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Characteristics of Success: The Factors that Predict Academic Success for African American Male Students Attending a Small, Rural, and Predominantly White Liberal Arts College

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This presentation will discuss analysis of data and show how that data show can be used to develop strategies for improving the success rate of a target group of students.

Academic files of African American males attending a small, rural, and predominantly White liberal arts college between 1986 and 1994 were examined in the attempt to find correlations between academic success for these students and other factors. Factors looked at included: (1) standardized test scores, (2) high school grade point average, (3) high school graduating class ranking, (4) high school class size, (5) individual involvement in non-academic aspects of college living, (6) intended or declared major, (7) distance from hometown to college, and (8) participation in academic foundations curriculum. It was thought that analysis of these elements might help the institution identify those perspectives African American male students most likely to benefit from its programs, and develop strategies for improving the success rates of students within the target group.

Some results were predictable. It was no surprise, for example, to discover that students insistent on majoring in disciplines for which they had no high school preparation, or in disciplines not offered by the institutions, were not strong candidates for success. Other findings were more interesting. We found that students graduating between the 50th and 70th percentiles were actually more likely candidates for academic success than those graduating in the top 30 percent, for example, and that standardized test scores are not relevant as predictors of success for the target group.

The most disturbing discovery we made was that nearly 90 percent of the target group had had their academic transcripts impounded at one time or another for nonpayment of fees owed the institution.

Since the study, the institution has introduced a number of strategies to increase rates of the target students.

PRESENTERS

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