

## Participant Feedback from the Second McKee Learning Lunch

# The Influence of Student-Organization Participation on African-American Male College Retention

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This learning experience was co-sponsored by Dr. Jonathan Hershey, Chair of Humanities: Director: Georgia Highlands African American Male Initiative, GHC, and the McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

### Introduction

“Perennially underrepresented nationally within the general college population, the number of minority male students became perilously low during the early to mid-2000s. Worse, retaining those students through graduation was failing” (“Jon Hershey Honored,” 2011, ¶1). To address the issue, in 2003, Georgia Highlands College (GHC) created the African-American male organization called GHAME (Georgia Highlands African American and Minority Male Excellence) in order to address the recruiting, retention, and graduation rates of male minority students.

In a statewide initiative, each participating institution in the University of Georgia system developed its own program to meet its specific challenges. The GHAME program at GHC has been highly successful. GHC also works with its local chapter of Brother 2 Brother, a national mentoring association that supports young Black and Latino men (“Congratulations,” 2013; *Brother 2 Brother*, 2016).

Dr. Jon Hershey, chair of the Humanities Division and professor of English at Georgia Highlands College, presented the history of GHAME. Two GHAME members took part in the panel discussion. *Note:* Although we discussed the issue of college retention among African-American males, our objective was to provide participants with the opportunity to experience a multi-disciplinary discussion of the topic.

Typically, the process used at McKee Learning Lunches is to provide three general feedback opportunities, or Assignments 1, 2, and 3. In this case, however, the session was less formally structured. As a result, only the responses to Assignment 3—the post-discussion questions—were submitted in writing. They are presented below, and they reflect the concerns that arose.

### Assignment 3

**Post-discussion Question: After the discussion, we asked participants to respond, in writing, to two questions.**

**Question 1. What is the most important thing you learned today?**

#### **Community and University Involvement Critical**

- The importance of university and community buy-in and support regarding new and existing programs.
- Community investment is perhaps the most important variable in college retention rates, especially for minorities.
- A college organization that brings African-American men together empowers them . . . as long as they have a strong mentor.
- African Americans and Latinos can be successful in college if the appropriate support systems are provided at the college.
- Organized student organizations work, and being persistent and consistent is *key*.
- Organizational involvement increases the chances of college success for African American and minority males.
- The effect of what a positive association built for the purpose of encouragement and support can accomplish.

#### **Awareness and Value of B2B Specifically**

- We all have a responsibility to empower all youth in achieving success. The B2B model should be replicated and its principles should be adopted [by] already-existing organizations.
- I gained a lot of valuable insight into this problem and B2B. I learned about ways in which we can begin to solve the issue and how passionate we are to solve it.
- That statistics on African American males' rate of success and how the B2B program is helping.

#### **Communication and Action**

- That we can talk openly about sensitive topics if we have a common cause.
- Conversation can lead to connection, which will provide a path to changing our work and our world.
- I am not the only one with these ideas. What we do to change the system that has been set up is the biggest issue at hand. And to make change, we must all work together through communication and action.
- The notion that the lower retention and graduation rates for African-American and Latino males can no longer be a conversational topic but requires immediate action and cultural change.
- Passion for mission does *not* require more money.

## **Question 2. What unanswered question(s) are you leaving with?**

### **Support of Colleges and Universities**

- How do we at UTC and all other colleges build this same kind of organization?
- What role can college administrators play in providing the resources needed for minorities to succeed?
- How do we convince leaders of universities that this issue is important and must be supported with funds, staff, and commitment?

### **Responsibility of Community**

- How do we create new organizations to implement these ideas? How do we raise necessary funds? How do we gather community support?
- What specific steps can we take as community leaders to bring about change, both on campus and within the community?

### **Interest from African American Males**

- How do we interest African American in joining student organizations?
- How do we instill the “will, voice, and power” in African American males to succeed in completing college?

### **Need for Research and Data**

- Regarding the data around this issue: Are there studies on organization and participation and success? Is graduation the right metric?
- What are the single factors that enhance student engagement among African American males in college? How do we sustain extracurricular programs?
- With so much intellectual knowledge at our disposal, why is there still a cultural/racial divide and [why are there] stereotypes?
- What roles do fraternities play in retention rates? Is community enough? Do we need structural changes?

### **Uncertainty About How to Proceed**

- What can I do *today* to be part of the solution?
- Where do we start and with whom do we partner?
- What do we do from here—together—to help the cause? How do we handle the main issue and attack it at its core?

## **References**

*Brother 2 Brother*. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.b2b911.org/About.aspx>.

“Congratulations to 2013 B2B Graduates.” (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.highlands.edu/site/jon-hershey-honored-by-usg-for-minority-male-initiative>.

“Jon Hershey Honored by USG for Minority Male Initiative.” (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.highlands.edu/site/brother2brother>.

## Participants

**We would like to thank the following participants for their interest in and contribution to this McKee Learning Lunch.**

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