

Black Male Students in the Community College and Faculty Student Engagement: Differential Scores Across Levels of Faculty- Derived Campus Ethos

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The purpose of this study sought to determine whether there were differences in students' levels of engagement with faculty members based on different levels of faculty members' welcomeness and imburement of belonging. Using CCSM[®] data, this dataset was delimited to a sample of Black men who attended community college at a large urban district in the western United States. Data in this study were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Findings from this study demonstrate that faculty-student engagement is a function of campus ethos conditions fostered by faculty. When faculty members create conditions where students feel welcome to engage in the class, demonstrate an interest in interacting with students informally outside of class by being friendly, and create conditions where students feel like they belong, then students are more likely to be engage.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade education scholars have been increasingly attentive to the gendered experiences of males who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education, particularly boys and men of color (Bonner, 2014; Cuyjet, 2006; Dancy, 2012; Harper, 2012; Harper & Harris, 2008; Jackson & Moore, 2008; Palmer & Wood, 2012; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). Spawned by deleterious outcome rates throughout the educational pipeline (preK-20), scholars have sought to understand factors affecting the success (broadly defined) of these boys and men. In recent years, inquiry into the academic realities of these men in community colleges has been expansive. Researchers have attributed this increase to the recognition that community colleges serve as the primary pathway into postsecondary education for men of color (Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Wood, Hilton & Lewis, 2011). Specifically, 71% of Black men who

enroll in public postsecondary education begin their academic careers in community colleges (Wood & Williams, 2013). However, enrollment and achievement are not always congruous; men of color as a whole have strikingly lower outcomes (e.g., persistence, achievement, completion, transfer) than their peers. For example, in California, home to the largest community college system in the nation, completion rates by racial/ethnic affiliation differ greatly. While 65.1% of Asian men and 51.9% of White men will earn a certificate/degree, become transfer eligible, or transfer in six-years, only 37.8% of Black men will do so in the same time frame (Wood & Harris, 2014). Clearly, these disparate outcomes suggest a need for preventions and interventions to improve success for these men.

Prior research has indicated that faculty-student engagement is an integral facilitator of enhanced student performance, motivation in college, satisfaction, and academic effort (Chang, 2005; Cole, 2008, 2010; Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010; Thompson, 2001). Some scholars have even found that engagement with faculty had an intensified benefit for learning among students of color (Lundberg & Shreiner, 2004). Greater levels of involvement with faculty have also been identified as a central strategy for improving outcomes for Black men in community college settings (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood & Turner, 2011; Wood & Ireland, 2014). This is a critical point given that they are often apprehensive and anxious about engaging with faculty members to avoid perceptions that they are academically inferior and unintelligent (Wood, 2014). Guided by the previous notions, this study sought to determine whether there were differences in students' levels of engagement with faculty members based on different levels of faculty members' welcomeness and imburement of belonging. Three faculty-derived campus ethos variables were employed in this analysis, including: a) faculty members' welcomeness to engage inside of class; b) faculty members' welcomeness to engage outside of class; and c) faculty members' conveyance of students' sense of belonging. Hereafter, these variables are referred to as faculty welcomeness (in class), faculty welcomeness (outside class), and faculty belonging. The next section provides a brief overview of literature that helps to contextualize this study.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Prior research on faculty student engagement has emanated from two divergent schools of thought. The first school of thought specifies that engagement with faculty is a function of student backgrounds and environmental pressures (Chang, 2005; Thompson, 2001; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014). For example, Wells-Lawson (1994) examined predictors of faculty-student engagement among Black and White students. After controlling for race and school-type, she found that older students, part-timers, and women were the most likely to have engagement experiences with faculty. Similarly, Chang (2005) used data from the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students (TRUCCS) survey to identify determinants of faculty-student engagement. Like Wells-Lawson (1994), the majority of variables employed in Chang's (2005) analysis focused on student background traits and psychosocial dispositions. Specific to African American students, Chang found that students who were older, maintained positive perspectives about college, attended the campus orientation, spent time on campus, studied with their peers, and met with advisors were more likely to engage with faculty. Beyond findings regarding student characteristics, some scholars have focused their examinations on students' external lives. Thompson (2001) examined predictors of community college students' engagement with faculty. Thompson found that employment and familial obligations were

determinants of faculty-student engagement. Specifically, he noted that greater hours worked per week were associated with lower levels of engagement. In contrast, students with greater family obligations had a higher likelihood of engagement with faculty. These studies collectively demonstrate the inherent assumption that faculty-student engagement is a function of *who* students are and the external pressures they face. This perspective is understandable, given that Kuh (2003) notes that the concept of student engagement emanates from Pace's (1980, 1984) concept of quality of student effort. Pace contended that the quality of student's effort in school was a function of students' time, focus, and energies placed in academic matters.

In stark contrast, the second (and more recent) school of thought conceptualizes faculty-student engagement as a function of campus ethos (Wood & Ireland, 2014; Wood & Turner, 2011). This perspective places the onus for engagement on institutions, as opposed to students served by them. Specifically, scholars from this perspective perceive that institutions are responsible for fostering environments that are conducive to engagement (see Wood & Palmer, 2015). In this vein, Wood and Turner (2011) conducted interviews with 28 African American men attending a Southwestern community college. They found that "students who received personal attention from faculty members benefit from the establishment of positive relationships that led to greater engagement (e.g., attentiveness during class, attending office hours) in the course" (p. 147). Given this, they articulated strategies employed by faculty members that fostered students' engagement, which they referred to as the *five elements of faculty-student engagement*. Specifically, they noted that students engaged in relationships with faculty members when they: a) were friendly with them from the onset of the relationship; b) proactively checked in on them to see how they were progressing academically; c) listened to their concerns regarding academic and personal matters; d) monitored their performance to address issues before they arose; and e) provided students with continual encouragement. Extending upon findings from this study, Wood (2014) clarified that all of these interactions must be typified by authenticity for students' well-being. These findings were reaffirmed in a recent report, *Aspirations to Achievement: Men of Color and Community Colleges* (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2014). This report identified engagement with faculty as a primary contributor to success for men of color in community colleges. Based on focus groups with men of color, the report noted that faculty members who make personal connections with students, set high expectations for academic excellence, and demonstrated interest in their student's by fostering engagement. In turn, engagement leads to an enhanced likelihood of student success. Informed by these studies, the research sought to provide further empirical evidence to prior qualitative research on this topic by connecting faculty-derived campus ethos variables to Black men's engagement with faculty.

The theoretical framework employed in this study is Harris and Wood's (2014a) socio-ecological outcomes (SEO) model (see Figure 1). The SEO model suggests that success for men of color in community college is primarily attributable to four socio-ecological domains, including; the non-cognitive domain (e.g., interpersonal outcomes, identity); academic domain (e.g., faculty-student engagement, service usage); environment domain (e.g., familial obligation, employment, life stress); and the campus ethos domain. The latter domain focuses on the role of validation from faculty and staff, a climate of belonging, faculty member's encouragement and welcomeness for students to engage as a facilitator of student success.

Harris and Wood (2014a) postulated that the campus ethos domain (e.g., faculty member's authentic portrayal of students' sense of belonging and welcomeness to engagement) has an effect on the academic domain (e.g., faculty-student engagement), which in turn leads to

student success outcomes (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer). This study will test this relationship, to determine whether there are differences in faculty-student engagement as a result of faculty-derived factors from their campus ethos domain. Based on this model, it is hypothesized that successive score increases for welcomeness and belonging will be associated with greater scores for faculty-student engagement. Guided by this model, the next section explicates the methods employed in this study.

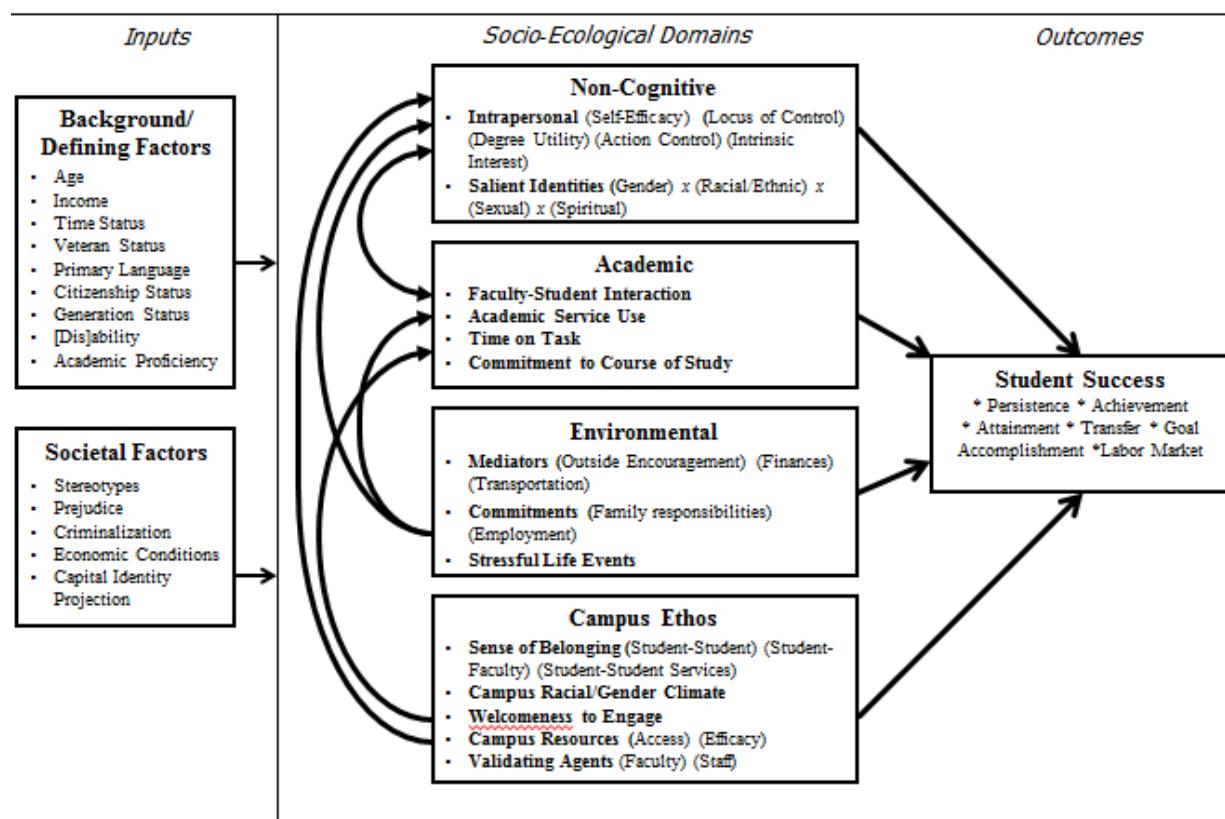


Figure 1. Harris and Wood's (2014) Socio-Ecological Outcomes Model. Used with permission from the Minority Male Community College Collaborative, San Diego State University, ©2012.

METHODS

Data from this study were derived from the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM[®]). The CCSM[®] is an institutional-level needs assessment tool employed by community colleges to examine factors affecting the success of historically underrepresented and underserved men. In particular, the instrument was developed based on student success literature focused on men of color in community colleges (e.g., Bush & Bush, 2010; Flowers, 2006; Mason, 1998; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011). The CCSM[®] has been distributed to over 7,000 men at 40 community colleges throughout the country. This dataset was delimited to a sample of Black men who attended community college at a large urban district in the western United States (N=212).

The outcome variable employed in this study was faculty-student engagement. This variable was a composite measured derived from student responses to four questions. These questions assessed the degree to which they engaged in conversations in and out of class on academic and non-academic matters ($\alpha=.83$). Three factors measuring faculty-derived campus ethos were examined. *Faculty Belonging* assessed students agreement regarding faculty members' conveyance that they belonged in class and at the institution (five items, $\alpha=.96$). *Faculty welcomeness (in class)* evaluated whether faculty members cultivated students' in class engagement in asking questions, responding to questions, inquiring about progress, and attending office hours (three items, $\alpha=.85$). *Faculty welcomeness (out of class)* assessed whether faculty encouraged interactions with students and proactively engaged with them out of class (four items, $\alpha=.85$). Each of the independent variables were divided into quartiles, with differing scores on the independent variable being compared across the quartiles. Given the influence of student background characteristics on potential relationships between faculty-derived campus ethos and the outcome variable, several covariates variables were employed. These covariates included respondents' age, annual household income, total number of dependents the respondent is responsible for financially, whether or not the respondent took remedial coursework, total credits earned, hours worked per week, and whether the respondent attended school full-time or part-time (see Appendix A for variable coding and schema).

Data in this study were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). ANCOVA is a quantitative procedure which allows researchers to examine differences across group levels while partialling out the effects of concomitant variables (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). Three separate models were generated for each independent variable. The threshold for the total number of covariates that can be included in an ANCOVA model is $C<(10XN)-(J-1)$. In this case, with a sample size of 212 and four-levels for each independent variable, less than 18.2 covariates could be employed. The total covariates in this study fell below this cutoff. In addition to normal assumptions on par with that of analysis of variance (e.g., normality, homogeneity, independence), ANCOVA models must also satisfy the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption. This assumption holds that "the population effect of the interaction between the covariate and the factor in predicting the dependent variable is zero" (Green & Salkind, 2009, p. 214). Thus, custom models were developed to test interactions between the factor, covariates, and outcome. Effect sizes were interpreted using partial eta squared (partial n^2) and R^2 for the full model. Partial n^2 effect sizes of .01, .06, and .14 were interpreted as small, medium, and large, respectively (Green & Salkind, 2009). Multiple imputation was used to replace missing values. To account for potential family-wise errors due to the three separate analyses of one outcome variable, omnibus tests were initially conducted at .017 (or .05/3). All post-hoc tests were evaluated at .05 but employed Bonferroni corrections to adjust for potential Type I errors. The next section describes the results from these analyses.

RESULTS

The first analysis focused on *welcomeness to engage* (in class). A preliminary analysis evaluating the homogeneity of slopes assumption indicated that the relationships between the covariates and the dependent variable did not differ significantly as a function of the independent variables. The ANCOVA for *welcomeness to engage* was significant, $F(3, 23.23) = 11.20$, $MSE = 260.12$, $p < .001$. The strength of the relationship between the factor and the dependent variable was approaching large, as assessed by a partial n^2 , with the factor accounting for 14.3 of the

variance in the dependent variable, holding the control variables (e.g., age, income, dependents, remediation, credits, hours worked, time status) constant. Inclusive of the controls, the full model accounted for 17.2% of the variance in the outcome ($R^2=.21$, adj $R^2=.172$). Prior to adjustment, the means for *welcomeness to engage* were as follows: 1st Quartile ($M=9.80$, $SD=4.67$), 2nd Quartile ($M=11.95$, $SD=4.52$), 3rd Quartile ($M=14.88$, $SD=3.47$), and 4th Quartile ($M=14.70$, $SD=5.30$). After adjustment, employing relevant controls, the mean scores were: 1st Quartile ($M=9.88$); 2nd Quartile ($M=11.88$), 3rd Quartile ($M=14.93$), and 4th Quartile ($M=14.69$). Post-hoc comparisons were adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni procedure. Comparisons indicated that Black men in the 3rd Quartile had significantly higher levels of engagement with faculty than students in the 1st ($MD=5.05$, $p<.001$) and 2nd Quartiles ($MD=3.05$, $p=.019$). Similarly, Black men in the 4th Quartile had significantly higher scores than men in the 1st ($MD=4.81$, $p<.001$) and 2nd Quartiles ($MD=2.81$, $p=.016$), but not those men in the 3rd Quartile ($p=n.s.$). See Figure 2 for the means plot of this analysis, depicting score increases across the first three levels and a minuscule drop from the 3rd to 4th Quartile.

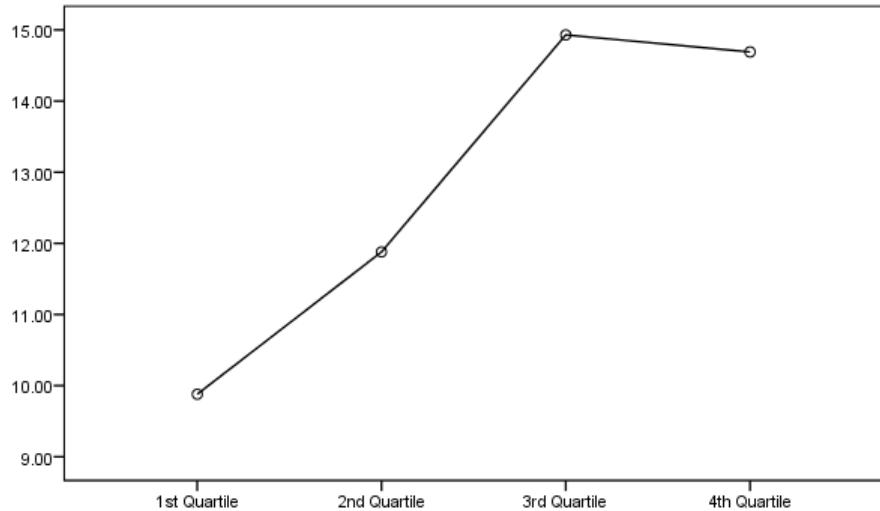


Figure 2. Estimated marginal means of faculty welcomeness (inside) and faculty student engagement

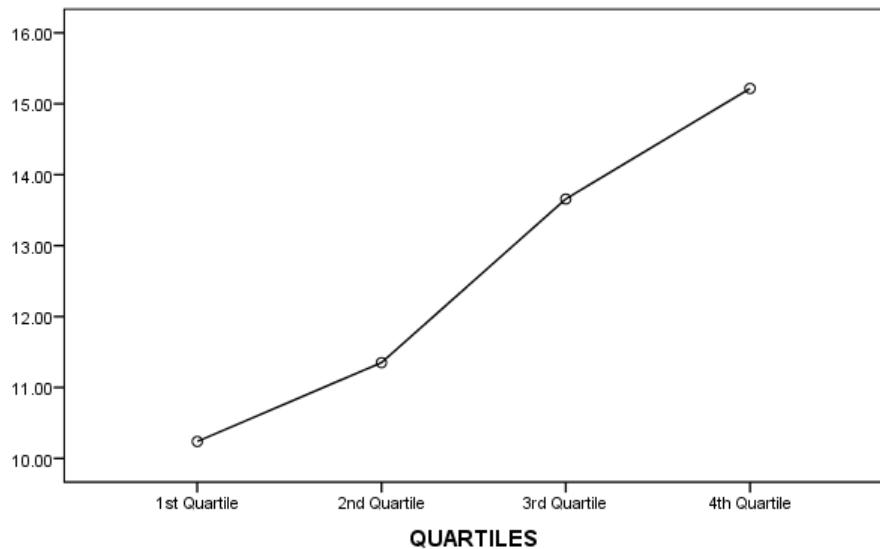


Figure 3. Estimated marginal means of faculty welcomeness (outside) and faculty student engagement

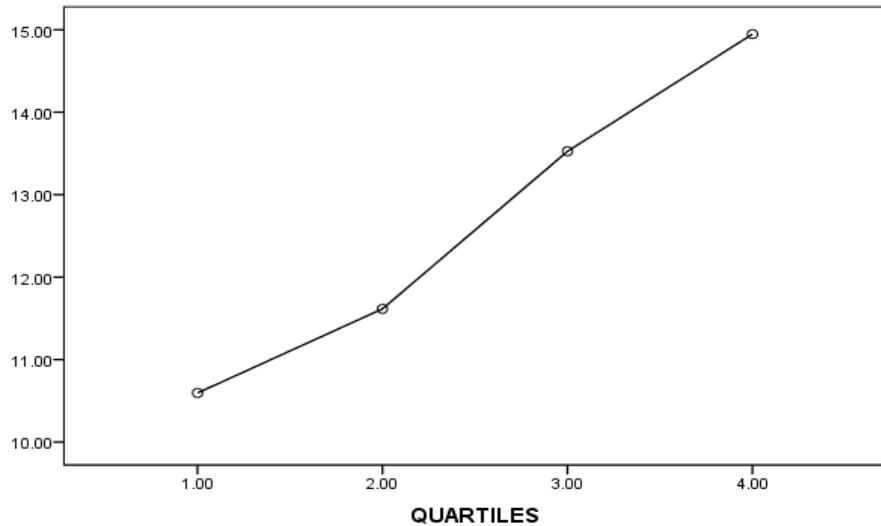


Figure 4. Estimated marginal means of faculty belonging and faculty student engagement

Next, differential scores of faculty-student by faculty members' *welcomeness to engage* (outside of class) were examined. In step with the prior model, the homogeneity of slopes assumption was not violated across the covariates. The full ANCOVA model indicated that there was a significant difference in engagement scores across the levels, $F(3, 201) = 12.07$, $MSE = 277.31$, $p < .001$. This difference represented a large effect size as assessed by partial n^2 . Specifically, the factor accounted for 15.3% of the variance in the outcome variable, holding the controls constant. Overall, the model accounted for 18.1% of the variance in faculty engagement. ($R^2=.22$, adj $R^2=.181$). Prior to adjustment, the means were as follows: 1st Quartile ($M=10.00$, $SD=4.49$), 2nd Quartile ($M=11.52$, $SD=3.94$), 3rd Quartile ($M=13.55$, $SD=5.78$), and 4th Quartile ($M=15.43$, $SD=5.42$). After adjustment, employing relevant controls, the mean scores were: 1st Quartile ($M=10.24$); 2nd Quartile ($M=11.35$), 3rd Quartile ($M=13.66$), and 4th Quartile ($M=15.22$). Bonferroni comparisons indicated 3rd Quartile Black men had significantly higher scores than their peers in the 1st Quartile ($MD=3.42$, $p=.003$). In addition, 4th Quartile Black men had higher mean scores than their peers in both the 1st ($MD=4.98$, $p<.001$) and 2nd (3.87 , $p<.001$) Quartiles. In line with the prior analysis, there were no significant score differences between men in the 3rd and 4th Quartiles ($p=n.s.$). Estimate marginal means plots indicated successive score increases across each level of the factor, see Figure 3.

The final analysis sought to determine whether there were significant score differences on students' perceptions of whether faculty members conveyed a sense of belonging to them. An examination of the homogeneity of slopes assumption indicated that the control variables for time status and income violated the assumption. As such, a subsequent final model was created which excluded these variables. This final ANCOVA model for *faculty belonging* illustrated a significant relationship between the factor and dependent variables, after holding constant the controls, $F(3, 203) = 7.17$, $MSE = 183.54$, $p < .001$. The effect size for the model was medium, as

assessed by partial n^2 . The factor accounted for 9.6% of the variance in the outcome, while the full model represented 8.7% of the variance ($R^2=.122$, adj $R^2=.087$). Pre-adjustment, the quartile scores for sense of belonging on faculty-student engagement were as follows: 1st Quartile ($M=10.64$, $SD=4.68$), 2nd Quartile ($M=11.58$, $SD=4.88$), 3rd Quartile ($M=13.59$, $SD=4.86$), and the 4th Quartile ($M=14.89$, $SD=5.97$). Post adjustment, the revised estimates included: 1st Quartile ($M=10.60$), 2nd Quartile ($M=11.62$), 3rd Quartile ($M=13.53$), and 4th Quartile ($M=14.95$). In line with the prior models, students in the 3rd Quartile had significantly higher scores than those in the 1st Quartile ($MD=2.93$, $p=.048$). Moreover, Black men in the 4th Quartile had higher scores than their peers in the 1st ($MD=4.351$, $p<.001$) and 2nd ($MD=3.33$, $p=.004$) Quartiles. No significant differences were detected between the 3rd and 4th Quartiles (See Figure 4).

DISCUSSION

As previously discussed, this study sought to determine whether there were differences in students' levels of engagement with faculty members based on different levels of faculty members' welcomeness and imbuement of belonging. After employing relevant controls, all three models examined indicated significant score differences on faculty-student engagement. In general, models indicated that students in the 3rd and 4th Quartiles had significantly higher levels of faculty-student engagement than their peers in the 1st and 2nd Quartiles. These score differences were evidenced by 'approaching large' to 'large' effect sizes, according to partial n^2 , across the models. However, there were negligible differences between students' levels of engagement with faculty for those in the 3rd and 4th Quartiles. These findings suggest that successive levels of faculty welcomeness and belonging are associated with greater levels of faculty student engagement.

More simply, the findings presented herein demonstrate that faculty-student engagement is a function of campus ethos conditions fostered by faculty. When faculty members create conditions where students feel welcome to engage in the class by asking questions, responding to queries, and inquiring about their progress, then students will engage with faculty. Moreover, when faculty demonstrate an interest in interacting with students informally outside of class by being friendly (e.g., waving, smiling, saying hello), inviting conversations with them, and checking in on them to see how they are doing, then students will engage. Additionally, when faculty create conditions where students feel like they belong, are cared about, valued, and believe in, then they will engage. Clearly, findings such as these move beyond outdated perspectives which assume that engagement is a function of student backgrounds, environmental pressures (e.g., Chang, 2005; Thompson, 2001; Well-Lawson, 1994), time, focus, and energies (e.g., Kuh, 2003; Pace, 1980, 1984).

The notion that greater engagement with faculty is experienced by students in the 3rd and 4th Quartiles of welcomeness and belonging corresponded with Harris and Wood's (2014a) SEO model. As noted, they specified that more positive campus ethos had an effect on experiences in the academic domain, such as faculty-student engagement. These findings corroborate hypothesized relationships, at least with respect to the faculty-derived measures of campus ethos employed in this study. These findings are also in line with the *five elements of faculty-student engagement* espoused by Wood and Turner (2011). While Wood and Turner did not speak directly to the concepts of welcomeness and belonging, they did articulate corollary strategies such as friendliness, encouragement, and listening to student concerns which are synergistic with

these concepts. Research in this study provides quantitative validation to the qualitative insights uncovered in prior research that has placed the onus of student success on institutions.

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

The results identified in this study have direct implications for practice. Given the importance of positive faculty-derived campus ethos, colleges should implement professional development programming which supports faculty members in understanding how to incorporate strategies that authentically demonstrate welcomeness to engage and belonging. Considering the dismal outcomes for Black men, the importance of such strategies are critical. However, as noted by Wood (2014), the authenticity of faculty affirmation and support of Black men is key. He connected the need for authentic care to combat persistence stereotypical views of Black men communicated (intentionally and unintentionally by faculty). Specifically, Wood found that Black men were apprehensive to engage in the classroom because faculty members fostered environmental conditions that made students feel academically and intellectually inferior. Students in his study noted that they avoided in and out of classroom engagement for fear that faculty would perceive them as ‘dumb’, ‘ignorant’, and ‘stupid’. Considering these findings, professional development programming should occur regularly, to remediate pervasive messaging that faculty members consciously and unconsciously convey to students. Moreover, examples of how to appropriately convey welcomeness and belonging to students of differing racial/ethnic, gendered, and cultural backgrounds is also needed.

In addition to strategies for capacity-building among current faculty, the ability to demonstrate strategies that foster welcomeness and engagement among diverse students (particularly Black men) should be a litmus test for new faculty hiring. Hiring committees should evaluate teaching philosophies, prior teaching evaluation, and on-site teaching demonstrations to determine whether faculty possess the training necessary to work with students in need of encouragement to engage and a climate of belonging. Such evaluations should be inclusive of both part-time and full-time faculty, given that part-time faculty and Black men are often over-concentrated in key gatekeeper courses (e.g., remedial English, remedial math) (Harris & Wood, 2014b). For both current and newly hired faculty, evaluations of teaching performance should be inclusive of the measures for welcomeness and belonging. In this light, students should be able to remark on academic content, instructional delivery, and faculty-derived campus ethos. As with normal evaluation items, these items should then be factored into retention, tenure, and promotion evaluations of teaching excellence.

In terms of future research, findings from this study provide an opportunity for expanded areas of inquiry. First, while faculty-student engagement was found to differ significantly across the levels of faculty belonging, the omnibus model was modified from the welcomeness models to account for violation of homogeneity of slopes. As a result, covariates for time status and income were excluded from the model. This violation suggests that an interaction is occurring between these variables, the factor and the outcome. As such, future studies can explore differential outcomes across the nexus of time status and income with the quartiles for faculty belonging. Second, since this study has highlighted the relationship between ethos and engagement, there may also be a need to explore how staff-derived campus ethos may have a similar effect on students’ engagement (via usage of campus services) with staff. Such lines of inquiry could explore these relationships across service types such as academic advising, career

counseling, tutoring services, computer labs, and the library. Third, given concerns regarding men of color in community colleges, this study should be replicated with Mexicano, Latino, Southeast Asian, and Native American populations to determine whether similar score differences in faculty-student engagement are evident across welcomeness and belonging quartiles. This will provide a fuller picture of how ethos and engagement are connected across racial/ethnic groups. In closing, the recent focus on issues facing boys and men of color in education has provided an opportunity to develop new programs, policies, and practices that can better support their success in school. This study has taken one step to exhibit the importance of campus ethos on students' engagement with faculty. The insight gained from this study provides added documentation of the role that campuses have in fostering conditions conducive to positive student outcomes. For Black men, those who reside on the academic and social margins of these institutions, the importance of actualizing these conditions is imperative.

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APPENDIX A

Variables and Coding Schema

Variable	Values	Type	Other
Faculty-Student Engagement	4 to 24	Composite measure ($\alpha=.83$)	4 items; 6 point scale agreement
Faculty Belonging	5 to 30	Composite measure ($\alpha=.96$)	5 items; 6 point scale agreement
Faculty Welcomeness (in class)	4 to 24	Composite measure ($\alpha=.85$)	4 items; 6 point scale agreement
Faculty Welcomeness (out of class)	3 to 18	Composite measure ($\alpha=.85$)	3 items; 6 point scale agreement
Respondent Age	1=Under 18; 2=18 to 24 years; 3=25 to 31 years; 4=32 to 38 years; 5=39 to 45 years; 6=46 to 52 years; 7=53 to 59 years; 8=60 to 66 years; 9=67 years or older	Individual item	
Annual Income	1=Under \$10,000; 2=\$10,001-20,000; 3=\$20,001-30,000; 4=\$30,001-40,000; 5=\$40,001-50,000; 6=\$50,001- 60,000; 7=\$60,001- 70,000; 8=\$70,001-80,000; 9=\$80,001- 90,000; 10=\$90,001- 100,000; 11=\$100,001- 110,000; 12=\$110,000 or more	Individual item	
Dependents	1=none; 2=1; 3=2; 4=3; 5=4; 6= 5 or more	Individual item	
Remediation	1=No remediation; 2=Remediation	Individual item	
Total Credits	1=None yet; 2=1 to 14 credits; 3=15 to 29 credits; 4=30 to 44 credits; 5=45 to 60 credits; 6=61 or more credits	Individual item	
Hours Worked	1=None; 2=1 to 5; 3=6 to 10; 4=11 to 15; 5=16 to 20; 6=21 to 25; 7=26 to 30; 8=31 to 35; 9=36 to 40;	Individual item	

10=41 or more

Time Status

1=Full time; 2= Part-time

Individual item
