FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: LEVERAGING IDENTITY-CONSCIOUS STUDENT SUCCESS STRATEGIES TO CLOSE OPPORTUNITY GAPS FOR BLACK UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Genyne L. Royal
Michigan State University

Ololade Banks
Oakland Community College

D'Wayne Jenkins
Michigan State University

Kevin Reeves
Michigan State University

Scotty Secrist
Michigan State University

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show how scholars and practitioners can come together to address opportunity gaps for Black students at Michigan State University. The authors detail identity-conscious student success strategies within Reason and Kimball's model of theory to practice used by a group of Black faculty and staff. Among the specific strategies and initiatives were: community development, Welcome Black Week, Soul Food Fridays, and Sankofa Summit. Each strategy also provided increased opportunities for Black students to interact with Black faculty and staff outside of formal classroom settings. The authors conclude with recommendations for other institutions interested in similar approaches.

Please direct inquires about this manuscript to: Genyne Royal, royalgen@msu.edu

College Student Affairs Journal, Volume 40(2), pp. 100 - 114
ISSN 2381-2338

Introduction

Institutions of higher education have increasingly invested in student success efforts, or "increasing the number of students who attain their postsecondary educational goals" (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017, p. 20). The pool of college-going high school graduates is becoming the most racially diverse in the history of the United States, despite overall declining college enrollment numbers (Bransberger, 2017; Grawe, 2018). Since 2000, enrollment to 4-year universities has increased for racially minoritized students (NCES, 2020a). However, according to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (2020b), completion rates for racially minoritized students tended to be lower than their white and Asian counterparts. Universities have shifted their focus to providing potential students access to admission and providing intentional and focused support services and programs that promote increased persistence and graduation. Despite the efforts to create programs and initiatives aimed at the retention and persistence of students, institutions continue to experience concerning attrition rates (Renn & Reason, 2021). Moreover, failing to shift the perspective of how institutions serve racially minoritized students will continue to perpetuate the practices that do not support them (Harper, 2016).

Universities have traditionally provided limited opportunities for success to racially minoritized students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). If higher education professionals truly value supporting racially minoritized students, then they need to work toward dismantling the systemic factors that perpetuate opportunity gaps within their institutions. Some of these systemic factors include, but are not limited to hostile campus climates, bias in admission and financial aid policies, and representation in the staff and professoriate. This will take commitment from executive leadership, practitioners, faculty, and staff. Degree attainment for any student cannot be actualized unless scholars and practitioners actively working to remove institutional barriers and promote equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. With these intentions, institutions must develop services, programming, and educational interventions that are culturally relevant and proven to support holistic student success for racially minoritized students.

To date, institutions have developed communities on campuses that support students' academic and social interests. For instance, some institutions have adopted initiatives that group students in residence halls according to their selected or intended majors, termed living-learning communities (Inkelas et al., 2018). Gonzalez and Romo (2014) provided another example showing how investment in student-led organizations, or common interest groups, has been beneficial to students' success and overcoming marginalization. This article examines how mid-level, Black staff members at Michigan State University engaged Reason and Kimball's (2012) model of theory-to-practice to take up and implement Pendakur's (2016) identity-conscious student success strategies framework to address opportunity gaps for Black undergraduate students.

Purpose and Aim

Michigan State University (MSU) is a large, research-focused, predominately white institution in the Midwest. In 2013, MSU's 6-year graduation rate for undergraduate students was 77%. For white students, it was 81% as compared to 56% for Black students. Disaggregating the graduation rate by race revealed a difference of 25% in 6-year graduation rates between Black and white students, representing the largest disparity in graduation outcomes among racial groups at MSU. In 2014, a group of Black faculty and staff began to explore this phenomenon. They worked to design and implement strategic student success initiatives that centered Black students' identities. The group specifically designed these initiatives to enhance academic outcomes for Black students. The purpose of this article is to show how scholars and

practitioners can come together to address opportunity gaps.

Positionality

It is important to acknowledge that when this article was in its infancy stages, all of the authors were employed at MSU within the Neighborhood Student Success Collaborative (NSSC). This MSU unit will be referenced throughout the article. Thus, as NSSC staff, collectively, we believe that we must strive towards closing opportunity gaps by developing access and support networks for underserved students. In addition, three of us served on the Black Strategic Outreach Committee (BSO), a committee also referenced later in this article, whose work is centered around using identity-conscious student success strategies to close opportunity gaps for Black students at MSU. While the BSO is one of many identity-conscious student success committees housed within our unit, it is the first and the longest-running committee, which is why we have chosen to highlight this particular committee's work.

Major Arguments and Supporting Literature

Throughout this article, we argue that scholars and practitioners should engage Reason and Kimball's (2012) model of theory-to-practice when implementing identity-conscious student success strategies to close opportunity gaps (Pendakur, 2016). We provide the context for how identity-conscious student success strategies were adopted at MSU to make this argument. In providing this context, we show how the individuals implementing these interventions used formal theory, informal theory, institutional context, and feedback loops to inform their practice. We first discuss deficit thinking, opportunity gaps, and identity-conscious student success strategies. Then, we describe the relevant institutional context in which the authors specifically address the NSSC, Black students' success, community development, and faculty and staff engagement. Additionally, we provide a detailed description of the suite of identity-conscious programs created and implemented. Following that description, we analyze the effectiveness of those initiatives in relation to retention rates. Finally, we discuss the important implications that the implementation and assessment processes illuminated.

Deficit Mindsets, Asset-Minded Approaches, and Opportunity Gaps

Racially minoritized students have experienced historical, pervasive gaps in the distribution of opportunities for success at institutions of higher education resulting in significant differences in metrics of success. Some scholars and practitioners point to the disparities in achievement and, from a deficit thinking perspective, assume certain groups of "students and their families of origin as *lacking* the academic, cultural, and moral resources necessary to succeed in what is presumed to be a fair and open society" (Smit, 2012, p. 317). When educators operate from this deficit mindset, they rhetorically frame deficits as innate to certain groups of students. This deficit thinking blames students and deflects from the institution's role in perpetuating these differences in success outcomes.

Menchaca (1997) demonstrated how deficit thinking and mindsets in education arise from racist and classist roots. Similarly, Valencia (1997) examined deficit thinking and how it permeates educators' language and ultimately practice. According to Valencia, deficit thinking and mindsets lead educators to think and talk about racially minoritized groups of students, not in terms of who they are and the inherent value of their life experiences, but rather as who they are not: "*not* traditional, *not* prepared for higher education, *not* in a position of privilege or advantage" (1997, p. 370). This language evolves over time. For example, Pellegrini (1991) demonstrated how the term 'at-risk' actually replaced the term 'culturally deprived' as a reference to racially minoritized students. To this point, Pitre (2014) showed how the phrase

'achievement gap' represents a continuation of deficit thinking, blaming groups of students for disparities in students' achievement.

An asset-minded approach allows educators and practitioners to stop blaming students and refocus their efforts on institutions and systems that inequitably distribute resources and opportunities. We take the approach Pitre (2014) described and refer to these differences, not as achievement gaps, but as opportunity gaps. In doing so, we refocus attention on the institution's role in perpetuating systems that inequitably distribute resources and opportunities. Importantly, scholars (e.g., Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Harper, 2009; Valencia, 2015) remain critical of comparing minoritized groups of students to their white or dominant counterparts, arguing that such exercises perpetuate deficit-minded assumptions. We agree. However, from an asset-minded approach, we assert that a focus on opportunity gaps does not add to the perpetuation of deficit-framed narratives. Instead, the rhetorical and conceptual shift focuses attention on the institution's role in inequitably distributing opportunities for success. As Harper (2016) wrote, "Without serious commitments to understanding and strategically redressing historical inequities within and among institutions, the opportunity gap will continue to be persistent and pervasive" (p. x).

Identity-Conscious Student Success Strategies

To close what Pendakur (2016) refers to as opportunity gaps, or the gaps in persistence and graduation among students from historically, racially minoritized groups compared to their majority group counterparts, higher education institutions need to invest in strategies specifically designed to do so. An identity-conscious student success strategy is designed with students' racial, socioeconomic status, and other identities in mind, but the intended outcomes are inextricably tied to student success outcomes such as year-to-year persistence and timely graduation (Pendakur, 2016). For an institution to be equity-minded, practitioners must disaggregate data by race and ethnicity, note racial inequities in student success outcomes, and make sense of collected data in critical ways (McNair et al., 2020).

Pendakur (2016) defined his framework by first differentiating student success work from identity-based engagement work. Student success work generally involves creating educational interventions based on the experiences and needs of students from dominant social groups. These interventions are then administered to all students with the aim of increasing overall persistence and graduation rates. On the other hand, identity-based engagement work generally provides opportunities for students from minoritized social groups, specifically racially minoritized students, with the opportunity to develop their own identities in community with others. While the importance of this work cannot be understated, Pendakur asserted this work is rarely directly tied to student success metrics. Pendakur's identity-conscious student success strategy framework brings the two together, calling on practitioners to build student success interventions with specific students' identities as the central design element.

Model of Theory to Practice

Scholars and practitioners aiming to take up an identity-conscious student success framework should engage with Reason and Kimball's (2012) theory-to-practice model. The scholars' model assumes a "need for rigor and adaptability" (p. 367). Their model consisted of four components and two feedback loops. The components were formal theory, institutional context, informal theory, and practice. There were also two feedback loops, one from practice to informal theory and one from practice to institutional context.

Formal theories form the basis of the work of student affairs professionals. According to Reason and Kimball (2012), formal theories provide "for a common language and shared understanding of student development goals among professionals"

(p. 368). Formal theories relevant to the work of student affairs professionals include those dealing with student development, identity development, ecological approaches to college students, and theories regarding attrition and retention. Notably, formal theories may come from outside the field of higher education. Such theories include critical race theory.

When scholars and practitioners use formal theories in their given institutional context, they adapt those formal theories. Scholars and practitioners using formal theories in their day-to-day context must adapt them, giving rise to informal theories. As Reason and Kimball (2012) wrote, "Informal theories serve as a capable guide to the implementation of appropriate developmental interventions on a given campus by a given student affairs practitioner" (p. 369). Informal theories draw on formal theories but acknowledge the messier nature of institutional contexts.

Reason and Kimball (2012) defined institutional context as "an aggregated understanding of informal theories" (p. 368). In their model, "institutional context is designed to call a specific attention to how the environment informs institutionally supported student development goals and provide guidance to student affairs professionals about how these goals are best achieved" (p. 368). Thinking about the institutional context in this way allows scholars and practitioners to consider the formal organizational structure, the more fluid and less formal social networks embedded in the institution, the political terrain, and the economic landscape.

Finally, Reason and Kimball (2012) defined practice as "the application of informal theory to the student affairs professionals' work with individual students and student groups" (p. 370). As Parker (1977) noted, practice requires "concrete and specific behaviors in complex situations" (p. 419). Practice is the act of doing, of implementing informal theories. Through this model, scholars and practitioners can draw upon the formalized theories of higher education, specifically Pendakur's (2016) identity-conscious student success strategies framework, to create educational interventions aimed at closing opportunity gaps.

Institutional Context

The existing opportunity gaps between white students and racially minoritized students are a national issue plaguing postsecondary institutions (Harper, 2016; Pendakur, 2016); MSU is no exception.

The Neighborhood Student Success Collaborative

In 2010, MSU made student success one of its main priorities. As a part of that work, the NSSC was established as a unit on campus to focus on student success, specifically. As Secrist (2021) showed, in its earliest iteration, the NSSC intended to normalize the use of theory and data in the development of its student success efforts and broaden the stakeholders' ideas of student success to include student learning, development, and holistic support. Secrist found that working to shift the culture around data use and sharing played a critical role in adopting identity-conscious student success strategies. At first, the NSSC used data to help campus constituents understand the importance of broad metrics, like year-to-year persistence and graduation rates. However, as this data-driven philosophical approach became normative, Black colleagues sought to disaggregate the data concerning academic outcomes by race/ethnicity.

Black Student Success – Formal Theories

In 2014, a group of Black academic and student affairs staff began to explore the phenomenon at MSU. After conducting a relevant literature review and analyzing national and institutional data sets, the group launched an initial effort in 2015. After the initial year of implementation, what had become the BSO committee assessed the effectiveness of the measures, engaging feedback loops with the qualitative and quantitative inqui-

ry. Our Black student success work was designed to mitigate opportunity and completion gaps and increase Black students' persistence at the institution. Using Pendakur's (2016) framework, we centered Black students' identities in the design and implementation of these educational interventions. Aligning the focus on Black students' identities illuminated an essential element within our Black student initiatives--community.

Community Development

Community became a common thread running through our Black student success initiatives. Fairfax (2017) defines community through an African-centered lens, positing community is more than a "geographical location, it is an intimate part of who a person is, how that person perceives him- or herself, and the concomitant aspects of life. [Community] has been defined as a network of connections" (p. 75). It is significant to note that this concept of community was foundational at establishing this work as members of both our academic and student affairs staff partnered to establish a community and network for Black student success.

Interventions and programs included Welcome Black Week, Soul Food Fridays, and Sankofa Summit, each strategically designed to positively impact Black students' sense of belonging, Black students' ability to successfully navigate the institution, and increase Black students' persistence and graduation rates.

Faculty and Staff Engagement

According to Jones (2001), interaction with faculty, staff, and the social environment of campus can influence the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of Black students attending PWIs, ultimately enhancing their satisfaction and academic achievement. With this in mind, interventions and programs developed by the Black Strategic Outreach Committee are designed to provide an atmosphere where Black MSU students can meet and connect with Black MSU faculty, staff, and alumni.

Black Student Success Interventions and Programming

Drawing on the aforementioned formal theories related to Black students' success in concert with the understanding of the institutional context at MSU, the BSO committee created and implemented a suite of programs and interventions aimed at closing opportunity gaps. We describe this suite of programs below.

Welcome Black Week

Welcome Black Week (WBW) is a collaborative partnership with academic units and registered student organizations that provide a week-long program of events designed to acclimate and orient incoming Black students to MSU. WBW includes events ranging from "meet-and-greets" to student/faculty panel discussions. WBW is specifically designed to guide students on "how to be a Black student at MSU" and increase the sense of belonging in Black students. Belonging is referred to "as [one's] perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17). Building community and establishing a sense of belonging are central to gaining student buy-in, specifically within marginalized communities. Strayhorn (2012) also suggested that a student's perception of support from multiple individuals (e.g., staff, faculty, or other students) on campus and how welcoming a campus contributes to their overall feeling of being connected. In an effort to provide more campus connections, during each WBW program, we highlight a different campus resource and encourage students to seek assistance if necessary. These programs offer incoming Black MSU students the tools necessary to being successful during their first and second years. Students make valuable connections early that prepare them for academic success during their undergraduate careers.

Soul Food Fridays

The Soul Food Friday's initiative was designed to increase Black students' belonging. Building community and cultivating relationships played an integral role in the overall design of Soul Food Fridays. Although the program was not initially designed through an identity-conscious lens, elements of the program certainly align with Pendakur's (2016) framework. Held monthly, Soul Food Fridays combine food, fellowship, and academic support for students where they connect with each other and make meaningful connections with Black MSU faculty and staff. The Black faculty, Black student connection is a critical component in overall Black student success. Guiffrida (2005) found that Black students at PWIs perceive Black faculty as more willing to assist students in succeeding in college, providing comprehensive academic, career, and personal advising; supporting and advocating for students at college and at home; and demonstrating beliefs in students' academic abilities.

Sankofa Summit

The Sankofa Summit is a uniquely designed day-long conference centered on academic and social engagement workshops catered to first- and second-year Black MSU students. Black faculty and staff volunteer to facilitate a series of workshops, and the summit seeks to provide students with success strategies and tips that will positively impact their academic, social, and personal endeavors at MSU. Each program and intervention by the BSO described above serves a specific and unique purpose geared towards increasing Black student success at MSU. It is a true collaborative and strategic effort that requires support from all institutional areas. Faculty colleagues provide additional support by using and incorporating their research in the outreach design.

Findings

The BSO committee implemented intervention programs such as Welcome Black Week, Soul Food Fridays, and Sankofa Summit. The NSSC tracked students' attendance throughout these interventions. We carried out a propensity score matching analysis (Ho et al., 2007) to examine differences in GPA, year-to-year persistence, and time-to-degree for students who attended compared to matched students who did not attend. Students were considered for comparison if they (i) were identified as "African American/Black" as their primary ethnic identity in student records, or (ii) if they selected "African American/Black" as one of their multiple ethnic identities. Afterward, students were matched based on legal sex, first-generation status, Pell Grant recipient status, classification (senior, junior, etc.), highest math placement score, and their academic college at MSU. Once a valid comparison group (matched cohort) was constructed, we compared various measures from the Fall and Spring semesters. These measures included grade point average (GPA), credits earned, the credit pass rate, and good academic standing (i.e., not on academic probation) for the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters.

Table 1 shows the positive effects of students attending Black Strategic Outreach events. The table shows significant increases in credits in the Spring 2020 semester, the passing rates in the Fall 2019 semester, and Good Academic Standing in both the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters.

These results show positive trends for Black students who attended BSO programming and interventions. Said another way, Black students who attended identity-conscious student success interventions planned by BSO seemed to have benefited from their attendance. However, they do not speak to the overall opportunity gaps experienced by Black students at MSU. Below, Figure 1 shows the differences in first-year persistence, 4-year graduation, and 6-year graduation rates of Black students compared to white students. To understand the impact of BSO's work, one must start in 2014, when the first members of the committee came together to address the opportunity

gaps. Looking at first-year persistence in 2014, the retention rate of white students was roughly 93%, whereas the retention rate for Black students was approximately 86%, almost a difference of 7%. Except for a major dip in 2016, retention rates have continued to increase for Black students, and in 2020, that difference shrank to around 3%.

While we have not observed much change in the differences between white and Black students in terms of the 4-year graduation rates, the gap seems to be closing between white and Black students relative to the 6-year graduation rates. We have not yet closed the gaps. However, our work shows promise. Given previous scholarship in conjunction with the results discussed in this section, student success practitioners can use our example to take up identity-conscious student success strategies to close opportunity gaps on their campuses.

Discussion and Implications

Throughout this article, we have described how Black faculty and staff have utilized Reason & Kimball's (2012) model of theory to practice addressing the opportunity gaps experienced by Black students at Michigan State University. Incorporating formal theory, institutional context, informal theory, practice, and multiple feedback loops, the Black Strategic Outreach committee engaged in an iterative process that integrated scholarship, considerations of institutional context, and reflection. In doing so, members of this group engaged in contextually relevant practice for the students with whom they worked. Their process provides scholars and practitioners with new knowledge related to using Pendakur's (2016) identity-conscious student success strategies as a framework for addressing opportunity gaps.

To better understand the identity-conscious student success work at MSU, one must consider how the institution situated the work organizationally. The creators of NSSC designed the unit to work at the intersection of student and academic affairs. In the early days of the NSSC, the unit reported to multiple divisional leaders, including an associate provost, an associate vice president of student affairs, and an associate director of housing and food services (Secrist, 2021). These cross-divisional origins allowed the NSSC to bring together sometimes siloed parts of campus. Over time, the campus has come to view the NSSC as the innovative hub for student success efforts. At present, the NSSC sits within the Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education (APUE), which reports directly to the Provost. Developing the identity-conscious initiative within the NSSC provided the best opportunity for institutional support, resources, and alignment to Pendakur's (2016) framework. The BSO committee serves as the institutional model to move the identity-conscious student success initiatives forward for other groups of racially minoritized students at MSU.

As the BSO committee continues to engage in Reason and Kimball's (2012) theory to practice model, they have developed an organizational structure, identified key stakeholders for collaborative partnerships, and clarified student success outcomes that can provide guidance in continuing identity-conscious program development. Identifying critical campus partners proved to be one of the critical strategies used to formulate the BSO committee.

Strategically identifying critical campus partners served to diversify the committee in both functional areas of campus. Bringing in experts from various fields and disciplines has expanded the formal and informal theories that underpin their work. Furthermore, the BSO committee's work was critical in modeling necessary strategies to expand identity-conscious student success strategies to other identity-based communities at MSU. Below, we provide two key considerations or findings for others working to address opportunity gaps on their campuses.

Identify and Cultivate Critical Campus Partnerships

As noted above, the organizational and institutional context of identity-conscious student success strategies at MSU played a critical role in implementing and mobilizing this work. At an institution the size of MSU, individual people and even specific units rarely have the ability to grasp the organizational and political terrain fully. Therefore, identifying and cultivating critical campus partnerships played a prominent role in implementing identity-conscious student success strategies. Specifically, these partnerships started with Black faculty and staff creating a cohort and bolstering participation of additional Black faculty and staff who genuinely cared about increasing Black undergraduate students' retention and graduation rates.

In the most nascent stages, Black faculty and staff convened to answer the question, "How do we increase the retention and graduation rates of Black undergraduate students?" The group relied on several formal theories, informal theories, and a collective understanding of the institutional context to address this question. Drawing on the expertise of the scholars and practitioners comprising the group, the BSO committee drew on formal theories of student and racial identity development (e.g., Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001) and college student retention (e.g., Tinto, 2007).

The group also relied on informal theories. For example, because the group was composed of Black faculty and staff, they each had their own lived experiences to draw upon when identifying institutional barriers experienced by most or all Black people on campus. Further, the individuals in this group were intimately aware of the experiences of the Black undergraduate students with whom they worked closely. This knowledge contributed to the "body of common knowledge that [allowed them] to make implicit connections among the events and persons in [their] environment…" (Parker, 1977, p. 420). Further, the group had a much deeper understanding of institutional contextual factors that affected the experiences of Black undergraduate students. While the group neither explicitly started their work with Reason and Kimball's (2012) model of theory to practice nor Pendakur's (2016) identity-conscious student success strategies, intentionally forming these partnerships ultimately resulted in the uptake of both frameworks in addressing opportunity gaps at MSU.

Utilize Institutional Data and Intentional Feedback Loops

Scholars and practitioners should use institutional data to identify specific opportunity gaps within identity-based communities. They should also use continuous assessment feedback loops to ensure the quality of ongoing educational interventions. The group started their work because leadership of the NSSC presented data that illuminated the retention and graduation rates of Black undergraduate students. Notably, this presentation did compare the retention and graduation rates of Black students to other groups of students, including white students. However, the gaps were framed in terms of opportunity rather than deficits and refocused the attention on the institutional barriers Black students faced. One might view these data points as an initial feedback loop. This feedback loop served as the impetus for a new understanding of the institutional context and forming the BSO committee.

As the BSO group began their work, they understood they were working from formal and informal theories about Black undergraduate students' experiences. They intentionally built-in feedback loops that would provide critical information about the institutional context from students' perspectives. Conducting focus groups, the BSO committee gathered qualitative data from Black undergraduate students about their experiences. From these initial focus groups, the BSO committee conceived of the idea of an orientation specifically for new Black undergraduate students. Looking to the concept of socialization (Weidman, 1989) and Barefoot's (2005) research on orientation programs as formal theory, their own infor-

mal theories, and understandings of the institutional context, the BSO committee implemented Welcome Black Week.

Implementing this program into practice also included multiple, intentional feedback loops. For example, the first year this program was piloted, many incoming Black students voiced concern about participating in an orientation program based on their racial identity. The BSO committee heard these concerns and changed the way they promoted the event in the future so that incoming Black students could more clearly understand the purpose of the program. Further, upon completion of this program, student outcomes were analyzed. Those who participated were compared to other students holding similar characteristics. This analysis served as another feedback loop. When the BSO committee saw that Welcome Black Week positively affected student outcomes, like retention, the group decided to continue with the practice.

By analyzing available data and considering that analysis in conjunction with formal theories and particular institutional contexts, student affairs scholars and practitioners can make data-informed decisions that best suit the targeted populations. Student affairs professionals must understand that a "one-size-fits-all" model is not applicable in identity-conscious student success program design. Understanding where the gaps lie within specific communities allows for a more purposeful program design. Utilizing institutional data also creates necessary feedback loops that provide the opportunity for institutional buy-in because it legitimizes the need for identity-conscious student success efforts. Practitioners should use continuous assessment and intentional feedback loops that consider the learning outcomes and success metrics they seek to affect.

Find a Sustainable Organizational Home

Unfortunately, employing identity-conscious student success efforts was not without various limitations. This finding occurs on the organizational level. Specifically, identity-conscious student success strategies must have a sustainable organizational home. At MSU, identity-conscious student success strategies are housed within the NSSC. The NSSC reports to the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education. Reporting up through the Provost's division provides legitimacy to the initiatives. People across campus associate these initiatives with the Provost and understand that they are academic in nature.

To establish a sustainable organizational home, institutional leadership and practitioners must provide funding for these programs and initiatives, signaling the institution's commitment to their aspirations. Further, finding an organizational home for and funding these efforts must be a part of the institutionalization process. Institutionalization is defined not only by formalized and explicit priorities, values, and goals but also when tendencies or habitual forms of action come to be second nature, natural, or "become background" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 25). In the earliest iterations of identity-conscious work, there was no specific home or dedicated funding structure. Lack of institutional funding hindered the effort of identity-conscious student success efforts. Therefore, institutional funds should be allocated to provide consistent support to administrators in creating and implementing relevant, necessary, and effective programming.

Avoid Hidden and Uncompensated Labor

For higher education scholars and practitioners to engage with Reason and Kimball's (2012) theory-to-practice model and Pendakur's (2016) identity-conscious student success strategies framework on their own campuses, they will potentially have to work against institutional culture, break down silos, and act in ways that are not explicated in their formal job descriptions. At MSU, faculty and staff dedicated their time, expertise, and institutional resources to do this work. For many, this work might only tangentially relate to their formal job descriptions. This lack of

compensation has led to faculty and staff inconsistency. In practice, individuals do what they can. However, utilizing feedback loops in the implementation of identity-conscious student success strategies, we know that the institutional context does not currently support the kind of cross-campus collaboration that is necessary to sustain these practices. Therefore, we are currently working on creating funding structures to compensate individuals for their labor as we establish a consistent and dedicated revenue for this ongoing effort. Further, we at MSU are working to recognize the individuals who provide support for identity-conscious student success efforts to ensure that their work is acknowledged and appreciated by the entire campus. Institutional funding allows faculty and staff to be acknowledged and compensated for their labor and encourages a sustained investment in the committee's work.

Implications for Future Research

Based on our findings, one possible avenue for future research focuses on partnerships and networks of collaborations. It would behoove future scholars to examine critical social networks and partnerships that influence understanding institutional contexts and the feedback loops that successfully influence leadership. Specifically, it is important to understand that Black students, faculty, and staff have a history of speaking up and speaking out at MSU. The grassroots activism around Black student success birthed identity-conscious student success efforts at MSU. Future research should examine how different racially minoritized communities receive equitable distributions of opportunities and support.

Future scholarly research should examine how this work is best organizationally situated to understand better how identity-conscious student success strategies operate in various institutional contexts. As a large, research-focused, predominately white institution, identity-conscious student success work needed the support of Student Affairs, the Provost, and Residential and Housing Services. This collaboration broke some silos and brought people from across campus together to address the needs of Black students. Scholars should examine how identity-conscious work can be taken up and sustained in multiple divisions within the institution to determine differential outcomes. The NSSC operates at the intersection of both academic and student affairs. Further exploration of this work, if situated specifically in one division versus another, might help practitioners and institutional leadership in their placement of this work in the future.

Additionally, it would be helpful to understand the impact of compensation on the outcomes of adopting and implementing identity-conscious student success strategies. Staff and faculty are currently uncompensated for their time and efforts in our work. However, understanding whether there is a difference between institutions that compensate their colleagues who engage in this work and those who do not could support the successful implementation of these efforts at other institutions. Future scholarship could examine how to uncover and illuminate this hidden labor in ways that promote and showcase change agents without subjecting them to increased professional risk.

Conclusion

As institutions continue to work to identify evidence-based approaches that support racially minoritized students, more specifically those who identify as Black or African American, a continued emphasis should be placed on practical applications for implementing identity-conscious student success frameworks. Scholars and practitioners should use Reason and Kimball's (2012) theory-to-practice model to achieve such a pragmatic application. As indicated in this article and supported by Pendakur (2016), the identity-conscious student success framework should extend beyond a set of strategic best practices to an approach that is ingrained in the fabric of the institution.

References

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press Books.

Barefoot, B. O. (2005). Current institutional practice in the first college year. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, B. O. Barefoot, & Associates (Eds.), C*hallenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 47-63). Jossey-Bass.

Bransberger, P. (2017). Fewer students, more diversity: The shifting demographics of high school graduates. Data insights. *Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED586768.pdf

Cross, W. E., Jr., & Fhagen-Smith, P. (2001). Patterns in African American identity development: A life span perspective. In C. L. Wijeyesinghe & B. W. Jackson III (Eds.), *New perspectives on racial identity development: A theoretical and practical anthology* (pp. 243-270). New York University Press.

Dowd, A. C., & Bensimon, E. M. (2015). *Engaging the "race question": Accountability and equity in US higher education*. Teachers College Press.

Fairfax, C. N. (2017). Community practice and the Afrocentric paradigm. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 27*(1-2), 73-80.

Grawe, N. D. (2018). *Demographics and the demand for higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Guiffrida, D. A. (2005). Othermothering as a framework for understanding African American students' definitions of student-centered faculty. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76, 701- 723.

Harper, S. R. (2009). Niggers no more: A critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(6), 697-712.

Harper, S. R. (2016). Forward. In V. Pendakur (Ed.), *Closing the opportunity gap: Identity- conscious strategies for retention and student success* (pp. ix-xii). Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Hurtado, S., & Ruiz, A. (2012). T*he climate for underrepresented groups and diversity on campus*. Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/83067/UnderrepresentedDiversityCampus.pdf?sequence=1%26isAllowed=y

Inkelas, K. K., Jessup-Anger, J. E., Benjamin, M., & Wawrzynski, M. R. (2018). *Living-learning communities that work: A research-based model for design, delivery, and assessment*. Stylus Publishing.

Jones, L. (2001). *Retaining African Americans in higher education: Challenging paradigms for retaining students, faculty, and administrators*. Stylus Publishing.

Kinzie, J., & Kuh, G. (2017). Reframing student success in college: Advancing know-what and know-how. Change: *The Magazine of Higher Learning, 49*(3), 19-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2017.1321429

McNair, T. B., Bensimon, E. M., & Malcom-Piqueux, L. (2020). *From equity talk to equity walk: Expanding practitioner knowledge for racial justice in higher education* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Menchaca, M. (1997). Early racist discourses: Roots of deficit thinking. In R.R. Valencia (Ed.), *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice* (pp. 13–40). The Falmer Press.

Parker, C. A. (1977). On modeling reality. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 18*(5), 419– 425.

Pellegrini, A. D. (1991). A critique of the concept of at risk as applied to emergent literacy. *Language Arts, 68*(5), 380–385.

Pendakur, V. (2016). Introduction: Two distinct paths and a missed opportunity. In V. Pendakur (Ed.), *Closing the opportunity gap: Identity-conscious strategies for retention and student success* (pp. 1-9). Stylus Publishing.

Pitre, C. C. (2014). Improving African American student outcomes: Understanding educational achievement and strategies to close opportunity gaps. *Western Journal of Black Studies, 38*(4), 209.

Reason, R. D., & Kimball, E. W. (2012). A new theory-to-practice model for student affairs: Integrating scholarship, context, and reflection. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 49*(4), 359-376.

Renn, K. A., & Reason, R. D. (2021). *College students in the United States: Characteristics, experiences, and outcomes* (2nd ed.). Stylus.

Secrist, S. M. (2021). A*dopting identity-conscious student success strategies: A vertical and transversal case study of one institution addressing opportunity gaps* (Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University).

Smit, R. (2012). Towards a clearer understanding of student disadvantage in higher education: Problematising deficit thinking. *Higher Education Research & Development, 31*(3), 369- 380. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.634383

Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.

Tinto, V. (2007). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention, 8*, 1-18.

U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education

Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2020a). The condition of education 2020 https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cpb.pdf

Valencia, R. (Ed.). (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. The Falmer Press.

Valencia, R. R. (2015). *Students of color and the achievement gap: Systemic challenges, systemic transformations*. Routledge.

Weidman, J. C. (1989). Undergraduate socialization: A conceptual approach. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 5, pp. 289-322). Agathon Press.

Genyne Royal (she/her) serves as assistant dean for student success initiatives, director of the Neighborhood Student Success Collaborative and interim assistant vice president for student life and engagement.

Ololade (Lola) Banks (she/her) serves as the associate dean for college readiness and secondary partnerships at Oakland Community College in Oakland County, Michigan.

Kevin Reeves (he/him) serves as the director of strategic initiatives within the Division of Student Success at the University of Tennessee.

Scotty M. Secrist serves as director for student success in the Neighborhood Student Success Collaborative at Michigan State University.

D'Wayne Jenkins (he/him) serves as director for student success in the Neighborhood Student Success Collaborative at Michigan State University.

Table 1

Results From Propensity Score Matching Analysis of Student who Attended BSO Interventions/Programs as Compared to Students who Did Not Attend

Measure	Matched Cohort	BSO	Diff.	p-value	Sig.
FS19 GPA	2.697	2.761	+0.064	0.312	
SS20 GPA	2.97	3.05	+0.08	0.329	
FS19 Credits	12.426	12.835	+0.41	0.081	.
SS20 Credits	12.046	12.716	+0.67	0.016	*
FS19 Pass Rate	88.8%	91.6%	+2.8%	0.048	*
SS20 Pass Rate	87.5%	89.7%	+2.2%	0.207	
FS19 Good Academic Standing	88.9%	93.8%	+4.9%	0.011	*
SS20 Good Academic Standing	95.1%	97.8%	+2.7%	0.037	*

Figure 1

Graphs Depicting First-Year Persistence Rates, Four-Year Graduation Rates, and Six-Year Graduation Rates for Black and White Students from 2010 to 2020