

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A PATH TOWARD EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: FACTORS FACILITATING THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIAL/ETHNIC MONORITY STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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This study investigates the effects of students' on- and off-campus contexts and experiences on their community college persistence. Building from Crisp and Nunez's (2014) Conceptual Model of Vertical Transfer and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition, this research examines the role of pre-entry characteristics, psychosocial factors, environmental factors, socio-academic factors, and institutional environments. Specifically, I address two main research questions: (1) to what extent do these factors vary by race/ethnicity (White, Black, and Latinx students)? (2) to what extent are these factors associated with community college student persistence?

Using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 2004:09 and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System 2003, and a sample of over 4,000 students and 800 institutions, I employed Hierarchical Linear Modeling for estimating associations between factors and persistence. Findings demonstrated

that the main factors associated to community college persistence were indicators of students' pre-entry characteristics and environmental contexts, with one psychosocial (highest degree expected) and socio-academic factor (college GPA), respectively.

This research demonstrates that the combined theoretical model previously posited would be strengthened by integrating a third theory, namely Tinto's (1975) Theory of Student Departure, due to the significance of family income and parent education on student persistence. Findings from a supplementary analysis also suggest that men and women experience community college persistence due to slightly different factors – as well as show one racial/ethnic difference by gender. This study advances our understanding of which factors influence community college students persisting in college, thereby offering insights to community college administrators in best serving their student populations, as well as how some college support systems can best help men and women at community colleges specifically.