Student Voices Defining Our Direction: 
Developing a Framework for Supporting the Success of Minority Male 
Community College Students 

It started with an invitation for 15 students to attend a meeting with a group of 8 managers, faculty and staff to hear their stories, experiences, and recommendations about what Mt. San Antonio College should do to improve and increase the success rates of male students of color. We started with introductions. Three and one-half hours later, we finished the introductions. Their stories, their sharing, their voices were touching and compelling. More importantly, this pointed us in the direction in which we needed to head. 

From that point forward, we utilized interactive group processes to record and develop our students' voices as to what they were facing, what they needed, and what they wanted us to do. We grouped and analyzed their student voices to define the framework of support that is needed to enhance their success. Interventions and strategies were subsequently developed to address the framework of support. 

A Sense of Belonging; Being Accepted 
I kept looking for people who looked like me. 
I played it off like I belonged. 

Male students of color are not only underrepresented, they are misunderstood and frequently do not feel like they are real college students. 

Help-Seeking Behaviors 
I can make it on my own. 
I don't even know how to ask for help. 
I finally learned that it's okay to go to tutoring. 
That first day (in Stats) once I started asking questions of the teacher, I ended up passing. 

Many educators design services and wait for students to come. The students that seek out services on their own are frequently students who already are fairly confident and goal-directed. Our male minority students do not always know how to access services and do not always believe they need help, believing instead that they just need to figure things out on their own. 

Imposter Syndrome 
Who am I fooling? People like me aren't supposed to be in college. 

Male students of color constantly struggle with whether they are imposters in higher education. Clearly, our systems weren't designed for them. And clearly, there are not sufficient role models to demonstrate that they belong, that they should be there. 

Identity Development 
No one here has a story like mine. 
How do I keep my friends from the hood and still do this college thing? 

Helping students to develop their new identities as college students is imperative to their success. College provides a wide open campus for students to discover themselves — who they are, what they value, how their culture and their past impact who they want to become.
Code Switching
I don’t talk like everyone else.
I don’t know how to talk to a faculty member or how to speak up in class.
Socialization of first generation students of color must include an awareness of their transition and status sequencing into a new, foreign environment.

Social Capital
My life experiences have made me stronger.
I have learned that I can help others like me.
Balancing what may feel like “deficiencies” for male students of color is critically important. By focusing on the rich experiences and strengths that these individuals bring to college is essential. Development of social capital is both freeing and validating.

Sense of Direction/Locus of Control/Self-Efficacy
I am a slow walker, but I never walk back now.
Whatever you want to be, if it’s your purpose, it’s already within you.
I no longer live for the moment -- I live for tomorrow.
I’m not where I want to be yet, but thank God I’m not where I was before.
Helping students to find their direction, their purpose, and to believe that they are capable of making it happen is essential to their success. Male students of color need to know that they are fully empowered to reach their goals. Although having a plan hasn’t always been a part of their lifestyles, developing and following one is critical for their future success.

Perseverance/Resiliency/Grit
There will be tremble before uncertain futures. May we dance in the face of our fears.
This is the third time I’m taking this class, but I’m a pass it this time, for sure.
I tell myself to be strong; don’t be a victim.
If I give up, I’m giving up on myself.
The beauty of empowering men of color is building on their abilities to persist, to persevere, to continue in the face of all odds. Recognizing this feat and helping them understand that their internal strength will propel them into a future of more successes.

Significant Others
The hug I got after I failed.
Feeling alone is my constant companion.
I have no one to support me -- if I make it, I make it on my own.
In the course of one’s day, the minority male student may have no one in their life that understands them, acknowledges their role as a student, and encourages them. Building in support systems, whether they are “brother to brother” or interactions with college staff and faculty is critical to their development.

College Knowledge
I don’t always get this “college thing.”
I’m not always sure what I need to ask.
I now feel less lost.
College is a foreign entity; foreign territory. Understanding our complex maze of matriculating, registering for correct courses, knowing how to study and take tests, and simply knowing what to do next is confusing and even frightening.

Student equity research models measure gaps in success rates for particular groups of students but they don’t necessarily shape the direction of interventions to address disproportionality in outcomes. Our students told us to focus on the following: Academics, Services, Peer to Peer Focus, Cultural/Ethnic Identity Development.

The strategies and interventions we have developed are designed to build awareness and teach skills so that students feel more confident and have a clearer sense of direction as students. Some of our activity components are:

- **Brotherhood dialogs**: regular open space discussions related to topics of concern initiated by students
- **Student leadership retreats**: focused attention on identity development, social capital, imposter syndrome, self-efficacy
- **Faculty mentoring**: structured opportunities to review code switching, building a support system of significant others
- **On-campus jobs**: skill development along with contacts with significant others
- **Professional conferences**: opportunities for social networking and career exploration

Our work with our male students of color has awakened us, inspired us, and fueled us to listen more, listen better, and act purposefully with wisdom, courage and heart.
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