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1-2023

Chapter 6 - Empowerment Programming: Case Study of How Intentionality and Consideration Create Breakthrough Elevating Graduate Programs

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INTRODUCTION

The nation's higher education institutions have historically been at the leading edge of social change and innovation. College administrators are challenged with ways to understand, embrace, advocate for, and empower diverse groups beyond their cultural differences. These considerations describe the "why" of empowerment endeavors. Administrators must also grapple with "how" an empowerment project should unfold. These issues were the nexus and the impetus behind the support efforts of a cohort of African American graduate students at a small, Predominately White Institution (PWI) in Kansas. The initial concern was how to guide them through the institution's MBA program. This chapter analyzes the events surrounding a successful intervention between the college and these transitioning athletes into a more deliberative and rigorous academic endeavor. It will provide contrasts between athletic and academic programs for administrators considering survival behaviors such as intellectual competence and social isolation.

BACKGROUND

The Dilemma

In the summer of 2008, a small, predominately white college (PWI) in Kansas was deeply concerned about several of its newly graduated African American students. These students had decided to enroll as a cohort in its MBA program. The cohort consisted entirely of athletes; 11 football players and one basketball player. The Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) and the Vice President of Academics (VPA) feared that the students' ambitions outpaced their actual prospects for academic success. Although they were successful in the undergraduate program, the data suggest the administrators' concerns were well-founded.

The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools (2009) found that "Statistically, African American and Latino men arrive at college less prepared than their White counterparts." The racial achievement gap finds Black and Latino students trail their White counterparts of the same age. Even now, the National Urban League's (2022) annual State of Black America Equality Index holds that the graduation rates from 4-year institutions where students started as full-time, first-time students are 44.3% to 66.6% black to white overall: 80%

to 94% for student-athletes. The report shows a dismal 0.9% for black students compared to 1.1% for whites. There are myriad explanations for the academic achievement gap. For example, Steele (1998) attributed what he called "stereotype vulnerability" and "intimidation" as contributing factors to poor academic performance in black students, along with the widely held views that limited resources in black neighborhoods and schools are the main contributors.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 report finds that,

> While blacks and Latinos are generally much poorer than whites in America, it is possible to parse available data to demonstrate the existence of distinct income achievement gaps within racial groups. Poor white students tend toward lower achievement than rich white students. Whites, meanwhile, significantly outperform blacks and Latinos at each income level. As a result, low-income black students suffer from the largest achievement gap of any cohort. NAEP data suggests that the average non-poor white student is about three and a half years ahead in learning compared to the average poor black student; this gap increases to roughly five years when comparing top-performing New Jersey with low-performing Washington, DC. (p. 13).

Examining reading and math scores in grades four, eight, and 12 shows how performance declines over time and illustrates the existing racial disparities. While in some cases, the number of black and Latino students at the "advanced" level was statistically significant, few were (p. 11).

NAEP Test Scores, average for reading and math, 2007
% of students at the "advanced" level

White — Grade 4: 10, Grade 8: 6.1, Grade 12 (2005): 4
Latino — Grade 4: 3, Grade 8: 1.1, Grade 12 (2005): 0.4
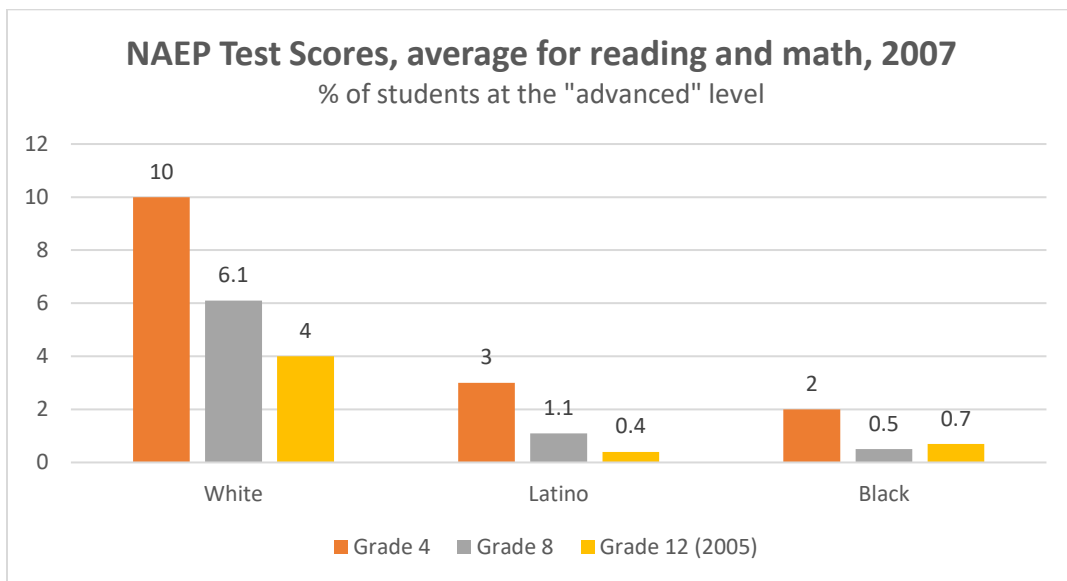Black — Grade 4: 2, Grade 8: 0.5, Grade 12 (2005): 0.7

Figure 1. NAEP test scores (2009)

Notably, there was a 60% decline in performance from grades four to 12 among whites, an 87% decline among Latinos, and a 65% decline among blacks over the same grade range.

THE URGENCY AND IMPORTANCE OF DISMANTLING EDUCATION INEQUITY

The broader implications of these data suggest the substantial economic impact on the GDP and how empowerment programs could bridge the economic impact among racial groups and improve U.S. economic performance overall.

The NAEP (2009) makes a strong case for the high price of underutilization of human capital.

> By underutilizing such a large proportion of the country's human potential, the US economy is less rich in skills than it could be.

> - If the United States had closed the international achievement gap between 1983 and 1998 and raised its performance to the level of such nations as Finland and Korea, US GDP in 2008 would have been between $1.3 trillion and $2.3 trillion higher, representing 9 to 16 percent of GDP.
>
> - If the United States had closed the racial achievement gap and black and Latino student performance had caught up with that of white students by 1998, GDP in 2008 would have been between $310 billion and $525 billion higher, or roughly 2 to 4 percent of GDP. (The magnitude of this effect will rise in the years ahead as blacks and Latinos become a larger proportion of the population.)
>
> - If the United States had closed the income achievement gap so that between 1983 and 1998 the performance of students from families with income below $25,000 a year had been raised to the performance of students from homes with incomes above $25,000 a year, then GDP in 2008 would have been $400 billion to $670 billion higher, or 3 to 5 percent of GDP.
>
> - If the United States had closed the systems achievement gap so that between 1983 and 1998 states performing below the national average on NAEP were brought up to the national average, GDP in 2008 would have been $425 billion to $700 billion higher, or about 3 to 5 percent of GDP (p. 17).

Issues, Controversies, Problems

Before we explore graduate-level empowerment programs, we should contextualize the student-athlete experience since the participants in this case study come from that population, and it is how they arrive at the program. Athletic programs have long been regarded as the nexus and on-ramp for African American students' involvement in academics and personal empowerment. Examining the literature regarding the positive aspects of athletic participation and academics for student-athletes, especially African American students, is wide-ranging and provides a provocative theoretical framework. Brown et al. (2000) cite how well-documented the physical and personal development aspects of sports participation are for student-athletes (Folkins & Sime, 1981).

Petitpas (1987) suggested that sports participation provides opportunities to develop athletic skills, to engage in social interaction, and to build self-confidence. Similarly, Erikson (1963) noted from a developmental perspective that sport participation facilitates acquisition of skills and industry and further helps determine a personal identity around athletics (p. 53).

Brown et al. (2000) found some negative aspects of the student-athlete experience in what they identified as "identity foreclosure."

Identity foreclosure denotes a commitment to an occupation or ideology in the absence of engaging in exploratory behavior (Marcia, 1966; Petitpas, 1978). Marcia (1966) described the foreclosed personality as being set in one's way in the absence of any personal searching. Similarly, Muuss (1975) regarded the foreclosed individual as rigid and inflexible (p. 54).

Another potential pitfall for the student-athlete is what Brewer et al. (1993) identified as "the ego-identity construct," which is defined as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role (p. 237).

Athletic identity may be relevant to understanding the career decision-making process of college student-athletes. It has been argued that individuals who identify strongly with their athletic role may be less likely to explore other career, educational, and lifestyle options because of their intensive involvement in sports (Brown, et al., 2000, p. 54).

Ultimately, Brown et al. (2000) cite inconsistency in the literature. Murphy et al. (1996) show "an inverse relationship between athletic identity and career maturity attitudes," whereas Brown and Hartley (1998) "found no significant relationship between athletic identity and five career development variables: planning, exploration, decision making, world-of-work information, and knowledge of preferred occupational group." In their research, Brown et al. (2000) also found no significant relationship between athletic identity and identity foreclosure, suggesting that "failure to explore alternative roles and strong athletic identification are distinct processes" (p. 60). This chapter is more interested in the evolution of self-efficacy associated with current or former student-athletes involved in a mentoring process and how students of color navigate the pressure to perform along the two expectational axes of academics and athletics.

Students, Schools, and Athletic Program Pseudo-Empowerment

Black students face systemic racism embedded in the dilemma of using their physicality to benefit their school versus their personal academic development. Beamon (2008) highlights this perspective.

In terms of African American male student-athletes, there are two opposing perspectives that are employed regarding sports' role in the educational development of the group: (a) athletics may provide educational opportunities to African Americans from underprivileged backgrounds that would not otherwise be available, and (b) sports have exploited the majority of African American athletes (Sellers, 2000). Although

participation in athletics is often considered a golden opportunity for African Americans, compelling evidence to the contrary has been presented for decades (Beamon & Bell, 2006; Edwards, 1983, 1988; Lapchick, 1996). In fact, serious involvement in athletics has hampered the development of African American males in several areas, including academic and occupational achievement (Lomax, 2000).

Further, she notes that there is

a clear emphasis placed on the physical capabilities of student-athletes, their academic capacities and role as a student are often overlooked (Eitzen, 2000, 2003; Hawkins, 1999; Litsky, 2003; Maloney & McCormick, 1993). Sack and Stuarowsky (1998) discussed this emphasis by stating, "Universities are far more concerned with exploiting the athletic talent [of student athletes] than with nurturing academic potential" (p. 104). It has been noted that some student-athletes are academically unprepared for college and a gap exists in the graduation rates of African American student-athletes compared to White student-athletes (Benson, 2000; Edwards, 1983; Lapchick, 1996; Washington & Karen, 2001).

An important consideration for these students is how to negotiate the opportunities collegiate athletic programs provide to uplift their social-economic status while avoiding possible shortfalls by not maximizing the full college experience. Beamon (2008) argues the profit motive of collegiate athletic programs. "Universities use the commercialization of their sports programs to generate revenue, increase visibility, recruit students, and receive alumni support, which creates a pressure to win (Donnor, 2005; Upthegrove, Roscigno, & Charles, 1999)." Therefore, "exceptional athletes are of great financial value to universities" (Beamon, p. 353).

A comparison of the economic impact of participation in athletic programs shows that schools and athletic associations are the real benefactors. Watkins (2006) argues that because of the overrepresentation of African Americans in revenue-generating sports.

In this paper, using simple financial discounting and valuation techniques, it is determined that the wealth transfer out of the black community for the use of black athletes is over a quarter of a trillion dollars over a 40-year period. This number exceeds the GNP of Russia and is 125 times greater than the 60-year fund-raising total of the United Negro College Fund. "In light of the socioeconomic struggles of the Black community, these numbers suggest that a highly valuable resource is being extracted by the NCAA (p. 2).

In stark contrast, the black student-athlete does not benefit economically in proportion to his contribution to these programs.

Therefore, the athlete's contribution to the NCAA can be argued to be nearly 30 times greater than his compensation. But this only assumes that the athlete graduates from college, which is not true for most black division I athletes in revenue-generating sports (Watkins, p. 7).

Brown et al. (2000) note the dissonant demands placed on the student-athlete: "The demands of playing, training, and traveling generally compete with adequate career preparation (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982), rendering many student-athletes ill-prepared for career and life choices outside the sports milieu."   Conversely,

> the positive aspects of sports participation, including both physical and personal development, are well documented (Folkins & Sime, 1981). For example, Petitpas (1987) suggested that sports participation provides opportunities to develop athletic skills, to engage in social interaction, and to build self-confidence.

These factors provide the context for the importance of empowering and elevating programs for student-athletes in general and black college students more acutely.

Theoretical Framework of Student-Athlete Psychosocial Identity

Embedded in the literature for student-athletes are Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy in Social Learning Theory, Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966), and Social Reproduction Theory (Giroux, 1983).

- Self-efficacy refers to one's confidence in accomplishing certain tasks. Hence, career decision-making self-efficacy refers to confidence in one's ability to make career decisions (p. 54).

- Locus of Control refers to the extent to which people believe themselves to be in control of the reinforcement sources in their lives (p. 55). "Research findings have suggested that college students with an internal locus of control possess attitudes and skills indicative of higher career maturity level as compared to students who possess an external locus of control" (Blustein, 1987; Taylor, 1982).

- Social Reproduction Theory, according to Giroux (1983), holds that schools impart differing classes and social groups with the skills and knowledge needed to maintain the status quo in the labor force, which is stratified by the variables of class, race, and gender.

It is important to note Locus of Control Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory's contradiction with Beamon's (2008) findings. Brown et al. (2000) accounted for this distinction in the following way:

> Based on previous research which has found lower career maturity in student-athletes as compared to nonathlete students (Blann, 1985, Kennedy & Dimick, 1987), and the hypothesized identity development explanation, it was expected that (a) student-athletes who report greater hours of sport participation exhibit lower career decision-making self-efficacy; (b) student-athletes who exhibit a strong identity to their athlete role and/or who are identity foreclosed demonstrate low self-efficacy for career decision-making tasks; and (c) student-athletes who possess an internal orientation toward career planning exhibit greater career decision-making self-efficacy.

Gerdy (2000) notes that some universities do little to endorse an academic lifestyle among student-athletes. This lack of programming "provides a clear emphasis on the athletic abilities of student-athletes at the high school and university level, reproduce student-athletes with an educational inequality who are not prepared academically or culturally for the transition into the occupational sector" (Beamon, p. 354). Beamon (2008) echoes Brown et al. (2000) that the educational attainment of student-athletes is frequently hindered by athletic training and travel; and student-athletes often find it difficult to balance athletics, academics, and social roles (p. 354).

DISCUSSION, SOLUTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Watkins (2006) suggests that solutions may require a substantial change in the business of college athletics but that these changes may be necessary to "eliminate the strong contradictions in the philosophies in American universities" (p. 9). Beamon (2008) observes

> the mass media constantly deluges society with images glorifying African American men who are successful by employing avenues connected with sports and reinforces the stereotype of African American males as exclusively athletically talented (Hall, 2001). Collegiate student-athletes, particularly, African American male student-athletes, often have lower career maturity, an impaired aptitude to devise educational and career plans, with self esteem and an identity based on athletics (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Blann, 1985; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987).

> African American male student-athletes in football and basketball also have lower academic achievement, stronger expectations for a professional sports career, and are socialized more intensely toward sports than their White counterparts (Beamon & Bell, 2002, 2006; Edwards, 2000; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Hoberman, 2000; Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn 1999). Pursuing athletic achievement in an obsessive manner and doing so to the detriment of educational and occupational aspirations is described in an Edwards's study as a triple tragedy for African Americans:

> 1. The tragedy of thousands of black youths in the obsessive pursuit of sports goals that the overwhelming majority of them will never attain.

> 2. The tragedy of personal and cultural underdevelopment throughout black society.

> 3. The tragedy of cultural and institutional underdevelopment in black society as a consequence of the drain in talent potential toward sports and away from other vital areas of occupational and career emphasis such as medicine, law, economics, politics, education, and technical field (Harrison, 2000, p. 36).

Beamon (2008) observes that schools and universities that provide opportunities to African American males to attend college through athletic scholarships by emphasizing the importance of the athletic role over the academic one reproduce systemic inequities of failing to prepare these students for careers and even hindering their choice of majors. She recommends that "Student-

athletes should demand and take responsibility for a well-rounded education. They should value the educational opportunity as much as they value the athletic opportunity" (p. 362).

This author's father characterizes himself as academically poor as a high school student in the 1950s. He said that he had little interest in school except for his love of sports. It was to be expected; neither of his parents finished school, so he had no positive examples or mentors. He became a Hall of Famer at Washington High School in East Chicago, Indiana, because of his fondness and talent for basketball and football. He also garnered popularity and notoriety conference-wide because of his athleticism. He recounts that he was successful in school because he had to get decent grades to play sports. He says this kept him in school, helped him graduate, and obtained a football scholarship to Illinois University, which he later changed to Toledo University.

Unfortunately, while at Toledo, he encountered racism from the head coach of the football program. Instead of having the full-ride scholarship he was entitled to, he was forced to give up his starting position to a white, lesser-gifted student. He decided to drop out and go into the Air Force instead of the steel mills of Gary, Indiana. This story highlights a phenomenon involving a disruptive event that is responsible for some student-athletes avoiding identity foreclosure. In these instances, some causative events involving injury, graduation from an athletic program, or voluntary or involuntary withdrawal, resulted in the student being open to new avenues and supplanting athletics for alternative academic, career, and empowerment programs such as the one discussed in this case study.

EVOLUTION OF THE EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

Year One

The VPA and the VPSA decided it would be best to provide a mentor for their new MBA students to facilitate success in the program. Having met the VPSA earlier, and because of this author's affinity for his alma mater, she recommended him to the VPA. The author had recently completed his MBA, had enrolled for a second master's degree in Leadership, is an African American male, and was a police officer: things that lend suitability for the role.

In the fall of 2008, this author met with the student cohort and, over the next year, worked with them on a part-time basis. Relationships between the mentor and cohort deepened. The initiative took shape, and group members, including the author, formed a chapter of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) after reviewing other college mentoring organizations. SAAB has a few key mantras. "Saving Lives, Salvaging Dreams" is the main one. Also, "SAAB time is on time" and "I am my brother's keeper" are other slogans that promote positive reinforcement in members and dismantle negative stereotypes and behaviors across the organization.

Although there were chapters across approximately 40 states, the Kansas chapter was the only one in Kansas and Oklahoma. The chapter received a grant from the Lumina Foundation for the startup, which included a visit from the Founder and CEO, Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe, for a strategic planning event. The Lumina Foundation engages and facilitates programs that confront social

issues like racial justice and equality. They believe "education provides the basis for individual opportunity, economic vitality, and social stability" (Lumina Foundation Grants, 2022). The chapter elected officers, and the organization was situated under the office of the Vice President of Academics as a retention initiative.

The Kansas organization was unique because they were the only SAAB chapter consisting of graduate students. The chapter held weekly meetings, which were heavily attended; there was no absenteeism. The meetings were fun and inspirational. VIP guest speakers, such as a black female Air Force pilot from McConnell AFB, a black doctor, and a black architect from Wichita, were brought in to share career options and personal experiences.

Theoretical Framework of Empowerment Programs

A high level of pride and group affiliation developed simultaneously consistent with the following:

- Social Learning Theory – Bandura (1971) states human thought, affect, and behavior can be influenced by observation (of the model), and practice (experience), self-regulation of behaviors impacted by rewards and consequences of that behavior.

- Social Cognitive Theory – Bandura (2002) posits that in the cultural context of SCT, individuals try to change their socio-cultural customs and lifestyle patterns for a new life.

- Relational Leadership Theory – Uhl-Bien (2006) asserts that social exchange through relationship-oriented behavior carries with it "simultaneous, multiple, and common meanings that emerge from interdependence and recognition by both or all parties, the common socio-cultural contexts" (Fox, 2015, p. 40).

- Social Interdependence Theory – Thibault and Kelley (1959) deconstructed power and attraction to the group along with status, control, social norms, group goals, and role norms along the continuum of social psychology.

- Social Identity Theory – Ashforth and Mael (1989) allow the individual to locate or assign himself within the social environment and self-classify into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age, as examples.

Affiliate Programs

The program was so successful that members identified as "SAAB men." The chapter developed deep identification. They adopted a logo and related programs like a summer camp experience called the "SAAB Summit" for high school students, where they were mentors for high school students. The chapter partnered with urban programs in Wichita, like the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, which also mentored black high school students. The VPSA drove the development of affiliate stakeholders in multiple communities because she was deeply committed to the success of the chapter and its members.

Member Status and Community Involvement

Chapter members received increased status and recognition in the campus community. Faculty members knew that their affiliation meant they could expect more effort in classwork and that any issues involving SAAB members could be communicated to the VPA or the SAAB Director (this author) for resolution. In the inaugural class, there were no adverse incidents. In the Wichita community, members attended special events at local churches and received special recognition from the clergy. The chapter became involved with the National Urban League of Kansas and attended its annual banquet. One of the prominent retailers sponsored the "Dress for Success Day" when he closed his store and hosted a special presentation on how members should dress for business, interviews, and casual events.

Before the conclusion of the first year, the Founder and CEO of SAAB National Headquarters invited the Kansas chapter to attend and participate in the SAAB Annual Conference at Stony Brook University in New York, hosted by SAAB Headquarters. Year one marked the culmination of many successes. The inaugural class had a 100% graduation rate, marked by the chapter's "Graduation Showcase," where graduating members received special recognition and awards. The SAAB chapter had become institutionalized, as reflected in Figure 1, which shows the organizational hierarchy and the flow of institutional resources and outcomes.
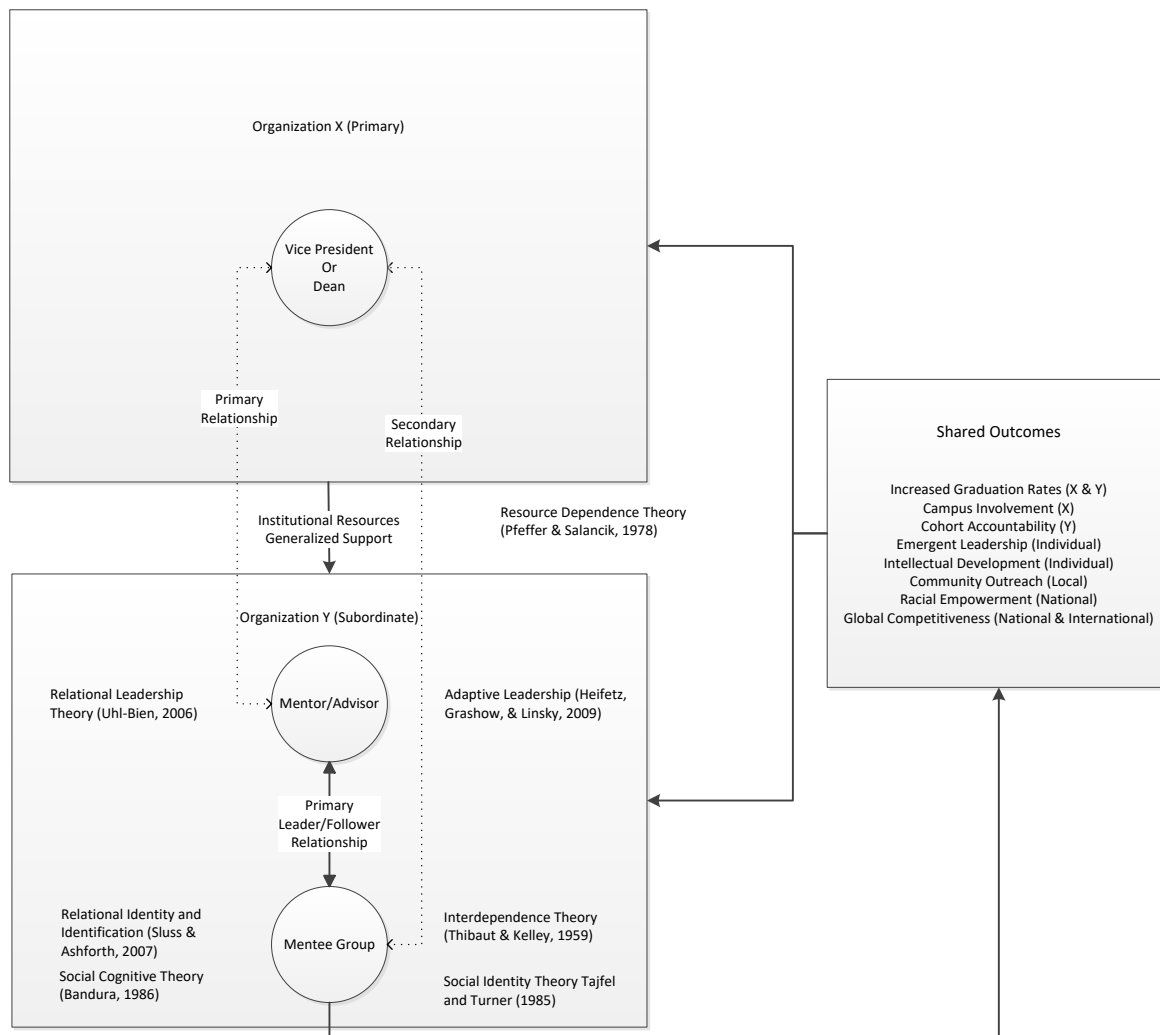
Organization X (Primary)

Vice President
Or
Dean

Primary
Relationship

Secondary
Relationship

Institutional Resources
Generalized Support

Resource Dependence Theory
(Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978)

Shared Outcomes

Increased Graduation Rates (X & Y)
Campus Involvement (X)
Cohort Accountability (Y)
Emergent Leadership (Individual)
Intellectual Development (Individual)
Community Outreach (Local)
Racial Empowerment (National)
Global Competitiveness (National & International)

Organization Y (Subordinate)

Relational Leadership
Theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006)

Mentor/Advisor

Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz,
Grashow, & Linsky, 2009)

Primary
Leader/Follower
Relationship

Relational Identity and
Identification (Sluss &
Ashforth, 2007)

Social Cognitive Theory
(Bandura, 1986)

Mentee Group

Interdependence Theory
(Thibaut & Kelley, 1959)

Social Identity Theory Tajfel
and Turner (1985)

Figure 2. Conceptual diagram of theoretical underpinnings of organizational and mentoring relationships (Fox, 2015)

Years Two Through Six

Continued positive momentum marked the beginning of the second year. The VPA hired this author as the new SAAB Initiative Director, a full-time administrator position. He also had additional responsibilities as the Director of the Student Success Center, a member of the Retention Committee, and an Academic Coach for students placed on academic probation. Together, the thrust of all these duties was to strengthen the retention efforts of the VPA. Additionally, the Director partnered with the VPSA in strategic enrollment efforts that generally targeted, identified, and recruited students from historically underrepresented populations for enrollment in the college and SAAB membership. The organizational impact affected schools regionally throughout Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The SAAB Director enrolled in a doctoral program to enhance his institutional profile and increase the program's reach. Programs like the "Speaker's Bureau, the SAAB Summit, Dress for Success," annual church visits (which now included two African American churches), and

the National SAAB Conference continued. Now chapter members were being asked to speak in the Conference's "Speaker Showcase," which was an honor that provided national recognition for the chapter. Female African American students wanted to form a similar chapter; they started a branch of the Student African American Sisterhood (SAAS). Both chapters mutually supported each other and sponsored co-events.

Figure 2 shows a visual representation of the broadening ripple effect of the impact of this elevating empowerment program.
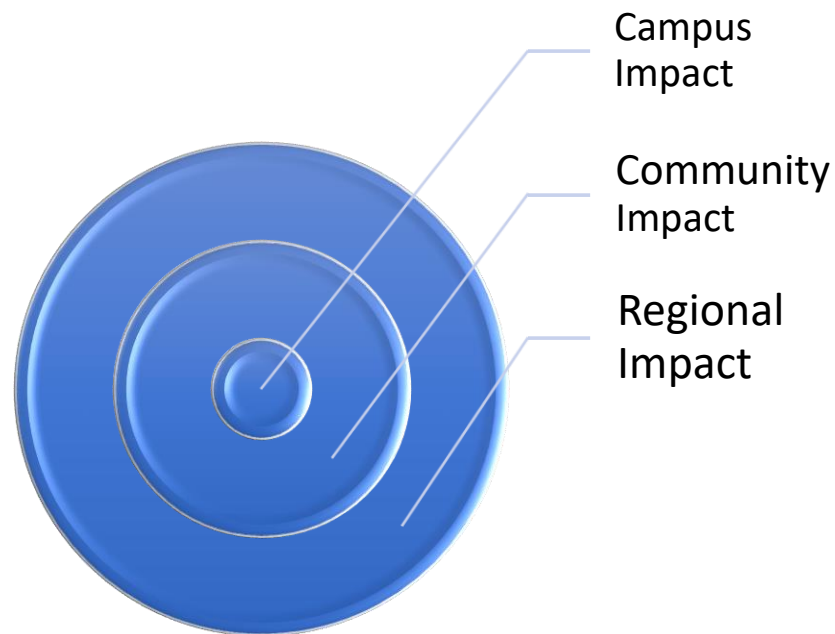
Campus
Impact

Community
Impact

Regional
Impact

Figure 3. Ripple effect of elevating empowerment programs

POSITIVE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Neutralizing Social and Professional Isolation

According to Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996), Black students still find the environment at predominantly white colleges and universities to be racist, which leads to perceptions of a hostile environment, diminished participation, engagement, increased stress, dissatisfaction, and attrition. Additionally, "White students have very little contact with African American students, and most of their preconceptions are based on preconceived stereotypes" (Torres et al., 2003 & Saddlemire, 1996). Taub and McEwen (1992) reinforce the isolation argument. "Black students must focus their energies on survival behaviors such as developing intellectual competence and dealing with the social isolation found at predominantly white institutions." This author argues that such is also the case for African American faculty and staff at PWIs, although they experience professional isolation. This notion illustrates another positive outcome of elevating

empowerment programs: they provide an environment for students and affiliated minority and majority stakeholders to feel belonging, validated, and dispel the notion that the upper echelon endorses social and professional isolation.

To maximize empowerment and self-efficacy, SAAB adopted four cornerstones of the SAAB values statement:

- Accountability
- Proactive Leadership
- Self-Discipline
- Intellectual Development

As a result, participants in the SAAB Initiative reported an array of positive outcomes. In addition to learning how to dress for business and social occasions, chapter members who previously had no substantial male influence learned how to shave, tie ties, and embrace success-oriented behaviors. One member, who became president of the chapter in the second year, reported that he had no appreciation for a GPA until his involvement with the chapter and his cohort. He graduated with distinction. This author interviewed 13 peer SAAB advisors in his previous research and found seven emergent themes: Transformation, Pride, Connection, Encouragement, High Standards, Determination, and Disappointment (Fox, 2015, p. 72). It is important to note that these programs were embedded within PWIs.

Participant Transformation

Regarding the observed transformation of their mentees, SAAB advisors noted the following:

> Other mentors related significant mentee metamorphosis, such as being homeless to becoming the SGA president, becoming better fathers, making community impact, and making better choices. The interviews of two advisors revealed the struggle that many African American males face: the choice between projecting masculinity, the mentees' perceived societal view of what being a man means, and changing their paradigm of what success is (pp. 74-75).

Another advisor reported:

> With respect to change in behavior, we have definitely seen that. I have seen that when they join in their freshmen or sophomore years and are somewhat quiet and reserved. Through the involvement, through the meeting attendance, through the interactions, they become more connected, more communicative, more trusting, and open to being supported and also extending themselves as support to other SAAB members. We've definitely seen that. We've obviously seen the typical change in level of maturity that our students go through anyway. And then just the change in their tendency to think more critically about their college experiences but also about their personal life choices.

> It's a joy to watch. I think that makes the sacrifices that you often make in terms of getting late night texts or late evening texts about different situations, whether it's

conflict or a personal family situation, financial issues, or academic issues. Being able to come to the aid of these students and provide them with advice, counsel, and guidance - that initial sacrifice is well worth it when you see the degree of change and the change of behavior on the other side (pp. 75-76).

Advisors express a high level of satisfaction with the transformation of their mentees:

We had one guy went from being homeless to being president of SGA in less than a year. His whole demeanor, his whole dress, his whole attitude, the way he talked to people, it was like, "Who is that?" The haircut, making sure that his hair was cut, them checking each other, that's what we see as success. We have a pretty good graduation rate, yes. Most of them transfer to universities. Once they graduate, they're going to Italy. They're spokespersons for HBU. They're in commercials. They're going to Africa. They're working for NASA. We have that happen, but sometimes it's just the kid who doesn't cuss every other word, the kid who goes to class every day; we're like, "Yes!"

Pride and Accountability

Some advisors expressed pride in their mentees: "They pull it together, and it's very good." Another described self-pride in his role at the school. "I have always been involved in minority activities on campus and recognized as the person to talk to about minority issues even though it's not my area of expertise." One advisor observed the pride from self-identification by a student saying, "I'm a SAAB brother!" "It gives them a certain prestige" (p. 77).

Expressions of the advisor's pride were widespread and palpable. There is no shortage of it in this organization.

We strive to be the best. We're not in this for the short term; we're in this for the long term. We're definitely vested in this thing and just to see the success of our young men. Many of them will tell you that without the support, they would not be able to achieve academically, personally, or otherwise. We use the advising model, so we're involved in their lives, not only when they're in school.

We make sure that they understand that when you leave the walls of X College or whatever meeting room you're in, your decision-making impacts every single person inside this room and outside of this room. You got to understand the importance of being your brother's keeper; not just saying it and preaching it, but doing it and being it. We are in our view, and I can guarantee that the faculty advisors would reiterate that we are a global organization, and we want to change the world one person at a time (pp. 79-80).

Another advisor observed:

Ultimately, they become successful. The majority of our students who have been in the organization, they grow into young men who we would be very proud to engage in a conversation with. Some of them may come in with a rough exterior, and we've all been there, but when we see them walk across that stage and their paradigm has shifted, you

can't put a price tag on that. You really can't put that in words how we feel as faculty advisors for the organization. It's pride plus (p. 80)!

Accountability is understandably rigid in SAAB. One advisor expressed his value system the following way:

> You represent me. You know what you should and shouldn't be doing. We allow them to be men, to be boys, and enjoy life, but you also have rules that you have to adhere to. They come back [and say], "XXX, he's pretty cool." I'm pretty cool, man! But you mess up; I'm going to deal with you. They understand. We've never had a problem. We've never had a problem (pp. 81-82).

Connection

Connection is an essential aspect of this empowerment program to counter the isolation mentioned above.

> I may encounter students, and I will encourage them to attend a SAAB meeting. Particularly if it's students, who are having some kind of a crisis, who are missing their family if they live on campus, and their feeling disconnected from their family support system. In instances like that, I will definitely encourage students to check out SAAB. That has happened, and some of those individuals are still active in SAAB and have become very connected and close with the other SAAB members. It's become not like a family; it has become a family support system for them. When you actually see that happen, obviously, SAAB has that as part of its mission in terms of building connectedness and support, but when you actually see it as an achieved reality, you really get a real-life understanding of the impact of what SAAB offers for our mentees (p. 86).

Another advisor described how his program participants were so connected that they decided to return to the school.

> It does provide him with a platform. Not only in terms to work with African-American males but in terms of his professional trajectory. Now he's a success coach, which he doesn't just work with our African-American males. Now he works with our general student body. And our other guy, Chad, he works with the general student body also.

> They've been provided opportunities. I think SAAB is one of the reasons that they decided to come back. Like I said, in 2009, that first 15, because they were selected in what they'd experienced in those years. It was about 1-2 years. I think it made a difference. And we've had several come back, too. He said, "It just wasn't home." He went to X State. He said, "I just wasn't home." So he came back. He's not connected to the program. He's working full-time, but he said it wasn't home, so he came back.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustain Organizational Commitment

The organizational commitment of host organizations was inconsistent across the SAAB-participating schools:

> Of the 13 participants that were interviewed, only four reported sufficient financial support from their organizations. All of the remaining advisors had financial resources that they committed to the institution or community in the startup phase that expired or rerouted to competing interests which caused them to campaign vigorously for the necessary funds to run their programs. For this reason, most programs become organic over time and are sources of significant frustration (Fox, p. 117).

In his study, the author found that SAAB advisors work in a continuum of inter-organizational relationships and upper-echelon support ranging from "competing" to "symbiotic." As such, advisors were at the mercy of priorities defined by the upper echelon.

> In symbiotic relationships, the upper echelon determines that the resources brought to bear coincide with organizational goals. In those cases, there is a set aside for the functioning of the organization. In competitive environments, the SAAB organization must compete with other school priorities or groups for survival. Some advisors report having to fundraise or shame their bosses into financing activities (p. 143).

Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) describes the social control of organizations due to the interdependent nature of inter-organizational influence, which causes one organization (the host organization) to exert power and control over the other (subordinate) organization. This power dynamic creates an erosion of program effectiveness, which neither organization ultimately wants, assuming the host organization was well-intentioned initially. This author recommends a thorough examination of organizational priorities and the reasons why an organization would support elevating and empowering programs one year and then withdraw them the next.

Have Resolute Intentionality

Torres et al. (2003) articulate the core idea of why these programs are essential. "Systemic racism and sexism is [sic] a central part of the foundation of our national identity, and its eradication requires the uprooting and changing of the existing hierarchy power (Spring, 1994; Takaki, 1993)." They acknowledge that administrators have two primary responsibilities in influencing the environment for diverse populations: 1. Creating policies that govern behavior, and 2. Enforcing those policies.

According to Torres et al., if administrators want to create an inclusive environment [and thereby establish elevating graduate programs], they need to concentrate on the level of involvement diverse people are given and the ability to express cultural identity within the environment (p.

82). Institutions must do more than talk a good game. They must put resources and the right people behind the talk for it to be wholly intentional and make any real impact.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

If online searches accurately indicate the diversity and inclusion environment for students on college campuses, it appears that all institutions successfully embrace the spectrum of cultural and racial differentiation. Higher education intends to provide students with a level of exposure to out-group cultures and races that one may not otherwise encounter. Although organizations like SAAB are still active, their website does not reveal active chapters. In a Google search of elevating and empowerment programs at various colleges and universities, there appears to be a Black presence, albeit marked with the usual Black Student Union in most cases. There are some institution-specific organizations like B.L.A.C.K. (Brothers Leading and Conveying Knowledge) at the University of Kansas, whose mission is "to equip black men on our campus with the tools necessary to become better men that are inspired to reach their highest potential in all aspects of life and be leaders in our world today." There are also 100 Black Men of America, Project Ricochet in Lexington, Kentucky, and various other organizations that mentor African American teens.

These organizations have value, and it is encouraging that at-risk youth have programs they can turn to for support. Many of the college-based organizations appear to be student-led instead of having an administrator whose primary mission is the growth and sustainability of the empowerment program. As such, these programs may have limited reach and impact and may cause a silo effect for the initiative, thereby contributing to group isolation of its members.

The distinction between this author's experience with SAAB relative to this case study and institution-based programs highlights the importance of national-level programs. The salience of nationally led empowerment programs is that they provide rich extra-collegiate connections and experiences to members, similar to Greek organizations. Upper-echelon involvement with these programs is crucial in signaling to campus and community constituents that these programs are vital and of large scale. They are paradigm-shifting. In contrast, most of the institutional programs of selected colleges appear to be an item on a checklist to show that the institution has one or two segmented but "diverse" programs.

An examination of the persistence of "disruptive events" that cause student-athletes to shift to deeper academic and career pursuits would be valuable for how administrators could engage and elevate these students. It would provide insight into how institutions might engage in the significant and philosophical change in American universities that Watkins (2006) calls for. Future research should also include qualitative and descriptive studies that compare institutional and nationally based programs for their impact. Also, a longitudinal study would help explore and explain the depth of transformation of participants throughout their involvement.

CONCLUSION

This chapter compares and contrasts the role athletic programs have played in affecting marginalized students historically and a case study of how the SAAB program provided

empowerment programming for graduate-level students. As stated above, the Kansas cohort was the only chapter in the SAAB organization that included graduate students. However, the impact of the partnership was transformational for all stakeholders at the campus, multi-community, and regional levels. The positive and elevating effects are long-lasting in that many graduates of the program have become mentors or are at least positive role models for their families and children. Their connection with each other and the institution continues. As a strategy for upper-echelon leaders at higher education institutions passionate about racial justice, empowerment, and creating avenues for higher academic achievement, programs like this provide a template for success.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Antiracism: Structured, conscious, and deliberate actions that intend to provide opportunities
for all people on an individual and systemic level. It acknowledges personal privileges,
confronts acts and systems of racial discrimination and works to change personal racial biases.

Cultural Competence: The ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from
cultures or belief systems different from one's own. A willingness to learn about the cultural
practices and worldview of others: a positive attitude toward cultural differences and readiness to
accept and respect those differences.

Cultural Reframing: Cultural reframing occurs when the mentee's existing cultural norms, values, and expectations are reoriented toward a divergent cultural perspective. The new cultural perspective enables the mentee to be open to and practice new behaviors suitable for success in the new environment.

Ethnic Identify Achievement: Results from exploring what it means to be a member of an ethnic group and commit to group membership. A bicultural identity develops whereby individuals develop a level of comfort with who they are in society (Phinney, 1990, 1992; Torres et al., 2003).

Group Dynamics: Emphasize the importance of group norms in shaping individual behavior. Both peer-to-peer and mentor-to-mentee involvement change normative behavior due to the role expectations of the group and the advisor.

Integrative Awareness: The individual has a well-defined sense of self and can incorporate aspects of their culture into their identity. Their attitudes toward self become self-appreciating while still appreciating the group affiliation. The individual can now show selective trust and liking for members of the dominant group who seek to eliminate the oppressive activities of the group (Sue & Sue, 1999; Torres et al., 2003).

Racial Competence: The skills and attitudes required to develop and maintain healthy cross-racial relationships, notice and analyze racial dynamics, and confront racism in the environment and in oneself. People aren't born racially competent (Michael, 2016).