

3

The authors of this chapter present the Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model as a means of predicting student success for community college men of color.

Applying the Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model to the Student Experiences of Men of Color

Frank Harris III, J. Luke Wood

For nearly two decades, there has been a proliferation of attention among scholars, educational leaders, and policymakers about postsecondary access and success for men of color. Although most of this attention has been directed toward Black and Latino men enrolled at 4-year institutions where attrition rates among these men are alarmingly high, stakeholders have begun to raise questions about men of color who enroll at 2-year institutions. The concern about men of color at 2-year institutions has been fueled, in part, by the recognition that community colleges serve the overwhelming majority of men of color who participate in postsecondary education. In our home state of California, for example, 82% of Black, 81% of Latino, 79% of Native American, and 68% of Filipino men who were enrolled in public postsecondary education in 2010 attended community colleges (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2011).

Despite the heavy concentration of men of color in community colleges, theoretical and conceptual models that explain their development and success have been virtually absent from the published scholarship. Consequently, both scholars and practitioners have relied heavily on student success models that prioritize 4-year institutional contexts and overlook race/ethnicity, gender, and other salient pieces in the student success puzzle for men of color in community colleges. In an effort to address this gap in the body of work on men of color in community colleges, in this chapter, we propose the Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) Model. The SEO model accounts for the primary factors affecting the success of men of color in community colleges, highlighting interactions between societal, environmental, intrapersonal, and campus-based factors that influence

student success outcomes for these men. We offer this model as a framework to inform educational research and practice on this population. In the next section of this chapter, we discuss the background and development of the SEO model and its key constructs. After that, we discuss interactions among the key constructs. We conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of practical implications of the model.

Background and Development of the SEO Model

The SEO emerged from *The Five Domains: A Conceptual Model of Black Male Success in Community Colleges* (Wood & Harris, in press). The five domains model focuses exclusively on Black male student success in community colleges and was based on an interdisciplinary synthesis of relevant literature and research on the experiences of Black men in postsecondary education, community college student success, Black masculinity, and Black identity development. Based on our review and synthesis of this work, we identified five factors that have been prioritized in scholarly discussions of the experiences and outcomes of Black men in community colleges: social factors, noncognitive factors, academic factors, environmental factors, and institutional factors. Our examination of these factors, interactions among them, and their impact on academic success for Black men in community colleges led to the development of the *Five Domains* model.

Although the five domains model is the precursor to the SEO model, it differs in two notable respects. First, the SEO model has broader application in that it accounts for the experiences and outcomes of men of color (e.g., Black, Latino, Native American, and Southeast Asian), whereas the five domains model focuses exclusively on Black men. Second, in addition to being informed by the published literature and research on men of color, the SEO model has been field tested and is grounded empirically by initial findings from the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM)—a comprehensive needs assessment instrument that has been completed by nearly 4,000 male community college students across 27 colleges. As a result, the SEO model is more parsimonious than its predecessor in that it is composed of the most salient factors that are known to influence student success outcomes for men of color in community colleges and is a more accurate portrayal of the relationships and interactions between these factors.

In addition to aforementioned literature and research on student success for men of color in community colleges, the SEO model is also informed by Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outputs (IEO) model. Astin proposed the IEO model to account for input variables or prior educational experiences and characteristics that students bring to the educational environment. By doing so, educators are better able to measure how educational variables affect student outcomes. According to Astin, "inputs" are the personal qualities and characteristics students bring to an educational program, the "environment" includes students' actual experiences

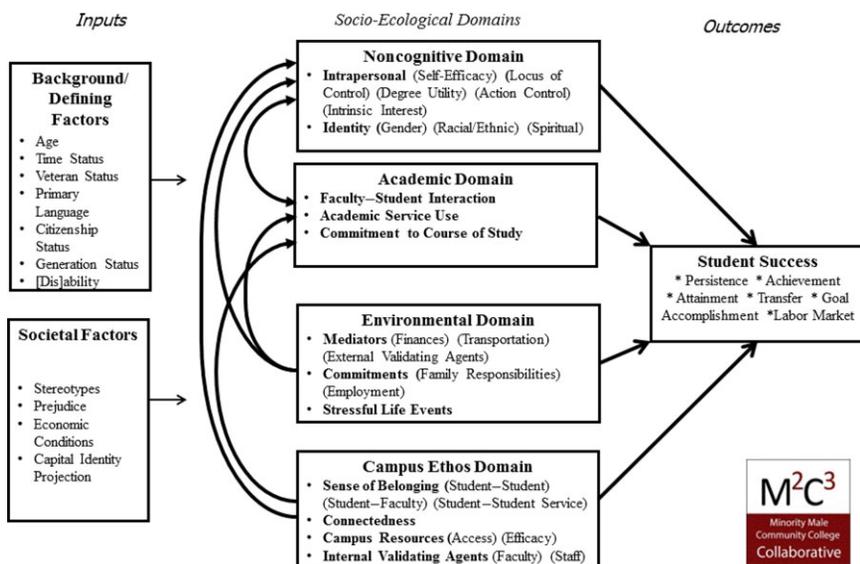
during the educational program, and “outputs” are the “talents” educators hope students develop by way of their involvement in the program (p. 18). Although the constructs of the SEO model are not completely analogous to the constructs of the IEO model, there are some clear similarities between the two.

Key Constructs of the SEO Model

As shown in Figure 3.1, the SEO model is composed of seven key constructs, each of which is depicted in rectangular boxes.

Inputs. The first two constructs in the SEO model—*background/defining and societal factors*—are described as “inputs” in that they account for the factors and experiences that occur for men of color prior to matriculation to community college. These factors influence their success. Both students and educators have little control over these factors; yet, they can have an observable impact on student success for men of color if they are ignored or not taken into account in educational programming and service delivery. Student demographics (e.g., age, citizenship status, primary language), enrollment status (e.g., part-time, full-time), and levels of academic preparation are considered background/defining factors in the SEO model. A host of background/defining factors are consistently noted in the published scholarship as having a significant influence on student success outcomes for men of color, notably their age (Hagedorn, Maxwell, &

Figure 3.1. Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) Model



Hampton, 2001), educational goals (Mason, 1998), and academic preparation (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Perrakis, 2008).

Societal factors are also depicted as inputs in the SEO model. This factor captures the larger sociocultural forces that lead men of color to community colleges and the internalized societal messages that shape perceptions of men of color. For example, it is widely documented that most men of color who participate in postsecondary education are enrolled at a community college and a critical mass of those who attend 4-year institutions began at a community college (Beginning Postsecondary Students, 2009). The myriad of reasons men of color are disproportionately represented in community colleges (when compared to those who are enrolled at 4-year institutions) cannot be adequately accounted for in one model. However, some reasons may be economic in nature, whereas others may be attributed to the accessibility of community colleges. Racist stereotypes and prejudices about men of color, including academic inferiority, negative dispositions toward education, athletic prowess, and even criminal behavior, can lead educators and even men of color themselves to question the extent to which they belong and can succeed in community college (Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson, 2009; Harper, 2009; Wood & Turner, 2010).

Socio-ecological Domains. The four rectangular boxes positioned in the middle of the model represent its core and account for the experiences and interactions occurring subsequent to the matriculation of men of color to community colleges. These are factors that influence their success. Consistent with the language we used in our presentation of the five domains model (Wood & Harris, in press), each of these domains is presented in the model as discrete spheres of activity, and relationships and interactions among them are fluid and dynamic. Moreover, we described these domains as “socio-ecological” because they capture the interplay between salient sociological and environmental factors that interact and shape student success outcomes for men of color in community colleges. These domains include the noncognitive domain, the academic domain, the environmental domain, and the campus ethos domain.

The *noncognitive domain* is composed of variables that are primarily psychosocial and captures students’ emotional and affective responses to social contexts and the person–environment interactions that take place within the institution. Intrapersonal factors, or those that are situated within the individual, are also important noncognitive considerations that influence student success outcomes for men of color. For instance, the extent to which students believe they are capable of being successful in college (self-efficacy), the amount of personal control they assume they have for their success (locus of control), the value they place on obtaining a college degree or certificate (degree utility), and the energy and focus they invest toward their academic endeavors (action control) all come into play in shaping student success outcomes for men of color.

With regard to identity, given the SEO's model's focus on men of color, the interaction between race/ethnicity and gender, notably masculinity, must also be acknowledged. For men of color, the intersection between race and gender can complicate their college experiences in unique ways. Harris and Harper (2008) noted that men are socialized to view school settings as feminine spaces and, thus, may view academic activities like studying and participating in class as contradictory to the values they have learned to associate with masculinity. The conflict between masculinity and schooling can be experienced intensely for men from low-income underserved backgrounds who often feel pressure to fulfill the role of breadwinner in their homes. Thus, sacrificing earnings in order to attend school can be a difficult decision for these students.

The salience of racial/ethnic and gender identity in the experiences and outcomes of men of color in community colleges is reported in several key studies. For example, Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010) and Sutherland (2011) attributed negative experiences and interactions men of color reported having with faculty and administrators to judgments they made about these students based on their appearances (e.g., baggy clothes, tattoos, braided hair). Wood and Essien-Wood (2012) and Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010) also noted how internalized identity conflicts served as barriers to success in community college. Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010) found that for men of color, socialization as "breadwinners" led them to prioritize work and earning money over their engagement in academic endeavors. Wood and Essien-Wood (2012) found that men of color who embraced capitalistic values and measured their self-worth by their ability to acquire material wealth and possessions were likely to experience negative outcomes in community college.

The *academic domain* consists of student interactions with faculty, student use of academic services, their commitment to their course of study, and other variables that are directly related to student academic experiences and outcomes. The interactions of students with faculty have been widely considered in the recent research on men of color in community colleges (e.g., Bush, Bush, & Wilcoxson 2009; Flowers, 2006; Wood, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2010). Generally, this research has concluded that although these interactions are integral to the success of men of color, they are reluctant to pursue faculty interaction because they have the perception that faculty are unsupportive and uncaring. The use of academic services such as tutoring and academic advising by men of color, (Glenn, 2003; Mason, 1998), and the extent to which they are committed to a course of study (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Mason, 1998), have also been identified as key variables within the academic domain that influences men of color and their success in community college.

The *environmental domain* of the SEO model captures important student commitments that occur outside of the institution. These commitments may direct the time, attention, and other resources of men of color

away from their academic pursuits. External commitments that have been identified as especially salient among men of color are family responsibilities and employment (Mason, 1998). Stressful life events, such as a divorce, death in the family, eviction/homelessness, or job loss, are also situated in the environmental domain because they have been identified by scholars as having a negative impact on persistence in community college (Freeman & Huggans, 2009; Wood & Williams, 2013). Although external commitments and stressful life events are believed to negatively influence the success of men of color in community college, these commitments and events can be mediated by targeted support. For example, financial resources (e.g., grants, scholarships, book vouchers) that reduce the need to work full time off campus and transportation resources that reduce commuting time and make it easier for students to get to and from campus, can mediate the negative effects that external commitments may have on engagement and success in college for men of color.

Validating agents outside of campus who provide encouragement and support to students, especially during challenging times, are also important external mediators that can counteract the negative effects of environmental commitments. Rendón (1994) described validation as “an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents to foster academic and interpersonal development” (p. 44). Rendón argued that validating agents are especially critical for college persistence and success for *nontraditional students*, as they often have doubts about their abilities to be successful in college. Nontraditional students include those from low-income backgrounds, historically underrepresented and underserved students, and students who are financially independent.

In the SEO model, we distinguish internal and external validating agents. Internal validating agents (which are situated in the campus ethos domain and discussed later in this chapter) are faculty, administrators, and student services professionals who help students navigate the institution, teach them how to access campus resources, and provide information to help them succeed in college. Conversely, external validating agents can be significant others, family members, friends, and other individuals in students’ lives who provide encouragement and the support necessary for students to be successful in college. External validation was described as “outside encouragement” in the persistence model for African American male urban community college students proposed by Mason (1998). According to Mason, “the more support the student had received from outside the college (this was generally found to be from a significant female—mother, girlfriend, wife), the more likely the student was to persist” (p. 758). For example, a family member who provides childcare while a student attends classes, a boss who allows a student to adjust his work schedule to allow for ample study time or a partner who offers messages of praise and encouragement are examples of external validating agents. Given the

pull effect that environmental factors can have on student success (or lack thereof) in community college, external validation is prioritized and shown as a mediator in the environmental domain of the SEO model.

In the *campus ethos* domain, institutional policies, programs, campus resources, and day-to-day practices that shape the way students experience and succeed in community college are presented. Many traditional models of student success place the onus for student success solely on students and disregard the role that institutional leaders and educators play in facilitating success. The SEO model underscores the institution's responsibility in fostering a culture that is conducive to learning and success for men of color and situate the factors that are necessary to do so in the campus ethos domain. Our conceptualization of student success is informed by Bensimon's (2007) concepts of equity-mindedness and institutional responsibility. According to Bensimon, equity-minded practitioners (e.g., faculty, administrators, student services professionals) attribute outcome disparities to "institution-based dysfunctions" rather than student deficits (p. 446). Thus, when outcome inequities are viewed this way, practitioners are more likely to seek and apply strategies that focus on fixing the institution or adjusting their own practices rather than rely exclusively on strategies to remediate perceived student deficits.

Consistent with Bensimon's (2007) conceptualization, internal validating agents are positioned in the campus ethos domain of the SEO model because of the critical role they play in making campus environments more welcoming and affirming for students. Recall in our earlier discussion of Rendón's (1994) concept of validation, internal validating agents are faculty, student services staff, and even peers who support students by sharing important information, facilitating access to campus resources, eliminating structural barriers that impede student success, and communicating messages of encouragement and self determination to students. This can be especially important for men of color who may have had invalidating educational experiences and relationships throughout their schooling.

A sense of belonging and connectedness for students to the campus are also key variables in the campus ethos domain. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), sense of belonging is a concept that "captures the individual's view of whether he or she feels included in the college community" (p. 327). Furthermore, they argued that student persistence and success in college is predicated on the extent to which students perceive the institutional environment as welcoming. Finally, Hurtado and Carter concluded that student perceptions of the campus racial climate are a salient factor for Latino students' success. To varying degrees, findings from Perrakis (2008), Gardenhire-Crooks et al. (2010), Sutherland (2011), and Wood and Turner (2010) speak to why a sense of belonging and connectedness to the campus are factors that influences student success for men of color in community colleges. Findings from these studies confirm that perceiving the campus

as accepting and affirming is paramount to men of color's willingness to engage, seek help, and establish authentic relationships with faculty, student services professionals, and other students.

Campus resources that facilitate student success in college (e.g., academic advising, career counseling, transfer services, computer labs, tutoring) are also situated in the campus ethos domain of the SEO model. Findings and insights that have emerged from our research on the experiences of men of color in community colleges confirm that campus resources need not only be available but also accessible and efficacious in order for them to have a desired impact on student success for men of color. Institutional barriers that make key resources difficult to access will reduce the likelihood that men of color will seek them. For example, if the institution is not offering academic advising at a convenient time of the day, or academic advising is accessible only in person, then students may not use that service, regardless of how helpful advising may be. As for the efficacy of campus resources, once students have the opportunity to access them, they must see them as making a positive difference in their college experiences and having a meaningful impact on their success. The accessibility and efficacy of campus resources are especially important for men of color because the social construction of masculinity encourages men to embrace an attitude of independence and to avoid vulnerability or admit weaknesses. This often results in a negative disposition toward help-seeking (Harris & Harper, 2008) and a reluctance among men to use campus support services. For example, men of color in Gardenhire-Crooks et al.'s (2010) study reported being reluctant to seek help with personal, academic and financial problems because they perceived doing so as a threat to their masculinity.

Outcomes. The outcomes variable of the SEO model is positioned at the far right. Essentially, we contend that dynamic and interdependent relationships among the key constructs of the SEO model, which take into account the sociocultural experiences and backgrounds that men of color bring with them to community college as well as the experiences and interactions that take place within the socio-ecological domains, shape student success outcomes for these students in meaningful and observable ways. As such, persistence, degree and certificate attainment, achievement as measured by grade point average, transfer, and other student goals are the result of the constructs and interactions that are depicted in the model.

Interactions Among Key Constructs of the SEO Model

The SEO model shows that each domain (i.e., noncognitive, academic, environmental, campus ethos) influences student success (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer). However, like all social phenomena, the experiences of men of color in community colleges do not occur in isolated domains. As such, the SEO model recognizes interactive relationships

between the variable domains. Five key interactive relationships are depicted in the model and discussed in this section of the chapter.

First, the campus ethos domain has an effect on the academic domain. For example, the model suggests that students' feeling of belonging and connectedness to the campus and its affiliates influences their interactions with faculty and use of campus services. Specifically, greater feelings of connectedness and belonging are associated with greater and more authentic interactions with faculty and use of academic services that are designed to enhance student success.

Second, the campus ethos domain is also seen as influencing the noncognitive domain. For instance, when students receive validation from faculty and staff, they may experience greater feelings of confidence in academic matters (self-efficacy) and can begin to internalize the worthwhileness of pursuing a college degree (degree utility). Moreover, healthy campus environments are also seen as being essential to students' identity development. For example, as noted by Harris, Palmer, and Struve (2011) campus climates that are rife with stereotypes and racism intensify negative concepts of masculinity.

Third, the environmental domain is also seen as influencing the noncognitive domain. Take for example work and family obligations; the greater a student's commitment in these areas, the more they can detract from their focus in college (action control) and conflict with their ability to reap intrinsic rewards (intrinsic interest) from their studies.

Fourth, the environmental domain interacts with the academic domain in a manner similar to its interaction with the noncognitive domain. Environmental factors (e.g., stressful life events, limited financial resources, transportation challenges) can pull students away from relationships with faculty, inhibit their ability to use campus services, and detract from their commitment to academic pursuits. The influence of the environmental domain on the academic and noncognitive domains is particularly salient, given that many institutions struggle to address external challenges in students' lives. For example, colleges may often balk at addressing environmental challenges because (a) they occur external to the institution and are perceived as outside of the institution's locus of control; and (b) they typically require a substantial investment of institutional resources (e.g., scholarships, bus passes, on-campus childcare, free textbooks). However, based on the SEO model, the environmental domain largely has an effect on student success through the academic and noncognitive domains, both of which are within an institution's locus of control.

Finally, the authors of the SEO model recognize the interplay between the academic domain and the noncognitive domain, suggesting there is a mutual, bidirectional exchange between the two. For instance, faculty-student interactions can shape a student's self-efficacy and perceptions of the utility of college. However, self-efficacy and degree utility can then shape

future interactions with other faculty members. The same can be said for the effect of academic service use on these intrapersonal factors.

Conclusion

Given that the SEO model is informed by the published scholarship on men of color in community colleges and from data that were collected from nearly 4,000 male community college students, its application in practice and future research studies of this population is potentially far-reaching. Fully unpacking how the model can be applied is beyond the scope and purpose of this chapter. However, we encourage educators who are positioned to facilitate the success of men of color by way of teaching, designing programs, delivering student services, and developing institutional policies, to consider the key constructs and interactions that are presented in the model. Colleges that rely on minority male initiatives to enable student success will also likely find the SEO model useful in informing these interventions. At a minimum, these constructs should be the basis of campus-based assessment efforts. The CCSM and the Community College Student Success Inventory (see Harris & Wood, 2014; Wood & Harris, 2013) are two campus-based assessment tools we have developed that are aligned with the SEO model. The SEO model can also inform professional development and other efforts to build practitioners' capacities to serve men of color responsibly and equitably. Finally, beyond the practical implications of the SEO model, scholars who study the experiences and outcomes of men of color should also consider it in future inquiries on this population.

References

- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Beginning Postsecondary Students. (2009). *Reason enrolled 2004 to transfer to four year college (yes) by community college student 6-year retention and attainment 2009, for race/ethnicity. Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Bensimon, E. M. (2007). The underestimated significance of practitioner knowledge in the scholarship of student success. *Review of Higher Education*, 30, 441–469.
- Bush, E. C., Bush, L., & Wilcoxson, D. (2009). One initiative at a time: A look at emerging African American male programs in the California community college system. In H. T. Frierson, W. Pearson, Jr., & J. H. Wyche (Eds.), *Black American males in higher education: Diminishing proportions* (pp. 253–270). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group.
- California Postsecondary Education Commission (2011). *Proportion of men of color enrolled in California's public postsecondary institutions*. Sacramento, CA: California Postsecondary Education Commission.
- Flowers, L. A. (2006). Effects of attending a two-year institution on African American males' academic and social integration in the first year of college. *Teachers College Record*, 108, 267–286.
- Freeman, T. L., & Huggans, M. A. (2009). Persistence of African-American male community college students in engineering. In H. T. Frierson, W. Pearson, Jr., &

- J. H. Wyche (Eds.), *Black American males in higher education: Diminishing proportions* (pp. 229–251). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group.
- Gardenhire-Crooks, A., Collado, H., Martin, K., Castro, A., Brock, T., & Orr, G. (2010). *Terms of engagement: Men of color discuss their experiences in community college*. New York, NY: MDRC.
- Glenn, F. S. (2003). The retention of Black male students in Texas public community colleges. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 5, 115–133.
- Hagedorn, L. S., Maxwell, W., & Hampton, P. (2001). Correlates of retention for African-American males in the community college. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3, 243–263.
- Harper, S. R. (2009). Race, interest convergence, and transfer outcomes for Black male student athletes. In L. S. Hagedorn & D. Horton, Jr., *New Directions for Community Colleges: No. 147. Student athletes and athletics* (pp. 29–37). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Harris, F., III, & Harper, S. R. (2008). Masculinities go to community college: Understanding male identity socialization and gender role conflict. In J. Lester (Ed.), *New Directions for Community Colleges: No. 142. Gendered perspectives on community colleges* (pp. 25–35). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Harris, F., III., Palmer, R. T., & Struve, L. E. (2011). “Cool posing” on campus: A qualitative study of masculinities and gender expression among Black men at a private research institution. *Journal of Negro Education*, 80(1), 47–62.
- Harris, F., III., & Wood, J. L. (2014). Community college student success inventory (CCSSI) for men of color in community colleges: Content validation summary. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(12), 1185–1192.
- Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino students’ sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70, 324–345.
- Mason, H. P. (1998). A persistence model for African American male urban community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 22, 751–760.
- Perrakis, A. I. (2008). Factors promoting academic success among African American and White male community college students. In J. Lester (Ed.), *New Directions for Community Colleges: No. 142. Gendered perspectives on community colleges* (pp. 15–23). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rendón, L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education*, 19(1), 33–51.
- Sutherland, J. A. (2011). Building an academic nation through social networks: Black immigrant men in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35, 267–279.
- Wood, J. L. (2012). Black males in the community college: Using two national datasets to examine academic and social integration. *Journal of Black Masculinity*, 2, 56–88.
- Wood, J. L., & Essien-Wood, I. R. (2012). Capital identity projection: Understanding the psychosocial effects of capitalism on Black male community college students. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 33, 984–995.
- Wood, J. L., & Harris, F., III. (2013). The Community College Survey of Men: An initial validation of the instrument’s non-cognitive outcomes construct. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 37, 333–338.
- Wood, J. L., & Harris, F., III. (in press). The “five domains”: A conceptual model of Black male success in the community college. In F. Bonner (Ed.), *Frameworks and models of Black male success: A guide for P–12 and postsecondary educators*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Wood, J. L., & Turner, C. S. V. (2010). Black males and the community college: Student perspectives on faculty and academic success. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35, 135–151.

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

FRANK HARRIS III is an associate professor in postsecondary education at San Diego State University. He received his Ed.D in Higher Education from the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education.

J. LUKE WOOD is associate professor of community college leadership at San Diego State University. He received a Ph.D in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Arizona State University.