

CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

# programming<sup>®</sup>

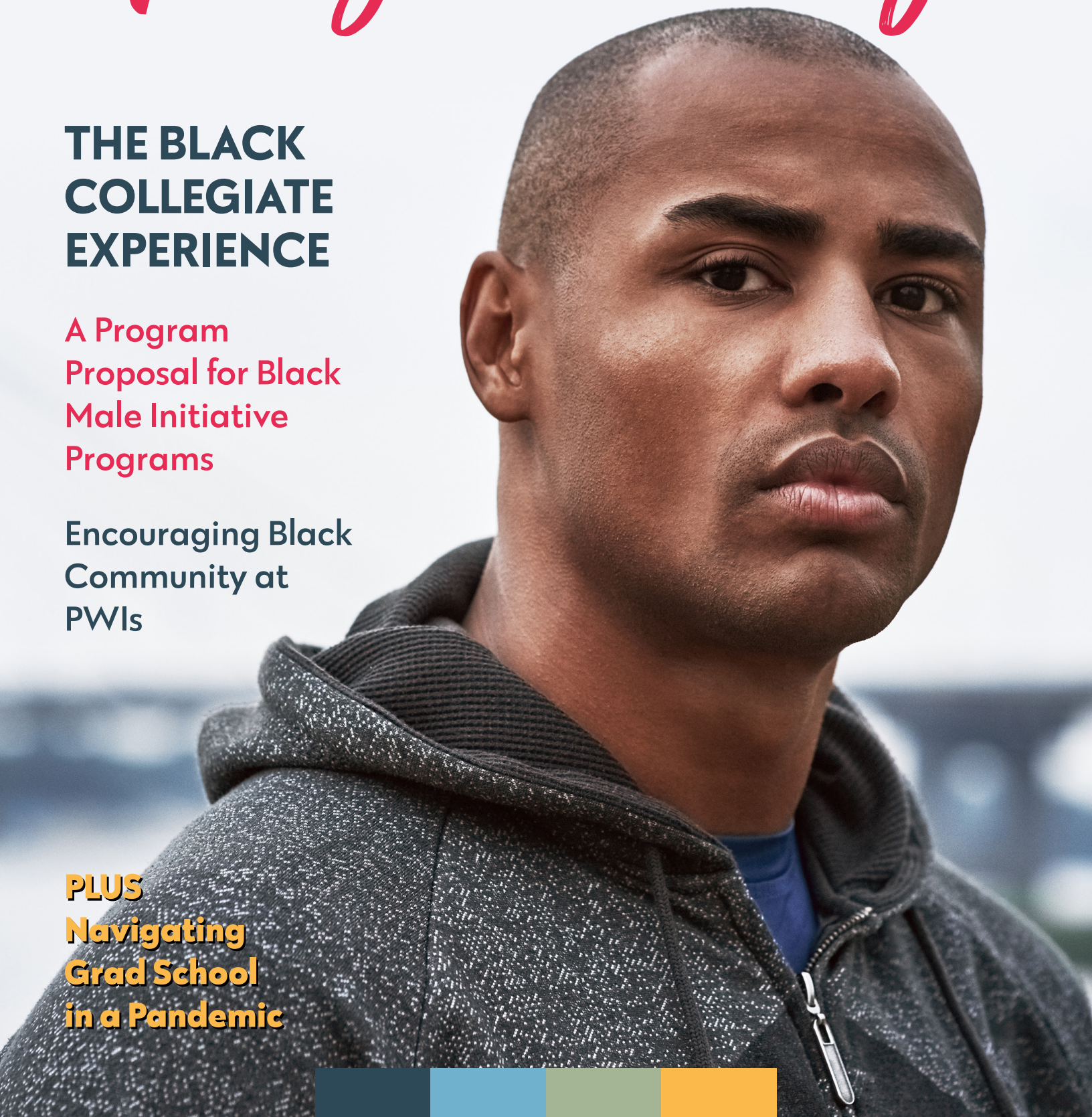
SPRING 2021

## THE BLACK COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE

A Program  
Proposal for Black  
Male Initiative  
Programs

Encouraging Black  
Community at  
PWIs

**PLUS**  
Navigating  
Grad School  
in a Pandemic



**F**INDING A SENSE OF SECURITY, safety, acceptance, and inclusion continues to be a challenge for many and at the heart of our work. We have learned from Maslow that satisfying the need to belong is a necessity to developing self-esteem and confidence, which in turn is a prerequisite for self-actualization - the motive to realize one's fullest potential. While fostering a sense of belonging has been a part of the student affairs work for the past several years, your work was challenged to meet the most fundamental needs – shelter, food, safety. For the past 12+ months student affairs professionals have worked to meet Maslow's entire pyramid of needs albeit from a virtual space, while for many putting personal needs aside. The commitment to student well-being and persistence has never been stronger. The NACA community is even more fueled to provide students with a sense of belonging.

NACA members constantly work to improve the elements of programming, so that higher education can serve as a place for developing friendships, exploration, introduction, connection, and growth through formal and informal activities with the goal of not only meeting individual student needs but promoting student persistence. Programming and student organizations not only create welcoming environments, they have the ability to serve as an entry point to finding people of similar interests and people that differ from one's self. Each academic term student leaders, staff, and associate members work together, so that small- and large-scale programs not only entertain and enlighten, but sometimes in disguise offer students the chance to explore. The exchange of laughs, competitive trivia game, reaction to a speaker, dancing together at a concert all offer students the space to connect with people of different identities. These shared experiences are invaluable to the work of the psychological and self-fulfillment needs of Maslow's pyramid. On paper meeting these needs translates into higher student retention and academic performance, but what can't be seen on paper is the effort to bring people of different identities together.

As a part of NACA's efforts to lead higher education in centering diversity, equity and inclusion a commitment the Association has made is to enhance member learning experiences through programs and resources that will increase awareness of the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusivity. We recognize that we can and should continue our work in supporting all members' efforts to create safe and inclusive programs that will help students not only find their sense of belonging but then become the leaders who foster community for others. Each day the Association's volunteers and staff are brainstorming strategies and resources that will aide in our individual and collective work. I am eager for all of you to participate in the Association's current and upcoming efforts as it requires all of us to foster college communities that welcome and support all.



**AMBER SHAVERDI  
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#### MISSION

*NACA empowers members to amplify the campus experience through inclusive learning, meaningful connections, and engaging entertainment that transforms college communities.*

#### VISION

*To create college communities where everyone belongs.*



**W**E ARE ABOUT 90 DAYS INTO 2021 and it's been a whirlwind. Believe me when I say, I will never forget the time that I spent being involved in the association, during this time in our history. A combination of emotions, challenges and opportunities have been presented to all of us this year, and it has left me thinking and grappling with many things. The one notion that I am excited about is change. Spring is coming and we can see the positive effects of change. One thing that is for sure: change is inevitable, and the trees are about to show us how we can evolve. We have lived through a contentious election season, a racial injustice epidemic and of course the current pandemic. How are you planning for re-entry? What has this past year taught you? What are you choosing to do that may be different than what you have done in the past? Who are you becoming?

This year has been a true rollercoaster ride, full of twists and turns none of us could have ever anticipated. One thing that I will take away from this experience will be the value of time. We take time for granted, thinking that tomorrow is promised. In fact, time is the most coveted opportunity that we should cherish. We should all take a moment to remind ourselves to cherish the time that we have together and be intentional about the way that we spend our time.

As we prepare for the spring, the leaves are about to show us how mother nature adapts to change. Change is inevitable and constant, but can be rather uncomfortable and uncertain. One thing I am certain about is the passion and drive that our association has for our overall greater good. As we navigate the rest of this year, we will strive to equip our membership with the necessary tools and resources to begin to re-enter, restart and re-engage our campus populations. I will never forget the lessons that 2020 brought our way. Many lessons that have taught me about resilience, intentionality and fighting for what is right and just. As we embark on a new NACA year, our association will forge ahead and continue to think strategically keeping our membership's best interest in mind.

It has been my utmost pleasure to serve an association that has given so much to me, thank you for coming along for the ride.

*Ase`, (Yorba word meaning "So it is" or "So it will be")*




**EBONY  
RAMSEY**

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“  
ONE THING  
THAT I WILL  
TAKE AWAY  
FROM THIS  
EXPERIENCE  
WILL BE  
THE VALUE  
OF TIME.  
”

## CONTRIBUTORS



**EMILY BROWN** is a graduate student and career coach serving dually-enrolled high school students at Sampson Community College (NC). She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in leadership studies from UNC Wilmington and earned her master's of education in higher education with a concentration in student affairs administration this May from UNC Greensboro.



**JARRICK BROWN** serves as the student activities coordinator for Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Jarrick also is an active NACA volunteer, serving as a general member of the National Showcase Selection Team.



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**MIKAHLA HAMMONS** is a first-generation college student and earned her Bachelor of Science in Human Services in May 2019 from Wingate University (NC). In that same year, she was recognized as NODA's Region VI Outstanding Undergraduate Student Leader after working extensively for New Student Orientation. Mikahla will be a graduate of UNC Greensboro's Master of Education in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education program in May 2021.



**JESSICA HUBERT** is a graduate student working to earn her Master of Education in Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro this May 2021. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature with a minor in Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies from Gettysburg College (PA) in 2018. She worked at Wingate University for a year, assisting in their implementation of the Thrive Residential Curriculum.



**TIMOTHY JOHNSON** is the associate director for Student Activities at Syracuse University here in Syracuse, NY. Currently he serves as the 2020-2022 Leadership Fellows coordinator, having been a past fellow in the 2017-18 cohort and a mentor for the 2019-20 class. Tim is also a member of the Diversity Advisory Group as the Leadership Fellows liaison. Tim believes that we work we do in student Activities shapes that leaders that go out in to the world to create and make change. NACA has given him the opportunity to reach across campus and share that philosophy with others in the realm of higher education.



**ANDRÉ JORDAN Jr.** is a second-year in the Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education (SAAHE) program at UNC Greensboro. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in African American and African Diaspora Studies with a minor in Political Science from UNC Greensboro in 2018. He has served as an Assistant Coordinator for Residence Life at UNC Greensboro while also working as a Graduate Assistant for Beyond Academics, a four-year certificate program targeting students who navigate the world with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.



**CATEATRA D. MALLARD** is the assistant director for Student Activities at Syracuse University located in Syracuse, NY. She has served as a leadership fellow in 2018-2019 and currently serves a Leadership Fellow mentor for the 2020-2021 cohort. She continues to volunteer within NACA as a general member for the Diversity Advisory Group (DAG) along with her provisional acceptance of the Professional Staff Educational Programs Coordinator for the Mid-Atlantic Region. Cateatra strives to be a champion for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within higher education and within NACA.



**DOMINIQUE MAYNARD** is a second-year in the Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education (SAAHE) program at UNC Greensboro. She earned her Bachelor of Science in psychology and a minor in family studies from Towson University. She served as a Student Affairs liaison graduate assistant for the 4-year certificate program, Integrative Community Studies (ICS), commonly known as Beyond Academics. Beyond Academics serves students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and provides them access to higher education.



**MAYEESA MITCHELL** is a second-year M.Ed student in the Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education (SAAHE) program at UNC Greensboro (UNCG). She earned her Bachelor of Art in Communication and Bachelor of Business Administration from High Point University. She has served in Housing & Residence Life positions at High Point University, Winston-Salem State University, and UNC Greensboro, including as the program coordinator for the Make A Difference House living-learning community at UNCG.



**JAMAR WHITFIELD** is an assistant director for the Student Involvement Office at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He provides advising, programmatic support, and leadership development initiatives for the Campus Activities Board, Student Government Association, and other student organizations. Since joining NACA in 2019, Jamar has been involved on the regional and national levels. He served as a leadership fellow in 2019-2020 and is currently on the Scholarship Selection Committee.



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# The Complexity of Black Women & The Needed Support of Black Men

CATEATRA MALLARD & TIMOTHY JOHNSON

Syracuse University



## Part 1: Reclaiming My Worth

My Blackness frightens you. My confidence threatens you. My opinion makes you uncomfortable. I've been too loud. I've been too aggressive. I haven't smiled enough. I have not submitted to your fragility. My brilliance taunts you.

Gold medalist Simone Biles, in a 2019 interview with CNN, once said "They keep asking us to do more difficulty and to give more artistry, give more skills...So we do and they don't credit it, and I don't think that's fair."

When I reflect on the experiences of being a Black woman and being a professional within the functional area of student activities in higher education it often equates and relates to Biles statement. I, more times than not, often feel myself going above and beyond trying to meet and exceed standards and expectations, that were and are systematically never meant for me to achieve. Wearing multiple hats, resting in a place of intersectionality, and operating in a day-to-day function trying to appease students, staff, leadership, and everyone else in between. A familiar interchangeable phrase and colloquialism of running a race and watching the finish line move further and further, intended for me and others that look alike to just keep running. **It's tiring. I am tired. We are tired.** It is also no secret that student activities has

been beyond interesting navigating during a global pandemic.

In a field that was not intended for "us," Black people—especially Black women—I hold on to the thought and notion of my reasoning and desire of entering this field. I rest on my capabilities of positioning myself to where students can see more Black and brown people who like me, helping them shape their educational experiences. I dream of the impact on students and professional staff that I can achieve but often met with the reality of the structural constructs and the favorite words of "politics." I aspire to have lingering contributions to a field that I am so passionate about and staying in, but at what cost?

## Professionalism

To my Shonda Rhimes and Scandal fans, this is for you! Rowan "Eli" Pope once said to his daughter Olivia Pope "You have to be twice as good as them to get half of what they have (Scandal, Season 3; Episode 1)!" Although a scripted television show, there is no lie or fallacy in this generational saying that has been passed down within the Black and African American community. As a child and young woman, I was taught and conditioned on how to "present myself" in professional settings from the way that I spoke, dressed, walked, all the way down to hairstyles and influxes in my

voice and articulation of my words. My late father PREACHED about work ethic, and always being the hardest worker in the room, with an emphasis on being smarter, ethical, so much more. My mother taught me my tonality in all aspects (even email) had to be deemed soft because the ability to confront and address any form of an issue is seen as me being an aggressor, as we all know the stereotypes of Black women being labeled aggressive. I have been prefaced to be provisionally accepted in some white spaces, as long as I play by the “unwritten rules.”

I reminisce on the quote by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie adapted by Beyonce’s *Flawless*. “You can have ambition, But not too much, You should aim to be successful, But not too successful Otherwise you will threaten the man...”

Within the realm of my current quest to this day I still find myself, overdressing to be taken seriously, trying to over-deliver within leadership, programming, and activities, being intuitive and innovative with no credit, underpaid with the educational requirements, staying extra late some days just to show my commitment to my job (watching others go home), being as accessible as possible to students, needing male validation from my Black male counterparts, repeating myself and shared ideas, to still face some level of scrutinization from “non-melaninated” counterparts who do not understand the race of life I am in with a smile on my face. I take on more volunteer positions, say yes to more committees, publish more, present more, just to be deemed worthy on paper because in the back and front of my mind this current society has indirectly said my life and well-being do not matter. Everything about who I am has value.

## Part 2: It Takes a Village

“The most DISRESPECTED person on earth is THE BLACK WOMAN! I promise you I’ll do my best to change this as much as I can and even more!! LOVE to you QUEENS all over this country and beyond!”  
—Lebron James

In times where Black culture and lives have been under severe attack, is it important for us to stand tall and stand up for each other. Black women such as Stacey Abram, Abby Phillips, LaTosha Brown, Demetria Bell Anderson and so many more, these are fantastic examples of Black women doing just that. They not only have defied the odds stacked up against them but were able to bring other like-minded people together and create spaces for them to live their truth as a tool to inspire others. As a Black man not only is this important to the well-being of Black Culture/Lives but to the world of higher education and student activities to be more specific. As mentioned in the first half of this article Black women face many complexities in this field as many other functional areas of higher education and what they need is support. From both white and POC colleagues, especially us Black men.

## What Does Support Look Like?

Support comes in many forms, that of which can be tangible and seen from both the person receiving it and those who have the ability to witness it. Then there is support that comes in the form of advocacy, you know, when you have the ability to be in spaces that aren’t afforded to our Black women and advocate on their behalf. This is important because they have been doing this for many of us for centuries. Most times they still weren’t allowed into the space and still found a way and then some. Lastly is the emotional support that comes with the constant defending that Black women have to do on a daily. The un-welcomed or asked competition that

comes into the workplace, where they are asked to do more and paid less, prove their EXTENSIVE wealth of knowledge on various issues, most of which is unrelated to the job, but forced to know anyway. Most importantly the constant comparison to their other Black male colleagues. I cannot tell you the amount of times that I have sat in meeting with a fellow Black woman, watch them present adequate information, detailed plans on solving an issue or provide emotional support to a subject matter that makes it unsafe for them come to work (Black Lives Matter Movement) and yet because of the “tonality” in her voice, was passed over. Also in this same meeting, to watch a Black male colleague raise the same points and get a standing ovation.

## The Power of Voice and Gratitude

I want to be clear that by no means is this article meant to be Black male bashing as America has done enough of that and we need to unite ourselves around a more positive narrative that one, we can all exist together while holding true to our multiple identities and still impact the lives we come in contact with on the daily. Secondly, that as Black men when we see something is wrong, to stand tall and voice those concerns without hesitation. In our line of work, we have the opportunity to connect with students in a unique way. We get to challenge the views of the classroom centered around the theme of an event and/or program. In these moments students cling to every word, free item distributed, and every memorable moment that happens within that time frame. They come back with how life-changing it was, can we do this again and I am so happy that you are here. What sticks out most is the “I am happy that you are here” as a programmer that is the Golden Thank You. At that moment you are reaffirmed within that space and your calling of being in this field. Imagine if we not only did this for each other but for our Black women. I was told that gratitude is one of the greatest joys that a person could both give and experience.

It is not what separates us that makes us different but the things that we share in common that bring us together. My goal here was to have us all reflect on a marginalized population that has given us so much and continues to pour into us each and every day. To give Black women their flowers as this current generation would phrase it and to be more than just an advocate towards, equal pay and praise, but to voice that I would be nothing without my Black mother who taught me that the love and appreciation you put into this world is one the greatest seeds ever planted. I hope that we can take time to appreciate our Queens and celebrate both in the moment and beyond.

“...I’ve grown most not from victories, but setbacks.  
If winning is God’s reward then losing is how he teaches us.”  
—Serena Williams

# BLACK LIVES STILL MATTER

*A program proposal  
for Black Male  
Initiative Programs*

**EMILY BROWN  
MIKAHLA HAMMONS  
&  
JESSICA HUBERT**

## **Positionality Statement**

We came to this topic through a course in our graduate program where we were to design a program and assessment for a targeted population at a specific institution. In the wake of BLM demonstrations and the election season, we found it particularly important that we shape something to support Black male students after observing a gap in programming. We found initiatives specifically for Black women or generally for People of Color, but nothing that was specifically designed for Black males at the institution we were assigned.

None of the authors of this article identify as Black or men and therefore wanted to acknowledge our positionality in relation to this topic. As emerging student affairs professionals, we saw the

project as an opportunity to push our thinking beyond our own identities. Collectively we identify as two White women and a Biracial woman. While we cannot speak to the experiences of being Black men, we are very aware that we should rely on Black men for guidance and assistance with the implementation of this work.

## **Introduction**

After too many generations of racial injustice, police brutality, and systemic racism, the United States is at a pivotal moment to decide which direction it will go. Now, more than ever, our Black American students need to be heard, valued, and provided with targeted support services. Widespread Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations are occurring across the globe in response to the public deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClean,



and countless other Black men, some of these have been at the hands of police, others from civilians who were supposed to be neighbors. Ever since the infamous “war on drugs,” Black men have been criminalized at higher rates than their male counterparts and regarded as lesser in society (Pearl, 2018). Now more than ever, we need to be providing tailored, holistic support to Black men. While much work needs to be done at the K-12 level to help students reach college, once they are enrolled, it is very important to support this population throughout their higher education journey. American institutions of higher education are being given a societal mandate to be incubators of social change and support for all students (O’Malley, 2016). Given that Black men make up one of the smallest percentages of college students, it is imperative that they receive an equitable allocation of time, attention, and resources in order to succeed and persist. We believe that community, networking, and leadership development opportunities will increase persistence, graduation rates, and sense of belonging. To address this need, we have created a program targeted at increasing engagement, leadership efficacy, and networking among Black male undergraduates. Our justification of this program is highlighted by the challenges facing Black men in contemporary literature.

### Literature Review

Black men have a 30% six-year graduation rate, which is one of the lowest degree completion rates of any demographic category (Brooms, 2019). Academic and social deficit perspectives position many Black men to feel as outsiders on college campuses (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Researchers position that student involvement can assist with retention, matriculation and academic success (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2008). Furthermore, student involvement organizations and programs can assist students in how to navigate that dissonance. In an evaluation of a Black Male Leadership Program (BMLP) at a PWI, Baker and Avery (2012) identified students experiencing “anti-Black male stereotyping, hyper-surveillance, and racial microaggressions, and feelings of having to act White, feelings of racelessness, and feelings of invisibility” (p.74). These external factors impact the student experience negatively and need to be addressed at an institutional and personal level. Through strong retention programs like BMLP that focus on Black male student’s academic needs, social needs, career ambitions, and leadership skills, they will realize the importance of their Blackness within themselves and the larger society (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 128-129).

Research has found that cohort based leadership development programs that cover goal setting, mentoring, and interpersonal skills are key for Black men navigating their collegiate experience (Kneiss et. al. 2020). Specific-to-culture Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs are student-centered, allowing Black males to dive deeper into their collegiate experiences in order to make meaning of them (Brooms, 2019). It is important for students to identify and engage with a community that is based in race or culture specifically focused on social interactions, collectivism, and group identification of their identity development. Studies have shown that students who feel secure in their identities are better able to navigate academic and social spaces than students who do not have a strong sense of identity (Harper & Quaye, 2007, p. 131). The Black identity is not a monolith; however, students have stated the importance of connections and relationships with other Black students, staff, and faculty.

The Black Male Leadership Program provided many students their first leadership experience with all Black men and they reported making connections that instilled a sense of pride in their race and gender (Baker & Avery, 2012). The study codified qualitative responses from participants who stated the program helped them in (1) building relationships, (2) gaining academic

footing, and (3) increasing their level of institutional engagement.” (Baker & Avery, 2012, p. 78). Through seminars and workshops with Black faculty and staff, students expanded their social and professional circles, increasing their social capital and creating role model relationships. The BMLP showcased the representation of successful men who looked like them through introductions to Black male leaders on campus, those of whom are not usually in abundance. Students were exposed to campus resources that they could utilize in the future and now had a face to a place, lessening the fear of asking for help or finding where to go for help. As studies have shown, it is important to begin acclimating students to campus resources and tools for success in their first year,

Black male students may come into their college experience with feelings of internalized racism or preconceptions of racial identities that can be harmful to their success and retention. BLM programs can catch students at the start of their journey to get them on the right track to be successful. The themes of the workshops and seminars should be holistic in nature and assist Black males in “developing self-efficacy, navigating predominantly White spaces, and processing racialized and gendered experiences” (Baker & Avery, 2012, p. 83). Through focus groups with participants in the program, Black male student’s stories and experiences become the focus of the assessment and evaluation.

### Proposed Program: Building Black Male Initiatives

The proposed program is designed to span a full semester and consist of four unique experiences to cultivate spaces for Black male undergraduates to explore their identity and leverage their social capital. The original design is for events to be held once a month for approximately 90 minutes (with the exception of the final event). Moreover, the chronology of the events is flexible to the needs of your campus and population. The four events are as follows: Barbershop Talks, Leader Development, Networking Workshop, Culminating Summit.

1. The Barbershop Talks are intended for students to either be transported to a local barber shop or have barbers brought onto campus and provide haircuts to the students while campus representatives facilitate a dialogue around Black male identity in the current socio-political climate. We recommend this being co-led by relevant cultural/identity center leaders and representatives from the counseling center.
2. The Leader Development session would be a structured dialogue with food and community that is co-led by leadership and civic engagement professionals. We recommend offering 1:1 coaching as staff allows, followed by group discussion of how the students can take action on campus and in their community.
3. The Networking Workshop would include working heavily with the career center and the alumni network to help the students connect with Black male leaders in their community and equip them with a connection in their network that could grow into a mentoring relationship. We recommend discussing capital that the students bring with them and how to leverage it in the workspace, having mock interviews or job prep instruction, and time to mingle with the alumni.
4. The final component is a culminating summit that would be a half-day event to celebrate their completion of the program as well as give them exposure to a conference structure to allow them opportunities to connect with each other and learn from keynote speakers, engage in a Q&A session with the speaker, and have a final networking luncheon that concludes on a call to action. This event would be an amazing opportunity to

incorporate student leadership as the program cycles through additional cohorts to allow students to shape it and serve as mentors for the incoming groups. As interest for the program grows, there are many ways to adapt the timeline, the amount of offerings, and the topics and need arises.

### Student Learning Outcomes

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2018) highlight integrative and applied learning as “an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curricular, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus” (para. 2). As student affairs practitioners, we position integrative and applied learning as critical components of our work and central to student learning. Therefore, we highlight the following learning outcomes:

1. Students will be able to meet peers and professionals with similar stories, successes, interests as well as common challenges based on their racial identity in order to build brotherhood and lasting connections.
2. Students will immerse themselves in evolving and enriching conversations related to current events in the Black community and how they see their roles in society through the numerous workshops which are geared toward educating and developing the future leaders of tomorrow.
3. Students will engage in networking opportunities with fellow Black men who have become successful in their field of work, ultimately leading to continued generational relationships and potential mentors.
4. Through this program, students will recognize the importance of Black Male success in the classroom, the community, and the world. Through dynamic speakers, attendees feel inspired to achieve their goals and empowered to write their own narrative of success. (Kniess et al., 2020)

### Assessment Recommendations

We recommend administering pre- and post-test survey instruments to measure learning outcomes as well as collecting qualitative feedback via focus groups. The pre-test instrument would be administered at the start of the first event and the post-test instrument at the end of the final program. We suggest keeping the instrument to approximately 10 Likert-scale questions. To allow for data analysis and track growth on each item, it is advisable to use the same questionnaire for the pre-and post-test. Some sample questions are:

1. How often do you think about your racial identity?
2. To what extent do you currently see yourself as a leader?
3. To what extent do current events involving Black men influence your involvement?

For the post-test, one could add additional questions, such as:

1. How likely are you to recommend this program to a peer?

Regarding the focus groups, it would be more beneficial to facilitate these after a brief time has passed to allow students to reflect and apply what they have learned, but not so long that they have disconnected from the program. We also recommend being mindful of the identities held by the facilitators. Some sample discussion questions are:

1. What was your initial reaction when you heard about this program, and what made you want to participate? What hesitations did you have about participating?
2. How did you feel after attending each workshop? Were you excited or skeptical? What did you like? What would you improve?
3. What made you decide to continue (or not) participating in the subsequent workshops?

### Conclusion

After completing this program, students should feel a greater sense of campus and community connection, growth in their leadership skills, and have an increased network of peers and mentors. Not only will this aid the individual students, but the campus community will have a return on its investment with a new cohort of leaders ready to make a difference inside and outside of the classroom. Future directions include expanding the program into a residential model by creating a living-learning community, increasing a sense of belonging in residential spaces. Mentor relationships with program alumni would enhance the experience for new participants and allow for annual engagement for past participants. Black and African American students have long been underserved by colleges and universities. It is time to use higher education as the incubator for change and model how to support and develop the next generation of Black leadership. We hope that this program outline will be one step we can take to lead the way.

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# MASTERS *and* MASKS



## Navigating Graduate School Amidst a Pandemic

**VINCENT EVOLA**  
Syracuse University

IT IS 2021, the Coronavirus is STILL HERE, and we are about to celebrate our “pandemic-versary.” This past year has tested everyone’s limitations, shifted lives, all while allowing us to learn so much more about ourselves. My educational experience took a very hard shift from what I thought my graduate tenure was “supposed to be” at my dream institution. Suddenly all my classes were shifted online and all the activities around the university were cancelled. 2020 not only introduced the Coronavirus to the world but, it also just so happened to be my second semester of graduate school. Coming off of a high from my first semester which was deemed amazing and successful, I was excited to see what the second semester had to offer. I didn’t apply to be in school or learn “online” but, if someone would have said the rest of my graduate experience would be virtual, I would have busted out laughing.

This pandemic was and is a difficult time for everyone. The continuous changing of plans and having to pivot and shift what we’re doing has taken a toll on everyone working in higher education. Getting adjusted to working from home and being isolated in the house, for someone who is a social butterfly such as myself, flat out sucked. Even though this experience was nowhere what I imagined it to be, I was able to learn and navigate SO MUCH during this pandemic. Like most, I could probably write a novel on all of the skill sets I have learned during my remaining time as a graduate assistant and student, so here are a few tips to help you navigate your graduate experience.

### Make the Most of Your Experiences

You must make the most of your experiences. Being in an online world, our effort can tend to be lackadaisical at times. Your lack of effort can lead to surface level or transactional experiences. No one is going to learn or develop in an environment where

you are simply going through the motions. You need to dive into everything you do, headfirst and give it your all. One will only be able to develop and learn by fully submerging yourself in every experience you have. Push yourself to dive deeper into each program and each workshop. Not only should you be intentional about the type of programming that you put out but, the programming you put out shouldn’t be superficial. Even if the program is a complete failure, you should be pouring your whole self into every experience that you get because you will learn something about yourself or learn a new skill to take back to your team that you never thought about before. Make the most of the cards that you are dealt and create a winning hand out of them.

### This Is a Great Time to Mess Up

Graduate school is a learning experience. At some point during your experience, it is expected that you will mess up. If you mess up that is OKAY! What a great time to allow your creative mind to roam free and wild. The risk is so small that one shouldn’t hide behind fear. During the pandemic trying something new is more important than ever. Everyone is learning something new, so it is more important than ever to step out of your comfort zone. You learn not only so much about yourself, but you learn a lot about the world around you in the process. Trying to create new initiatives can make you a better person and professional. On top of all the great things you learn, developing new ideas is also great a topic of conversation in interviews. These new ideas can help make you more marketable in the professional world as you look to secure a job. So, dive in headfirst and submerge yourself in the waters of creativity because you never know what cool, new thing you will create on the other side.

### Don't sell yourself short

Often, we feel like a product of our environment. Graduate students are low on the pecking order within an office, we often think of ourselves as an expendable piece that can easily be replaced. I know I am 100% guilty of thinking I can be easily replaced, which could not be further from the truth. Do not, ever, sell yourself short. Not many people can say that they took graduate-level classes online while working in a virtual environment at the same time. Juggling all of these different roles is hard and not many people can do it. Through blood, sweat, and many, many tears, you navigated a pandemic and graduate school at the same time! That alone is a major accomplishment outside of what you accomplished in your graduate career. So never forget your worth and never sell yourself short. So yeah, go on and brag on yourself, let your ego run wild, and never forget your worth. When you secure that bag, it will all reflect the hard work that you put in.

### You are still a student! Enjoy it!

As a graduate student, we all tend to overload our plates with as much as we can handle and more. Graduate students eat, sleep, and breathe work and professional development for these two to three years. The result is us watching our graduate school experience blow right by. You often forget these are your last years before we work full-time. Our mental health is so important and the best way to take care of that is by having fun. Never forget to make time to do the things that you love. You are still a student and not expected to do full-time work, so don't. The graduate experience only comes once in your life so make the most of it and have fun while doing it. If you don't enjoy it, you will just look back and realize you might have wasted those two years being drowned in work. You also may realize that you never made the connections that truly matter and the ones that will last for years to come.

Graduate school is a tough time. It is characterized by lots of caffeine, all-nighters, and not a second of downtime. Graduate school is challenging for everyone and not something everyone can do, especially during a pandemic. There are several things you should apply to your graduate experience to be successful. First and foremost, it is important to maximize all of your experiences. Try new things and mess up, who doesn't love a place where it is expected to mess up because it is a learning process. Never forget, what you are doing is genuinely hard work, having to balance so many different roles. So, brag on yourself, hype yourself up because you aren't anything short of a superstar. Lastly, have fun with it! These experiences are something that you are going to hold onto for a lifetime. So take it all in because someday all you will have are years full of memories to hold onto.

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# NACA's New Conference Structure

Starting this year, we will reduce NACA's in-person conferences from seven regional conferences to five NACA conferences, four in the fall and one in the spring, not including NACA® Live which will continue to serve as the national convention and flagship NACA experience. While conferences will be held in various parts of the country, under this new model and strategy, **members can attend the conference that best fits their calendars, travel needs, and budgets regardless of their regional affiliation.** As a part of this transition, conferences will be named for their location instead of the NACA region where they may take place.

The conference schedule for the 2021-22 membership year:

**NACA® Winston-Salem: Sept. 30-Oct. 2**

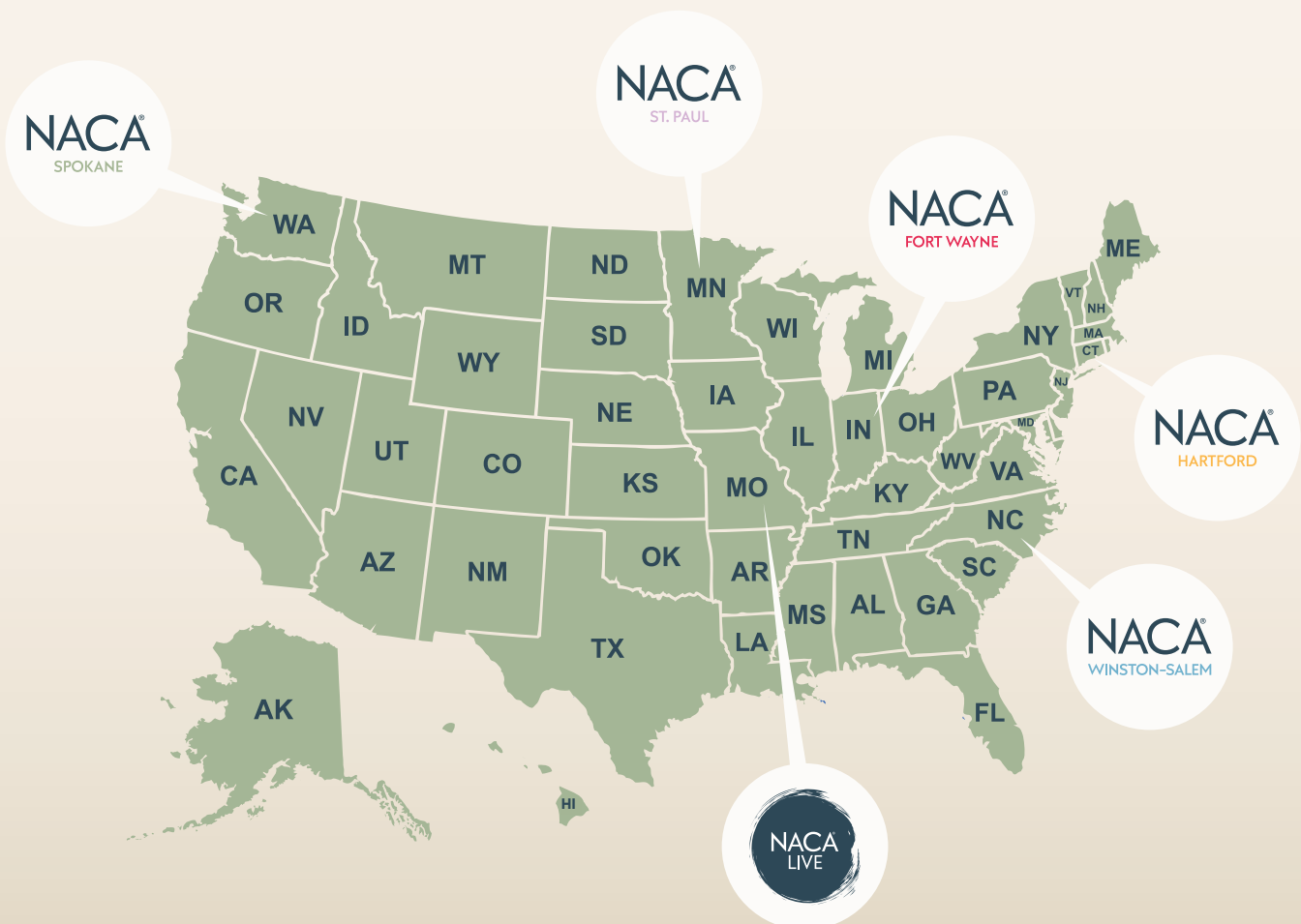
**NACA® Hartford: Oct. 28-30**

**NACA® Fort Wayne: Nov. 4-6**

**NACA® Spokane: Nov. 11-13**

**NACA® Live in Kansas City: Feb. 12-16, 2022 (the national convention)**

**NACA® St. Paul: Mar. 31-Apr. 2, 2022**



# who all gon be there?

## *Encouraging Black Community at PWIs within the Classroom and Residence Halls*

**MAYEESA L. MITCHELL,  
DOMINIQUE M. MAYNARD,  
and ANDRÉ L. JORDAN, Jr.**

*UNC Greensboro*



### **Introduction**

**S**INCE 1976, BLACK STUDENTS' ENROLLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION has gradually increased (NCES, 2017). As a result, it has become crucial that institutions make Black students feel safe and valued, and strides are continually being made to improve these students' experiences. Moreover for roughly 50 years, it has been a commitment of higher education institutions to create diverse, equitable, and multicultural learning environments (Pope et al., 2009). Unfortunately, universities have not been as responsive to diversity because of their conservative culture (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002). Access to higher education has often been viewed as a means of social mobility; however, this is more difficult for racial and ethnic minorities who have been historically disadvantaged and underrepresented in higher education (Harper et al., 2009).

To address this disparity and improve Black students' experiences, we have developed a two-fold initiative that aims to enhance their residential experience through a living-learning community (LLC) as well as their academic transition through a First Year Seminar (FYS). Throughout this article, we will discuss our vision for the execution of this initiative and continue to outline its importance and relevance. It is our hope that this initiative will improve Black students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy thus improving their overall experience and performance at their institution. Before sharing our proposed initiative, we offer a brief overview of Black student experiences and sense of belonging in higher education.

### **Literature Review**

According to Harper & Hurtado (2007), research indicates that lower levels of perceived institutional commitment towards diversity are associated with negative social behaviors among students. Harper and Hurtado (2007) also highlights how research could impact the sense of belonging of Black students and lead to higher levels of alienation among all students. The feelings of alienation could also be described as "onlyness- the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" which could very well impact Black students' progression and comfortability at PWIs (Harper et al., 2011, pg. 190). This could lead to higher levels of racism and discrimination as well as lower academic achievement among African American students (Milem et al., 2005). Furthermore, racial stressors at PWIs can dramatically undermine minority students' educational outcomes and social integration (Smedley et al., 1993). This could be due to instances in which Black students are challenged by their White peers and faculty who underestimate their intellectual capabilities (Karkouti, 2016). Another factor could be the racial stereotypes placed on Black students at PWIs which can erode their academic sense of self and again diminish their academic performance (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001).

Frazier and Eighmy (2012) supports our intended objective of increasing Black students' sense of belonging, retention, and persistence. They highlight the significance of focusing on learning in and outside of the classroom. Frazier and Eighmy (2012) state, "the concepts of academic learning and student development can no longer be considered independent of one another" (p.12). Programs such as these fall into the fourth form of learning communities outlined by Frazier and Eighmy (2012), which is "student-type learning communities that are specially designed for targeted groups" (p.13). We believe the goals of our proposed initiative can be reached based on research that shows the benefits of student involvement (Astin, 1985) and learning communities (Tinto, 2000). Additionally, research has shown that promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion through learning communities has been routine for housing and residence life departments (McGowan et al. 2017, p. 10). Furthermore, Frazier and Eighmy (2012) found that perceived satisfaction with all aspects of their living learning experience increased with more faculty and residential staff interactions, thus confirming the importance of faculty and staff involvement in our proposed initiative.

In the article, Knowledge and Community: The Effect of a First-Year Seminar on Persistence (Pittendrigh et al., 2016), the necessity of the first year seminar portion of our initiative is highlighted. The authors conducted a study to see if students were more likely to be retained between their first and second years depending on whether or not they participated in a first-year seminar class that they created called 'Knowledge and Community'. From the results of both surveys, it was abundantly clear that students who participated in the seminar were more likely to be retained at the institution. Even in situations where students indicated lower levels of motivation in their academics, retention rates were higher than students who weren't enrolled in the course.

Ultimately, all of the pieces of literature utilized for this study highlight a different reason that a focused and intentional initiative can create incredible outcomes for Black students. We feel that it is the responsibility of the university to protect and value the lives of Black students. Thus, it is important to create opportunities for students to participate in meaningful academic conversations in the classroom, stimulating and engaging activities outside of the classroom, and purposeful development in residential spaces. This can aid in their holistic development, which is what our proposed initiative aims to do. And, as Derrick Broom points out, "These groups assist Black students in navigating the collegiate milieu, especially between the Black college community and the larger predominantly white campus community. Even further, participating in these organizations can serve as a buffer for Black students against alienation and isolation." (Brooms, 2018, p. 144).

## Terminology

We offer the following definitions of significance for understanding the population and initiative:

**Black Identifying Students** - "A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa" (State Council of Higher Education, 2013, Description section). Students of the Black racial groups in Africa can include individuals who identify as African, African-American, Caribbean, Carribean-American, Black, or multi-racial with at least one of their identities including an ethnicity outlined above. Throughout this proposal, Black is used as a comprehensive racial identity that includes individuals from all of these ethnicities.

**First-time, First-Year Student** - "A student attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. Includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the

first time in the prior summer term. Also includes students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school)" (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 2017, Description section).

**First Year Seminar** - A class of first-year students that aims "to promote close interaction between faculty and students in a small setting that encourages curricular innovation and pedagogical innovation" (Brown University, n.d., para. 2).

**Living Learning Community (LLC)** - "Specialized living environments that connect students inside- and outside-the-classroom experiences. Each LLC is unique, but all are centered on a distinctive theme or academic interest area. Students who choose to live in an LLC have a direct connection to their classroom experience, access to intentional events and programs, and dedicated staff members who work to make the community a success" (University of Pittsburgh, n.d., Living Learning Communities section).

**Sense of Belonging** - "In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers) (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 28-29).

## Initiative Overview

Our initiative is a method to address the challenges outlined in our literature review. We offer the following as a potential solution to assist first-time, first-year Black students in navigating and finding community in predominantly White college environments. We believe the focus on first year students is imperative in assisting students' transition into the collegiate environment and in communicating their "mattering" as an individual on campus. Using Schlossberg's 4 S's, situation, self, support, and strategies, this initiative will help students adjust to their new environment and find their place on campus (Schlossberg, 1989).

To make this initiative a success, it will take a great deal of planning. This will be especially important during the developmental stages but will also be vital to consistently keep the initiative running smoothly and functioning from year to year. To accomplish this goal, we intend to advertise for this community alongside advertising housing options for first year students during their recruitment process and when the prospective students submit their application to attend the institution. The process will include an application specifically for the initiative that must be submitted by February of the calendar year that they would be joining the living learning community. Prospective students would be admitted into the LLC in mid-March at the same time that they are admitted into the institution. The last step would include students notifying the institution of their decision to attend and their commitment to participating in the initiative by submitting their housing application and deposit in early May.

## Proposed Living Learning Community

Students will be required to enroll in and attend the First Year Seminar. They will live in the specified residence hall with fellow living learning community (LLC) students as roommates. To build a sense of community, they will attend weekly meetings within the residence hall during which they will participate in activities with other LLC students and gain leadership skills through community and personal responsibility. Also, they will meet with the program coordinator at least once per semester for support and guidance. Lastly, to contribute to the greater community, students will be asked to dedicate at least 10 service hours per semester.



## Proposed First Year Seminar

To embrace a co-curricular approach, the LLC students will enroll in and attend the First Year Seminar. This class will support the community building and continued learning taking place in the LLC students' living spaces. During the 15-week course, students will learn about the academic resources available to them, familiarize themselves with the student organizations that are historically dedicated to Black students at their institution, learn more about life as a Black student at their institution, meet university officials who are willing to support them, understand the Black history associated with the institution and the surrounding community, and create plans for navigating the university as a Black student. These goals will be obtained through a combination of guest speakers, academic readings, lectures, class presentations, and reflective assignments.

### Initiative Method of Analysis

The method of analysis will be qualitative as individual and collective experiences will be gathered in the students' voices through the focus groups. The first focus group will take place with the living learning community members and the second with Black first-time, first-year non-LLC members. By having two focus groups we anticipate gathering data that can be compared and contrasted to support the learning outcomes listed above. Most importantly, we intend for the focus groups to provide data that will promote the LLC's significance in retaining Black students and improving their sense of belonging.

When choosing members for the non-LLC focus group, we suggest gathering data to understand the students' intersecting identities including, but not limited to socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, sexuality, gender, academic major, and hometown. Additionally, to remove bias from the data, we propose the individual conducting the focus groups be someone who doesn't work with the students involved in the initiative regularly. While this could also have a negative effect of students not feeling comfortable enough to express their feelings about the initiative with the focus group facilitator, we believe the positive of having an individual unknown to both groups of students would ultimately create the least biased responses from the participants.

All students will be notified that interviews will be no longer than one hour in length and that audio from the sessions will be recorded to transcribe participants' responses and for ensuring accuracy during the interpretation of data. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, participants should be given pseudonyms after the interviews have concluded. Both focus groups will be asked many of the same questions. There will be some variation in questions for students who are involved in the initiative but intentional effort should be placed on ensuring that the experience for both groups is as consistent as possible. An example of questions for the LLC group are: "How would you say it feels to be a Black student in college? What has your experience

been like as a Black student at this institution?" Examples for the non-LLC group are: "Can you discuss any challenges or instances of adversity you have faced in college? What are some ways to develop a sense of community among Black students in college?"

After the focus groups are completed, the other members of the team complete a blind review of the focus group transcripts. These reviewers would draw out themes from the transcripts to create a cohesive narrative of the data collected during the focus groups by assessing common words, phrases, and ideas used by the members of the focus groups. Additionally, based on participants' responses, the reviewers would determine if there were significant differences between the LLC students and non-LLC students' understanding of their own Black identity and their sense of belonging and community at the institution.

### Assessment of the Initiative

Assessment is the "collection, analysis and interpretation of data and information related to an issue or area of interest, primarily to make changes or improvements" (Dorimé-Williams et al., 2017, p. 5). As entry-level student affairs professionals, we offer the following as outcomes for the assessment of this initiative. Through participation in the living learning community and first year seminar, we believe students will:

- Reflect on their understanding of what it means to be a Black college student
- Learn the importance of community and personal responsibility and their influence on leadership
- Create a sense of community through weekly meetings, class sessions, service projects, and living within the same hall

### Conclusion

Research centered around the impact that living learning communities and First-Year Seminars can have on Black students at PWIs is not widely conducted or published. We offer the following as a limitation of this work as it was originally a class project that could be used to expand living and learning communities at PWIs. If a student does not

complete the entire year of the project, it could influence the data collection and analysis on the effectiveness of the initiative. While this is a potential limitation, we believe this work could be of significant importance and impact to Black students across the nation. The results of this type of initiative can also be imperative for many stakeholders, including student affairs professionals working in the residence life, admissions, diversity, equity and inclusion departments, African American Studies department, and other units. Additionally, universities' alumni, sponsors, donors, and other influential stakeholders may also be interested in these findings. This initiative has a solid foundation and can have a lasting impact on the climate of institutions of higher education for Black students. Overall, we see this work as an opportunity to support Black students, both current and future, and assist with coping with some of the damaging pieces of our country's past.

WE FEEL THAT IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY TO PROTECT AND VALUE THE LIVES OF BLACK STUDENTS. THUS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN MEANINGFUL ACADEMIC CONVERSATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM, STIMULATING AND ENGAGING ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM, AND PURPOSEFUL DEVELOPMENT IN RESIDENTIAL SPACES.



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# EmpowerMENT

## *How Two Men with Shared Identities Are Motivated to Serve Their Students*

**JAMAR WHITFIELD**

*The University of North Carolina at Charlotte*

**JARRICK BROWN**

*Texas A&M University-San Antonio*



IT IS AMAZING how the intersectionality of our identities presents itself in the workplace and influences our respective campus communities. We all possess dominant identities, however, we sometimes overlook the importance of our subordinate identities and how they can affect others. As student activities professionals, we are some of the most front-facing student-centered staff members at our institutions. Beyond executing noteworthy campus events and programs, we often serve as a representation of familial authoritative figures for students.

Jarrick and Jamar initially met through NACA's Leadership Fellows Program in the summer of 2019. Through this experience, these two men bonded over several shared identities and professional aspirations. Thus, leading to multiple ongoing conversations related to how our identities show up in the workplace and how they impact the students we serve in our respective campus communities. The common theme in all of their interactions was incorporating the concepts of inclusive excellence and servant leadership in educating their student leaders. In this article, Jarrick and Jamar provide a glimpse into how their leadership styles, shared identities, and sources of inspiration play a major role in their work as student activities professionals.

### **How do student activities professionals impact the student experience?**

**Jamar:** Our roles as student activities professionals are multilayered. Some people may consider us the “fun people”, the people who give out pizza, or the people who pass out free stuff. However, our roles are much more meaningful to the student experience than that. We engage students to connect them to the greater campus community and help them create impactful memories for life. We help facilitate campus traditions and build school pride. Through events and programs, we are able to tell a part of our institution's story.

**Jarrick:** “Student Activities is the CLASSROOM WITHOUT WALLS!” Working in Student Activities we teach our students life long lessons and skills they could use in their day to day life. Yes, it is important to learn  $2+2 = 4$  and Newton's Law of Motion but here in Student Activities, we teach our students about time management, how to network with various individuals from students, administrators and vendors, programming skills, and more. We also teach them how to multitask and problem solve. Lastly, Student Activities are truly the center of the student experience. We engaged the students and helped create memories that will stay with them for a lifetime.

## How do you support your students beyond advisement?

**Jamar:** Although our foundational responsibility is to provide advisory support to our student programming boards and other student organizations, the relationship that many student activities professionals have with their students goes beyond that. Our days go way beyond the traditional 8 AM–5 PM, Monday through Friday work schedule. We regularly give up our evenings and weekends to serve our students. There are several instances where we represent something greater for our students. Many of us play various roles for our students such as mentor, life coach, confidant, counselor, and stylist. We genuinely develop familial connections with our students and aid their personal and professional growth.

**Jarrick:** If you are looking for a typical 8 to 5 job, you are in the wrong field of work. Working in Student Activities, the primary role in your job is “Other duties as assigned.” Beside advising and supporting just your programming board, clubs/organizations, or Greek Life you also are a mentor, counselor, life-coach, adopted father, mother, aunt, and/or uncle. You build lasting relationships with your students and help them figure out their life and support them in all of your future endeavors. Not only are you teaching and helping cultivate your students, but they also help and cultivate you as well.

## What role does your identity as a Black man play in student activities?

**Jamar:** Of course, representation is essential in any university setting. It is essential for students and staff to see people they feel they identify with. As someone who identifies as a Black man, it has always meant a lot to me when I have seen and interacted with leadership in the community that shares some of my identities. Students and staff need to see people with shared identities. As a Black man, it means a lot to me when I see and interact with leaders in the community who share my identities. As crucial as representation is, connectedness is what really matters. Additionally, these individuals intentionally invested in me and other students of color and inspired me to be my best self. We have to affirm and validate our students, especially those who possess underrepresented identities. Our presence and efforts to engage historically marginalized student populations can contribute to their willingness to persist and their overall satisfaction with their college experience. As I have heard many folks say, “black people do not simply go to work with a job to do, they go to work with a responsibility.” Many people from underrepresented communities or marginalized identities conduct themselves with a greater consciousness of purpose to trailblaze the way for others. We want to produce quality work and be a positive representation in hopes that our efforts will not only empower others but enable progress from a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) perspective within institutionally oppressive systems.

**Jarrick:** People would say that the world changed in 2020 from COVID-19 to the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd which led to the Black Lives Matter Protests around the world. Which is 50% true the world did change with COVID-19 but not with the murdering of Black and Brown people. Being a Black man in the US is hard and scary but being a black man in student activities is rewarding. The reason being is that I am in a position to plan and host events that will educate and highlight diversity on our campus. Yes, you might say that your DEI office should be doing this but what is stopping you from planning events that celebrate various cultures, heritages, and races. This summer I had the opportunity to plan a social justice panel discussion for my University that truly impacted our students. Also, I make it a requirement for my programming board to host

at least two events for the various heritage months. I want to show our student body that we are here for them. It also shows our BIPOC students that yes “I can achieve my dreams just like I did.” Representation is critical in today's society and I believe with me being a black man in this field I am able to reach and connect with our students who look and identify as me. Representation is critical in today's society, and I believe with me being a black man in this field, I can reach and connect with our ( or many) students who look and identify as me.

## How does your affiliation to a Greek-lettered organization impact your work with students?

**Jamar:** An identity that I hold which is very important to me is belonging to the Greek community. The role that fraternity & sorority life has played in my collegiate and professional experience is meaningful. The leadership development, education on diversity & inclusion, scholastic achievement, and the importance of serving one's community I originally learned in my undergraduate experience as a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. has continued to strengthen my abilities as an advisor. I have had the privilege of connecting with numerous students belonging to Greek-lettered organizations or those aspiring to join these organizations. As a professional staff member, I have been reminded of the significance that having Greek-affiliated campus administrators mean to students in this population. Outside of the standard job responsibilities, I continue to support several Greek-lettered organizations within our campus community. In return, they have been significant supporters of our programming board's events and initiatives. There is an innate connection one has with fellow members of the fraternity & sorority regardless of the organization.

**Jarrick:** My fraternity mission statement reads, “Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. develops leaders, promotes brotherhood and academic excellence while providing service and advocacy for our communities.” My fraternity is very near and dear to my heart. It has taught me numerous things that I don't only utilize in my personal life but professionally as well. As my professional mission statement, I develop leaders and promote academic excellence. Working in Student Activities as a Greek affiliate man I can use the teachings and lessons that I learn through my fraternity to help develop the next leader of tomorrow. It also helps because I am able to connect with our Greek Life on campus and offer advice. The lessons and skills that I have learned from being a part of a Greek Letter Organization I have used in my advising skills and working with my programming board to develop them to be the next leader on campus and when they graduate.

## What comes to mind when you hear the term “Big Man On Campus”?

**Jamar:** For some, being a “big man on campus” is considered a term of elite status. However, for me, it simply describes my physical stature and being a part of a college setting. Over time, my peers have said I humbly manage to infuse the two concepts to impact the campus community positively. In addition to having a “larger than life” persona, I identify as an overweight male. I want to say I have “big boy confidence” and carry myself with pride. I did not know how impactful having body positivity in the workplace could be until a few students reminded me that it was indeed a big deal. I think it is critical to have self-love and recognize the value you add to a space. As a result, I have learned that students appear to look for commonalities or connections in every aspect of a college campus. They look for and can benefit from an attachment to people, places, or things to bring added meaning to their college experience.

**Jarrick:** “When I got here, I dominated. They thought I worked 100 hours a day. Now, no matter what time I get in, nobody questions my ability to get the job done. Get it through your head. First impressions last. You start behind the eight-ball, you’ll never get in front.” – Harvey Specter. The reason I used this quote is because as a “Big Man” people automatically judge you. Is it right? No, but it is the truth. When I started my job I embodied what Harvey Specter said in the quote above. Now, with my proven track record and my big personality, I have nothing else to prove. If you identify as an overweight male do not let that bring you down because if you do not have confidence in yourself, nobody else will. So, to my BIG BOIYZ in the field, I want you to promise me that you will be worthy of the attention you command when you step into the room.

**How has your involvement within NACA influenced your ability to work with students?**

**Jamar:** I am forever grateful to NACA for the role it has played in my professional and personal life. I remain thankful for the Office of Student Involvement at UNC Charlotte for their continued support of my involvement within NACA and for allowing me to nurture my skills and abilities as I navigate my student activities journey. NACA has provided me with leadership opportunities, educational resources, tools to develop my campus programming board, and a network of vendors to bring some of the most phenomenal trailblazing events to our campus. NACA has also connected me to some of my best friends and dynamic colleagues! John Qunicy Adams said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” I am inspired by and thankful for the work of trendsetters like my Leadership Fellows family, my NACA South crew, and my UNC Charlotte squad because they are pillars in supporting student success and excellence. Additionally, the most significant thing NACA has provided my students and me is a real sense of community and belonging. The diverse and inclusive representation of leaders, schools, and vendors I have interacted with in NACA is remarkable and inspiring. Therefore, we go back to our respective campus feeling motivated, enlightened, and excited to empower our students and propel our institutions forward through innovative campus programming. My experiences in NACA has taught me to never underestimate your ability to influence and empower others for the benefit of the greater campus community.

**AS I HAVE HEARD MANY FOLKS SAY, “BLACK PEOPLE DO NOT SIMPLY GO TO WORK WITH A JOB TO DO, THEY GO TO WORK WITH A RESPONSIBILITY.” MANY PEOPLE FROM UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES OR MARGINALIZED IDENTITIES CONDUCT THEMSELVES WITH A GREATER CONSCIOUSNESS OF PURPOSE TO TRAILBLAZE THE WAY FOR OTHERS.**

**Jarrick:** NACA is a family! Being a part of this association has given me a new found love for working in Student Activities. I have served on multiple committees within NACA but being selected to be a part of the leadership fellows program has truly given me a work family that I could have never dreamed?. NACA has also given me numerous leadership and professional opportunities that have helped me advance to new opportunities in Student Activities. NACA has challenged me to accept new challenges like presenting on a national level, writing for a publication, facilitating round tables, and so much more. Not only has NACA helped me but I have seen how it helped my students as well from the various summer institutes and conferences. My students still talk about the PBI Summer Series that took place in the Summer of 2020 and how people like Krystal Vielman, Yabi Demissie, and Ashley Walker just to name a few inspired them. Because of NACA, I have friends and family from the West Coast to the East Coast that will be in my life for a lifetime. NACA is an association that truly cares about its delegations. NACA is truly the #1

student activities association in my eyes. I would like to thank the Leadership Fellows, my LF Cohort, Steve Ransom, Kayla Brennan, Sarah Keeling, and Victoria Moulterie who have truly supported and helped me navigate to be the best student affairs professional and NACA Volunteer.

**Engage! Enlighten! Empower!**

Remember, we are preparing our students to be global citizens in a constantly evolving society. As student activities professionals, we help students develop the emotional intelligence and cultural competence to become good stewards in their community. Therefore, never underestimate how your identities can have the ability to influence others for positive change or instill a greater belief in one’s self. Be open to sharing your story and allowing your authentic-self to be visible to your students. We urge you to continue building your legacy by investing in people. We encourage our colleagues to lead with the heart and know that you can be someone’s inspiration or provide that “aha” moment. The validation we can provide our students can be affirming for them. You never know who you may be helping or the depth of empowerment your presence means to students, even if you cannot bear witness to it. To some, you may be everyday people, but to us, you are an icon living!

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**Ready to become a published author? NACA can help you make it happen:**

**Journal of Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship (JCAPS)**  
The Journal of Campus Activities Practice and Scholarship is a biannual social science peer-reviewed journal focusing on publishing rigorous, relevant and respected scholarship related to postsecondary education co-curricular campus activities and translating such scholarship to practice. Learn more at [naca.org/JCAPS](http://naca.org/JCAPS) and plan your submissions.

**Campus Activities Programming®**  
NACA’s award-winning magazine, published six times a year, offers experiential articles designed to inspire collaboration in bringing educational and entertainment programming to college campuses. Contact Jameson Root at [jamesonr@naca.org](mailto:jamesonr@naca.org) for more information.

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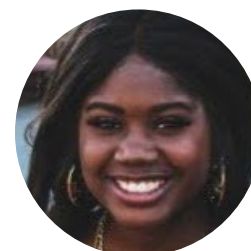
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# Thanks to everyone who made Virtual NACA® Live a success!

Over 230 schools attended (over 3,600 individual participants), while over 50 artists performed and over 50 exhibitors filled the virtual marketplace. Keynote addresses were given by voting rights activist LaTosha Brown and storytelling experts Dear World.



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