Factors Contributing To Course Completion Among African American Male Undergraduate Students in Distance Learning Environments: A Phenomenological Study

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Intro

Increasing with substantial use predicted in future

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Poorest educational outcomes
2nd lowest completion rates
  – Bachelor’s degree or higher
• By 2050, demographics will shift
  • Half of total U.S. population will be:
    – African Americans
    – Hispanics
    – Asians

(Ortman & Guarneri, 2009)

Image credit (http://howtobuyusarealestate.com/real-estate-investing-exit-strategy-demographic-shift/)

OLE May Widen Gap

• OLE & open admissions policies have increased access
• Graduation & retention rates have decreased, especially among African American males

(Gibson, 2014; Moore, 2014)

Image credit (http://www.booksoverballs.org/product/2nd-annual-fundraiser-gala/)

• Growth in online education
• High attrition among African American males
• Demographic shift

(Flowers et al., 2014; Merrills, 2010; Stanley, 2014; Tucker, 2014)

Image credit (http://whatsyourissue.org/)
Idea

• Identify factors associated with online course completion among African American male undergraduate students

We wanted to know...

1. What economic factors are common?
2. What technologic experiences are common?
3. What academic factors are common?
4. Challenges or obstacles encountered?

Why?

• Identify least restrictive environment
• Improve educational outcomes
Research Design
Phenomenological method

Participants/Setting

- 10 African American male undergraduate students
- Successfully completed an online course
  - Administered at same university
  - Public university in the southern United States
  - 2016 Fall enrollment
    - 6961 undergraduates
      - 40% males
      - 16% African Americans

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant no.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Academic concen.</th>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
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<tr>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Junior</td>
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<tr>
<td>P2</td>
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<td>Criminal justice</td>
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<td>Business</td>
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• Research question
• Prediction
• Findings
• Recommendations

Economic Factors

I predict...

Findings

• All participants used scholarships, grants, or student loans
“I have a pre-med scholarship, and I have a federal Pell Grant.”

“I qualify for financial aid because of our income. And we only have one income. So I get the Pell Grant. And I use school loans too. It’s not a lot, so I can pay it off.”

“Scholarships are paying for college.”

**Recommended Application**

- Provide financial resources
- Include all educational technology costs

**Technologic Experiences**

I predict...
• Previous OLE experience
• Device use

Findings
• Three had previous OLE experience
• All completed 1+ computer IT courses in HS
• All used phones frequently for ED
  – Access LMS, check announcements & due dates, emails, view grades, & participate in DBs
  – Computers preferred for extensive typing

IT Course
“*I learned typing in a Word Microsoft class. Then we learned how to do Excel and other computer programs. I did pretty good. I like technology. I like computers.*”

“*In high school, I took Introduction to Business Computer Applications or IBCA. It was also a typing class.*”
Handheld Devices

“I would say I use my cell phone 50% for school use and 50% for social use.”

“I use my phone primarily. I use my phone to log in to the course and to check emails every day. But in order to submit assignments, I use my computer at home.”

“I use my cell phone, tablet, and laptop to complete online course requirements. I participate in discussion boards in the car while my wife’s driving. I can type on my phone and copy and paste it into a discussion board.”

“I usually use my phone, but sometimes it requires me to type something like a long thesis, then I use my laptop.”

“If I’m on the road and there’s Wi-Fi on the bus, I’ll use my phone since it’s easier to access. While I’m at home or school, I use my laptop or go to the school library and use the computer.”

“I use my iPad because it’s small, and I can take it anywhere. I usually do work on my iPad or even my phone. I have a laptop at my apartment, but I don’t really take it out because it’s big. But my phone is usually the one I do most of my work on.”
“I use my phone to access the course because that’s the fastest way to do it and my phone is less susceptible to freezing. If I have to type something up, I go to the computer lab or something.”

Recommended Application
• Encourage students to enroll and complete IT courses during high school
  – These courses should remain in future high school curricula

Recommended Application
• Ensure course materials are compatible with smartphones and that many activities can be completed on smartphones
  – Review online course materials through a smartphone to ensure platform design is optimized for mobile display and does not create additional barriers by its layout or structure
Findings

- Prior high academic achievement
- Continuous academic enrollment
- Subjects perceived as easy and uncomplicated
  - Subject familiar due to sufficient prior knowledge
- Preference for nonprejudicial environment
  - Avoid discrimination and anxiety

High Prior Academic Achievement

“I enrolled in college while attending high school. I transferred 46 hours and started as a junior.”

“I took AP English, AP History, pre-AP Physics, and pre-AP Calculus.”

“While in high school, I attended college. I had half a day as a high school senior and half as a college student.”
Continuous Enrollment

“I came out of high school and went straight to college.”

“I started college the summer after I graduated high school.”

“I began college during my senior year of high school.”

Subject Ease or Prior Knowledge

“To me, it’s the ease. Like if it’s a really easy class, I prefer to take it online. But if it’s really hard, I wouldn’t want to go to an online class and just fail and not understand. I want to understand.”

“You teach yourself the subject in online classes, so unless you’re smart or know it, don’t take it online. Once I dropped an Accounting class because it was really hard, so I tried it online, and I did better in the online course. But I passed the online course because I had the background knowledge of what I learned in class. So even though I failed the first time, I still gained something and applied it to the online class.”
“How I chose depends on the class. For some classes, you need somebody who knows it backwards and forwards. To tell it to you, teach it to you, and to go over it with you. The complexity of the subject plays a very critical role. There are different subjects that are a lot more difficult to learn online than face-to-face. I took a psychology class face-to-face and later took psychology online. The online course required the foundation of the face-to-face class, and the knowledge that I had from the face-to-face class was brought over. So I had a better grasp. This order seemed more beneficial to me.”

“For difficult subjects, I prefer having the teacher right there physically instead of having to learn on your own. If I’m weak in a subject, I need to take it face-to-face. Math and stuff, I need to be sitting in the classroom looking at the teacher’s face because I don’t know how to do it. Some people can read stuff, go from that. If it’s hard, I need to hear it explained to me, then I’ll be straight. But no, if it’s some writing or research, I could look at that and do that, but if it’s something that I need to break down, like math, you need to see the teacher’s face.”

“Some classes, I need to take face-to-face. Mostly like math and chemistry. Yeah, I need to take these face-to-face; I don’t want to do online. I think online will be harder for me. I need to see them face-to-face and talk with the teacher. You know, in person. It’s a strategy.”
Non-Prejudicial Environment

“In an online class, I go on my own pace. There’s no pressure to worry about who’s finishing first. When you take a test in class, people look around, see who’s finished first. When I’m online I can go at my own pace. I don’t have to worry about who’s done and who’s not done. There’s less competition.”

“I am not good speaking in front of people. I am not a good debater. Ideas don’t pop up right away, and I am not quick to argue back. The online format works for me because there’s less competition and less pressure, and it’s not time-limited, so I can sit back and think before saying why I feel a certain way about a topic.”

“It’s an open forum where everyone has the opportunity to say what they want to say. In the classroom you may not get picked. That’s being honest. In online classes, everyone has the same access. I hate to talk about all that kinda stuff. You know, race and that. But, I see fewer people of color raising their hands. Because they already know that it’s not going to happen. Now we can decide. In online classes, it takes all of those variables away. It makes you feel comfortable. No anxiety about that. I really do
"I dropped History 101. I was on my phone in class. The teacher saw me doing it and kicked me out of class. The guy next to me doing the same thing wasn’t African American, and he got to sit in class. We went and told, but nothing happened. Now I use the Internet and check the teacher. See who they are and to see if they know athletes. If they are athlete friendly, I’m more apt to take the class face-to-face. If I don’t want to be involved with a teacher, I take it online."

Recommended Application

- Promote high academic achievement during high school
- Encourage immediate college enrollment
  - May require guided assistance with college and financial aid applications

Recommended Application

- Discussion topics should be culturally inclusive and reflect ideas/events from different points of view
  - Examine current and historical events from the perspective of the oppressed or overpowered

Image credit (https://www.linkedin-makeover.com/category/linkedin-recommendations/)
Challenges/Obstacles Encountered

Findings
- Lack of professor interaction
- Lack of immediate feedback
- Lack of examples
- Lack of notifications
- Lack of teacher-directed instruction
- Lack of teacher-mediated assessments
- Poor Internet connection

Recommended Application
- Develop and distribute technologies that:
  - Provide learners with immediate assistance when requested
- Multimodal instruction when learning difficult concepts or procedures
Reduce Barriers – Increase Options

• Schedule face-to-face meetings
• Provide drop-in space
• Increase ease of contact between online students and academic support team
  – Use multiple methods such as email, phone, texting, or making an appointment with an instructor at a time that is convenient for the student

Brief Response Time is Essential

• Perhaps a system that serve as intermediaries between students and appropriate resources
  – Help ensure student’s get their academic needs were met in a timely manner
Session Evaluations Contest

- Download and open OLC Conferences mobile app
- Navigate to specific session to evaluate
- Click “Evaluate Session” at the bottom of session details screen
- Complete session evaluation*

*Each session evaluation completed (limited to one per session) = one contest entry

Five (5) $25 gift cards will be awarded to five (5) individuals

Must submit evals using the OLC Conferences mobile app or website