project will examine factors which contribute to low retention of black students and appropriate interventions to address this issue.

This project will review relevant literature on black student retention in post-secondary education (PSE), and will gather pertinent data via focus groups and key informant interviews. The project will also identify in-college program development opportunities to support black male student retention in Community Services. A final report will present key insights, intervention options and recommendations.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO IN THE RESEARCH

You will be asked to participate in a focus group where you will be asked about your experience as a student at George Brown College. There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to learn about your experience and gather your knowledge about what students who identify as black may need to achieve personal success.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are minimal risks to participants. The risks may include some uncomfortable feelings when discussing your opinions. Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions if you do not want. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions you may ask to pass on that question or withdraw from participating in the focus group without any negative consequences. If, after completing the focus group you are feeling distressed, please inform Neil Price (nprice@georgebrown.ca) when it is convenient for you to do so. Neil we will try to help or refer you to someone you can talk to.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH AND BENEFITS TO YOU

Your involvement in this study is very important because of the experiences you bring as black student at George Brown College. Research findings will be shared with Student Services Office and the Research Working Group. Neil Price will also share the findings with faculty and staff across the college. No identifying information will be reported.



VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation or non-participation in the research project will not have any effect on the services you receive from George Brown College.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STUDY

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation. Your decision to withdraw from this study will not influence or jeopardize your current or future relationship with your experience at George Brown College. If you decide to withdraw from the study after you have completed the focus group, your information will be removed from the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality in this study will be provided to the fullest extent possible. Any information you provide us in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential. Your name will not appear on the collected data, nor will your name or any identifying information appear in any writing that will arise from the research. The data will be used for research purposes only and will be stored in research cabinets.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in this study, please feel free to contact Neil Price. His confidential telephone is 647-994-2684 and his email is nprice@georgebrown.ca

LEGAL RIGHTS AND SIGNATURES

I, _____ consent to participate in the George Brown College Black Student Retention Project focus group conducted by Neil Price of the GBC Community Worker Program. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature of Participant

Date



Signature of Project Director

Date



APPENDIX B: RESEARCH STUDY RECRUITMENT E-FLYER



Help shape the future of George Brown College

If you are a George Brown Community Service student who identifies as African-Canadian and/or Black we want to hear from you!

We want to hear how you think GBC can better support your college experience.

All participants who attend will be given a \$20 Tim Hortons gift certificate.

Snacks will be provided.

Sign up for ONE of the following sessions:

Monday	November 23	12pm - 1:30pm
Monday	November 23	4pm - 5:30pm
Thursday	November 26	12pm - 1:30pm
Thursday	November 26	4pm - 5:30pm



E-mail Neil Price at nprice@georgebrown.ca to sign up for a session.



Neil Price

We look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Organizers

This faculty-led research project is being conducted by Professor Neil Price of the Community Worker Program. As a long-standing Community Services faculty member, community-based researcher and youth advocate, Neil brings extensive experience in supporting post-secondary education attainment and persistence among racialized students.

This initiative is being supported by the retention and persistence program in Academic and Student Affairs.

