

# **A Strong Focus on Collaborations between K-12 and Higher Education to Increase Enrollment and Success of Black Men in Postsecondary Education**

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As a researcher, I have been devoted to improving rates of access, enrollment, retention, and persistence among African American male collegians. When I reflect on the value of my scholarship, I realize its practicality and significance cannot be denied. Nevertheless, and perhaps more importantly, I also realize that there is a factor that is missing from my scholarship: a greater need to collaborate with scholars who specialize in the study of the African American male experience in K-12 and to investigate the relationship between Black males' experience in K-12 and their access and success in postsecondary education.

My scholarship has been largely concerned with exploring issues of access, equity, retention and persistence for racial and ethnic minorities, specifically, Black men in higher education. Distinct from the works of J. Luke Wood, who specializes in Black males in community colleges, Shaun R. Harper, who explores high achieving Black men at predominantly White institutions, Terrell L. Strayhorn, who gives perspective to low-income Black men, Black men in STEM, and Black gay men across diverse institutional types, and T. Elon Dancy and Frank Harris III, who investigate Black male gender construction and masculinity, my work focuses on providing insight into the experiences of Black men at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). I firmly believe that the higher education community certainly sees the value in these and other researchers' (e.g., Michael Cuyjet, Jerlando Jackson, and James Moore III) scholarship, considering how beneficial their work has been to the vexing problems challenging academic success for Black men in higher education. More specifically, consider the following:

- Currently, Black men account for 4.3% of the total enrollment at four-year postsecondary institutions in the United States, the same as it was in 1976 (Strayhorn 2008).

- According to national data, two-thirds of Black men who start college never finish (Cuyjet, 2006).
- There is a ‘gender gap’ in the number of Black men and women who enroll and complete higher education. While this disparity is present across all racial and ethnic groups, it is more severe among Black male collegians (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009)).

When I consider that Walter Kimbrough and Shaun Harper (2006) acknowledged that researchers have neglected to provide insight into the experience of Black men at HBCUs, coupled with Valerie Lundy-Wagner and Marybeth Gasman’s (2011) assertion that Black women appear to gain more from their college experience than Black men at HBCU, I too realize the value of my work. More specifically, I realize that I have been able to provide a voice to Black men at HBCUs, explore their challenges and triumphs, and provide recommendations to educational policymakers, HBCU faculty, student affairs practitioners, and stakeholders.

Notwithstanding, when I continue to read a litany of stories and reports about the dismal conditions and educational outcomes of Black men in K-12, I am often forced to ask myself two pivotal questions: *Am I doing enough in my scholarship to make a difference on the success of Black male collegians and what do I see as the missing linchpin in the higher education literature on Black men that will increase their access, enrollment, and success?* In a book chapter, Tyrone Howard (2007) emphasized that until significant improvements are made in the area of K—12, the Black males’ dismal rate of participation will continue. I echo Howard’s sentiment. When one considers the current state of African American males in K-12, this agreement becomes unequivocal.

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**Robert T. Palmer** is Assistant Professor of Student Affairs at the State University of New York—Binghamton. His research examines issues of access, equity, retention, persistence, and the college experience of racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Black men at historically Black colleges and universities. Since completing his PhD, Palmer has produced 4 books and has authored well over 65 refereed journal articles, book chapters, and other academic publications. In 2009, the American College Personnel Association’s (ACPA) Standing Committee for Men recognized his excellent research on Black men with its Outstanding Research Award. . In 2011, Palmer was named an ACPA Emerging Scholar and in 2012, he received the Carlos J. Vallejo Award of Emerging Scholarship by the Multicultural/Multiethnic Education SIG of the American Education Research Association AERA. Dr. Palmer is on the editorial boards of the *Journal of College Student Development*, *Journal of Negro of Education*, *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, and ASHE Monograph Series.