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A Piece of Ivy: A Case Study of Black Student Retention at the University of Pennsylvania

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The purpose of this study is to understand why Black students leave and what leads them to persist to graduation at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). A thorough analysis was completed on a sample of Black undergraduate students who live in W.E.B. DuBois College House (DCH). The DuBois College House is designed for students of all ethnic backgrounds who have a particular interest in and a commitment to African-American culture. At this location, students are given the opportunity to explore African-American culture while maximizing their academic experiences at the University of Pennsylvania. DuBois College House is considered by many the center of Black student life at Penn. Approximately 18 percent of the Black students at Penn live in this dormitory.

A selected sample of 67 students completed a 10-page questionnaire that primarily dealt with why Black students decide to come to Penn and their experiences while at the university, as well as asking for suggestions on ways to improve the retention of Black students at the university. A proportion of these same students completed a 30-minute, one-on-one interview about retention issues with the researcher.

Findings reveal that Black students are struggling to enjoy their college experiences at Penn. Even though many of these students are substantially integrated into the institutional culture through campus and community organizations, a number of needs and concerns have been identified to help increase retention of all Black students at Penn. Recommendations to increase retention are also presented.

PRESENTER:

Wesley Proctor earned an Ed.D. in Educational Administration at the University of Pennsylvania in 1998. He holds a M.Ed. in Educational Administration from Temple University, and a B.A. in English from the University of Delaware. Dr. Proctor currently serves as director of Planning, The Philadelphia AIDS Consortium, where he manages the development, implementation, and administration of the regional planning process. He has also served as staff assistant to the President, Office of the President at the University of Pennsylvania.