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Educating Urban At-Risk Students on Aspects of Life Skills and Personal Management  
While enrolled at Borough of  
Manhattan Community College

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### Abstract

This research report was written on the premise of devising an intervention module for wellness among at-risk community college students, which can enhance retention within the group. Barriers to retention cannot solely be eradicated by didactic remedial services of a core curriculum; there must be a dichotomy of intervention, which includes building academic competency as well as intervention strategies for enhancing social functioning with an emphasis on life-skills that incorporates the family-life cycle. This report was structured into three sections, entitled the breadth, depth, and application. The **breadth** discusses how community colleges have historically been on the forefront for educational opportunity for many urban dwellers and how these institutions have awarded degrees to numerous individuals. The **depth** is a review of some contemporary research that indicates that students have reported that family-life was an impeding factor for retention. Currently, there is a need for social intervention strategies to be devised and implemented among at-risk students who attend these institutions. The **application** explores a proposed intervention module that can be implemented to assist with restoring wellness among at-risk community college students with an emphasis on family-life, which can enhance retention. This wellness module was devised from a family systems theory perspective, which states that if one family member is experiencing a problem, then all family members are affected by that problem, and the problem is deemed as a family-problem. This intervention module can build resilience among many community college students who have barriers to retention, on the basis of having multi-tasking roles from family-life, employment, and academia. Students will be taught coping skills for multi-tasking as well as how to utilize resources. Last, based on current literature in higher education, counselors and educators will need to devise more intervention strategies for effective communication skills and understanding behavior dynamics among students within a multicultural global community. (67 works cited).

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Breadth

Since the 1930s, community colleges have primarily focused on educating individuals for expanding industries (2005, AACC). These institutions of higher education have been providing academic instruction that has prospects for upward mobility for its members (Purnell & Blank, 2004). Many students who attend community colleges report a primary goal of obtaining financial empowerment (Peterman, 2000; Filkins & Doyle, 2002). Community colleges have not only been providers of educational access for diverse groups, but they have also played a vital role with tackling and reforming social barriers, by enhancing educational access and competence of its community members via successful innovative programs (Melendez, Falcon, & Montrichard, 2004). Therefore, “Community colleges have successfully adapted to waves of societal changes over the last century” (Sáñez, 2004, p. 97).

There has been a 143 percent increase in the number of associate degrees awarded to American students between the years of 1980 through 2000 (Laden, 2004). Thus, for the year 2000 there were 200,000 associate degrees awarded to diverse students across America (Sáñez, 2004). Historically, community colleges have been liberal with how they provide services for students who have employment and family responsibilities while enrolled in college (Hagedorn, 2004). Currently, many community colleges have adapted campus childcare centers and outreach services for students (Grossman & Gooden, 2002). Higher educational organizations must devise programs that will assist at-risk students attain their education (Bailey, Alfonso, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2004). Unfortunately, social demands in family-life and employment continue to be the leading factors to poor retention among community college students who are at-risk of not meeting minimum retention standards (Thayer, 2000).

### Depth

Many students enrolled in community colleges have been the first in their families to attend college (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Thus, some of these students have more social barriers for attending college when compared to students whose parents attended college or perhaps graduated from college (Hertel, 2002). “Students who break their family traditions by changing their identity, are perceived as being different, leaving old friends behind, separating from their families, breaking family codes of unity and loyalty, and living between two worlds” (Rendon, 1995, p. 6). Furthermore, these developmental changes can become problematic within the family (Bowen, 1978; Lambie, 2000). These behavior dynamics are commonly found in concepts of family systems theory. This theory argues that change affected by any family member, changes the dynamics of the general family system and problem affects the whole family (Klein & White, 1996). Thus, family members either support or demonstrate a lack of support for the family member who is performing change, in which the latter can compromise personal life aspirations, life satisfaction, and mental wellness (Ackerman, 1970; Bowen, 1978; London, 1989; Minuchin, 1974; Lee, Sax, & Hagedorn, 2004; Grossman & Gooden, 2002).

Filkins & Doyle (2002) contend that the lack of family support causes anxieties towards education and developmental change among first generation college students. These anxieties make many students at-risk of not being educationally progressive, because of personal attitude conflictions toward attending college, family responsibilities, and perceived loyalty to family and friends. For these at-risk students, situations of family sabotage and various bullying behaviors, whether conscious or unconscious, becomes a reality in their lives. If these students have poor coping strategies they will be more likely to conform to the hindering strengths of family pressure (London, 1989; Carson & Lewis, 2002; Rodriguez, 2003). As a result, these students may not continue nor complete their higher-educational goals and parents may advocate for employment rather than educational attainment (Lee, Sax, & Hagedorn, 2004). Most importantly, in today’s society, higher education cannot be compromised, on the basis of most entry-level positions in America require a college degree (Zunker, 2002). Barriers to retention

are attributed to a student's social economic status, attitudes for career goals, college enrollment, low academic skills, low perceptions of confidence, and family influential attitudinal values for family-life that takes precedence over academic responsibilities (Baily, Alfonso, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2004; Grossman & Gooden, 2002; McConnell, 2000). Unfortunately, since many community college students have a history of enrolling with low academic skills (McConnell, 2000; Schuman, 2005), for many of these students, there were problems with educational instruction at the high schools they attended. Community colleges have created many academic intervention programs to assist students with raising their educational competence (Laden, 2004). Moreso, there continues to be a need for innovative approaches that can be implemented as social intervention strategies for at-risk community college students (Peterman, 2000). Additional support will assist these college students managing their multi-task responsibilities (London, 1989; Thayer, 2000).

#### Application

It is apparent that contemporary societal demands can be impeding factors for retention among low-income families whose members attend community colleges (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Counseling professors who are employed at these institutions can provide intervention by educating students on: (a) How to cope with family-life issues, (b) How students can manage personal behaviors, and (c) How students can manage other multi-task role responsibilities (Grubb, 2001; Peterman, 2000; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). "Counselors often stress the need for a holistic approach, by using a variety of strategies to lead students to understand themselves, their capacities, and their alternatives in much deeper ways" (Grubb, 2001, p. 17). Thus, intervention approaches should demonstrate apathy as well as empathy to students and their situations, by discussing common barriers to academic success as well as ways of improving retention (Combs, 2001). Thus, the leading inquiry for devising social intervention would be: *what type of intervention module can be practiced with at-risk community college students to assist with retention?*

The most influential approach would be to devise a curriculum of literature and supplemental activities that will assist at-risk college students who report ambiguity with

multi-tasking responsibilities, in relation to family-life, intimate relationships, the world of work, and have some discussion regarding the perks of having a belief system (Bandura, 2000; Grubb, 2001; Kennedy, 1992; London, 1989; Grossman & Gooden, 2001; McConnell, 2000; Rendon, 1995). These supplemental activities are a form of narrative therapy (Sholvin, 1999; Hogan, 1999; Phinney & Haas, 2003)) it allows an individual to write alternative stories about him/herself, with hopes that he/she will find new ways of implementing positive strategies. This technique is considered of form of brief therapy as well as a form of problem solving therapy (Haley, 1987).

Holland (2005a) suggests that counselors at community colleges take a general systems approach to working with students who are at-risk of not attaining their education. Thus, general systems theory argues that the sum of parts equals a whole (Bertalanfly, 1975; Boulding, 1985; Hanson, 1995). By examining contemporary life-style influences for at-risk students, some societal aspects of the sum of parts would be: 1) family-life, 2) intimate relationships, 3) the world of work, and 4) how a student's belief system impacts how they perceive and approach life. Thus, by educating students on the family-life cycle, personal behavior skills, establishing healthy partner relationships, some aspects of the dynamics of being an employee coupled with identifying job satisfaction, & the viability of having a belief system can be beneficial intervention applications for at-risk students. These conceptual variables will assist with constructing strategies for social progressiveness.

As stated earlier, low academic performance, results in low perceptions of self and the belief that one cannot become resilient from complex life experiences. Poor perceptions can lead to what this researcher termed "paralyzed pessimistic thinking," because of prior negative events and/or outcomes. Research has found that poor academic skills and/or achievement have a cohesive correlation with the inability of self-efficacy among college students (Combs, 2001; Mahli, 2003; Olszewski, Scott, & Joy, 2001; and Rogus, 2001). Thus, self-efficacy is a beneficial approach for college students to apply in their life-style. In an effort to assist students to venture into the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of self-efficacy, better known as the personal agency (Bandura, 2000), the following

curriculum module entitled: student wellness, has been devised. It is based on a family systems perspective and the module delineates topics that should be discussed in small group workshops with students who are at-risk of not meeting retention on the basis of impeding family and social factors. Please see the figure 1 entitled intervention strategies.

Figure 1.

*Intervention Strategies (an untraditional variation)*

**Student Wellness Module**

- Educate Students on the Family-Life Cycle
  - Introduce the stages of family life cycle
  - Discuss behavior concepts of family conflict
  - Create Supplemental Worksheets on:
    - Identifying college allies
    - Identifying likes and dislikes of family behaviors and students outline how they will cope with undesired behaviors of family members
    - Assessing where you are in the family-life cycle
    - Managing college projects and family responsibilities
  
- Educate Students on Personal Behavior Management
  - Being Truthful
  - Incorporating self-esteem in daily activities
  - Resiliency
  - Displaced anger
  - Self-fulfilling prophecies
  - Reducing frustration
  - Create Supplemental Worksheets on:
    - Self-analysis
    - Becoming resilient from life's challenges while assessing and enhancing your self-esteem
    - Examining our inner dialogue vignettes
  
- Educate Students on how to Establish Healthy Partner Relationships
  - Intimate relationships and the college student

- Relationship imbalances
- Choosing a healthy mate
- Create Supplemental Worksheet on:
  - Relationship vignettes
- Educate Students on how the Family is Impacted by the World of Work as well as Employment Expectations, and Entertainment Culture in the World of Work
  - Contemporary family dynamics and the world of work
  - Employment expectations and your role in the office
  - Entertainment culture and the world of work
  - Create Supplemental Worksheet on:
    - My role as an employee
      - Self affirming inner dialogues
      - Self defeating inner dialogues
- Educate Students on Concepts of Belief Systems
  - General concepts of belief systems
  - How to establish a belief system
  - Create Supplemental Worksheet on:
    - Students will be given negative and positive employment vignettes.
    - How does the students current belief system work for them

The following are research concepts for the previously discussed student wellness module. Ideas from the following topics can be written into a curriculum devised to assisting at-risk college students.

### *Educating Students on the Family-Life Cycle*

Learning about the family life cycle will enable students to minimize personal stress as well as enhance the ability to manage life. The family life cycle consists of developmental stages that families encounter over a period of time. Sociologists have studied this cycle of family life since the 1800s (Bankston, 1999; Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Devault, 1967; Klein & White, 1996). This literature can also be used as a guide to understanding family role expectations. Over the years there have been many variations of the family life cycle. It is important for students to know that each stage can occur differently among diverse races, untraditional life-styles, and cultures (Carter &

McGoldrick, 1999). For the students at Borough of Manhattan Community College an untraditional variation of the family life cycle was constructed that can be identified among the general student population.

When discussing family life, it is necessary to discuss the reality of family conflict (Bowen, 1978). Many first generation college students report various incidents of family sabotage. For many years, clinical research in family studies has built concepts for strategies of intervention regarding hindering and bullying behaviors in family-life. Thus, these unproductive behaviors continue to be active in family dynamics for college students (Bowen, 1978; Carson & Lewis, 2002; Ackerman, 1970; Ginsberg & Schlossberg, 2002). Students can be empowered by being educated on how to cope with family conflict and situations of sabotage within the family. Bowen (1978) expounded on the following six vital aspects of family conflict, which may be encountered by contemporary community college students.

Triangles- When the family is in conflict, someone within the unit is pushed out and is viewed as an outsider, which is a form of bullying.

Emotional Distance- When people distance themselves from each other to reduce intense confliction in relationships, which can be unhealthy.

Family Projection Process-How a parent(s) transmits negative messages and emotional instability to their child/children. This behavior instills fears, anxiety, weakness, and perceptions.

Multi-generational Transmission Process-Problematic issues become generational family behaviors. These behaviors may have been conscious or unconsciously transpired to offspring.

Emotional Cut-off and Societal Emotional Process-When people do not resolve emotional conflicts with family members and stop interacting with them. This causes stress, grief, worrisome behaviors, poor communication among family members, and these conflicts affects the individual interacts in society.

Societal Emotional Process- The emotional state of society influences the family's emotional state, which is usually apparent at the time of war.



Some of the above issues are crises that students encounter in family life and prior research among community college students indicate that these family conflicts are not being addressed and become a barrier to retention (Grossman & Gooden, 2001; London, 1989; Filkins & Doyle, 2002).

### Family-Life Cycle Intervention

#### Family Life-Cycle Developmental Stages

- ❖ Stage 1: Independence & Care-Giving- Explores the reality that some community college students may have a different type of independence that is in a form of mental independence, because they reside with their family while attending school. Also, have some discussion regarding family responsibilities to relatives and perhaps children.
- ❖ Stage 2: Parenting Newborns until Pre-adolescence- Discusses the developmental stages of parenting and family-life among diverse family life-styles as well as various developmental stages and coping skills for each stage; i.e., dual parenting, single parent families, cohabiting families, same-sex parenting, multi-generational parenting, and commuter marriages.
- ❖ Stage 3: Parenting Adolescence- Discusses the developmental stages of teenagers and parental relationships that can have confliction and how parents can communicate with their children.
- ❖ Stage 4: Parenting: Launching Child/Children- Explores the concepts of parents launching their children into society.
- ❖ Stage 5: Young Adult- An exploration of some contemporary and traditional roles and behaviors, which are prevalent among young people.
- ❖ Stage 6: Middle-age Adult - An exploration of some contemporary and traditional roles and behaviors that are prevalent among middle-age adults.
- ❖ Stage 7: Older Adult & Retirement- Discusses family dynamics and some physiological changes that may occur for men and women. Discuss new roles and perspectives of men and women during this stage in regards to family-life.

- ❖ Stage 8: Senior Life- Explores- Explores some contemporary and traditional behaviors that are prevalent among seniors.

### Family-Life Conflicition Intervention

By discussing the reality of family conflicition, students can learn new ways on how to cope with family problems when issues arise, so they can continue to focus on educational attainment. Coping skills could be discussed as role-plays in vignettes, which will allow students to identify conflicition in family behaviors as well as learn how to appropriately resolve conflicts. Students should be encouraged to establish relationships with peers, who can be identified as college allies. These college allies can be a support system when discussing the rigorism of college. Students should be informed that it may not be advantageous to confide personal family dynamics or nuisances with college allies, preferably speak to a counselor for those issues.

Supplemental Activities: Students will be given three worksheets, which will focus on the following: 1) Identifying college allies, 2) Identifying likes and dislikes about family members and how to cope with disliked behavior, 3) Assessing where you are in the family life cycle, and 4) Managing college projects and family responsibilities.

### Educating Students on Personal Behavior Skills

The personal behavior skills aspect is based on a self-help approach. This will assist students to examine their own behaviors and these behaviors can impact various situations. Bowen (1978) and Erikson (1980) discussed the issues of *differentiation of self*, in which the self is innate and constructed during early childhood experiences. Family dynamics influence how the individual continues to mold the “self” over-time. When a person has a weak “self,” negative aspects of society and negative family behaviors can have a greater impact on the individual and his/her beliefs. Therefore, people who have a weak “self” depend on the confirmation and the credence of others. In contrast, a person who has a “*well differentiated of self*,” is more focused and confident on his/her own beliefs about situations and life-experiences.

Personal Behavior Skills Intervention Strategy

Important areas of exploring "self" should could be discussed with students, such as the in the following.

- 1) Being a truthful and honest individual, with an emphasis on how he/she interacts with others, which defers inter-culturally and intra-culturally; how he/she completes educational tasks; how he/she manages role responsibility (Combs, 2001; Rogus, 2001).
  
- 2) Have a discussion on how to assess self-esteem in various situations, which is highly dependent on their life experiences and how they feel about disappointing aspects of life (Mahli, 2003; Murk, 1995).
  
- 3) Educating students on how to become cognizant of resiliency from challenging life experiences (Carlson & Lewis, 2002; Mahli, 2003; Walsh, 2002).
  
- 4) Exploring with students how displaced anger could happen, by being transferred to different situations and people (Bowen, 1978; London; 1989).
  
- 5) Having some discussion on nutritional aspects of the life cycle that can enhance well being (USDA, 2005).
  
- 6) Discussing negative self-prophecies that can be a part of inner dialogues and manifest itself as an overall fear of success (Campbell & Fleming, 2005; Anderson & Whitten, 2005).

Supplemental Activities: Students will be given a self-analysis sheet that will allow them to privately monitor their truthful and untruthful behaviors, which they could discuss privately in counseling. They will also be given sheets with vignettes of negative situations that are translated into positive situations. Students will be asked to write their own negative situation and then re-write it with a positive analysis of the situation (Lambie, 2000).

Educating Students on how to Establish Healthy Partner Relationships

Approaches for educating students on how to identify relationship-imbalance, ways of choosing a healthy mate, and how to access professional counseling from

community resources when in family and/or couple crisis would be a beneficial intervention for student retention. In an effort to promote healthy couple relationships there should be some discussion on problematic intimate relationships. Bowen (1978) termed a concept entitled the *nuclear family emotional system* that entailed three family patterns of conflict. Namely, (1) *marital conflict*, when anxiety and frustration increase within a relationship and each spouse have paralyzed thinking patterns and only focuses on what is wrong with each other as well as tries to control each others behaviors; (2) *dysfunction of one spouse*, happens when one spouse controls another spouse and he/she lets him/herself be controlled, a prolonged state of dysfunction in an individual creates psychological, medical, and/or social dysfunctions; and (3) *Impairment of one or more children*, when the parent(s) transpire anxieties to their children. These are issues that destruct the student's ability to concentrate while enrolled in college.

#### *Healthy Partner Relationships Intervention Strategy*

Last, theorists contend that American men and women are now viewing relationships as a social exchange (Bankston, 1999; Strong, Devault, Sayad, & Cohen, 2004; Gaugh, 2002; Rouse, 2001). The behavior of social exchange in relationships means men and women are weighing the cost and benefits of being committed to each other. The way social exchange works is best shown by this example: When a man and woman marry, they expect to share equally in the burden of providing for the newly created family. If both husband and wife work outside the home to support the family, the wife may still be expected to come home and handle all the domestic work as well, because of traditional concepts of marriage behaviors that may have not been discussed before marriage. When this happens, the social exchange is said to be unequal (Holland, 2005b). An imbalance in role expectations leads to a conflict that can heavily impact the family life cycle for any racial group, because role expectations are an intricate part of any intimate relationship (Holland, 2005b; Batalova & Cohen, 2002). If there is an imbalance in role expectations, the nuclear family is more likely to not survive, resulting in a lack of marital commitment, or in divorce (Holland, 2005b). Thus, the more educated students are on appropriate cohesive family stability, the more educated decisions they could make regarding role expectations and sustaining family life.

Supplemental Activities: Students will be given sheets with vignettes of negative situations that are translated into positive situations. Students will be asked to write their own negative situation and then re-write it with a positive analysis of the situation.

*Educate Students on how the Family is Impacted by the World of Work as well as Employment Expectations, and Entertainment Culture in the World of Work*

Educating students on family life and the reality of how the world of work has impacted the family will give students another perspective regarding contemporary thoughts of social change in the realm of family-culture. Contemporary research reports that college-educated couples are now sharing domestic household duties and childrearing responsibilities on the basis of dual employment (Schwartz, 1994) as well as having commuter marriages, where spouses may reside in different states on the basis of advantageous employment opportunities for growth & financial power (Kiefer, 2000). Thus, it behooves students to look at their own cultural beliefs on male and female roles within the family and have some exploration on how they can construct family-life styles regarding employment that will be comfortable for their family. Students will be able to take what they have traditionally valued in family-life and have the ability and/or opportunity via education to incorporate some new behaviors and perspectives.

Another vital dynamic of the world of work and the contemporary community college student is the “truth” that the “world of work” and academia have always required *prescriptivism*, which argues a standard form of speaking and writing English. At this time, Linguists have moved away from those ideas and now examine how language is used culturally, “Linguists don’t invent rules, they discover them” (Kolln & Funk, 1998, p. 4). Thus, environments outside of academia and the world of work, does not require using standard-English rules when speaking or writing. So, many people speak in a variety of non-standard English, which is culturally errorless and these non-standard dialects are systematic and ruled-governed. When becoming common with speaking in a variety of non-standard English, it is probable that a clash would happen when a portion of community college students are in the world of work and/or academia and are unaware

that they speak in a variety of English. Although the variety of standard-English is spoken at times on television as well as in other aspects of their environment, such as in dialects, writing, and reading; a variety of non-standard English can also be reinforced in their families, communities, and in some aspects of entertainment culture. Therefore, their own level of consciousness may need to be raised regarding the reality of speaking in a variety of non-standard English and choosing to utilize rules that are incorporated in the standard variety of English for settings that deem it necessary. This option of choosing standard English in settings that require it becomes a vital aspect in the “world of work” in regards to upward mobility within organizational settings, especially when there is a competition for advancement among students who do not speak a variety of non-standard English when compared to their counterparts who may speak in a variety of non-standard English and these students are *unaware* of the necessity of utilizing rules in standard English varieties in settings that deem it necessary (Brook, 1973; Quirk, 1991; & Richards, 1993).

#### World of Work Intervention Strategy

There should be a discussion on how the world of work impacts the family. Although, using a variety of English is errorless, raising the level of consciousness among community college students who already demonstrate low academic skills in reading and writing can benefit from engaging in a discussion that explores the options of English in various settings. “Since culture and education are interwoven phenomena, culture has a powerful effect on education” (Linde, 1996, p. 241). First, A special workshop should be given by an English professor who is aware and sensitive to the dynamics of how the variety of English is spoken among diverse racial groups in America and who will be able to create a curriculum that can teach students how to utilize standard rules in environments that deem it necessary, such as in school and in the world of work. Second, students should be educated on what type of employee the world of work is seeking in contemporary society. Currently, organizations are seeking individuals who are able to: 1) Learn the concept of change from diverse experiences, 2) Have the ability to apply information and not be only recipients of instruction, 3) Be able to develop positive interpersonal relationships as well as know how to network, 4) Be able to

understand and implement positive group behavior, 5) Be creative in devising processes and procedures for change, 6) Have the ability to resolve problems, and 7) Have self management skills that will enable them to manage personal development (Zunker, 2002).

Supplemental Activities: Students will be given sheets with vignettes of negative relationship situations that are translated into positive situations. Students will be asked to write their own negative situation and then re-write it with a positive analysis of the same situation.

### *Educating Students on Concepts of Belief Systems*

A belief system prepares an individual for the spontaneous unexpectedness of life, whether positive or negative in experience (Holland, 2005c). Establishing and implementing a positive belief system is another vital aspect for improved academic performance. Positive belief systems can assist students by empowering their mental thought processes, which leads to goal accomplishment. The college student is optimistic and empowered to complete personal, academic, and employment aspirations. Usually belief systems derive from religious, spiritual, and cultural practices within a family structure. A belief system allows the individual to have complete trust that something positive will happen when it is not presently happening, and rebuke the tendency of paralyzed pessimistic thinking.

### *Belief Systems Intervention Strategy*

An article that discusses the viability of establishing a belief system or perhaps referring to a belief as a venue for self-healing when in distress should be given to students. Please see appendix a, which is an article written by Christopher Williams, M.S., on how to establish a belief system. This article was included in a student workbook that was written by Dr. Rochelle Holland (2005c).

Supplemental Activities- Students will be given sheets with vignettes of negative employment situations that are translated into positive situations. Students will be asked to write their own negative employment situation and then re-write it with a positive analysis of the situation. Additionally, students will be asked to write an essay regarding how their belief system works for them.

### Conclusion

Family-life impacts individual success rates more than usually realized, especially in the lives of community college students. Devising a curriculum to promote social and family-life skills enables students to venture into the personal agency of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000), which will enable the at-risk student to believe that he/she can achieve self-regulated goals, once students have a “belief” that they could accomplish delineated goals, it can be more probable that they would venture into the second phase of self-efficacy, known as the proxy agency, which will have students seek assistance with attaining their projected goals. Having existence in the personal and proxy agencies will eventually lead the student to work in the third agency, known as the collective agency. During the collective agency, the student will participate in different groups and strive for group achievement. Furthermore, there are long-term benefits for providing intervention services for students in the area of social and family-life skills and for retention within the organization that is providing such services.

Most importantly, as institutions of higher education prepares to expand services for a multicultural society, issues of family-life, employment, intimate relationships, and belief systems are even more vital to explore among students of diverse backgrounds. “Culture is the spiritual programming of thought. It creates a consciousness of mind, a regulation of conduct, an understanding of the individuals place in the world, and an opportunity for transferring this knowledge to posterity” (Linde, 1996, p. 240). Thus, culture and education are interlinked, so educating future generations in a global community will require more skills for counselors and educators, for enhancing communication skills within the college community and the understanding of behavior dynamics among diverse people. More intervention strategies will be needed to address the social needs of a multicultural society. “The community college faculty must sustain the intellectual and social environment of the college by controlling academic standards, shaping the curriculum, and helping to create a learning climate for their students” (Okumura, 1996, p. 86).



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## Appendix A

## **How to Establish A Belief System?**

By Christopher Williams, M.S.

If your good friend, or a total stranger approached you and asked, “What do you believe in, or what is your belief system? What would you say? Would you respond by saying “I believe in Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, or Christianity? Would you say you believe in Confucianism? Physical Science? Relativism, or Animism? On the other hand, have you ever heard of individuals who say they believe in nothing? Is belief in nothing necessarily a wise decision to make?

Since the beginning of time, human beings have clung to various beliefs and belief systems. A belief system has many definitions such as ideas that are taken on faith and that cannot be scientifically tested. Other definitions include related beliefs and convictions concerning particular phenomena and one extremist definition is those inventions that you create to explain what you do not understand and is normally considered truth. Another definition includes a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing. Having beliefs, or a system of beliefs, have served to enrich men and women, connecting them to their environment, enhancing their culture, and ultimately, in most instances, improving society itself. A belief system also serves to connect us with reality and our own self-consciousness by making us more adaptive and pliable to different types of stress. How then does this happen?

Scholars have long indicated that stress is the product of a complex interaction between culture and biology in which individuals’ experiences are positioned. Our responses to stress are triggered by a threatening stimulus first (Canon, 1953) and stimuli, which trigger the physiological response, which are culturally constructed. Humans adapt to stress in two ways, through biology and through culture and, according to Marks (1995), if culture constitutes the manner in which people cognize the world and the way people cognize the world is created from experience (D’Andrade, 1995), having a belief system either empowers or hinders individuals to act more responsively, or unresponsively to stress. In other words, what you believe in helps dictate whether you make an appropriate and a positive response to stress.

But most importantly, having a belief system causes men and women to be conscious of and closely connected to their spirituality. Men and women confront different degrees and forms of stress everyday. This manifestation of stress is apparent to almost everyone and we all handle stress differently. However, the individual who has a viable belief system, based on experience, can adequately handle those stresses that seek to compromise an individual’s quality of life. Most of us complain of having to endure life’s trials and tribulations, including persecutions. But how successfully do you handle

these trials and tribulations? Being aware of your belief system, which brings men and women in closer contact with their spirituality- your innermost being, and placing faith and confidence upon this belief system, enables men and women to ride the stress wave until it recedes and no longer has a negative impact and effect upon the individual.

In other words, when stress, worry, or anxiety is placed upon a person, what a person believes on the inside will manifest itself. It's similar to placing pressure on a piece of fruit like an orange. Once the pressure is applied, whatever is on the inside, whether positive or negative, will come out and will be made apparent. So, what do you believe in on the inside?

The problem is, as far as belief systems go, there are many different religions, ethnicities, races, creeds, languages, customs, cultures, perceptions, philosophies, and so on... With so many human differences, what is the common focus between men and women on this verdant colorful planet Earth? The most important realization is that we are human beings, with the same physical and spiritual embodiment, created by the same spiritual Creator. Whatever you decide to name him at this point, is not that important now, but what is important is to realize that this Creator gave each man and woman the capacity to have beliefs and a system of beliefs to improve our quality of life here on Earth. How do we establish a belief system?

The first thing in establishing a belief system is to accept the ordinary system of tenets and truths inherent with your belief. For example, if you believed that all college students were smart and gifted and were capable of performing outstanding feats of accomplishment on any examination during the academic year, you would automatically accept this tenet and would expect to see everyone in your class perform exceptionally well. If anyone did not do well, that would destroy the basic tenets of your belief system and the belief system itself.

Secondly, you would display a confidence, or would believe that everyone would do well on any examination, through your actions, mannerisms, communication, knowledge, and attitude. This is what makes the belief system viable to you. Belief systems make it possible for one to exude 100% complete confidence. Complete confidence to the point where you entrust yourself to the belief system, and you believe in the belief system, by walking in the basic belief system tenets is what makes a belief a true belief. Your belief system would then be inside of you, outside of you, and all around you.

Lastly, confession of your belief system, or acknowledging what you believe to that Creative spiritual force, and to others, will go along way in the process of establishing and grounding you in your belief system. There is a special coordination between the mind and the innermost part of the human body which houses and generates emotions, what some individuals call the "spiritual heart." The spiritual heart is very important because it contains philosophical truths, providing a detailed knowledge of God, man, the purpose of human life, and the path of spiritual self-realization. Verbal



confession, the interplay between the mind and the spiritual heart, then reinforces these spiritual philosophical truths and guides you in the most appropriate positive direction.

So to establish a belief system involves 1) acceptance of the basic tenets of the belief system 2) confidence through belief, or entrusting yourself totally to the belief system and 3) confession of the belief system to the great Creative Spiritual force and to others.

Having a belief system then is beneficial since such belief systems provide various coping strategies to deal with life's issues and stresses. The advantages of having a belief system definitely outweigh not having a belief system. In summary, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Black Activist, Malcolm X stated philosophically

“A man who believes in nothing will fall for anything...”

Do not, then, be in the category of individuals who fall for anything !!!!!!!!!!!!!

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