Models of Excellence for African American Males at Richland Community College: A Field Study

Luegeanes McGee
Eastern Illinois University

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Models of Excellence for African American Males at
Richland Community College: A Field Study

(TITLE)

BY

Luegeanes McGee

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FOR THE DEGREE OF

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YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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Models of Excellence for African American Males at Richland Community College

A Field Study

by

Luegeanes McGee

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of Eastern Illinois University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Specialist in Education, Guidance and Counseling

May 1996

Major Subject: Educational Guidance and Counseling
Models of Excellence for African American Males at

Richland Community College

A Field Study

by

Luegeanes McGee

Approved as to the style and content by:

______________________________  ______________________________
Charles G. Eberly              Robert E. Saltmarsh
(Chair of Committee)           (Head of Department)
Purpose

The purpose of this field study was to investigate the problems that African American males encounter at Richland Community College, Decatur, Illinois. This investigator interviewed thirteen graduates, person-to-person, who graduated from Richland Community College between the years of 1993 through 1995. Twelve themes emerged from this study: academic counselor/communication/involvement, prejudice/isolation, teacher/student reaction, student seating location, support group(s), role models, mentors, student involvement in college life, educational purpose, programs, and college requirements. Respondents also made recommendations for the success of African American males attending Richland Community College.
Methodology

Person-to-person interviews were utilized in studying this phenomenon because it is highly subjective. Individuals were selected from students who were identified as graduates by personnel in the Office of Student Development Services at Richland Community College. This researcher used six questions in the process of this investigation to allow participants the greatest possible range of responses and expression regarding their perceptions of racism, and institutional policies and procedures which affect retention. Interviews served as the primary data collection method. Interviews were relatively unstructured as represented by opened ended questions.

Findings

The findings of this study support the assumption that African American males have many challenges to deal with in getting through higher education, but the most consistent themes in successful completion college life were involvement on campus and the helpful influence of support groups.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Charles G. Eberly, my mentor and friend, has my unending gratitude for the generous donation of his wealth of wisdom, constant encourage, and patient guidance which instilled in me the confidence not only to grow immeasurably during this study but also to successfully complete my field study. Dr. Eberly, through unselfishly devoting his own time to this effort, displayed a tremendous amount of commitment towards my successful graduation. For this, I owe him a debt of gratitude I could never repay. Dr. Samuel W. Jenkins who helped guide me through my internship during my graduate work and to Dr. Robert E. Saltmarsh who assisted my development of my counseling skills; to both my unending appreciation.

My heart felt thanks to not only two very dedicated individuals at Richland Community College's Transfer Center, Deborah Comage and Gail Cox who always lent a helping hand by gathering information and mailing correspondence for me, but also to the members of Student Development Services. To the fine ladies of the Kitty Lindsay Library at Richland who at a moment's notice placed research material in my hands, my unending appreciation. To Karen Black, Secretary of Richland's Social Sciences Division, who deserves special recognition for always offering to assist me with the aesthetics of my paper, even though she was overburdened with her own work; I will forever be in her debt.
My deepest thanks and gratitude to the male graduates of Richland who so generously relinquished their spare time to share their educational experiences at the college with me in order to build the foundation of my research.

For the encouragement, help, and constant support I received from family, friends, relatives, and acquaintances who contributed their insight, heart and sweat in order to breathe life into my field study; I am grateful to all of you.
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Chapter 1

Overview of Study

Education must serve a consciousness raising function to prepare Black people to make a contribution to a struggle that began centuries before they were born and will extend centuries after their death.

Janice Hale Benson
My Soul Looks Back, 1993

Introduction

Observing the progress of African American males in higher education over the past ten years, I have noticed what appears to be a revolving door. Students seem to come and go without the majority of them ever attaining a degree or certificate during their tenure at the institutions with which I am familiar. Young African American men, especially, seem to be coming and going with majority society not appearing to take notice. In order to have a healthy society, the needs of the total population have to be included, or the total society is damaged in proportion to that segment which is mired in poverty, crime, and illiteracy.

Statement of the Problem

The premise upon which this study is based is that students who are successful can be identified in spite of adverse conditions, i.e., little support from professors, adverse family traditions, and a college environment not conducive to the learning process.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the problems that African American male graduates encountered at Richland Community College, and probe what they did, experienced, and felt to support their successful graduation. It will
also identify what enabled them to be successful, and to apply what is learned to the education of subsequent Richland Community College African American male students.

Limitations

1. The findings of this study are specific to Richland Community College and not universally generalizable to other institutions.

2. The age, and status of the interviewer may have some effect on the degree to which respondents provide sought after information.

Operational Definitions

**African American/Black Students** Several words have been used to describe African-Americans in the last few decades: in the 1960s, Negro was the correct phrase; then Black or Afro-American became the standard; now African-American is the appropriate phase (Shankin, 1994). The term refers to those people whose ancestral roots are linked to Africa and whose nationality is considered that of a native born American. According to the Richland Community College Student Development Service (1995), African Americans currently make up 11 percent of the Richland Community College population, whereas, Whites make up 87 percent.

**Alienation** Alienated persons feel that those in power have neglected them, and that there is nothing they can do about it. They believe that they have little or no control over their own destiny, and that in effect they have become dispensable (Kephart, 1994, Zellner, & Bartollas, 1990, Boudreau, 1993). The feelings of exclusion and neglect by the surrounding community are due to either overt or
covert acts, while others similarly situated are perceived as being nurtured, accepted and supported.

**Isolation** In this study, isolation refers to feeling socially isolated on campus, the end result an academic deficiency associated to caused by the castelike ostracism present in North American life from 1619 to the present (Jackson, 1986, Fleming, 1984, Dyson, 1993, Ferrante, 1995). Isolation is the perception of one's self as being physically, emotionally or spiritually separated from other individuals/larger community or important aspects of the social and cultural environment.

**Underclass** William J. Wilson (1989) has argued that the long-term removal of job opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled workers is the force most responsible for the growth of the Black underclass in America's inner cities. Underclass refers to that educational underclass, that segment of the population who experiences no social mobility (Boudreau, 1993).

**Retention** In this research, retention refers to addressing the low retention and graduation rates of Black students in U.S. colleges (Fordyce, 1991). According to Tinto, (1993), effective retention is an enduring commitment to student welfare, a broader commitment to the education, not mere retention, of all students, and an emphasis upon the importance of social and intellectual community in the education of students.

**Significance of Study**

As we move into the 21st Century, institutions of higher education must face the reality "that much of the recent decline in Black College enrollments reflects..."
decreases in number of African American males" (Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, & Royster 1991). The concept of multiculturalism as applied to campus environments, student body composition, and educational offerings dictates that serious consideration be given to those aspects of campus environment which directly impact individual behavior, organizational development and student assimilation. The results of this study could assist in changing institutional priorities in which administrators adopt strategies to enhance the collegiate experience for African American males and ultimately increase retention and academic achievement. In addition, for members of the White majority racial group, opportunities to develop greater understanding and sensitivity to the needs and unique experiences of African American males will be identified. Research in retention of the African American male will facilitate improved access to and African American male representation in higher education, now, and in the future.

**Review of Literature**

The literature review for this study focuses on: (1) the historical and present day impact of higher education on the lives of African American males, (2) the aspirations and expectations of African American males who choose to attend college, (3) institutional responses to the presence of African American males in College (4) the current impact of racism on campus culture and climate, and (5) programmatic efforts designed to address Academic success of African American males.

African American males have made tremendous contributions to American society in spite of widespread prejudice and discrimination. One of the first well-
renowned African American male achievers was Frederick Douglass, who was minister to Haiti during the Lincoln administration. As a writer and lecturer, he fought slavery and was an early supporter of women's rights. Another achiever, W.E.B. DuBois, a Harvard-educated sociologist, believed that all people of African descent should unite against racial prejudice. He helped found the NAACP. Daniel Hale Williams, American surgeon, founded the Provident Hospital in Chicago, Ill. (1891), the country's first training school for Black interns and nurses. It was at Provident Hospital that Williams performed the first successful operation on the human heart in 1893 (Jackson, 1987).

These African American men achieved against great odds in their day; today, African American men continue to achieve in spite of similar obstacles. Thurgood Marshall, U.S. Supreme Court Justice, won numerous civil rights cases before state and federal courts as special counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Hess, 1990, Jackson, 1987). Martin Luther King earned degrees from Morehouse College in Atlanta and Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He then went to Boston University, where he earned a doctorate (Harris, 1987).

As a member of the Richland Community College faculty for the past seven years, becoming accepted as "one of the group" has been a difficult challenge. Many times "the invisible man" would be an appropriate word to use to describe the feelings I have experienced. Neither faculty nor students at Richland Community College are very diverse. The entire college staff consists of approximately one hundred thirty-seven people. There are approximately ten African American staff,
and only two African American faculty members, one male and one female. According to Richland Community College Development Services (1995), the African American student population is 11 percent of the total student population, which makes the faculty/student ratio disproportionately unbalanced for African American students to African American faculty. One problem seen by many educators is that there are so few African American educators to teach and mentor African American males. Brown noted the importance of mentors: "I don't think anybody can make it without mentors" (in Mercer, 1990, p. 11).

Since only one African American male educator is available at Richland Community College, the task to be a role model, counsel, and mentor to the twenty to thirty African American males attending the institution presents quite a challenge for this individual. An additional problem is that several students may not identify themselves with the educator. Because of his position on a white dominated faculty, some Black males may not identify with the lone male Black instructor because they may view him as a "sell out" to White society. The term "sell out" means that this educator has earned a Eurocentric education, adopted Eurocentric culture, and it is implied that he has forgotten about the plight of other less fortunate African American people. Current literature suggests that because of the hard work by many educators and community leaders, programs are continually being put into place to enhance minority achievement.

Many of the early programs were based on the compensatory education model, designed around assumptions about the causes for consistent and severe underachievement among Black and disadvantaged children. Three
of the prominent of these programs were Head Start, Follow Through, and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Willie, Garibaldi & Reed, 1991).

These early programs appear to have been successful, but African American males seemed to attain less success than Whites and African American females.

Approximately 20% of African American males are not high school graduates, relative to 15.8% of White males, 15.5% of African American females, and 12.8% of White females. From 1987 to 1988 alone, the proportion of African American male high school graduates enrolled in or completing one or more years of college dropped by 5.5 percentage points. College enrollment rates for all other demographic groups increased during this period (The National Urban League Research Department Fact Sheet, 1990, Jones, 1993).

Even with the implementation of many programs specifically focused on the needs of American males in grades K-12, their presence continues to decline. Many cities and states have developed alternative programs to help these young men from becoming an academic dropout statistic.

Alternative schools are schools for adolescents who are unable to progress in regular school systems. The African American academy could be viewed as a preventive and choice alternative school for young African American men as a place to foster academic achievement and development. The premise is a clear one-the young African American man is at extreme risk in regular schools that are not sensitive to his needs (Midgette & Glenn, 1993).

Jones (1993) also supports the ideals of Midgette and Glenn above. Not only are K-12 schools trying to retain African American males, but higher education institutions are also implementing programs to foster academic achievement and development.

In response to these difficulties encountered by African American males in the education system, a two semester block program with comprehensive support services was established for full-time day students at a large urban community college. The African-American Male Block curriculum was structured as one year of a three year program leading to an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree.
in a university parallel program. Upon graduation it will allow students to matriculate into a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree program with advanced standing. The goal of the African American Male Block Program is to increase retention of African-American males in academic courses of study, assist them in matriculating through these courses of study and have them transfer on to four year institutions (Jones, 1993).

Life experience has been instrumental in teaching me how African Americans are viewed in a negative manner. While attending a faculty meeting over six years ago, one of the majority faculty spoke out against African Americans. This individual's position was painfully apparent from their statement, "They just can't cut it." I experienced a sudden feeling of discomfort among the group and after that remark the conversation continued on to another topic. As this was only my second or third meeting as a faculty member, I said nothing in defense of African Americans.

What I think about is the incredible extent to which people do not look at one another, do not do so in most communities and especially on my own campus; the extent to which we -- professors and students alike -- act as though we do not see one another and are not seen, act in such a way as to make ourselves and others invisible (Parr & Savery, 1989).

The feeling of the "invisible man" was appropriate in this setting because the outspoken faculty member seemed to have forgotten that an African American was present, and to this faculty member his comment was business as usual. What really needed to be said at the faculty meeting was, "Why aren't African Americans at Richland Community College cutting it?" Another appropriate question would have been, "Are you putting your best foot forward to these students?" If this critical faculty member could have said, "Yes" to the questions asked and had documentation to substantiate the statement that was made, then the feeling of
being the "invisible man" probably would not have been so strong. The pain of invisibility remains as great as though it only happened yesterday, even though it has been over six years ago. Another reason great pain occurs is because educational institutions are supposed to be for people seeking an education, but so much bias exists in who educational institutions select to educate. Many educators today continue to believe test results, as well as socioeconomic status, are predictive of a student’s ability (Conciatore, 1990). In spite of appearances, what is happening is that very little or nothing of real substance is being done in support of the African American male.

Considerable research and data strongly indicate that the young African American male is an endangered species. African America male youth have been written off by educators as being unteachable, the juvenile justice system has failed to rehabilitate them, the mental health system has virtually ignored or excluded them, and social welfare institutions seem ill equipped to respond to their multiple problems (Midgette & Glenn, 1993).

The message is clear that the African American male is becoming an endangered species in American higher education; they are becoming the least likely to be educated. Disproportionately, African American males have the highest homicide rates in the United States (Conciatore, 1989, Simmons, 1991, Morgan, 1995, Hagan, 1990). Siegel (1995) has stated the issue clearly:

One of the most important distinctions found in the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) data is the racial differences in the victim rate. Young African American males are at great risk for being homicide victims. They face a murder risk four or five times greater than that of young African American females, five to eight times higher than that of young White males, and 16 to 22 times higher than that of young White females (Siegel, 1995).

Minorities are overrepresented in the prison population; only 35 percent of the prison population is White. In contrast, African Americans make up 46 percent of the population and Hispanics 17 percent (Siegel, 1995, Morgan, 1995).

Earlier Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, and Daniel Hale Williams were mentioned as African American men who were achievers against the prejudices of their day. Their pursuit of education was the major reason for these well-renowned men to achieve against the odds. In a society like ours, education is the driving vehicle to almost any achievement. Colleges and universities in the United States have a tradition and mission of transforming and enriching the lives of students. This mission is consistent with the goal of preserving, enriching and transmitting culture (McEwen, Roper, Bryant, & Langa, 1990).

Through education men/women gain social status, political, and economic power. If the present trend continues, the majority of African American males will continue to be alienated toward and isolated from the larger society. While some men in the past have been successful without a higher education, during the past fifteen to twenty years American society has changed from an industrial to an informational/technological base. "Any time you're building a prison a day instead of a training center a day, something's wrong we need to refocus" (Gray, 1995, p. 44). If the present trend persists into the 21st Century, the African American male will become more isolated, more impoverished, and a major part of what social scientists call "society's underclass." These concerns are serious because the United States Department of Labor contends that there are different trends that will shape the last years of the 20th century. These trends are reported in Workforce 2000
(Jenning, 1991), a Hudson Institute study commissioned by the Labor Department which indicates that new jobs in the service industries will demand much higher skill levels than the jobs today. The education of all people, including African American males, is the primary key to our society becoming successful and productive in the 21st century.
Chapter II
Observations of African American Males

When you have one body of people who have been sewn together by a common experience--I won't even talk about the cultural heritage from Africa--and when you plant this people in a highly pressurized situation and they survive, they're surviving with all of this motivations and with all of the basic ingenuity which any group develops in order to remain alive. Let's not play these kids cheap; let's find out what they have. What do they have that is a strength? What do they have that you can approach and build a bridge upon? Education is all a matter of building bridges, it seems to me.

Ralph Ellison
Going To The Territory, p. 66

Qualitative research methods have been used in this research to give form and substance to the observations of thirteen African American male graduates from Richland Community (RCC) about their educational experiences as they completed their academic program. The value of qualitative research approaches is that both individual and group behavior can be described in thoughtful, human terms which facilitate an understanding of personal motivations behind observations of public behavior (Kuh and Andreas, 1991). The goal of this research is to identify the complex interaction between individuals and their environment which support models of excellence for African American males (Whitt, 1991).

What personal, family, community, and institutional supports did these young men use to reach their academic goal?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The sources of information used for this study were student interview data and the informal observations of the researcher across a period of six years. Tape-recorded person-to-person interviews were utilized to study the success
experiences of thirteen African American males. Advantages of the person-to-person interview is that the responses are in much greater depth, and because the interviewer is present, the opportunity to clarify any confusing questions and to probe incomplete responses is available (Cargen & Ballatine, 1994).

Interviews were conducted during the 1995 fall semester. Participants were contact first by letter, and then by telephone by the secretary in the RCC Transfer Center. An explanation of the purpose for the research was given, and a time was arranged for the researcher to meet the participant for a person-to-person interview. An informed consent form agreeing to participate in the research was signed by each participant prior to the interview (Appendix B).

The interview questions were designed to allow participants the greatest possible range of responses and expression dealing with their perceptions of African American male life experiences, perceptions of racism, and RCC institutional policies and procedures which effected their persistence to graduation. Seven general, open-ended questions provided the basic structure for the interview.

1. What problems academically do you feel you have encountered at RCC?

2. Can you identify any feelings of isolation or separation from majority campus community?

3. Please identify any feeling of exclusion, subtle, or overt acts that give you the feeling of not being accepted and supported by the college community.

4. What support group(s) have helped you to academically achieve your goals, i.e. church, parents, friends, siblings, teachers, or other role models?
5. How have programs that are in place at Richland Community College helped you achieve your goal in graduating?

6. What other courses should be added to the curriculum?

7. What are some recommendations that you have to offer that will help other African American males succeed at RCC?

Site Selection

The site for this study was Richland Community College, a twenty-four year old institution located in Decatur, Illinois, in the central part of the state. Richland's 117 acre site easily accommodates the 137 full-time faculty members, and the institution serves a student body of 3,150 students in the Fall of 1995. Of these, 345 students identified themselves as of African American heritage. The campus was selected because the researcher is a faculty member of the institution, and due to the encouragement of the college administration to carry out the research.

Participant Characteristic

Participants for this study were identified by personnel in the Office of Student Development Services at Richland Community College. Letters were sent to all African American male RCC graduates from 1993 to 1995 introducing the researcher, describing the study, and requesting student participation by the RCC Transfer Center (Appendix A). Twenty individuals were later contacted by telephone to set up a time and date for a personal interview. The thirteen men who were subsequently interviewed ranged in age from 20 to 52 (seven were from 20 to 30, and six were from 31 to 52), and met the following criteria: 1) graduated from
Richland Community College between 1993 to 1995, and 2) were African American males.

**Data Collection**

The primary source of data for this study were personal interviews conducted with thirteen African American graduates of Richland Community College. Each interviewee signed a consent form agreeing to the interviews upon the conditions that individuals would not be identifiable as such in the final document, and that all tape recorded information would be erased when the study was completed. The first interview was completed in late September, 1995, and the remaining twelve in the next three months of the year. Many participants were no longer living in the Decatur area, having moved for reasons of employment or pursuing a bachelor's degree at another institution. Even with knowledge of names, addresses, and telephone numbers, it was difficult to arrange for interviews between the work schedules of the participants and the researcher. All interviews were done in person, and lasted from 30 minutes to two hours, with the typical interview lasting just short of an hour.

Initial interview questions were shaped through a review of the literature, and the researcher's personal observations of African American students on the RCC campus of the prior six years. The questions were designed to draw as much personal and contemplative information as possible from the participants about their educational experiences at RCC. Following standard qualitative analysis procedures, initial interviews were analyzed as subsequent interviews were being
taken. The initial analysis helped me to sharpen the way questions were asked, but no new question topics emerged from the analyses.

**Data Analysis**

The thirteen personal interviews were conducted between September, 1995, and December, 1995. Recorded verbal data were transcribed into hard copy, and draft transcripts of interviews were mailed to participants for correction and verification. After the initial interviews were verified through the member checking process, a coding schema (Appendix C) was devised to identify topics, categories, and themes (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). The coding schema was verified by two second readers, members of the Field Study Committee, who compared the schema on selected interview transcripts with their own topical classifications. Initial interviews were analyzed for topics and categories while subsequent interviews were being arranged and taken, but no new issues emerged from the initial interviews.

**Data Management**

All interviews were tape recorded, and there were no mechanical problems with any of the tapings. No other notes were taken during the tapings; only the recorded data were used for the study. After complete interview transcripts were printed, they were returned to the interviewee for verification. There were no major changes. The coding topics used for analysis are those listed in Appendix C.

**Trustworthiness**

One question associated with the usefulness of qualitative research is the trustworthiness of the data collected. It is noteworthy that none of the participants
contacted refused to take part in the study. Furthermore, when people were contacted, they readily agreed to participate in the study. New topics emerged from the interview transcripts up until the next to the last interview.

A second question of trustworthiness is involved with the fact that most of the information requested was contemplative, as it represented participants’ version of their realities at RCC from 1993 to 1995. Yet, such selective perception is important to the value of this study, because all of the students who attend Richland maintain selective, subjective perceptions of their personal experience. A limitation of this study in terms of its trustworthiness was that no attempt was made to verify information through triangulation with other, external documents (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993).

Researcher’s Role

As mentioned earlier, the research has been a faculty member at Richland Community College for the past six years. I have had personal involvement with the institution, and I have known of all the research participants as students, as well as having six of them in my own classes. There were no overt indications that any of the respondents were suspicious or untrusting of my motives for completing the research; only one person seemed in any way hesitant in forming answers to the research questions.

My primary role with these students as an instructor was one of a role model and mentor. I believed that students would speak freely about their realities dealing with Richland, and I thought that they would have more negative
impressions about the institution that what they did in fact have. I have no reason to doubt the truthfulness of the information they provided me.

Limitations of the Study

1. The findings of this study are specific to Richland Community College and not universally generalizable to other institutions, and
2. they are limited to the particular group of African American graduates studied.
3. The age, and status of the interviewer may have some effect on the degree to which respondents provide sought after information.

Significance of the Study

The concept of multiculturalism as applied to campus environments, student body composition, and educational offerings dictates that serious consideration be given to those aspects of campus environment which directly impact individual behavior, organizational development and student assimilation. The results of this study should assist in identifying institutional priorities for which administrators can adopt strategies to enhance the collegiate experience for the African American male, and ultimately increase retention and academic achievement. Furthermore, what works for African American males should in turn enhance the educational opportunities available to all students, regardless of race. As greater understanding and sensitivity to the needs and unique experiences of African American males is realized, the insights involved with facilitate improved access to and African American male representation in higher education, thus helping to save a generation of vital young men.
Chapter III

SELECTED THEMES

Themes which emerged from this analysis of the verbal data were academic counselor communication/involvement, prejudice/isolation, teacher/student reaction, classroom seating location, support group(s), role models, mentors, student involvement in the college community, college academic requirements, educational purpose, student support programs, and recommendations for African American males attending RCC. In this chapter and the next, six themes will be discussed in each. The order of the twelve themes was based on my subjective impressions of their relative importance in the interview data.

Academic Counselor Communication/Involvement

Good counselors lack no clients.

Measure by Measure

Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, p. 203

Personal experience has helped this investigator to understand that counselor involvement plays a pivotal part in African American male success in higher education. Responses from African American male students ranged from where they can seek academic help and/or receive counseling to students being equipped when they come to Richland to be able to do college work. The involvement of counselors and teachers can be crucial to the student's success. Experience has convinced me that professionals, like the aforementioned, may be a
turning point in an individual's life. Encouragement helps build the self-concept of
the student, giving him confidence in his attainments. One student mentioned that
additional help is needed other than going to the instructor:

We need some place to go for additional help. When students have problems
with the instruction, there needs to be someone available other than the
instructor.

Another student voiced his opinion about students not understanding how to
seek out advice:

Well, I see some of them don't even know how to ask for advice, you know.
Some of them would probably have to seek out and give advice. They know
where the counselor's office is, but really don't know what the counselor's are
there for. Then none of the counselors that I sought when I went there and
did not know exactly what I wanted to do.

He went on to say that he could have been in classes he was not capable of
handling because of certain educational deficiencies:

I really believe I could of been put in a field I was not capable of. Because I
was put into electronics class and there is a lot of math and I know I was
really weak in math. I was doing remedial 090. Then last semester I had a
"C" and went back and when I went to the counselor, I told them. I was
looking at calculus and down the road or whatever and I've barely made it
through the remedial. If I could understand it, I'd be alright. I think that is
what happened when I talked to some of the Black students. And some of
them came out to be a psychiatrist or being a doctor and have no idea what it
takes you to reach for that.

Still another individual explained how some African American males are not
aware of the formal educational system and how relevant advising functions are in
the curriculum process:

Then in two years they think it's time to graduate and they haven't been to a
counselor's office enough to know that the classes that they have taken are
remedial classes and they don't transfer, so they don't get caught up. Well I
wanted to go into sociology okay, and the next year want to be something
else. But now what had happened that they thought they were taking
sociology classes and when they changed their major again they are in remedial again.

Due to the counselor's lack of awareness connected with a student's major, students can be placed in courses that are outdated and the student does not become aware of this problem until late in the semester:

I think the counselors should tell them. If the counselors know, I say that because there were times when I talked to some of the counselors that didn't know my sole major. They had me taking something that was outdated that wasn't even required in the curriculum and halfway through the semester I found out about it. I'm talking about some of the full-time counselors. Basically in the time that I was there I think that I talked to maybe 5 and out of talking to 5 probably my last year I probably knew what they knew. When this certain person was not in the office that day I would reschedule.

Another student believed that conducting a survey to identify students' needs or some other type of course placement procedure to assess student capability should be required so they do not take classes that they really do not need:

I think the course outline needs to be more fine tuned. The counselors and advisors, some need to do some kind of study because there is a lot of students who claim that they are taking a lot of classes that they don't really need. It seems that from the feedback that I get from hearing people. When I hear African Americans talk to the counselors or advisors are another problem. It seems as though a lot of students don't even know that there is a difference between counselors and advisors. It just seems to be that they put students in something that they can handle or maybe they can't handle. Maybe they don't even need the class.

One student stated that many African Americans males who come to Richland Community college have no idea of exactly what they are capable of accomplishing. Counselors sometimes fail to inquire as to what the student intends to pursue as a career:

I've never seen a counselor come outside to see about the students and ask them what they want to do. When they want to look into different curriculum, they have to go to the counselor about it. So I really believe that
all of them, a lot of the Black males and females basically when they come out to the community college they really have no idea exactly what they are capable of doing.

Even though one student was critical of counselors and advisors, Richland Community College did an adequate job in helping students who were not college prepared:

I think that the way the college is setup is to accommodate those students who are not fully equipped, quote college equipped. I think its pretty good.

In summary, remarks from respondent realities were that counselors were lacking in their performance. Suggestions were for counselors to make an extra effort to leave their offices and interact with students on campus in order to improve their service to the students.

Prejudice/Isolation

Racial prejudice is usually blind...[more] the result of reason and personal experience than of inherited ideas, and a hasty American tendency to lump all things which look alike into a single category.

Paul Williams
My Soul Looks Back, p. 14

Problems for African American men have been continuous in our major institutions throughout the history of America and surprisingly enough educational institutions are no different. The responses from African American men who were interviewed reflect that sentiment.

According to one African American male prejudice is ingrained in the history of America:

Well it stems way back. I don't think it's anything that has occurred in the last fifty years. You know, there's been a pounding of the male ego just over and over again. And the things that they are allowed to be successful in, are
the things that constantly keep them under part of the rest of society. Drug usage, having and getting guns. If we could get jobs as fast as we get guns, or if we could find entrances into good positions in jobs like we can find way to deal drugs, then of course, we are going to elevate to better positions.

He went on to talk about institutional prejudice and how White society has viewed African Americans:

But it has been yet a long standing in the Black community, just stay out, don't help them, don't educate them as far as how they're hurting each other and what not, and the Black male has just constantly gravitated towards that. Well it's a combination; you know you have to first start with the chicken and the egg; if the chicken won't lay the egg, then the egg it ain't just there. So if it hadn't been, you know, we could probably go all the way back to slavery. If it hadn't been for oppression back then, we might not be on that route.

Another respondent believed that for the different races of people to communicate and get along better together, Richland Community College needed to generate some type of excitement which would be of interest to the total college community:

It needs to be more communication in the school, there needs to be more excitement in the school between the Whites and Blacks. No one is really fighting. They are coming to coming to school and going home. There needs to be something to bring people together. We are out here kind of, but I could go to Illinois State or Bradley Universities people are excited about the school and what is going on. That is just life outside of home, but out here there is not enough excitement, there is not enough charisma, not enough things going on.

Noteworthy, he went on to talk about how the African American race is stereotyped in America, and only seems to have status in the entertainment and sports professions:

Yes, the African American race. We're not looked so far upon, unless we're in the movies, unless we're a basketball player, unless we're doing things like that. We're not looked so far upon and it's a struggle to get into places where
authority places it doesn't concerns sports or anything like that it's you may have to work twice as hard like they say.

He expounded on the perception that African Americans view the inequality they suffer from White society as an ongoing crisis:

I grew up, I'm not that, I am 22 years old, but I learned that you know my parents always told me all my life you're Black, you are going to have to work twice as hard. I get to this age and I find out that they are just right. Where I work now UPS, it's largely corporate in some areas, especially in the high management. And the Blacks there know that it is very hard to get to a place in the high corporate offices. You won't see a lot of them unless you go to Chicago, I've never been to those places there. I might check them out one day. Sometimes we have routine checks, but they're not here.

The Decatur community and the world, sees the African American male: in a suspicious light.

You could say, it could even be the people we relate to as far as our community, our community sometimes, the world sometimes as a whole is down on us because of all the gangs going and not just because of that, it's just because it's hard for a Black, a African American male to make it to really get himself together with all the competition and all the things coming against him these days.

A vivid picture was painted by a one respondent as to how the African American male is viewed in American society:

They think that every time we walk around or we wear a long leather coat, we can be looking a certain way and automatically sometimes people think that we are a drug dealer, we're this, we're that, they stereotype us badly, we can go around listening to a certain type of music while driving in the car and a lot of people think we're selling drugs, we are doing this, some of us are in school, you know.

He supplemented that statement by telling about a friend he works with and the manner in which his friend is viewed by society:

I have a friend, his name is Rap, he works with me at UPS, he talks about how people looks at his car and they think that he is this or that. He graduated from Illinois State University. He had a contract with the
company when he sold his rap music and he has made a little bit of money off of it and talks about how people stereotype him because of what he drives or how he looks. Not everybody is selling drugs, not everybody is into the wrong thing. I think that we are stereotyped a great bit, a great deal. I think as a whole it makes it hard on us. This individual echoed the same sentiment as the last respondent as to how he felt that the African American male was viewed by society:

So many times they look at a person. They say "well he's in a gang or selling drugs. It might be a reason other than that, not knowing as far as [person's] education.

The classroom is very important for African American males because one can feel prejudicially isolated/separated as part of the minority. Because of frustration and stress several individuals could have given up their pursuit of schooling, but continued to endure their struggle. As one man stated:

I felt separated because I didn't feel that the instructors. I pretty much excelled in all my courses. The Caucasian faculty, they looked at me like I shouldn't have succeeded. He would ignore me during class when I had my hand up and then act like I had problem a after class. He acted like I needed extra help. Some of the faculty members treated me this way. Some didn't. But the majority of the faculty members did.

His isolation was not only because he felt differentially treated in his history classes, but also because he thought other African Americans did not treat him fairly:

It was European History and the American History. You know I could say yeah. He was a nice guy and everything but, I pick up on things like that. I isolated myself from my own people because I felt that nobody wanted me to succeed. I was just confused and then expulsion from my own people; those African Americans. I was just really confused and I just wanted to drop-out of school and do whatever I had to do. The faculty were treating this way. I also felt that other African Americans looked at me as kissing up or whatever by being successful in school.
He considered dropping out of Richland, but felt as if dropping out of college was exactly what society wanted him to do:

I got frustrated, stressed out. I wanted to drop-out. Many times I went back to my parents talking to them about this and uhm, it just made me feel really bad. Really bad. I just didn't know what to do. As a Black man already it's like what society expected of me. They didn't want me to go to school. They down us for not getting the education. We're not educated. But then when we try they shoot us back down. It's all a paradox. I accepted it, not necessarily that I accepted, I don't know what I'm looking for. I just don't let it get to me anymore. I have to do whether or not my people approve of it. I'm doing what makes me happy.

Some respondents felt as though teachers purposely did not call on them for answers to questions posed in their classes:

When a teacher makes a comment or maybe an indirect question so to speak, it is an open question but not necessarily directed to anyone to answer and if someone chooses to answer, African Americans seem to be looked over. Like a question was asked. I, myself wanted to answer a question and before I could get to answer the question, the instructor went on to someone else. I didn't have a chance to complete it. And it did not happen once, it happened two or three times in just one class period. It happened before in other classes.

Students feel put off when their teachers critically mark their papers without any apparent explanation for the criticisms:

Although when I first started I did have a teacher that, you know, I write pretty good, but no matter what I turned in he always hacked it up. I had to end up switching teachers, but I thought it rather strange, cause I'd never had a problem with writing papers or anything like that, but no matter what I turned in, you know, he would just hack it up. I wasn't going to sit up there and fall. I figured he must of had some kind of something against me, so I didn't sit there and try to figure him out. I just switched teachers cause I just don't have time for that, I'm trying to get stuff done, you know.

Such criticism without explanation comes to be viewed as a form of racial prejudice towards students:
But that's not uncommon. I have a cousin who went out here, she's a female and she said her English teacher was just like—you know, she wouldn't offer any help she'd just hack your paper up; just hack it up. You know basically, actually try to flunk you kind of thing. But as far as myself, I mean that was pretty much the only bad experience with faculty that I had out there was just that particular teacher. He was like that only one that was like—I guess you know. Everyone has their views of things, you know, usually that comes out at home and that's fine where you live, but when you're at work or at school or whatever. All that stuff should be left at home and everybody should just be there to take care of things, but you know he really let his— with the way he feels about Black males or his bias show.

Even with many negative remarks about respondents' impressions of institutional prejudice/isolation, several respondents were very positive in their overall assessment of educational experiences at RCC.

One respondent stated that he had never permitted himself to feel any isolation:

I never really felt isolated here. You know the atmosphere. I'm a pretty positive person, so I don't like that kind of stuff. I don't let it get me down or stop me from doing what I want to or goals that I set.

Another student reflected on his experience and could never think of a time where he felt isolated:

I can't think of any situation where I've been isolated or turned away in any kind of way, accidentally or on purpose. The other students I was just more so, I guess it was different for me. The students I wasn't isolated by them. I always enjoyed everything. I was always integrated into everything. I was never isolated in any way emotionally, physically in any sorts.

For some students, extracurricular activities he participated in gave them a sense of belonging in the college community:

Anything I was interested in whether, like with the arts and stuff and doing plays. They had that for me and it wasn't like, well it's a Black trying to come in here that has not been done before. They welcomed me.

At least one student participated in any activity that was of interest to him
Many people in the past have done these things and I'm just doing what I can and enjoying myself. Physically I was not isolated as many Blacks. I never experienced any kind of isolation of any sort. I enjoyed going. I had an opportunity to do it here. Outside of sports and understanding that. But I knew that coming in there wasn't really a sports program here. So everything was dealing with academics, forensics, speeches, plays and different things like that. Competitions, so those were things I was into and got into them so I felt no isolation at all whatsoever.

Another man spoke of a positive experience at RCC with different races coming together, and not feeling second best or having to fight any battles to be even with everyone else:

A lot of people had never had any individual close contact with people of different races and different colors when they are put in the same class. I remember one particular girl at the end of the course she just stood up and admitted how she had grown in being able to be among others who thought a little different or had a different background, or looked at a problem differently. Well basically when I was here in '94, I was going at night and only took 3 classes. So I was somewhat limited. But I really didn't see a whole lot of basis that would make me feel I was coming in second or had any uphill battles to be fought. I feel like I was on an even keel with everyone.

One respondent expressed his skepticism because of his long stay out of school, but believed that Richland did a good job in building his confidence toward his success.

Richland did a good job as far as; well when I entered Richland's atmosphere, I was skeptical. After 17 years of being out of school, from the counselor...on they immediately answered all the concerns that I had and they just worked real well at making me comfortable.

These last respondents felt as though prejudice/isolation was not a factor in their education. They seemed to be positive in their pursuit of education and had their goals in clear focus, allowing nothing to deter them.

**Teacher/Student Reaction**

The reasons some black people choose to become serious intellectuals are diverse. But in most cases these reasons can be traced back to a common root: a conversion-like experience with a highly influential teacher or peer
that convinced one to dedicate one's life to the activities of reading, writing and conversing for the purposes of individual pleasure, personal worth and political enhancement of black (and often other oppressed) people.

Cornel West
Keeping Faith, p. 68

In the classroom setting a student can either feel as though he has support or that none exists. Respondents were asked how the teacher reacted to them and also how they reacted to the teacher.

I was pretty vocal in all my classes, so I had a way of letting the teacher know I was there.

Another very outgoing, student made this statement:

I don't think any of the teachers scolded me or disciplined me for being outgoing.

A third respondent, who was turning in below average work and refused to ask for help, did not want to drop the particular course he was taking. Fortunately, he was able to enlist the help of a different instructor, one that taught with an instructional style more conducive to his learning style:

I wasn't coming to that teacher asking for extra help. I as going though and turning in sub-average work. It was like there is no way I was going to take this course again. So, I went to another teacher that I was comfortable with their style who reacted to me very well and worked on this paper and I turned it in and ended up passing the course. The reactions are very good among all teachers, but they are different. You just have to find who's best for you.

For another fairness was not an issue:

I really feel like the instructors were fair. And I guess what I mean by that, if you came and looked like you were interested and willing to work and you didn't have any attitude, I had no problem [with my classes].
A good teacher can make a difference through the appreciation they display or through the encouragement they give:

All of the instructors I had, I got along with them real well, you know, they taught me good work. I usually got self respect from my instructors 'cause they appreciated the work I did, 'cause you know, I'd usually turn in pretty good work as far as like reports and things like that. And instructors that I had, all of them were pretty good.

Instructors' performance can play a vital role in the success or failure of the student:

The teachers did such an excellent job, and being in the later years of my life, I had matured to the aspect where I knew what I had to do to learn, and what I wanted to be, almost the number one student.

In summary, respondents felt as if instructors at Richland taught at a professional level. Overall treatment of students was appreciated when the student was willing to work, and instructors were very helpful to students.

Classroom Seating Location

Force will never be without a place to sit down.

Nigeria
Quotations in Black. p. 231

Personal experience has convinced me that seating location in the classroom is very important to student success. The following responses were made by individuals as to their choice of seating in a certain location in the classroom: 1) ability to hear the instructor, 2) ability to see the overhead or chalkboard, and 3) ability to focus on the instruction rather than be distracted by other students at the back of the classroom.

Poor hearing or sight were reasons for sitting at the front of the classroom:
Well, a lot of times I sit where ever I can find a seat. But a lot of times I sit at the front. I wear glasses and I sit at the front because it is easier for me to see the board. I am able to hear the teacher. If I am at the back of the room, it is because the only available seat.

Another respondent felt as if he could be influenced with what goes on in the back of the room and he needed to be actively involved up front to be part of the class:

I always sat in the front in the middle and I encouraged all African Americans or just all students in general. I tutor a lot of students while I was out there, but I've always felt that by being up front not allowing yourself to be influenced by what the back of the room can bring on; having a position of clarity where you can hear and see, it worked out well for me. And it continued by being in the front; it made you always feel like you were involved and had to be part of what was going on in the class.

Noteworthy, of the response below is its similarity to the one above:

I would sit in front because I want to hear what the teacher had to say. I would want to have a relationship with the teacher and my studies. I feel like now it's school and it's not time to play around and you learn your best when you sit near the teacher where you can listen real well. I walked in and sit right up front, you know. And then I am the only Black person in there along with this other guy, a friend of mine that comes in and he, we didn't really become friends until we got into the class but, he sat right up front with me.

Whether or not students are acquainted with one another determines where an individual will sit. "They know each other, so they sit by each other." However, African Americans will gravitate toward each other even though they may not be acquainted:

Well we all know that if we see a group of people, we tend to sway towards someone who looks like us. It just seems to be pretty normal. So in a classroom setting we tend to follow our own where they are setting, we sit. So that allows the teacher or instructor to teach on one end and not on the other end. Instead of setting in the back of the room or the end, African American males need to sit right up front. The teacher has no choice but to teach to you then.
Another respondent described his observation of grouping in a humanities class:

The only class we'd [African Americans] sit in together was humanities class. There tends to be a grouping that goes on. sit toward the front.

Another respondent said his reason for being selective in where he sat would depend on who is in the classroom population. He explains that he would try and stay away from disruptive individuals, so that he is not labeled with the disruptive group:

Usually when I sit in the classroom, I guess I'm nervous, that some of them kind of crowd up in the back or else some of them will talk a little bit or something like that, but I mean it would depend on who's in the population in the classroom because I wouldn't want to sit with a group of people who would be disruptive. Because you know, when they're disruptive if you're sitting with that group, then you're being grouped in with them as far as like when that teacher looks back there, he sees that group and all of you are disruptive and that kind of thing.

He explained his reasons why he might make the choice to sit at the back of the classroom based on the company he was near:

It just depends on who it is. Now if it's some people that's like they're actually partying or serious about school. They might be back in that group trying as far as doing something instructive, you know, trying to make sure if you need help with something or discussing a topic in class or something like that. So it just depends. I mean in high school you know, maybe there, but we're all adults now. So you know, you can't be sitting back there having fun and all that. Sitting in the back of the classroom is fine as long as you're not back there socializing all of the time.

Another individual said he would sit in any seat that would be available:

I'd sit in the front. I'd sit in the third row, I'd sit in the back row. It just depended on when I got to class and what was available
A third respondent went through a succession of changes, sitting in the front in one class and sitting in the back in another without any logical explanation other than that the class was full:

I went through like a series of changes while I was here at Richland. I think my first semester as I think back, I chose English 101 and also Sociology 110. In one class I sat in the front and the other class I sat in the back. You know because, why did I sit in the back. I don't know. I think the class was full or whatever.

The race of the instructor sometimes plays a role in determining whether Black students would sit up front. Oftentimes when the instructor is Black, African American students sit in the front. On the other hand, when the instructor is White they congregate at the back of the classroom:

I noticed where Black kids would sit for seating. Now when I was in a class with White instructors, most would sit in the back of the class. With a Black instructor, most would sit in the front. Now why, I don't know.

Sitting at the back of the classroom was more comfortable for others, and an added plus was that instructors many times were less likely to call on students who sat at the back of the classroom:

I would walk in there as of the first day of class I would it in the back. As the semester progressed and we would really begin discussion and I felt more comfortable in the back. All eyes weren't staring at me like being in the front of the class. I have to get comfortable in that classroom setting. I see all these other students around me in particular, White students who love the front. They jump for the front. Well it's no problem with me I want to go in the back. Other African Americans sat in the back with me. I don't know why we sat in back. Well, we're all hiding from the instructor. The embarrassment that might occur throughout the semester. That was some of my reasons. Like I said, I was a student who excelled, but I still sat in the back of my classrooms.

Fear of giving an incorrect answer in front of the class, and the resulting embarrassment, was a common reason for sitting at the rear of the classroom:
I think I'm still the type of person that usually sits way in the back because I still have a sense about me, some of it's boring and stuff. Or I'll have to leave today cause he's not talking about situations. I would have good standing with that teacher. I talk to them and come back, so that they can understand why I left or what's going on. I guess when I did certain things like that they think that I'm not trying.

While this same student advises others to sit at the front, he continues to point out why the back of the classroom is best for him:

I've encouraged many people if they have a [good] attention span to sit up close. They'll be afraid to be called on. So I sat in the back so I wouldn't be called on, or you might be called on more because you are sitting in back. To sit up front, you have to stay alert, you will learn more you know in the course of class. I found I just can't stand all the pressure. I don't see anybody when I turn around. I personally do sit in the back. If you do sit up closer the teacher's attention is more directed towards you. You'll do better in class and probably get better grades. I would recommend that to those who have the attention span than some of us who don't.

In summary, several respondents had varying reasons for sitting at the front of the classroom, as well as the back, but more positive reasons for sitting at the front of the classroom were that it is better to see and hear, one is less likely to be ignored, and teachers recognize the student's interest in the course.

Support Group (s)

No one rises to low expectations.

Les Brown
Famous Black Quotations, p. 13

Support groups were most important for the students in order to sustain their commitment to school with the numerous obstacles they faced. One individual stated that family members were very instrumental in supporting him. His brother, and especially his wife, were particularly helpful.
I'd have to say first and foremost my wife. My family has been very supportive; being the youngest of five boys, all my brothers always emotionally fed me that usual line about how the youngest becomes the oldest. I felt that a lot. All the individuals around me continue to support me.

For another, his father supported him physically and mentally. His dad took care of utilities, put food on the table, encouraged him with his education, supported him financially, and urged his best efforts.

He put food on the table, a roof over his family's head. Dad would take care in those aspects and so that was a graduating point for him. He's got a job now, he's comfortable and is doing things he wants to do now in life. He's always told us to do better to move on and get an education, and not really have to work with my body, but with my mind. I would always hear my dad say you've got to do better than I did. They want nothing in return. They want to support me financially, emotionally, and in every kind of way to move on and better and stuff, and move on and be the best I can. I've been pushed in that way by them, and it's a good push, not a forceful one. Not in any kind of negative way at all.

In addition to his parents, another graduate credited the support of RCC staff and faculty.

I can say like [humanities professor] and [a secretary] who works in the library. Even [the dean of my division]. Just people that encouraged me and saying that I can do it encouraged me to do better. My parents have supported me since day one. They encouraged me to stay in, saying you can do this. Don't let people get to you. I'm still in school until I graduate. My mom has a bachelors degree.

In fact, several teachers were instrumental in helping him put things in perspective and setting his direction.

There have been quite a few of those that have been teachers here. They have been very good as far as when I was employed here at [a college academic service. We talked on like the basis of relationships and some of the things I was going through. Problems of separating that from my schooling and dealt with those situations and talked to me. From that standpoint of an academic standing where you dealt with those issues. It really helped me out if I was making decisions understanding the female side
or you know thoughts that may be coming through that maybe I hadn't thought of. That's just one case of understanding things.

One professor advised him about personal relationships, and to be open-minded about his personal views. Another person, an administrator, appeared to be all business, but was like a kid at heart:

My English professor] has helped me as far as the issue of I hear a lot of people say that I'm racist, but I don't believe that, you know. I just have a very strong view. But she has helped me understand the context I have to put things. [The administrator] is one of those type of people of no nonsense. They just have this aura about her like I'm all business, don't come to me with your jokes. Kind of like this intimidation factor every time I see them pass up, but everyone knows they're like a kid at heart.

For some, groups, as well as specific individuals, were instrumental as support to persist to graduation.

Well the church. One of the role models for myself because like I said the only reason I went to Richland was because I was out of work. So by going to church I talked to different people. By talking to people at church basically they told me, you're never too old to go to school and were using examples of some people I had never known that had went back to school. By my wife being a teacher and in the education field she would basically support me a 110% to go back.

One man did cite the availability of state and federal government support, but stated the Black Community was not taking advantage of it.

There is no set way to touch all the people that need to be touched. But there are government organizations in Decatur in the Black Community, we're not taking advantage of it. In each sector of Decatur, there is a Black program, free, you know, but you just don't see Black people taking advantage and that goes back to the parents, you know.

In summary, support groups, emerged as one of the most important themes in helping a student complete their schooling. Grandfathers, grandmothers,
fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, church groups, and even the government were very important to the students' success.

Role Models

We have a stake in educating and socializing our children. But if we really expect to see a change, men have to get involved, because it takes a Black man to prepare a Black boy for whatever he's going to face out there.

Spencer Holland
My Soul Looks Back, p. 13

Roles models, and their personal achievements in the face of great obstacles, were important to the pursuit of academic success. If others were successful before them, students could identify with their struggles, and continue working toward their own goals. As one student said, African Americans need to be informed about African American achievements, not only locally, but globally.

I think we need some kind of out reach program and that would give the children a chance to see that there are not just one or two, or a handful of African Americans who are in businesses, because the world is so big. But when you pick up a book that describes the achievements of African Americans as a whole, males and females, there is a large number. They need to know that there is a number here at home and it needs to start at home.

Another individual thought how young people should view older people who graduate as role models; just as when he graduated at an older age, younger students looked at him as a role model:

I think any time that Black kids look at older people that graduate from college, they are looking at a role model. I felt like that when I graduated at 40 years old, like some of the kids that had graduated that were 21 and they would look at me as one.

Role models were found among political leaders, and among RCC staff and faculty.
Carol Mosley Braun was running for office and different things like that nature going on in Decatur. But it helped me to deal with the surroundings because I had people that had gone before me that laid a trail. They provided me information. The same way the counselors had worked with me. They pointed me in a direction I believed resulted in me achieving my associates degree. The people were positive. They provided me opportunities to meet professionals [my sociology professor], [GED teacher], [my English professor], [my history teacher] and a few others that maybe I'm not able to recall at this time.

One graduate, who has become a role model himself, said that it is up to older Blacks to be role models for the young people in the community. He described the role he plays in the community to make a difference:

It’s up to us, you know, to come out of it and that’s why me as an individual, I try to do some things with the younger Blacks in my community to make a difference there to let them know that hey, all your peers and role models aren’t drug dealers and some of your role models don’t need to be identified. You just have to know who they are and seek out what they’re offering for you. But it’s not a thing where a president or a White community can come in and give you what they have and all of a sudden it makes you a better person; no it doesn’t work like that.

As a grandparent, he is trying to instill positive things in his grandchildren to encourage them to not fight, and to let them know that when he is away from home, he is at work.

I've got my grandkids and they're with me most of the time at my home rather than their parents, and I think what I do with them is or what I hope that's going on in their minds, is when grandpa is sitting there taking all the time after a twelve hour day on the job, and sing songs with them about how positive or the good things that they can do and encourage them or just little things.

He believes that the positive influence he has on his grandchildren will carry over into their adult lives. He believes the negative incidents that are happening in society are not only affecting the people involved, but affect the community and society as a whole:
I think that's going to transfer in later life to them when they, see, we even talk about where grandpa is all day, and they'll say, "he's at work; yeah grandpa's at work." And in that I ask them, Do you think grandpa works all day and he wants to come home and you guys are fighting?" And that kind of makes them identify with being bad with, you know, how they're affecting other people, rather than, just being bad. And that's what's going on in our community. We see it on rap songs and everything. People are just into themselves, they're not thinking about how they affect other people. And that's you know, if you can identify that then you can start changing the key and turning it later on.

This grandfather explains that some people are motivated because there was someone in their lives who was a role model, and it had great influence.

And you see an individual that's motivated, he's motivated for a reason. He didn't just grow up in a negative atmosphere and because somebody motivated them. Even though my mother died when I was seven, she was a very motivated woman. She went back to college with five boys. You know my uncles that surround me, [a Black renowned artists], another [a Black businessman] and, so you know, I was around a lot of motivated people. And hopefully I can pass that on to my kids and hopefully the [Neighborhood Association] can pass that on to its members.

In summary, a role model can be anyone who encourages an individual to become motivated, focused, and to build confidence in helping students to become successful. Family, teachers, business persons, and other various professionals all play a vital role in shaping an individual's future. Without adequate encouragement one may fail to see their own potential and be doomed to a life of failure or mediocrity. A role model may be the most influential person in an individual's life by leading them to a positive path.
Chapter IV

Whether you like it or not the millions are here, and here they will remain. If you do not lift them up, they will pull you down....Education must not simply teach work-it must teach life.

W.E.B. DuBois
My Soul Looks Back, p. 113

Mentors

Mentors are important since they help an individual to do 'hands on' work. Without mentors, however, student success might be severely limited. One particular mentor impacted a graduate's life both personally and politically.

Actually I've really ran into or talked with several professional people, but one stands out and that is [a businessman]. I worked with him through a couple tutorial programs though [one of the districts] and he's always been there for professional advice and political advice. He's pretty much been my mentor since I've been here. He's really shown me the way. I also like to recognize the [congregation of the church I attend], and working with children between the ages of 5 and 18, providing information for the high school seniors who are thinking about attending college.

Another graduate became involved in helping other students, and gave advice about who students should choose as a mentor:

I wasn't in the student mentor group. They had different requirements that I maybe didn't meet at the time. But what I would do is, if they had a problem with speech that's where I took control. I told them if there was anybody who needed help with speech, I would be willing to do that. So because of a certain requirement I did not meet, I was not able to be in the program. And I do say as far as Blacks, choose someone Black. More than likely, if you choose a Black teacher they probably have gone through some of the issues that you're facing now and that you're having problems with, so they are going to be able to tell you how they've overcome theirs.
Some members of the [area neighborhood association] have helped in the past by tutoring young people, and their good example supports one man's belief that successful people should give back to the community.

So I was really busy and then besides that I still had the [area neighborhood association] which we teach karate classes every Saturday morning and we developed into a three day program there; besides tutoring. Well, look around you, look at people who are successful, those people that are successful try and give back, you know. If you're in a position to where you can help out 5 or 6 Black males, you know that ratio 6 to 1; but if I can help six, every one Black person that's successful helps six, then we can alleviate these things until we can get education built up so they can help themselves.

"No matter what accomplishments you make, somebody helps you."

(Quotations in Black, 1981)

Mentors can be the key for young people to understand that in their learning, they need to give back to society. Life needs to be reciprocal. If one successful Black individual is able to give to another, possibly the meaning of exchange can again be discovered. Perhaps, the impact will be a positive sequence of people offering one another encouragement in circular progression. Many avenues in life may direct a person down the wrong path, but having a friend may keep an individual on the right path.

**Student Involvement in the college Community**

One of the most striking evidences of the failure of higher education among Negroes is their estrangement from the masses, the very people upon whom [they] must eventually count for carrying out a program of progress.

Carter G. Woodson

*My Soul Looks Back*, p. 112

Involvement in college clubs seem to be one of the most positive experiences in the lives of college students. If one is an active participant, the involvement can
enhance the person's life, as well as others. Engaging in club activities often generates commitment to community through volunteerism, gives one a sense of purpose, and builds self-esteem in the individual. One person encouraged African American males to be involved in clubs to create interest in the college community.

I think that they should get involved in clubs. I think that clubs could create things of interest for the African Americans. I was involved in the film club. I know that I keep going back to film, but even at a community college, there has to be more things of interest for the student.

Another respondent listed several clubs as well as student government, the Student Senate and valued his involvement in them.

They should be maybe in a Christian Club because Christianity is the morals and values in the Bible, what [we] should stand and live on. There is the Christian Club, the Black Student Association, it is not just in helping Blacks, but it is interested in helping all groups. Any body is welcome into the BSA. Phi Theta Kappa, that's another group of high grade average students and helps give them benefits and scholarships to go anywhere, and especially the Student Senate. I was in Senate and they gave us experience in the governing of the school and you get to hear first-hand and be a part of whatever events they set-up, whatever they do. You can see more of what they do for the school. [There are] a lot of good clubs.

Clearly, membership in student clubs encourages student involvement, and some become leaders, where they enhance their leadership ability and stretch themselves in ways they never imagined.

Basically it's just people trying to do something for the school, and it's that I feel it gives you a chance to be a leader. I was Vice President of [the clubs] and it gives people a chance to look at you and see and vote on and make votes and whoever gets picked. You're supposed to get up there and try to be something that you would not have a chance to be somewhere else. You have a chance to be a leader and it is a good experience. It strengthens you, just the experience. You get to know how the club works. You learn what people expect from you and (you learn how to do good and the mistakes you make). But all in all, it is a good experience.
Clubs are an important instrument which allows students to become an integral part of the college. When students are having a difficult time, club involvement helps through the rough times.

Okay, uh, well, [three clubs at RCC] have been helpful. I really wouldn't put it under the category of programs, but as different clubs or whatever. They help us keep our heads up when maybe things got rough around here.

Several respondents felt as though clubs helped in bringing people together, and maybe even kept students from feeling isolated or excluded.

The clubs which I am involved in are trying to work together and not as separate groups. Well as far as clubs, I don't think that anyone has been rejected in any kind of way or excluded from it. It is their choice in whether they join or not.

Still another person said clubs made him feel as though he was a part of the college community, protecting him from feelings of isolation:

I would not say that I have felt isolated or anything. You need to be in some club or group to feel a part of something. Because a lot of times around here it's not a big campus and people sometimes stay to themselves. So you really have to be a part of something, to be a part of a group. When you have it, it is okay.

Enough money to actively promote club events was a problem. With additional funds, information could be disseminated to Black students to help in their retention, according to one young club leader.

Based on funding for different activities here that might have interest of African American students, I think that with the money the Black Student Association receives each semester, it's not quite enough to disseminate information to positive individuals who come to Richland. Every semester I've been here we start with an abundance of African American males and by the end of the semester they're gone. I'm just trying to say that maybe if there were money that was allocated to our group like other groups disseminate information through whatever news they use. Maybe we could use this money in a positive way as far as providing information, counseling,
things of that nature for people, primarily for people who are entering college for the first time; African American males.

He went on to point out how [one club] helped him in understanding his social surroundings, and how the school system operated:

The [club] helped me have political understanding and have a social understanding of the surroundings of Decatur and the school itself. I walked into college about 2 1/2 years ago and I met somebody that I went to high school with that was a member of [the club] and there were a lot of different things going on at that time. It was [this club] I learned how to maybe comprehend the system of attaining education. As far as securing Pell Grants, I knew that I could get a Pell Grant. I went my first semester paying out of my pocket. I didn't get a Pell Grant. I got a Pell Grant, but didn't receive it until November after somebody brought it to my attention that I could maybe qualify for a Pell Grant. [This club] has been in my corner all the way.

Involvement in [a literary club] was instrumental in establishing an avenue to meet people, equipping him for speech tournaments, helping in creating writing styles, and in aiding him academically overall:

Forensics program, speech tournaments, it helped me out. I was getting out, finding other outlets and stuff in the world besides just sports. Coming here, and there were no sports. I got into that cause I like talking apparently and so I got into doing this and it was a lot of fun. Meeting people, talking, and problems I had in speaking, I got over them. It helped me out academically because I had a lot of problems writing my paper, but during forensics and speaking you have to speak in the style the paper was written in, in outline form. Your opening statement, breaking down.

In summary, the majority of respondents believed that clubs promoted positive involvement in RCC and they encouraged African Americans males to join. Being involved in a club can also provide leadership opportunities for a student if he becomes a club officer.
Educational Purpose

Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.

Malcolm X
My Soul Looks Back, p. 114

Many comments were made by respondents about African American males not understanding their educational purpose. Another category in this theme was that African American males do not view RCC as a college. They have not adjusted their attitudes towards college, and maintain same attitudes they had while attending high school. For several others, RCC was a place to gain new job skills, knowledge, or just marking time until they could be called back from a lay-off.

Overall, African American males seem not to understand the value of schooling, and come to college ill-equipped for the long-haul, resulting in academic failure.

One respondent brought out the importance of a high school diploma.

If they don't have a high school diploma they throw out your application. They don't even consider them, they just throw them away. It's getting to where a high school diploma means a lot, that's because the drop-out rate is so high.

Some African American males congregate in a certain public lounge area of the college, and fail to take advantage of the learning experiences available in exchange for the immediate pleasure of social identification.

They were just congregating and spending the whole day just in the lounge area, and then trying to catch up around test time. I think they thought that was something positive, especially with one of the biggest things that felt negative out there at Richland was that they had an area where, in this case, African Americas were congregating and not going to class. A lot of time, it's just not a standard college atmosphere. It's more of a lecture than a teaching
experience. And they took advantage of that. They figured well I can go to class when I get ready, pass a test, and I'll make it through. But they forgot about the knowledge part. You've got to have that to pass the test.

African American males who do not take advantage of their educational opportunity at Richland short change themselves by being unprepared for life's challenges:

They are talking here, playing cards, whatever, and they are not really mingling as much and it's been like that, and I've been here three years, it's been like that ever since I've been here. And when they go to class it's the same way. Plus it takes away a lot of lost time that's just sitting up in the pit in between classes where you don't have anything to do, just sitting up there and time goes by you, not learning anything and you get lazy.

One individual emphasized that having the lounge area in a highly visible location actually hindered students' learning. Recreation became primary instead of secondary on many students' agenda:

Well, see now like myself again. What we're speaking of here is young African Americans and I feel like that setting of Richland in the lobby, they have T.V. set out in front of the library. I feel that is the biggest mistake in this school. They show recreation before the kids even get to class. I feel that they (Administration) should at least move the T.V. to the end of the building, not at the front of the building.

All students have their own little cliques, but one particular group [American Americans] seems to be congregating in the lounge area more than others:

They join in their own little group and they all have their own little fun in their own ways, but you see more of one group hanging out more than you see the other.

For many, RCC appears to be a place to get together and socialize with a latitude of freedom that was not available at the high school level.

Often, job layoffs were the incentive for students to initiate their college experiences.
You know, from the time I got laid-off and had to go back to school, I had things that I had normally done to keep my mind conscious about staying alert. I was displaced from the job and immediately became eligible for what is called the Trade Adjustment Act for Dislocated Workers, and this was when I was laid-off from [former job].

For many of these Black males, community college attendance seemed to be a way to fill in the wait time between jobs.

Now I would say by being on the community college level, most of the Black males when I came to college have had jobs before they came to the community college and I really believe that a lot of them go to school long enough to find a job or get called back from the layoff. I really think that the Black female, they are looking for a better career. I think some of the Black males come out is like I said, they are laid-off of work, in between, look for job, you know.

Community college attendance may be used as a "filler" because many African American males do not understand the value of education. Further, many such students are not college prepared, and may lose grant money because of lack of preparation:

I don't think they understand the value of education, that is a problem and that is an age old problem that I've seen for years. I have been around this college for years, in and out. My perspective is that there are large numbers of African Americans who learn about this grant, and after they receive this check, they don't come back. But then you have a small percentage that get into this situation of getting classes that they don't need and are not equipped and not ready for the classes and they end up dropping and are put on probation or suspension. This means they will have to fund their next semester out of their own pocket in order to prove themselves worthy of being back on the grant and getting back into it.

The school setting is what this individual talks about. He believes that Richland does not give one the feeling of being at college, and students bring their high school attitudes with them:

I've often said myself that the school setting doesn't give you a feeling of college. You know a lot of the kids coming out of high school seem to come
here with the type of attitude and bringing high school attitudes with them. Most of them I have seen are the African Americans.

Colin Powell's following quote expresses the sentiments of several study participants as to how the student must possess a hunger to be self-motivated to succeed:

Let racism be a problem to someone else...Let it drag them down. Don't use it as an excuse for your own shortcomings.

Colin Powell  
Famous Black Quotations, p. 11

Because unless in our family growing up we have this hunger to know more and learn more, we have to initiate, we have to self motivate ourselves to go out and research to get the information that we need to succeed. African American families are not like others who have this knowledge available to them in their homes. Actually it starts in the home. When you don't have parents to insist that you do your lessons, you do your homework, you tend to run wild and hang-out and listen to other African Americans. And you go off hearing that the White man this, and the White man that. He held me back and he's holding us back and these are all negative. Truth, you know as much truth as it may be, when you hear too much negative things, it just doesn't do anything for yourself to want to get up and do anything.

For one man, a willingness to stand strong, with the flexibility to admit a wrong, was closely related to not giving up his pursuit of his schooling.

I had always been told that I was a person who did not back down from anything, and don't give up. I have often looked back and thought of the small things that I have done as a child compared to what I do now and it holds true and I guess that is part of my makeup. I will stand toe to toe with you until I was either found right or found wrong and if I was found wrong there was no problem. I know I am going to learn something in the process.

If an individual does not have drive, then they may not have purpose:

My drive was film, I am interested in film. Other than my family, film is my drive. There might be African Americans out there who don't have a purpose, they may not have a drive. I was a junior or senior in high school when I got any interest in film. I don't know. I guess I am lucky because
when I came out here I knew what I wanted to do. They may not have had anything that they wanted to do specific and I knew what I wanted to do.

Discipline, as well as drive, seems to be key for maintaining the energy necessary to achieve educational goals.

If you're trying to be successful in something you have to have the discipline to continue to do it and to push yourself forward. And then do whether it's workshops or whatnot to educate yourself so you're equipped. You've got the essential weapons. They are out here, they get the good idea and they start out good. I'm gonna go out here and get a good education. They are not prepared to go through the long haul. They feel my friends are out here doing this and doing that and I'm doing nothing. They're not looking at it as a long term goal.

Visualizing the steps necessary to attain an educational goal appears to be an element that many African Americans are lacking. As one man said, to be successful one has to set their minds to the task.

We just stay in the same jobs. But for Whites more is just visual in life for them. We have not set our minds towards one direction and thrown everything we had at it. .......; when I sit in class my number one objective is to learn and I applied myself as any other student would. I just studied the material. I just did what was required of me. There is a lot of responsibilities, but I think at this level that you shouldn't have to motivate students to get them to come to class. They should be wanting that education on their own.

Personal goals must be visualized, as well as the steps to attain them.

It's very difficult to not see or finish in line and run a good race and that's where we are. We see a lane but it just goes on forever. So the average Afro-American when he takes off the block, he sees lanes but says, how far can I run? I'm just running. He doesn't visualize. I believe only a few visualize they can make it.

In order to succeed, a student has to possess a mind set to not only do what is required of him, but also go beyond the requirement:

I tried to make sure I had it before I went into the classroom. I don't want to sit there and try to wonder about what's going on in one class. I want to be
able to have it so that when we go to the next topic, whether I understand it or not, I've got a head start.

Inspiration arises from many sources, and strengthened one man to keep a positive outlook:

It's kind of interesting. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. I tried to listen and follow whenever He came into my life and showed me truth. The truth shall make you free. You can always be positive and have a positive outlook. Not man or woman holds your destiny. He gave us control down here and so I think anyone can be positive.

Instead of hand-outs, Blacks should not have the mentality that society owes them something, but should have the dignity to work hard and make accomplishments on their own:

Everybody wants to be happy, everybody wants to do this, but nobody realizes that it takes schooling and work to get to the places they want to be. Black males want everything quick and do not want to really work for it the way they should because they feel like this country owes them something. I'm a business owner myself. My wife and I just don't want to sit around and do nothing and work for other people the rest of our lives. We want to stand up and try and be leaders ourselves. The Black male have to stop listening to everything everyone has to say about us and start having some dignity and some hope in themselves.

African Americans may feel as though White society is obligated to rectify the wrongs inflicted upon African Americans because of past treatment, but past wrongs do not excuse them from working hard to move up the socioeconomic ladder:

This country true enough, we have not been treated not so great in the past of course, but maybe to a certain extent in some ways they do owe us some things, but it is not an excuse for us to not go on about ourselves, get our education, own businesses, own things so that we can have our place in society. And we can't do that by just asking everybody for a hand-out.
African American males sometimes have responsibilities which extend beyond the realm of school, such as the task of caring for a child. Other times instant gratification becomes their goal to satisfy a material or physical need.

I've been passed over by many women cause I'm taking care of my son. So all my money goes for my responsibilities. I don't have any money to be dating and all that kind of stuff. So you just got to be willing to sacrifice. I think women have an easier time staying more focused and I think these men get caught up in materialism. They just want to be 'Large' and 'Quick'. The don't want to make the sacrifice to get there and do the things that will make getting 'Large' and staying 'Large'. I'm broke now--you know, but I have a plan, I know when I get out--that you know, I'll have mine. Instant gratification, that's what it is.

Women also play a role in young men wanting to become 'large' too quick. African American men know that in order to be popular with women is to be 'large', so indirectly a woman's materialistic need influences the Black male to become involved in illegal activities in order to provide themselves and their mate with materialism.

A lot of young Blacks that are in my age group are coming out of high school, they want to be 'Large' too quick, 'cause they know that's what the women like 'cause the women are "material" too. But the women don't get caught up with materialism as easy as the men. It was there, but I guess I kind of had my drive more controlled, 'cause you know, I feel like this: If you don't have that drive controlled and the drive controls you, then you'll do whatever to satisfy that drive. As far as like some of these brothers, they get out here and sell their drugs and they're obvious, they turn over money, turn over money, but if you end up in jail, it just isn't worth it. I just...I like money and everything just as much as the next person, but I just don't let that aspect rule my thinking.

One man felt the attention he got while growing up deterred him from pursuing a deviant lifestyle:

You know, maybe I got enough attention to where I just didn't want to get caught up in all that. And then again I'm kind of a low key person anyway and don't want all eyes on me 'cause everybody's in your business. You got to
be focused—'cause if someone is out there to distract a brother, you know, they see other brothers on T.V. on the videos doing this and that and brothers out on the street, you know. But I mean if they’re doing something positive to get all that, that’s fine. But if they’re not, is it really worth it? Who knows? You’re just all out of focus. You’re just living day to day instead of looking to the future.

Students who lack focus will lag behind because they will not understand their educational purpose. One who lacks this characteristic will fall further behind because their experience will be insufficient compared to those who understand their aim.

It seems to be a break in the flow of current so to speak, so where the electricity is not flowing through all students. It seems to always be a break somewhere. It seems as though only certain students are picking up the electrifying experience I guess you could say. It’s mainly the younger students. Because any student that is returning is usually returning for a purpose and that is to achieve something. I think the overall picture is we need to try to find something to energize everyone. You know not 100 volts over here and 220 over here, we need the same amount of current to flow though everyone. If everyone is energized, then they can feel good about themselves and feel as though they are getting something out of this college.

The factory jobs once found in our industrial society have peaked and society has continued to change. Individuals who are not prepared to manage information will not be qualified for jobs in the changing economy:

Well, I’d like to say that you figure by the year 2000, the total population which is 80% will be performance jobs. Unless you’re gifted and or some kind of athlete or have some God-given talent to perform or entertain, you must got to college.

The 21st century is rapidly approaching, African American men need to have a focus in how to prepare for the changing world economy. Their aim does not have to be "high" initially, but take one step at one time. There needs to be adjustments in their lives, in order to clarity direction. These men need a vision with realities in
which they can reach their goals. Recognizing that change needs to be taking place today and "never give up" is the key for all African American men in their pursuit to attain any goal in which they are striving.

**Student Support Programs**

One of the most striking evidences of the failure of higher education among Negroes is their estrangement from the masses, the very people upon whom [they] must eventually count for carrying out a program of progress.

*Carter G. Woodson*

*My Soul Looks Back*, p. 112

In all colleges or universities, student support programs are important, otherwise student academic success is limited. Entering students sometimes find it difficult to adjust to new surroundings and lack awareness of college support services available to them, however, Richland Community College has helped solve the problem by employing Student Mentors and promoting the Transfer Center.

Student Mentors are used to greet incoming students, offering their services as a guide, go between with the professor, and to give aid and comfort if necessary. The Transfer Center is a service offered by the Student Development Service which gives transfer information to all students at the college.

When I first got here I needed help from them and when I needed help right then, there was somebody there who knew the information and could help me out immediately. All I had to do was simply got to someone who knew about the information and ask where I could get help. They pointed me to a Student Mentor and from there we set up times where we met and I was doing just fine. Another program which helped me was the Transfer Center. I didn’t know certain classes weren’t going to transfer and a lot of us come through school, start taking courses, just to be taking courses and don’t know what’s transferable. And you can end up getting so many credits and only about half of them will transfer to another college or university. The transfer program came in and it helped out.
Students sometimes find it very difficult financially to stay in school to continue their education. The Financial Aid office has probably been a savior for many students. As the following remarks suggest.

The biggest thing that helped me was Financial Aid 'cause I was a independent student and you know I always got pretty good assistance from Financial Aid as far as the people who worked there. If I had questions they answer them and everything got done on time. I really didn't have any financial aid problem. It could have been financially strenuous if there things hadn't been in place. So I mean it; out there, the help is out there for you to get through school, you just got to take advantage of it.

Tutoring Programs were essential to many student's success, and one man explained how helpful the staff in the Tutoring program, Learning Center, and library were to him.

I enjoyed their tutoring program, then with their learning center, you could go in at any time. Of course, they always had four or five teachers available for you and the questions that you had. Besides the Learning Center I think their library was also set-up for tutoring all through the day and what not. By them being there, that helped me out tremendously.

Often programs are not primary for the student. However, several students indicated that they are vital to student success. Research participants stated the Transfer Center and Financial Aid office were key in their success at RCC. One man stated more tutoring programs were required and more advertisement was needed for more visibility to the students.

**College Academic Requirements**

Educate your sons and daughters, send them to school and show them that besides the cartridge box, the ballot box, and the jury box, you have also the knowledge box.

Frederick Douglass
*My Soul Looks Back*, p. 110
Requirements are different for certain classes and sometimes there is a need for the student to have prerequisite skills. However, the academic advisor may fail to ask if a person has the skills that are needed for success in a class:

I felt like the English classes I had to take, they never mentioned that I had to type to take those classes. I was lucky that in law enforcement we had two computer classes which were Q106 and Q107, so when I took English 101, I was able to type. Some of the others that took it had to drop the class because they weren't able to type. I think more emphasis should be put on basic typewriters, keyboards, and so on.

Another respondent indicated that because of recent curriculum changes, it is taking students longer to earn an associates degree.

Just recently as you know they changed the math requirements from you needing Math 098, which used to be Math 115. They changed the requirement that now says you need Math 116 to graduate from Richland Community College. What I see that this problem is that it's creating an environment where African Americans are taking a little bit longer getting an associate degree, because of what they have to take. Certain people have to take Math 098, 090, 089, 091, or whatever. So by the time they get through taking those five or six math classes just to get up to Math 116, it's four years.

A curriculum change not only create more work for the student to complete, but also a feeling of apprehension and being overwhelmed. The end result could be that students begin to doubt their overall abilities.

It's kind of frightening when you look at being able to comprehend everything else and it takes you a little bit longer to comprehend the math. As far as a time period, for instance in my situation, you know I had to take the 092. Then when I got done with 092, I took a break and it just so happened when I took a break in between my semester they changed the requirements and then once they changed the requirements I had to take Math 098. From what I have heard from different people, it's only math with requirement changes. I don't know how to rectify the situation or anything, but maybe it's with the individuals. But I noticed since I've been here, people are just running scared of Math 098 and 116.
Several students reported that African American males are having a difficult time with math.

I'm really not familiar with the whole student population, but for most African American males I talked to, they're having trouble with Math 115 conversion to Math 098. I'm not saying they can't do the math, but it's another semester.

Student complaints seem to be present at all institutions in changing the curriculum to keep up with societal needs. However, these adaptations are sometimes difficult for faculty/staff and especially for students.

I feel Richland Community College has a large number of remedial courses. When they (African American males) are not prepared for college level courses. Often the sensitivity of the instructors is talked about, but we also have to take the responsibility on our own. I can sympathize with the instructors because at this level you are to be prepared to handle the volume of homework and for the note taking. You should know how to take notes. You can take this problem back to high school, junior high, and home. So we need to find a place to start.

In summary, curriculum changes seem to be a never ending concern for students. The two main areas creating anxiety for African American students are math and English. Since the changes which have recently occurred in math requirements, many students have expressed concern about fear of failure, apprehension toward being delayed due to lack of preparation by high schools, and the amount of money and time invested in preparatory courses. When students who cannot type are placed in writing intensive courses [English 101], it soon becomes a hardship for them.
Recommendations

Getting through isn't a laughing matter. If they drop out, they're going to miss out.

Bill Cosby
My Soul Looks Back, p. 112

Recommendations were made by research participants as to how they could better be assisted in improving their learning experience at RCC. These following are some remarks from respondents. One respondent believed it to be important to find a professional that is of the same race to show them what will be important and beneficial in making their adjustment to college life:

I would recommend them to do as it would help them, the first day you get here, me personally, I would say you need to find someone of your race that's in a higher status, as well as a teacher, a counselor of some sort. Find out what it is here I need to know that no one has told me.

Richland has numerous students who have recently graduated from high school. They come to this institution without going to student orientation, and not having insight about how the college functions.

I think a little more sternness needs to be set down. If we had somebody going round and going up and saying why aren't you there and talking with them, a simple embarrassment in front of their peers. It seems to be a great motivator for the Black male.

Administrators, faculty, and staff are busy performing their tasks and many times have very little interest in student involvement, according to the impression of this respondent.

I think that school executives should get together and use their office and start coming of their high pedestal and get down here and start working with the student bodies themselves. That is what they are there for. They are not just there to run the schools of business and everything. They should become part of the student body.
One graduate disclosed that he believes many African American males have a concept "of just getting by". He implied that many men go through K-12 just being average, and when they enter college the attitude just carries over. As these students continue their education, schooling becomes more difficult and "average" will no longer be good enough:

They believe average is good. I believe many African American males, high school and college get through certain courses. What I've learned is all they want is to see average is good and average is all they want to be. Well, we need a "C" to graduate and that's it. Some college students believe they can succeed in graduate school. I would tell them strive for the best, concentrate. There is more than being average. They have to go in understanding what they're there for. You've got to go and you've got to apply all the skills that Richland can give you. At this point there are so many that just don't have what it takes and if that sounds abrupt, it's true.

Even with the abundance of tutors, there still seems not to be enough to accommodate all the students. And some students are afraid to ask for help:

More tutoring programs. I mean a lot of them I think. They (African Americans males) want to do it. They want to do it and can't do the work. A lot of them are just afraid to ask for help. A lot of them don't know where to go and get help. I think if the programs were stressed more, advertised more, letting them know that they are there.

Many students enroll in colleges or universities without a clear sense of their career goals. They assign much of the selecting of their career up to the academic counselor. One man suggested that students need to do their homework. They should do library research and reference the career(s) they have in mind. He said it was valuable to find someone who can give them advice and make recommendations about the career field.

I would say know exactly what you want to do. I think that is the key. Before you go to Richland have a good idea what field you want to go into. Talk to somebody in that field. Go to the library and research the field. Try
to read about someone you know who is in the field. When you get to Richland find the curriculum you are interested in. See just how full the curriculum you can take. See if there is a sister school that you can transfer to. Find out which school the curriculum will transfer so that you can continue in the major; specialize in the field you are in. In my case in law enforcement, Western Illinois would be the sister school, if I wanted to continue in law enforcement. Talk to someone who is doing it.

Research participants had several recommendations for incoming African American male students. Most importantly, get acquainted with a teacher, counselor, or other staff member of the same race in order for that person to mentor you. Administration, faculty, and staff should get more involved with interacting with the students, to make RCC a more friendly atmosphere in helping African American males. Tutoring programs need to be advertised more and additional programs needs to be in place to help students. And one graduate recommended that African American males should research their career fields before ever enrolling at RCC for transfer reasons. Further, they should make contact with a professional in the field for suggestions and guidance.
Chapter V

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

We must always go the second mile. When we go the first mile, we simply do what is required of us. It is when we go the second mile that excellence is achieved and minor miracles happen.

Deborah McGriff
My Soul Looks Back, p. 112

McGriff’s description of what is required of African Americans paints a vivid portrait of many young people who arrive at the door of opportunity, but never enter the door. Many of these individuals enter institutions of higher learning with a lack of basic academic skills, [reading, writing, and arithmetic]. Their possibilities of building a sound educational foundation and unlocking the knowledge that waits behind the door of opportunity is the greatest during their early years of school. By the time these African Americans reach college level, they must strain all of the resources available to them to reach the key which will unlock the door. Unfortunately, many are unaware that they have the resources within them, or that the resources are available to them, if only they will ask.

The college experience for many of these African Americans is most likely to result in academic failure. Chief among the reasons for failure are deficiencies in the basic skills, poor study habits, tardiness, failure to attend class regularly, inattentiveness in the classroom, the belief that "real men do not ask for help," and identifying with a peer group which does not support the goals of learning. Given
these numerous hurdles, one can understand why the "first mile" may be all that many students can complete, let alone achieve a second mile.

In America, the Negro stands alone as a race. No people has born oppression like him, and no race has been so much imposed upon. Whatever progress he makes, it must be mainly by his own efforts.

William Wells-Brown  
My Soul Looks Back, p. 112

Despite tremendous odds, African American males have made substantial contributions to American society, in the present as well as in the past. The thirteen African American males who attended and successfully graduated from Richland Community College from 1993 to 1995 are to be commended for their accomplishments. The purpose of this study was to identify what personal, family, community, and institutional supports these men used to reach their academic goal. The findings of this study support the observation that African American males have many challenges to deal with in order to succeed in higher education.

Participant Characteristics

Participants for this study were identified by personnel in the Office of Student Development Services at Richland Community College. These thirteen men ranged in age from 20 to 52 (seven were from 20 to 30, and six were from 31 to 52), and met the following criteria: 1) graduated from Richland Community College between 1993 to 1995, and 2) were African American males.

Methodology

Tape-recorded person-to-person interviews were utilized to study the success experiences of these African American males because of their highly subjective
nature. Advantages of the person-to-person interview is that the responses are in much greater depth, and because the interviewer is present, the opportunity to clarify any confusing questions and to probe incomplete responses is available (Cargan & Ballatine, 1994). Interviews were conducted during the 1995 fall semester. Participants were contacted first by letter, and then by telephone by the secretary in the RCC Transfer Center. An explanation of the purpose for the research was given and a time was arranged for the researcher to meet the participant for a person-to-person interview. An informed consent form agreeing to participate in the research was signed by each participant prior to the interview.

The interview questions were designed to allow participants the greatest possible range of responses and expression dealing with their perceptions of African American male life experiences, perceptions of racism, and RCC institutional policies and procedures which effected their persistence to graduation. Six general, open-ended questions provided the basic structure for the interview.

1. What problems academically do you feel you have encountered at RCC?
2. Can you identify any feelings of isolation or separation from majority campus community?
3. Please identify any feelings of exclusion, subtle, or overt acts that give you the feeling of not being accepted and supported by the college community.
4. How have programs that are in place at RCC helped you achieve your goal of graduating?
5. What support group(s) have helped you to academically achieve your goals, i.e. church, parents, friends, siblings, teachers, or other role models?
6. What are some recommendations that you have to offer that will help other African American males succeed at RCC?

Data Analysis

Recorded verbal data were transcribed into hard copy, and a coding schema was devised to identify topics, categories, and themes (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). The coding schema was verified by two second readers, members of the Field Study Committee, who compared the schema on selected interview transcripts with their own topical classifications. Initial interviews were analyzed for topics and categories while subsequent interviews were being arranged and taken. Themes which emerged from this analysis of the verbal data were academic counselor communication/involvement, prejudice/isolation, teacher/student reaction, classroom seating location, support group(s), role models, mentors, student involvement in the college community, college academic requirements, educational purpose, student support programs, and recommendations for African American males attending RCC.

Results and Conclusions

Certain themes emerged more than others as research progressed. As I interviewed individuals, I found that the African American men who were most successful academically were the ones who sat up front, participated in classroom discussions, and made themselves acquainted with the professor. Another theme that was consistently mentioned was membership in college clubs. Students who became club members and participated regularly seemed to become a part of the college community, which gave them a sense of involvement and stability. Club
involvement made them aware of the organization of the institution, and some of these African American males became club officers, which provided them with leadership experience. Club membership appeared to be an effective way to repel feelings of prejudice and isolation.

Another theme that came to the forefront was the positive impact which support groups had upon these men. The encouragement of family members was often times are the driving force behind an individual's success. Fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, and other close relatives offer support through encouragement as well as personal example.

Often these family members were successful business persons who set a standard that a young person could identify. Success breeds success. Other individuals not only received verbal encouragement, but monetary support, and family members were a dependable source of sound advice. From the point of view of this researcher, the presence of good support groups was one of the most important aspects in these students' success.

Throughout history the African American male has dealt with personal and institutional prejudice, and have often experienced feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and apathy from an early age as a result of life experiences. In numerous cases African American men become school drop-outs mentally, emotionally, and eventually physically. Countless times Black males have come to RCC with attitudes they have maintained from their public school days, where feelings of isolation and hopelessness were originated. Generally, their attitude upon college entrance is expressed as one of attainment. "I have made it, and now I
can enjoy the student (social) life." Yes, they have attained college in a physical sense, but for many the mental and emotional attitudes left over from high school days leaves them too immature to handle the rigorous academic demands of the college experience. Such students can often be seen congregating and socializing in the student lounge area. These are young men who do not have a clear vision of their educational purpose.

Particularly at the community college level, African American males appear to believe that higher education operates similar to their K-12 experience. If your name is on the class roster and you show up (come to class every now and then), you will be passed on to the next course. These individuals do not have a solid grasp of how higher education functions. Other motives, such as attending long enough to receive their Pell Grant check, may be present. Richland Community College is obligated to identify and intervene with these individuals before they have become a victim of the bureaucracy, and reclaim those who are salvageable. A formal placement testing process should be developed for all students who enter RCC, so that more efficient placement in writing and mathematics courses can be instituted.

Not only is formal placement testing process recommended, but a formal mentoring program should be considered. Mentors would be able to monitor new students in problem areas identified during placement testing, and in aspects of the twelve themes which emerged from this study particularly tardiness, absenteeism, classroom behavior, interaction with the instructor, and managing free time. Time management, in particular, is essential for the success of all college students.
For Richland Community college to continue the quest for excellence for all racial groups, ethnic groups, and gender, a commitment must be made to a coordinated effort to identify and intervene with those individuals, especially African American males, who might be support to graduation. Many African American males who enter RCC possess the belief that they can succeed. However, if their academic and psychological foundation has been diminished from an early age, and educational values in the family are weak, they soon may experience discouragement and disconnection. If no positive role models exist for these students to follow in order to pave the way for them to become successful students in higher education, RCC must find a way to create them among willing faculty, staff, and students.
Bibliography


APPENDIX A

LETTER
Dear Richland Alumni:

I am conducting a study of African American males who have graduated from Richland Community College. The name of the study is “Models of Excellence for African American Males at Richland Community College.” I view you and others who have graduated from Richland as role models for those who will follow, and need assistance along the way.

Your help is needed in completing this study. I would like to set-up an interview with you at Richland Community College at your earliest convenience. The interview will consist of me asking you seven questions which relate to your perception of Richland, and what part Richland played in helping you reaching your educational goals. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. A representative from Richland’s Transfer Center will be contacting you in a few days to schedule an appointment for us to meet. If you are unable to meet with me at Richland perhaps we can arrange to meet elsewhere.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter and I look forward to our interview. In the meantime if you have questions or concerns, please contact me at (217) 875-7200, Ext. 393.

Sincerely,

Lue McGee
Assistant Professor
APPENDIX B

CLIENT CONSENT
CLIENT CONSENT TO MAKE AUDIOTAPE RECORDING OF FIELD STUDY INTERVIEWS.

I hereby consent to having an interview with Lue McGee recorded on audio tapes for a field study on "Models of Excellence for African American Males at Richland Community College." I understand that the tape will contain no means of identifying me, such as my full name, and that the interviewer will erase the tape(s) no more than one month after the completion of the study. I also understand that I can withdraw this permission record at any time.

The tape is for the purpose of gaining information for a study done on the "African American Males at Richland Community College." This tape is subject to the confidentiality safeguards found in the APA Code of Ethics.

Client Signature (Guardian/Parent)  ____________  Date  ____________

Interviewer  ____________  Date  ____________
APPENDIX C

CODING
STUDENT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AT A TWO YEAR COLLEGE:

PERSON TO PERSON INTERVIEWS AS A TECHNIQUE IN COLLECTING DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>College Clubs</td>
<td>Student organizations within the college (French Club).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Personal Prejudice</td>
<td>Prejudice that comes directly from a person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Institutional Prejudice</td>
<td>Prejudice that is within an institution (hiring all White teachers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Student Maturity</td>
<td>Students who are older.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>Role Models</td>
<td>People who are role models (parents, teachers, friends, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Immediate Tasks</td>
<td>Tasks that are immediate (daily assignments).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VG</td>
<td>Visualize Goals</td>
<td>Students who see where they want to be in the future (teacher, physician, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>College Temporary</td>
<td>Students who come to college temporarily. (Students who come to college who have been laid-off).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>College Purpose</td>
<td>Students whose purpose is to graduate from college, or to gain a certificate to be promoted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Student Placement</td>
<td>A placement center where incoming students can be tested and placed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TO</td>
<td>Tutor Opportunity</td>
<td>A center for student to get help in class assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Educational Importance</td>
<td>Students who know why college is going to be important in the 21st century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>Student Observance</td>
<td>Student observation in the classroom. (Teacher, student).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Student Attentiveness</td>
<td>Student classroom participation, active and passive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Professor Teach</td>
<td>Who the professor teach to. (Style of the professor.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>Academic Observation</td>
<td>The academic advisor observing the academic needs of the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Needs Oriented</td>
<td>The needs of the student upon entering the college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
<td>Students Limited</td>
<td>Accessing the limitations of the student being advised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Student Rapport</td>
<td>Gaining and maintaining a rapport of the entering student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE</td>
<td>Life Experience</td>
<td>Accessing the life experiences of the entering student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>Balance Life</td>
<td>Student involvement in outside classroom activities. (Clubs, community involvement, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Student Stability</td>
<td>Access personal life that may conflict with college life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>Strict Inclusion</td>
<td>An excellent teacher is a kind of teacher who helps the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>outside of the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Location-for-Action</td>
<td>The lounge area is a place where students frequent to socialize.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE</td>
<td>Cause-Effect</td>
<td>Being older usually results in students being more serious.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Rationale-for-Student</td>
<td>Being out of work is a reason for going to college.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Means-End</td>
<td>Students graduating from Richland Community College are able to continue their education at a four year institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Sense of Purpose</td>
<td>Student has knowledge about why they are attending college.</td>
</tr>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Involvement of Student</td>
<td>Student involvement in college/community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>Programs like the reading/writing center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>New Courses</td>
<td>Courses which the student believe will be helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Location of Student</td>
<td>The seating which the student chooses in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Professor Reaction</td>
<td>How the professor reacts to the student in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REC</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>Recommendations to help other students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Student Motivation</td>
<td>The motivation of the student.</td>
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<td>AI</td>
<td>Adult Influence</td>
<td>Adult influence for student.</td>
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<td>College Requirements</td>
<td>Requirements for graduation.</td>
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<td>-----</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<td>RC</td>
<td>Remedial Courses</td>
<td>Math &amp; English Prep Courses.</td>
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<td>LSL</td>
<td>Limited Social Life</td>
<td>Social life of student.</td>
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<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Mentors for students.</td>
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<td>PI</td>
<td>Professional Involvement</td>
<td>Involvement of professionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Student Determination</td>
<td>Determination of the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Cur</td>
<td>College Curriculum</td>
<td>Curriculum setup by college.</td>
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<td>SRE</td>
<td>Student Reaction</td>
<td>Student Reaction to Professor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Society Expectation</td>
<td>Society’s expectations of student accomplishments.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>