

Regis College
Weston, Massachusetts

Doctoral Program in Higher Education Leadership

Understanding First-Generation Black Male Experiences that Foster Engagement and
Lead to Student Persistence

A Research Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

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Abstract

First-generation Black males are a unique subset of the higher education population in which their struggles exceed their successes and yet – although far behind their counterparts – are as a group making strides in higher education (Barlis, 2013; NCES, 2013; Snyder et al., 2019). As institutions continue to enroll and graduate this population at higher rates (NCES, 2018) attention to the strategies that lead to persistence and retention are at the forefront (Harper, 2012). The experiences of successful first-generation Black males with a focus on their engagement in out-of-class activities as a pathway to graduation, have yet to fully be examined. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of first-generation Black males who encountered success at Catholic colleges in the Northeast. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and followed-up with reflective questionnaires to identify patterns in the data that described how first-generation Black males fostered engagement and overall persisted to graduation. The findings from this research will influence decisions about future programmatic efforts for current and future first-generation Black male college students and contribute to the success of institutions enrolling and graduating this population.