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Black Male Collegians in Public Two-Year Colleges: Student Perspectives on the Effect of Employment on Academic Success

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This article investigates factors influencing student perspectives on the effect of employment on academic success among African American males in public two-year colleges. Data derived from the 2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study from employed students were analyzed. This study used a dichotomous dependent outcome where students reported that employment either had a "negative effect" or "positive effect" on their academic success. Using logistic regression, three nested models were analyzed which examined the relationship between the dichotomous outcome and background factors, a job's affect on school, and students reasons for working. Findings illustrated that students who believed that their employment aided them in their coursework, provided them with work experience, and did not limit the number of courses they could take were more likely to believe that work had a "positive effect" on their academic success. Further, students who worked to pay their educational expenses were more likely to believe that employment had a "negative effect" on their academic success. Implications for policy, practice, and further research are explored.

The majority of college students are employed during some stage of their postsecondary education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This circumstance is true for public two-year college students where nearly 84 percent hold some form of employment during college (e.g., job, self-employment, work study, assistantship) and who work (on average) more than 27 hours per week (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Recent data illustrates that a portion, 42 percent, of students enrolled in the community college gain job skills (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). Given the current economic downturn, this

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circumstance has continued as increasing numbers of those in the workforce are turning to the community college to retool their skills to attain better employment opportunities (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Prior research has indicated that working students are less likely to persist and more likely to reduce their course-loads from full-time to part-time students. Further, this research suggests that on-campus employment opportunities are found to have a positive effect on students' success, resulting in increased persistence and graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). In a similar vein, Tinto (1993) noted that external obligations (student commitments which are external to the institution) can be detrimental to academic success and continuation. In particular, he stated that employment can inhibit time dedicated toward one's academic pursuits (e.g., studying, using academic resources) and limit students' interaction with faculty members. In turn, these barriers can prevent the full academic and social integration of students into the campus setting, thus reducing their likelihood of persistence. However, Tinto (1993) also stated that employment can serve to benefit students' academic success if there is a direct connection between students' career goals and academic pursuits. These findings suggest that working while in school can have a negative impact on student outcomes unless the employment relates to students career goals.

This article investigates factors influencing student perspectives on the effect of employment on academic success among African American males in public-two year colleges. The literature suggests that Black** male academic success rates in the community college*** are concerning (Goins, 1995; Mosby, 2009; Perrakis, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2008), the average Grade Point Average (GPA) of a Black male in public two-year colleges is only 2.55. This is lower than the majority of their male counterparts including Whites, Hispanic/Latinos, and Asian Americans who have average GPAs of 2.85, 2.63, and 2.82, respectively. In general, extant literature on student success and persistence addresses employment in two ways: (a) determining whether the student is employed or not employed, and (2) gauging the number of hours students work per week (e.g., Mason, 1994, 1998). While this approach does provide some insight to the extent of students' work schedules, it does not address the intricacies of work related factors (e.g., reasons for working, impact of employment) on student perspectives or academic success.

Prior to this study, limited research has examined how employment impacts the success of Black male collegians. Mason (1994, 1998) created a model of African American male persistence in the community college. Though employment was one of the factors he examined, his findings did not find any

** The terms Black and African American are used interchangeably in this study.
*** This study uses the terms community college and public two-year college interchangeably.

relationship between employment and success outcomes. Despite this fact, some qualitative research has illustrated differently. Shannon (2006) found employment to be an important factor in student persistence. In her interviews with students, Shannon noted that students attributed work as an integral barrier to persistence. She noted that one reason that this occurred was that students were in need of flexible work schedules. Similar to these findings, Wood (2010) found that ten of thirteen employed students who discussed employment as a factor affecting their college success discussed it as an impediment. Further, Wood found that students' employment left students too tired to study for classes, especially for students who worked physically demanding jobs.

A number of previous studies have suggested that African Americans, particularly Black males, are negatively affected by low employment rates (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001-2002; Jordan, 2008; Waddell, 2004; Wilkins, 2005). In particular, this circumstance has been enhanced because of the economic turndown. For example, during 2009, the national unemployment rate for African American males who were 20 years of age or above was approximately 17 percent (Corley, 2009). Related to this issue is the lack/choice of employment for Black males. African American males are described as being affected by undesirable employment options (Hagedorn et al., 2001-2002). This lack of employment mobility can limit job options thereby reducing the employment flexibility needed for success in college.

A topic interrelated with that of employment is finances. Finances have been raised as an important factor affecting African American male student outcomes in several prior studies (Hampton, 2002; Jordan, 2008; Offutt, 1971). Offutt (1971) was one of the first authors to note the impact of finances on academic outcomes for African American males in the community college. Offutt found that Black male students were in great need of financial assistance. Nearly 40 years since Offutt's research, similar concerns were identified by Mason (1998). Mason (1994, 1998) examined the relationship between finances and Black male persistence. He found a strong negative relationship between finances and persistence, meaning that as family income decreased, student persistence decreased. Similarly, findings from Wood (2010) illustrated that financial instability negatively affects students' academic success. The next section discusses the methods employed in this study.

Methods

In order to examine factors influencing African American male student perspectives on the effect of employment on academic success, this study draws upon data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 08). NPSAS is a comprehensive national dataset of all undergraduate students collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Starting in 1986, NPSAS is conducted every few years to report on how collegians finance their education. NPSAS serves as the base year for either the Beginning

Postsecondary Students (BPS) longitudinal Study or the Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) Longitudinal study, the 2008 NPSAS focuses on the latter (Cominole, Riccobono, Siegel, Cavesm, & Rosen, 2008). NPSAS: 08 produced "reliable national estimates of characteristics related to financial aid for postsecondary students at both the undergraduate and graduate level" (Cominole, Riccobono, Siegel, & Caves, 2010, p. iii).

Sample

Data from this study reports on 127,700 respondents who attended Title IV institutions (institutions eligible to participate in federal student aid programs) between July of 2007 and June of 2008. Participation requirements necessitated that students be enrolled in at least one course as part of an academic degree program or be engaged in a vocational program requiring, at minimum, three months of coursework. Cross-sectional weights were employed to enable student-level analysis of NPSAS: 08 data (Cominole et al., 2010). This study reports on data specific to undergraduate students who identified as Black or African American and male who attended public two-year colleges during the survey year. Data was further limited to all participants who were working. This represented a weighted sample of 575 students. This study uses NPSAS: 08 data to explore factors influencing student perspectives on the effect of employment on academic success. In this study, the population of African American male students in the community college was purposely restricted to those who were working and those who maintained strong perspectives (positive or negative) on whether employment served to benefit or detract from their academic success. This outcome (Y) necessitated a multivariate analytic approach which could examine a dependent variable which was both categorical and dichotomous. As such, logit analysis (logistic regression) was utilized.

Variables

In NPSAS: 08, participants were asked what effect their employment had on their grades, with response types, including "negative effect" (coded 0) and "positive effect" (coded 1). When delimiting the sample to these response categories, 70.4 percent reported the employment had a "negative effect" on college while 29.6 percent noted a "positive effect." A total of twelve variables were examined in relationship to this outcome. The first set of variables served to control (Z) for pertinent background factors, these included age, income percentile, and distance of job from college). The variable income percentile rank for all students presents a ranking of student income, which is calculated for independent and dependent students separately, and then combined into one variable. The second set of variables focused on student perspectives on how employment affected school. Five dichotomous variables (X) were examined: 1) job helped with class work; 2) job limited access to campus facilities; 3) job limited the class schedule; 4) job limited the number of classes; and 5) job

restricted choice of classes. These covariates were coded 0 for "no" and 1 for "yes." The third set of variables focused on students' reasons for working, and included: 1) gaining job experience; 2) minimizing debt; 3) paying educational expenses; and 4) paying living expenses. Similar to the second set of covariates, variables in the third construct (X) were coded 0 for "no" and 1 for "yes."

Table 1
Means and Standard Errors

Variables		Mean	SE
Controls			
	Age	27.7	.43
	Income percentile rank for all students	40.4	1.27
	Job: Distance from NPSAS school to work	16.0	.67
Job affects school			
	Helped with class work	-	-
	Limited access to campus facilities	-	-
	Limited the class schedule	-	-
	Limited the number of classes	-	-
	Restricted choice of classes	-	-
Reason for Working			
	Gain job experience	-	-
	Minimize debt	-	-
	Pay educational expenses	-	-
	Pay living expenses	-	-

‡‡‡ Variables were weighted using (WTA000) used in frequency

Table 2
Coding Schema

Theoretical Construct	Questions	Code
Controls		
	Age	Categorical: 0 = 0yrs to 27.7yrs; 1 = 27.8yrs to 100yrs.
	Income percentile rank for all students	Continuous: 2 to 100
	Job: Distance from NPSAS school to work	Continuous: 1 to 200
Job affects school		
	Helped with class work	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
	Limited access to campus facilities	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
	Limited the class schedule	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
	Limited the number of classes	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
	Restricted choice of classes	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
Reason for Working		
	Gain job experience	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
	Minimize debt	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
	Pay educational expenses	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes
	Pay living expenses	Categorical: 0 = no; 1 = yes

Procedure

The three sets of variables were examined as nested models. Models are considered nested when "the first model contains some, but not all, of the predictors in the second model and contains no predictors that are not included in the second model" (Menard, 2002, p. 22). The first model examined the effect of background factors (Z) in relationship to the dependent variable (Y). The second model focused on students' perspectives on how employment affects school (X) in relationship to the dependent variable. The second model also included background factors (Z). The final model examined reasons for working (X) in relationship to the dependent variable (Y). This model also included background factors (Z) as well as variables related to employments affect on school (X). Thus, the final model employed all variables (X, Y, Z) from all models. Data was analyzed using PowerStats, a statistical software accessible through the National Center for Education Statistics datalab.

In order to examine the "goodness of fit"*** in the nested models, the -2 log likelihood was used (hereafter referred to as -2LL). The -2LL is a deviance measure of the fit between one model and its comparison model. The measure is derived from subtracting "twice the value of the log of the likelihood ratio" (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003, p. 501). Model fit was determined by

*** Goodness of fit is a terms referring to the "predictive power of the model" (Henderson & Morriss, 2006, p. 182).

comparing the intercept only model with each successive nested model (covariates model) in order to determine if there was a statistically significant increase in the model (Peng, So, Stage & St. John, 2002). The difference between the -2LL from the intercept only model and the intercept and covariates model is referred to as the model X^2 (Menard, 2002). This statistic and the associated degrees of freedom were examined using a chi-square table to ensure that there was a statistically significant improvement in the model. Given the moderate sample size, the p-value for this study was <.001. In order to compare nested models using the -2LL, the sample size between models must match. This was the case in all models examined. Though only 575 participants were included as a representative national sample of working Black male community college students, this sample is sufficient to generalize findings to the NPSAS: 08 sample. In examining the use of logistic regression in higher education research, Peng et al. (2002) cited two generally accepted rules for a sufficient sample size as proffered by Lawley and Maxwell (1971) and Long (1997). Lawley and Maxwell (1971) stated that at least 51 subjects were needed above the number of variables employed. All models examined in this study were well beyond this criterion. Long (1997) indicated that ten observations per variable explored is needed for a reasonable analysis of data. This criterion was also exceeded in all models.

It seemed logical that models could pose potential problems for issues of multicollinearity. As noted by Allison (1999), this could inhibit achieving clarity in determining the respective effects of outcome variables. Two steps to avoid multicollinearity issues were employed. One step (among others) suggested by Allison (1999) is the use of a correlation matrix to examine the relationship between variables. This procedure was used in tandem with ensuring variance inflation factor (VIF) levels were lower than 10, a commonly used cut-off point (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1995; Mason, Gunst & Hess, 1989; Neter, Wasserman & Kutner, 1983). VIF levels were well below five for eleven of twelve variables. One variable was found to have higher levels but was determined to be useful for analytic purposes.****

Findings

The first model examined background characteristics, including age, income percentile rank for all students, and job distance from school to work. Findings indicated that the odds of a student viewing work as having a "positive effect" on college increased by 12 percent for students over the mean age of Black

**** The variable 'job helps with classwork' was found to have a VIF slightly over 10. As noted by O'Brien (2007) in his criticism of the use of VIF in regression models, VIF is effected by sample size as well as standard errors. Given the moderate sample size employed and the minimal standard errors seen as well as low correlations between this variable and other covariates in the models, this variable was determined to be stable enough for analysis.

Table 3
Odds Ratios for the Nested Models

Controls		1	2	3
	Age	1.120	1.436	1.878
	Income percentile rank for all students	0.997	0.998	0.999
	Job: Distance from NPSAS school to work	0.994	0.994	0.995
Job affects school				
	Helped with class work		6.966***	6.213***
	Limited access to campus facilities		0.719	0.899
	Limited the class schedule		0.704	0.685
	Limited the number of classes		0.311***	0.338***
	Restricted choice of classes		0.606	0.609
Reason for Working				
	Gain job experience			3.822***
	Minimize debt			0.643
	Pay educational expenses			0.499*
	Pay living expenses			0.534
	Number of cases	575	575	575
	-2 Log Likelihood	-94714.365	133259.767	144753.987
	Degrees of freedom	3	8	12
	Pseudo R^2	0.002	0.200	.260
	Percent Correct	.500	.705	.724

* < .05, ** <.01, ** <.001

Note: given the moderate sample size employed, readers should cautiously consider findings below the <.01 level (see Flowers, 2006).

males in the sample (27.7 years old). The mean age was used as a proxy to determine whether older students hold divergent views on the benefits of employment on their academic success in comparison to their younger student counterparts. However, this finding was not statistically significant neither were other background variables (e.g., income percentile rank, distance of job from school) employed in the first model as controls.

The second model explored the relationship between background characteristics (also examined in the first model) and variables related to a job's effect on school. With respect to the background variables, only minimal differences were seen in the controls. However, in the second model the odds of students viewing work as having a "positive effect" on college increased by 43 percent for students over the mean age of the sample. As in the first model, no background variables were statistically significant. Two of the five variables examining how jobs affect school were found to be significant. This analysis indicated that the odds of students perceiving a "positive effect" between employment and school were 595 percent higher when students viewed their

jobs as helping with their coursework. This finding was statistically significant (p <.001).

Also significant in this model, was the relationship between class limitations and perceptions of the impact of work on school. The odds of students seeing employment as having a "positive effect" on school decreased by 68.9 percent when there was a perception that work limited the number of classes they could take (p <.001). In general, employment was perceived as having a "negative effect" on college when students believed that their work limited their access to campus facilities, limited their class schedules, and restricted their choice of classes. However, these findings were not found to be statistically significant. The -2LL for the second model indicated that it was significantly from model 1, correctly predicting 70.5 percent of cases.

In the third nested model, the background variables, a job's affect on school, and reasons for working were all examined. Similar to the first two nested models, the odds of students over the mean age believing that work has a "positive effect" on college were higher (87 percent) than students below the mean age. As with the prior models, the background variables were not found to be significant in determining whether students viewed work as having a "negative" or "positive" effect on college. Variables related to a job's affect on school were found to have similar relationships to those in the first model. As with the first model, the odds of perceiving a "positive effect" between employment and school were higher (by 521 percent) when students believed that their jobs helped them with their coursework. This finding was statistically significant (p <.001). Also, the odds of perceiving a "positive effect" decreased by 66.2 percent when work limited the number of classes in which students could enroll (p <.001). Overall, students perceived a "negative effect" between work and school when they believed that their job limited their access to campus facilities (by 10.1 percent), class schedules (by 31.5 percent), and class options (by 39.1 percent). As with the second model, these relationships were not significant.

The third nested model also examined students' reasons for working in relationship to their perception of the effect of work on school. Findings indicated that the odds of perceiving a 'positive effect' of employment on school was greater (by 282 percent) for students who were employed for the purpose of gaining work experience. This finding was statistically significant (p <.001). This analysis also found that the odds of perceiving a "positive effect" was 50.1 percent less for students working to pay educational expenses (p<.05). In general, the odds of students' perceiving a negative effect between work and school was greater when students were working to minimize debt (35.7 percent) or to pay living expenses (46.6 percent). However, these relationships were not statistically significant. The -2LL for the third model was found to have a significant improvement from model 2, correctly predicting 72.4 percent of cases. The next section discusses the implications of these findings for student affairs practitioners.

Implications and Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate important considerations. Students were significantly more likely to believe that employment had a positive effect on school when their jobs aided them in their coursework or when they worked to gain work experience applicable to their interests. As noted by Tinto (1993), employment can serve to advance student success when there is a direct relationship between students' academics and their career goals. This notion is affirmed by findings from this study. These findings have strong implications for student affairs practitioners. Given that many of the Black males they encounter will be engaged in some form of employment, it is imperative to encourage students to consider employment options which correspond with their career objectives. Above and beyond the income derived from employment or distance from work to school, connecting employment to students' learning experience may be integral to student academic success (e.g., grades).

The importance of finding work which is at least marginally connected to students' career goals should be communicated early in students' academic careers. For instance, discussions about college employment can take place during campus orientations, one-on-one advising, and in freshmen seminar coursework (if offered). If a student is identified as not having employment applicable to their career objectives, then actions can be taken to support the student in attaining related employment (e.g., referrals to campus career centers, discussions about work-study options, exploration of internship opportunities). An added benefit of encouraging connections between school and work is that students will have an opportunity to explore whether they are still committed to their field of interest after gaining applicable work experience. If determined that work in their field is not desirable, then students still have time to consider alternative field (and possibly major) options.

This study also found that students believed employment had a negative effect on their grades when it limited the number of courses they could take. Conceivably, limiting the number of courses that students could take could reduce their time status from full-time to part time, increase their time to graduation, and create difficulties in completing classes offered less frequently. As noted by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), working students often reduced their course-loads from full-time to part-time. This can result in increased time towards graduation and lowered persistence rates. As indicated in this study, the balance between work and the number of courses that can be taken can also serve to negatively effect students grades.

Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) synthesis of research findings has suggested that on-campus employment may be a positive alternative option. This closer proximity may allow students to maintain their engagement in their academic coursework. That being said, this study did not find a significant relationship between the distance from students jobs to school and students perspectives on employment. Nonetheless, prior research on Black males in the

community college has suggested that students with full-time status are more likely to persist than students with part-time status (Freeman, 2003; Hagedorn et al., 2001-02). With this in mind, student affairs practitioners should advocate for flexible course offerings with respect to time (e.g., evening, night) and modality (e.g., hybrid, online, accelerated). Such offerings may allow students to better balance school and work commitments and reduce the effect of work on students' grades.

Since "actual" grade point averages did not serve as the point of analysis in the study, it is possible that there may be a disconnect between students' perspectives on what effects their grades and what "actually" effects their grade point averages. As such, future research should consider using students' grade point averages as the dependent variable to investigate the relationship employment and school. In addition, while this study examined students' perceptions of academic success (e.g., grades), future research should consider how employment impacts persistence, remediation, transfer, and job attainment (post graduation). Understanding how employment effects these areas will serve to advance knowledge bases needed to enhance the success of Black males in the community college.

In closing, findings from this study illustrated that students who believed that their employment aided them in their coursework, provided them with work experience, and did not limit the number of courses they could take were more likely to believe that work had a "positive effect" on their academic success. Further, students who worked to pay their educational expenses were more likely to believe that employment had a "negative effect" on their academic success. Given these findings, student affairs practitioners in community colleges should consider employment as an integral piece of the academic success puzzle.

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Career Counseling for African American College Students: Drawing outside the Line May Be Required

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This study explores the relation between current theory and practices regarding career counseling for African American college students and the lack of an appropriate theoretical framework to addresses the needs of this particular college population. Given the gaps in theory, research, and practice regarding African American career behaviors, the author offers recommendations and outlines important elements to be considered in future research and practice.

The good news is that African Americans attending postsecondary educational institutions have increased. The bad news, according to Owens, Lacey, Rawls and Holbert-Quince (2010) is that the "college completion rate of African Americans continues to lag behind that of other racial and ethnic groups" (p. 292). Indeed, the American Council on Education (2008) reported that in terms of people of color, postsecondary generational gains seem to have become stagnant. In 2008, The American Council on Education President, Molly Board, commented that "one of the core tenets of the American dream is the hope that younger generations, who've had greater opportunities for educational advancement than their parents and grandparents, will be better off than the generations before them, yet this report shows that aspiration is at serious risk" (Ryu, 2008, p. 2). Similarly, Walker, Pearson and Murrell (2010) provided evidence that "only 3 out of 10 [students of color] achieve their educational goal of earning an associate's or bachelor's degree" (p. 739).

What then is the disjuncture between more African Americans attending colleges and universities and their current low completion rates? Palmer and Strayhorn (2008) contend that the important variable which needs to be addressed is that of students non-cognitive skills, i.e., study habits, reflective activities, and career related issues. In addressing the career and vocational needs and concerns of African Americans, Falconer and Hays (2006) indicate:

> Several factors are implicated in the career struggles of African Americans. A variety of negative social and environmental factors, such as lack of social support and discomfort with the university social

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