

## **Factors that Impact College Matriculation for African American Students: Implications for Policy and Praxis**

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Access to postsecondary education is one of the most pressing current issues in higher education. Issues pertaining to postsecondary access have been listed as one of the top 10 state policy issues for higher education over the past several years by nationally recognized organizations such as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2008) and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2005, 2007). Access to postsecondary education has improved since the enactment of the Montgomery GI Bill in 1944 and, according to Wimberly and Noeth (2004) over 80% of eighth graders aspire to attain postsecondary education. Although students across racial and socioeconomic backgrounds have high collegiate aspiration, minority and low-income students' ability to penetrate postsecondary doors remains relatively depressed in comparison to their peers (Freeman, 2005; Perna, 2007). The aspiration/attainment dichotomy is indicative of an overarching access issue within higher education in an era of declining affirmative action policies (Allen, 2005; Gandara, Horn, & Orfield, 2005; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Researchers purport that several barriers continue to impede minority and low socio-economic status high school students. For instance, Hamrick and Stage (2004) cite inadequate fiscal and academic resources in inner-city schools as some of the barriers that hinder adequate preparation of minority students for postsecondary entry.

Postsecondary matriculation is influenced by numerous factors, such as parental education levels and involvement, socioeconomic status, student and parent expectations, ethnicity, gender, and residency (Astom & Oseguera, 2004; Charles, Roscigno, & Torres, 2007; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Perna & Titus, 2005). The college entry aspiration/attainment imbalance is magnified when examining minority and low socioeconomic status students. According to Perna (2006), persisting gaps in college access and choice suggest that existing approaches fail to ameliorate barriers impeding college access for underrepresented youth. Consequently, it is imperative for policy makers and leaders in the field of higher education to understand the factors that impact college entry for underrepresented groups in order to effectively change the landscape of higher education access in America.

The higher education literature on college access is replete with information regarding postsecondary access for low socioeconomic students, yet only a few authors have honed in on how issues and barriers to college impact African American youth. Researchers (Hamrick & Stage, 1998; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Qian & Blair, 1999) have asserted that it is important to differentiate between ethnic groups when examining the factors that affect college choice as research has shown that factors diverge when analyzed by racial and/or income subgroups. Accordingly, the central purpose of this article was to analyze and synthesize the factors that impact college matriculation for African American students to fill a large gap in the literature that addresses college access specifically for African Americans. The author drew upon the extant research

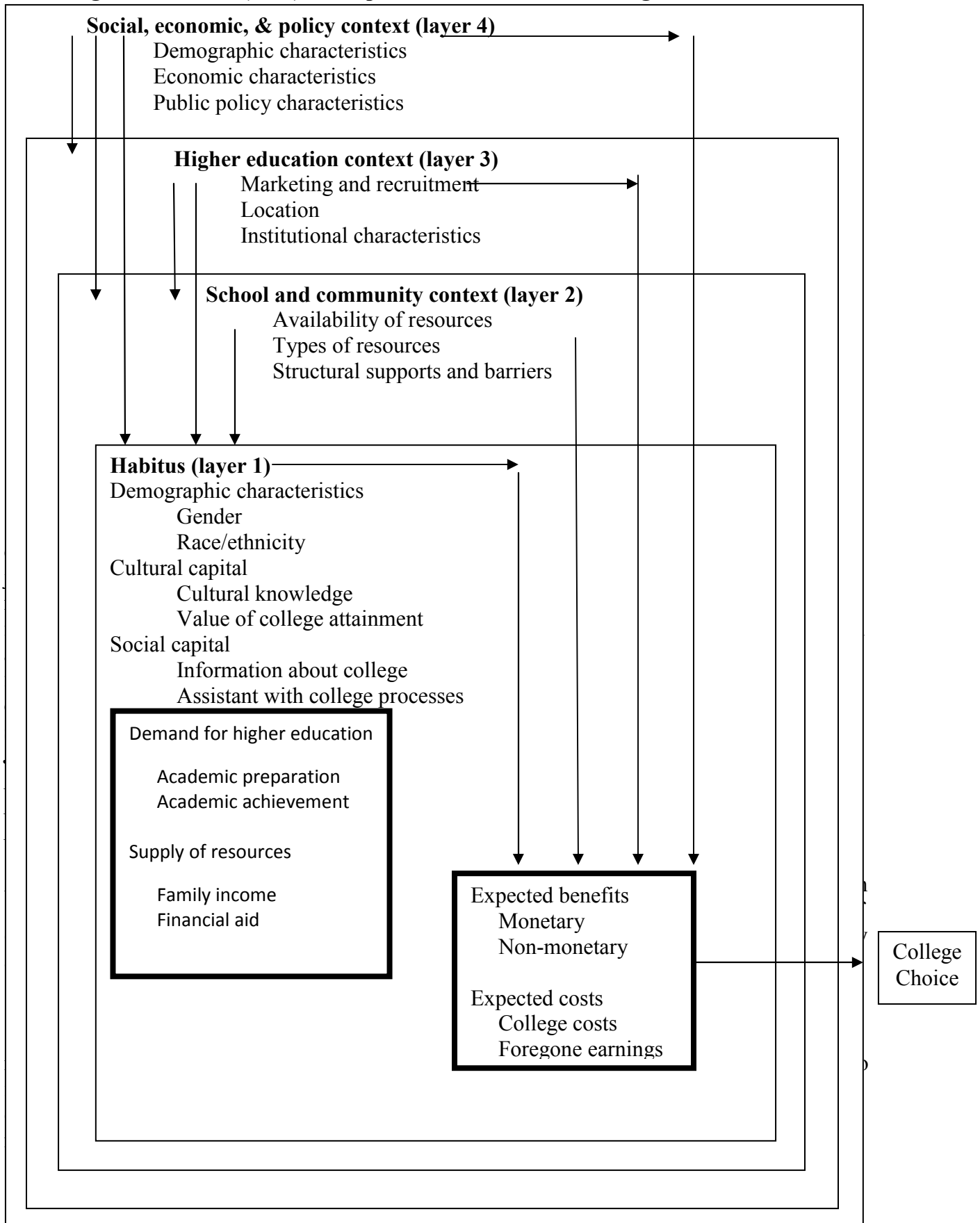
literature published within the last decade to determine relevant factors and practices that correlate with college matriculation for African American students. An integrative analysis of variables that influence college access for African American students is presented. The ultimate goal is to provide implications useful for educational policymakers and practitioners in the fields of secondary and postsecondary education.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Perna's (2006) model of student college choice was utilized as a lens to organize and examine the factors that impact college matriculation for African American students. Perna's conceptual model was deemed most appropriate because the model integrates both economic and sociological factors which interrelate in explaining college choice. While economic models such as those that reference financial aid certainly add to understandings of barriers to college access for African American students, research has shown that financial aid is merely one piece of the college access puzzle (Perna, 2000).

Perna's (2006) model which builds upon previous research by Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1998) provides four layers in which to contextualize factors that impact college choice. As seen in figure one, the first layer, habitus, a system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs about the social world (McDonough, 1997), encompasses personal factors that relate directly to the student such as demographics, cultural, and social capital. The second layer embodies school and community related factors that involve resource availability and structural supports and barriers. The higher education context, layer three, is utilized to explain how college choice is influenced by postsecondary institutions through mechanisms such as marketing and recruitment, location, and institutional characteristics. Finally, the fourth layer denotes the social, economic, and political context of college choice. Perna's student college choice model provides a multilayered and integrated conceptual lens through which to examine a complicated and multifaceted problem, college access for African American youth.

**Figure 1: Perna's (2006) Conceptual Model of Student College Choice**



## Habitus

The habitus layer encompasses critical factors such as demographics, cultural capital, social capital, demand for education, supply of resources, and expected costs and benefits of higher education. Demographics such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and even family composition (Lillard & Gerner, 1999) impact college matriculation for minority and low-income students who often lack the social and cultural capital needed to successfully navigate through the educational pipeline.

Research indicates that minorities and low-income students matriculate at lower rates than their White counterparts and portends that minority status and low-income status negatively correlate with college entry (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Perna, 2007; Qian & Blair, 1999). African Americans' income is lower than their White counterparts which stifles their ability to buy "college knowledge" (McDonough, 1994) in the forms of the college selection guidebooks, software, and coaching and counseling services widespread among the White middle and upper classes. While demographics such as gender do not significantly impact college matriculation for the general population, research indicates that African American females matriculate at much higher rates than African American males (Choy, 2001). There is little literature that addresses the shrinkage of African American male participation in postsecondary education. Finally, research by Lillard and Gerner (1999) demonstrates that family composition plays a role in college matriculation, citing that students from disrupted families are less likely to apply to, be admitted to, or attend four-year universities. African Americans are disadvantaged by the family composition factor as most of them come from single-family homes.

Perna (2006) indicated that a student's cultural capital in the forms of cultural knowledge and value of college attainment can impact postsecondary access. Perna asserts that students who possess knowledge of the dominant culture have access to the resources that promote college entry. The value of college attainment may be captured in parental encouragement and expectation, which are both positively correlated with college entry for African American students. Furthermore, research indicates that African Americans possess similar levels of collegiate aspiration in comparison to their peers, which is a testament to their understanding of the costs and benefits associated with college attainment (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Qian & Blair, 1999). Similarly, the parents of students of color also demonstrate high educational expectations even when they lacked postsecondary educational attainment (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Freeman, 2005; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). Despite their educational aspirations, African Americans are disadvantaged in other ways like in the area of cultural knowledge as most African American students are first generation college attendees and lack the knowledge beneficial to understanding the process of postsecondary entry (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Choy, 2001).

Research is extremely limited in addressing direct or indirect connections between African American culture, which can be defined as behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people (Yosso, 2005), cultural awareness, and college choice. Only a few researchers have studied the impact of culture on postsecondary attendance (Freeman, 1997; Tierney, & Jun, 2001), yet these researchers assert that culture has an effect on postsecondary entry. Tierney and Jun examined a college preparation program, the Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI), which incorporated cultural awareness and affirmation into its program along with academic rigor and support services and found increased college participation for the

disadvantaged participants. Much more research on the influence of culture and cultural awareness is necessary to truly understand its effects of postsecondary participation.

A significant amount of research demonstrates that social capital in the forms of access to information about college, assistance with college programs, parental education levels, parental encouragement, extended network of peers, familial and mentorship support, and parental involvement are significant indicators of college enrollment for minority students. The low rates of postsecondary entry of African Americans in comparison to Whites are attributed, in part, to their lack of social capital (Charles, Roscigno, Torres, 2007; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Qian & Blair, 1999).

Perna and Titus (2005) and Choy (2001) concluded that parental education levels and involvement for African Americans and Hispanics were positively correlated with college enrollment regardless of the resources available to students. Perna and Titus found that African American students were unique in their response to specific types of parental involvement. Perna and Titus cited that African Americans matriculate at much higher levels when their parents initiate school contact regarding academics than when parents simply discuss education related issues. Choy's research indicated that only 59% of high school graduates whose parents did not have a college degree enrolled in some form of postsecondary education while 93% of students whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree entered college. Choy's sample included all races and ethnicities but the majority of the sample was comprised of minority and low-income students.

Information access also plays a vital role in role in college preparation and postsecondary entry. Because information access is derived from social, cultural, and sometimes economic capital, African Americans are at a distinct disadvantage in accessing information advantageous for college entry. Research specifies that students, minority and low-income students especially, are misinformed about the kind of preparation necessary for college entry. Some students are uneducated about college entry course requirements or the impact of grades on college entry, for example (Martinez & Klopott, 2006; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). According to a report by Dan Cohen-Vogel, Assistant Vice Chancellor for the Florida State University System, (as cited in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2009) in 2005, an estimated 22,000 needy Florida residents left \$24 million in Pell grant money untouched. African Americans make up 17% of all college students in Florida and they make up a disproportionate share of students eligible for Pell grants. Cohen-Vogel cited a lack of education regarding financial aid as the culprit. Information is vitally important to a seamless transfer from high school to higher education for African American students.

The influence of peers and adult mentors can also impact postsecondary choice for African American students. Research regarding the role of peer influence on postsecondary entry is scarce at best. In addition to the scarcity of research on peer influence, its effect on college entry is difficult to ascertain because peer influence typically functions in tandem with other strategies such as mentoring or college preparation programming (Tierney & Colyar, 2005). Therefore, it is difficult to decipher whether outcomes are associated with peer influence alone (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Similarly, current research on mentoring is also limited and imprecise in determining its effect on postsecondary entry. In an empirical evaluation of several mentoring programs, Jekielek, Moore, Hair, and Scarupa (2002) found that one mentoring program, Career Beginnings, demonstrated a slight increase in college entry for students participating in the program. Career Beginnings participants entered college at a rate of 53% compared to 49% for students in the control group. Thompson and Kelly-Vance found positive

results in an evaluation of the mentoring program Big Brothers/Big Sisters' effect on academic achievement for at-risk students. The effects of Big Brothers/Big Sisters provide no direct connection to postsecondary entry, yet its positive effects on academic achievement indirectly influence college matriculation. Lastly, Levine and Nidiffer (1996) interviewed 24 low-income disadvantaged students who successfully accessed postsecondary education and found that almost every student referenced a mentor who played a significant role in assisting the student through the educational pipeline. Additional research is needed to gain better insight on direct linkages between mentorship and peer influence on college choice for African Americans.

The effects of psychological factors such as self motivation and intimidation influence whether or not African American students enter college and the type of institutions these students select. Freeman's (1999) research on African American student college choice demonstrates that, unlike traditional predictors of college participation, African Americans were influenced by their family members who did not receive postsecondary education yet encouraged them to surpass the achievements of their family members. African American students often mentioned themselves as motivators for college participation. The most prevalent finding from Freeman's research was the effect of intimidation on college choice whereby students attending predominately African American high schools where uncomfortable and intimidated by the predominantly White college campuses they visited. Literature surrounding how psychological factors mediate college choice for African Americans is extremely dearth.

### **School and Community Context**

According to researchers, the K-12 environment with regard to fiscal and academic resources, curriculum, teachers, demographics, and geography have a deterministic effect on college access for high school students (Martin, Karabel, & Jaquez, 2005; Perna et al., 2008; Wolniak & Engberg, 2007; Yun & Moreno, 2006). Adelman (1999) contended that the impact of a rigorous high school curriculum is far more pronounced and positively correlated for African-American and Latino students than any other pre-college indicator. Adelman further asserted that many minority students, especially those who live in rural areas, do not have the opportunity to partake in such a rigorous curriculum. Yun and Moreno (2006) conducted a study examining K-12 school related college access disadvantages disaggregated by ethnicity and found that schools with a high percentage of African American and Latino students in California tend to have higher poverty rates, lower teacher certification, and lower advanced placement course offerings than predominately Asian and White schools. The factors analyzed by Yun and Moreno negatively correlate with postsecondary entrance and completion. Similarly, a study by Martin, Karabel, and Jaquez (2005) demonstrated that high school segregation negatively affects college access in the state of California for minority students. Substantial inequalities related to race and resources at every stage of the transition from high school to college (i.e. high school course selection, number of college applications submitted, academic preparation, etc.) were prominent in Martin, Karabel, and Jaquez's study while other researchers (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Perna, 2000) reported similar findings.

Since the availability of information related to the college admissions process is critical to college enrollment, the role of high school counselors for African American students is important. In addition to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum and a college-going culture within high schools, Corwin, Venegas, Oliverrez, and Colyar (2004) cited appropriate counseling and resources committed to advising college-bound students as a reflection of factors critical to

postsecondary entry. Low-income and minority students need guidance from teachers and high school counselors regarding the process of preparation for postsecondary education the most, yet budgetary constraints, alarming counselor-to-student ratios, and in some cases a lack of caring and encouraging faculty and staff hinder their ability to successfully navigate through the postsecondary educational pipeline (Corwin et al., 2004; Freeman, 2005; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987).

Research on the impact of cocurricular and extracurricular activities is limited, yet the substantive literature indicates that cocurricular activity involvement for African Americans has both a direct and indirect effect on college entry. Hamrick and Stage (2004) asserted that school activity involvement is positively correlated with parental expectations which indirectly impacts college entry. Hearn and Holdsworth (2005) conducted a literature review of the effects of cocurricular activities and its connection to college entry and found that involvement in activities such as student government and school athletics can have positive impacts on college participation. Yet, Hearn and Holdsworth cautioned the reader that these effects tend to be modest and largely indirect, mediated through factors such as student attitudes and academic performance.

Little research exists examining the influence of high school curriculum on college choice for African American students. Freeman (2005) made an indirect connection between the lack of African American cultural history within secondary school curriculums and college choice for African American students by stating that this lack of inclusion negatively affects students' perceptions of validation at all levels of schooling, sense of self worth, and ultimately academic achievement.

### **Higher Education Context**

Perna's (2006) higher education context, layer three, provides a space for analyzing the impact of issues such as marketing and recruitment, location, and institutional characteristics on college entrance for African Americans. Higher education institutions' role in shaping higher education access is significant as they control admission requirements, financial aid distribution, marketing and recruitment, academic programs, and community partnerships each impacting college choice (Chapman, 1981; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; McDonough, 1994).

The role higher education institutions play in recruiting African American students is contingent upon their value system, mission, and ultimately the strategic plan for the institution (Bontrager, 2007). Most postsecondary institutions engage in targeted recruitment efforts for students of color in the forms of high school partnerships, mentoring programs, direct mail, alumni interviews, special events relevant to multicultural students, and multicultural advisory boards (Smith, 1998; Swail, 2000). Research assessing the effectiveness of college recruitment is limited, mostly anecdotal, and mainly institution specific (Gullatt & Jan, 2002). For example, Tierney and Jun (2001) examined the Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI), a partnership program between California schools and the University of Southern California (USC), aimed to increase postsecondary access for minority students at USC. The program was a success with 60% of those who started the program entering a 4-year institution and 90% pursuing some form of postsecondary education. However, Tierney cautions the reader in interpreting the impact of programs such as NAI on college access as they only impact a few disadvantaged students and calls for a systemic approach. Not all college recruitment strategies like NAI promote college access for minorities. Some researchers (Avery, Fairbanks, & Zeckhauser, 2003; McDonough,

2004) have asserted that early admission programs, for example, favor White affluent applications from resource-rich high schools while hindering access for other students.

In the wake of diminishing affirmative action policies, shrinking state budgets, and increasing tuition costs, increasing minority student enrollment is laden with challenges which make it even more imperative for higher education administrators to stay abreast of the factors that promote or hinder access for African American students. Bontrager (2007) states enrollment managers have been duplicitous in their efforts to commit to access and equity while promoting prestige through college rankings and institutional profiles. Even further, Humphrey (2006) speaks of the push and pull of the enrollment manager in her study of prestigious public higher education institutions and the double-edged sword of increasing access while maintaining prestige. Despite the challenges that accompany increasing access at postsecondary institutions, researchers suggest that higher education institutions should capitalize on opportunities to help ensure that all students receive sufficient college counseling and establish recruiting relationships that promote access for all students (Perna et al., 2008; Wolniak & Engberg, 2007). Finally, McDonough (2004), Jun and Tierney (1999), and Gullat and Jan (2001) proposed the following recommendations for practitioners to adhere to when implementing outreach based programs to increase access for underrepresented students:

1. Set high standards for program students and staff.
2. Incorporate identity affirmation.
3. Provide personalized attention for students.
4. Connect with the individual, school, and family.
5. Provide adult role models and peer support.
6. Collaborate with other institutions, school districts, etc.
7. Provide better information regarding the college entry process.
8. Incorporate strategically timed interventions.
9. Make long-term investments in students.
10. Provide a school/society bridge for students.
11. Incorporate scholarship assistance.
12. Invest in evaluation designs that contribute to improved interventions.
13. Consider cost effectiveness.
14. Integrate flexibility in the approach.

### **Social, Economic, & Policy Context**

The research that is categorized by the fourth layer of Perna's (2006) student college choice model entitled, social, economic, and policy context, covers how the following factors influence postsecondary access for African American students: a) financial aid (to include tuition costs and merit-based/need-based aid), b) the alignment of K-12 and postsecondary policy (also known as P-16/P-20 initiatives), and c) the role of local, federal, and state government role in increasing college access. Each of the factors represented in layer four present pressing current issues debated within higher education today.



## Tuition Costs

The literature is profuse with information regarding financial aid and tuition costs and their impact on college choice for students overall and specifically for African American students. Current research indicates that increases in college tuition rates have a negative correlation with college entrance for African American and low-income students (Heller, 1999; Long & Riley, 2007; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John et al., 2004; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). For example, Donald Heller (1999) sought to determine the extent to which divergent tuition levels and financial aid spending impact college undergraduate enrollment rates and if the effect differed by ethnic groups. Heller found that tuition rate increases lead to declines in college enrollment at both 2-year and 4-year institutions for African Americans, Whites, and Hispanics. Additionally, Heller determined that African Americans were slightly more sensitive to tuition increases than Whites but Hispanics were most sensitive of all. Similarly, Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that low-income and lower-middle-income students were far more responsive to college tuition prices than students from upper-middle-income and upper-income families. Paulsen and St. John further asserted that the current high-tuition, high-loan approach to higher education finance does not appear to be working and that sufficient funding for access to postsecondary education is still lacking for poor and working-class students in our nation.

### *Merit-based vs. Need-based Aid*

A panoramic view of the financial aid landscape in America reflects a continuous decline in the federal Pell grant, which serves as the primary source of need-based aid, and the proliferation of state level merit-based financial aid such as the Georgia's Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) scholarship program (Ehrenberg, Zhang, & Levin, 2006; Mumper, 2003). HOPE launched a national shift in financial aid funding where 14 other states and the federal government followed suit by adopting similar merit-based aid policies (Doyle, 2006). In fact, Doyle asserted that the shift to merit-based aid represented one of the most pronounced policy shifts in higher education in the last 20 years. Since the inception of the HOPE scholarship program, researchers have published articles analyzing the impact of merit-based aid on college enrollment and access for underrepresented groups. For instance, research by Doyle and Cornwell, Mustard, and Sridhar (2003) show statistically significant increases in overall college enrollment as a result of the HOPE scholarship program. While Doyle did not disaggregate data by ethnicity, Cornwell, Mustard, and Sridhar found that Black student enrollment rates at 4-year public and private colleges increased by 27% and 14% percent respectively because of HOPE. Cornwell, Mustard, and Sridhar asserted that part of the explanation for such an increase for Black students is that "Blacks have much lower enrollment rates to begin with; therefore, a relatively small increase in enrollment rates can account for a large percentage change" (p. 24).

While Cornwell, Mustard, and Sridhar's (2003) study appears to be one of the rare cases that points to benefits for African Americans due to merit-based aid programs like HOPE, several other authors (Long, 2004; Long & Riley, 2007; Ness & Tucker, 2008; St. John, Musoba, & Simmons, 2003) purport that merit-based aid programs disadvantage low-income and minority students. For example, Dynarski's (2000) research denoted that while Georgia's HOPE scholarship program increased middle-class and high-income student college attendance, it widened the gap in college attendance between African American and White students and between students from low-income and high-income families. Similarly, Heller (2004) cited how merit-based scholarships increased by 36% in 12 states while need-based aid only increased by

7%. Long (2004) and Heller assert that merit-based aid programs not only take away funding from low-income students, but college tuition costs in predominately merit-based states have increased in response to scholarship programs, such as HOPE, which also negatively effects non-merit-based aid recipients. A literature analysis by Ness and Tucker (2008) revealed that merit-based scholarship programs in some states, specifically New Mexico, Michigan, and Florida, awarded merit-based scholarships to a disproportionately lower percentage of racial/ethnic minorities. Some of the merit-based scholarship programs take into account ACT/SAT scores on which ethnic minorities tend to score lower (Fleming & Garcia, 1998; *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2006) and have no income limits which provide more affluent students with an advantage.

### *P-20 Initiatives*

Several states have P-20 initiatives either through some form of legislation or council formation in response to the disconnection between K-12 and postsecondary educational systems from a public policy, structural and organizational perspective. Each educational system has its own set of assessments, standards, and curriculum, which can harm students when there is a discrepancy among such elements, particularly students whose parents did not complete postsecondary education. Venezia and Kirst (2005) conducted a study to examine K-16 policies and practices and how they contribute to college access and success. The findings from their Stanford University Bridge Project demonstrate that access to college preparation related policy information follow racial, ethnic, income, and curricular tracking lines. Because of the misalignment between the K-12 and postsecondary educational policy, requirements for graduation at the high school level, in many cases, is completely different than college entrance requirements. For example, Venezia and Kirst demonstrated that student knowledge of curricular requirements was sporadic and vague and that students were unclear about the different information and skills necessary for transition between K-12 and postsecondary education sectors. Students whose parents did not attend college or had limited resources of information (i.e. low-income and minority students) were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to navigating between two different educational systems (Choy, 2001; Perna & Titus, 2005; Venezia & Kirst, 2005; Wimberly & Noeth, 2004). Stampen and Hansen (1999) call for K-12 education reform and hail the critical importance of a systems approach to improving access to postsecondary education. The alignment of K-12 policy and practice along with effective implementation of these initiatives is critical to advancing postsecondary access for African American students.

### *Local, State & Federal Programs*

In addition to the collaboration between higher education institutions and the K-12 educational system as a systems approach to improving access, the states play a critical role in facilitating a culture of equal access for all students (Perna & Titus, 2004). While all states have forms of need-based financial aid to provide access to low-income students, few state higher education boards have policy specifically designed to improve access for minority students. For instance, Welsh (2004) analyzed a study conducted by the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) which sought to determine if state higher education boards within the United States had created policies specifically related to improving minority access and success in higher education. The findings from the study exhibit that only a small minority of state higher education boards have articulated policy objectives and implemented initiatives intended to

improve minority student access and achievement in higher education. For the few state boards that have policy objectives in place, only a small number of them utilize their dataset systems to measure their own progress in creating equitable higher education systems in their states.

With an overabundance of federal and state level programs designed to increase college access, Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, and Li (2008) sought to create a typology of these programs in an effort to provide a better framework for policy makers to understand why policies and programs are not effective in increasing access for underrepresented students. Researchers purport that the strongest predictors of college enrollment for underrepresented students are parental involvement, academic rigor, access to information, and social support (Adelman, 1999; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Choy, 2001; Perna & Titus, 2005). Yet, 90% of the 103 programs analyzed in Perna's et al.'s study only provide financial aid funding to students, while less than 6% focus on any combination of academic preparation or knowledge about college. Perna's et al.'s typology displays that both federal and state college access programs are saturated with financial support, which is merely one of several factors that impact college entry for minority and low-income students.

College preparation programs such as the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) were created to assist and support underrepresented students in achieving postsecondary education entry (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Programs like AVID and GEAR UP have been deemed successful at increasing college preparedness with student participants but not all students participate in these programs. For example, many programs are available in specific states such as Project GRAD, while others such as AVID cover more states but students are selected to participate by their teachers (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Tierney & Jun, 2001). While college preparation programs are vital to increasing access, not all of them take into account all the factors that researchers have shown to positively correlate with postsecondary entry for minority and low-income students. For instance, a detailed literature review conducted by Martinez and Klopott denoted that not a single college preparation program encompassed all the major tenets researchers cited as essential to increasing college access. Although Project GRAD provides academic and social supports, aligns secondary and postsecondary sectors, and has a parental involvement component, it does not involve a rigorous high school curriculum which positively correlates with college entry (Adelman, 1999). Similarly, Tierney (2002) conducted research on the presence of parental and family components in college preparation programs and found that even for programs that boast of a parental involvement component that interaction with parents was typically minimal. Other researchers have pointed to how incorporating culture into college preparation programs is vitally important yet missing from most college preparation programs (Freeman, 1997; Tierney & Jun, 2001). While individuals leading college preparation programs are well intentioned and base their program structures on some research, in many cases, a disconnect between research and practice still persists.

### **Policy Implications & Conclusion**

As a result of this integrative literature review on factors that impact postsecondary matriculation for African American students, several pertinent factors emerged. Yet, the current body of research on factors that influence college matriculation for African Americans demonstrates major gaps in the literature and a lack of connection between theory and practice.

The literature reviewed in this study inadequately addresses how postsecondary based college preparation programs, high school curriculum, African American culture, mentorship, peer influence, and psychological factors impact postsecondary participation for African American youth. Based on the gaps presented in the literature, the following questions serve as a basis for further research:

1. How might college preparation programs sponsored by colleges and universities effectively impact African American college entry?
2. To what extent does high school curriculum impact African American viewpoints on education and postsecondary educational attainment?
3. To what extent does the integration of cultural elements in college preparation programming enhance college entry rates for African American students?
4. What are the measured the effects of mentoring on college entry for African American youth after controlling for all other factors?
5. How might psychological factors such as resilience, self-motivation, or intimidation be supported or overcome to increase postsecondary entry for African Americans?

Because current systems and programs fail to ameliorate gaps between college entry rates of Whites and African Americans (Perna, 2007), research addressing the aforementioned gaps in the literature may provide critical information necessary to improve current systems geared toward improving postsecondary access.

Based on the factors impacting the matriculation of African American students, it is important that policy makers and educational leaders at all levels consider all of the factors that impact college entry for African American youth. While the awareness of all factors influencing college participation is vital, integrating a balanced approach to policy and praxis is paramount as the overwhelming majority of state and federal programs fail to account for most of the factors deemed critically important to improving college access. A review of college preparation programs and federal and state programs demonstrate that while programs may focus on one, two, or even three aspects of college entry, they fall short of implementing essential factors pertinent to successful postsecondary entry for African Americans. For instance, Perna (2008) pointed out that 90% of state and federal programs are solely focused on financial aid. Similarly, Tierney and Jun (2001) asserted that parental involvement and cultural relevance was absent from most college preparation programs. However, current research indicates that factors such as parental involvement, information access, rigorous K-12 curriculum, and culturally relevant programming have a significant and relevant impact on postsecondary enrollment for African American students beyond financial aid. Below is a list the factors derived from this integrative review that impact postsecondary participation for African Americans in important ways:

Layer	Factors/Prevalence in Literature
Social, economic, & policy context (layer 4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Financial aid policy</li> <li>b. P-20 initiatives</li> <li>c. Federal and state access programs</li> <li>d. Parental Involvement</li> </ol>
Higher education context (layer 3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Postsecondary college preparation programs</li> <li>b. Marketing and recruiting efforts</li> <li>c. Institution financial aid policy</li> </ol>

	d. High school/community partnerships
School and community context (layer 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. High school community partnerships</li> <li>f. Administrator, teacher, counselor influence</li> <li>g. Rigorous K-12 curriculum, academic preparation and resources</li> <li>h. High school fiscal and personnel resources</li> <li>i. High school segregation by race/ethnicity</li> <li>j. High school curriculum</li> </ul>
Habitus (layer 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Demographic characteristics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Race/ethnicity</li> <li>ii. Gender</li> <li>iii. Residence</li> <li>iv. SES</li> </ul> </li> <li>b. Cultural capital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v. Cultural knowledge</li> <li>vi. Value of college attainment</li> <li>vii. Educational aspirations</li> <li>viii. Cultural history/customs</li> </ul> </li> <li>c. Social capital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ix. Information about college preparation/entry</li> <li>x. Resources/assistance with college preparation</li> <li>xi. Parental education levels</li> <li>xii. Parental involvement and encouragement</li> <li>xiii. Peer and familial influence</li> <li>xiv. Mentorship</li> </ul> </li> <li>d. Demand for higher education/supply of resources</li> <li>e. Costs and benefits of higher education</li> <li>f. Psychological Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Self motivation</li> <li>ii. Resilience</li> <li>iii. Intimidation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The continuation of policies disconnected from proven research strategies will continue to have damaging effects on minority students and their ability to gain college entrance. Within the current landscape of higher education policy and practice lies great opportunity to increase postsecondary entry for African Americans through the integration of all factors deemed critically important for postsecondary attainment for African American youth.

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