Examining the Experiences of Men of Color at Santa Monica College

CCEAL

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

About the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL)

Mission

The Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) is a national research laboratory under the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University. CCEAL support community colleges with research, assessment, and training activities that support the success of historically underserved students of color. The mission of CCEAL is to develop knowledge and advance promising practices that enhance access, achievement, and success among underserved students of color.

Objectives

- **Research** – to conduct and disseminate empirical research on the experiences of historically underrepresented and underserved students in community colleges;
- **Training** – to provide training that improves practices and research relevant to students of color in community colleges; and
- **Assessment** – to use assessment and evaluation to facilitate capacity-building within community colleges.

Project Team

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INTRODUCTION

The Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University was contracted by Santa Monica College to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the experiences of men of color (e.g., African American, Latino, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American). The assessment entailed collecting quantitative and qualitative data from students, and qualitative data from faculty. This project is a part of Santa Monica College's efforts to redress persistent inequities and outcome disparities in student success that disproportionately affect men of color.

The purpose of this report is to share findings that emerged from the qualitative assessment of men of color's experiences at Santa Monica College. In line with the purpose of this project, the four overarching questions below guided the qualitative inquiry with students:

1. What are some salient challenges that are experienced by men of color at Santa Monica College?
2. What factors (e.g., people, programs, campus services, resources, etc.) situated within the campus context enable men of color to persist at Santa Monica College despite the challenges they face?
3. What factors (e.g., people, programs, campus services, resources, etc.) external to the campus context enable men of color to persist at Santa Monica despite the challenges they face?
4. What advice would men of color offer to campus leaders and administrators regarding how they can best support them?

METHOD

Data Collection: Data collection for this project occurred during the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 semesters. Students who identified as "men of color" and were currently enrolled in credit-bearing courses were purposefully selected by Santa Monica College administrators to participate in the project. A total of 24 students participated. Twenty students participated in one of five focus groups that were conducted. One focus group focused mainly on challenges men of color experienced in math courses at the request of the math department. The remaining four participants were interviewed individually. The students who were interviewed individually were originally scheduled for focus groups, but were the only students to show during the time at which the focus group was scheduled.

All of the participants agreed to have their conversations audio recorded and were assured that the insights they provided would be treated confidentially by our project team. All of the audio recordings were transcribed for data analysis. During the focus groups, we also completed a "Community College Insights Protocol" matrix. The matrix included the guiding questions that informed the study organized in discrete columns. Completing the matrix enabled us to capture the participants' perspectives in real time. The matrix also allowed the participants to see that the insights they shared were captured accurately.

We relied on the audio recordings and completed matrices to construct this report. Prior to the focus groups and interviews, we informed the participants (both verbally and in writing) that their participation was strictly voluntary. Participants were informed that they could opt out of answering questions they did not feel comfortable answering, and could discontinue their involvement in the project at any time without consequences. None of the participants who began the project discontinued their participation. Participants were provided pizza, snacks, and beverages during the focus groups as an incentive for participating. They did not receive monetary compensation.

Participants: The 24 men of color who participated in the project represented a wide range of diversity on the basis of race/ethnicity (Table1), age (Table 2), enrollment status (Table 3), units completed (Table 4), employment status (Table 5), educational goals (Table 6), and participation in developmental education (Table 7).

Table 1: Race/Ethnicity Composition

Race/Ethnicity	N
Mexican/Mexicano	12
African American/Black	9
South Asian	2
Declined to state	1

Table 2: Participants' Age

Age	N
18-21	14
22-25	4
26-29	1
30+	1
Declined to state	4

Table 3: Enrollment Status

Status	N
Less than 12 units	9
12 units or more	15

Table 4: Total Units Completed

Completed Units	N
1-14	2
15-29	3
30-44	4
45-60	5
More than 60	8
None	2

Table 5: Employment Status

Hours worked per week	N
8-15	5
16-23	1
24-31	4
Various hours	6
Not working	1
Declined to state	7

Table 6: Educational Goal

Goals	N
Transfer to 4-year university	10
Prepare for new career	1
Declined to state	13

Table 7: Development Education Courses	
Subject	N
Mathematics	4
Reading & writing	1
Multiple subjects	2
Not applicable	3
Declined to state	14

Data Analysis: All of the data that were collected for this project were transcribed for data analysis. Each transcript was uploaded into *Dedoose*—a qualitative data analysis software program that enables multiple researchers to work collaboratively on analyzing a dataset. Data were coded deductively by at least two researchers. Although we took a deductive approach to analyzing the data, we also sought concepts and insights that could not be adequately coded using our previously established codebook.

Limitations: Despite our efforts to conduct this project in the most methodologically rigorous manner possible, we encountered several limitations that are worth noting. First, although the sample was very diverse, we would like to have had more students participate. Students who identify as Southeast Asian (e.g., Hmong, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian) or Native Americans were not represented in the sample. This is due primarily to recruitment challenges. Finally, a critical mass of the participants fit the profile of a "traditional" college student—being between the ages of 18-22 and enrolled fulltime. Published literature and research on men of color in community colleges indicate that these students tend to be in their late 20s and attend less than fulltime.

KEY FINDINGS

Four overarching thematic categories emerged from the focus groups and interviews with men of color at Santa Monica College:
- Challenges Students Experienced
- External Pressures
- On-Campus and Off-Campus Support
- Recommendations for Campus Leaders

These categories were salient across the interviews and focus groups. In this section, we discuss each of the themes and present the thoughts, feelings, and experiences participants shared to support the findings presented.

CHALLENGES STUDENTS EXPERIENCED

Participants were asked to discuss challenges they believed had a significant impact on their academic experiences and success at SMC. There were several challenges that emerged as salient during these discussions. These challenges included experiences within classroom settings and off-campus factors that affected their academic productivity. This section will highlight the challenges that were captured from the focus groups and interviews and a description of each challenge is provided below.

- **Challenges with the structure of math courses** – Participants shared difficulties with the ways in which math courses at SMC are typically structured with most having two exams and no other graded assignments. Students prefer classes with multiple assessments (e.g., exams, quizzes) and assignments to determine their grade in the course. Students felt that having multiple assessments provided an opportunity to recover from a sub-par performance on an exam and served as a mechanism for students to ensure they were understanding the course content. Math courses that only included exams were stressful for students who had responsibilities outside of campus (e.g., work, family responsibilities). Below are some of the reflections that were shared by students during the focus groups.

  > *"[I prefer] professors who do tests and quizzes. You see the ones who do that versus the ones who [just do tests], and their failure rate is higher."*

  > *"If you have an exam from several of your math professors, whatever professor you're taking, you're going to take the test, and they say okay right after the test we are going to move on to the next section, and I just ask myself okay we just took a test, we just got out of a stressful state."*

In addition, there were other reoccurring themes in regards to challenges that students experienced with classroom structure. These challenges included: (a) challenges with the inconsistency of curriculum among foundational and advanced math courses and (b) challenges with online software programs. Students felt that the curricular misalignment inadequately prepared them for advanced math courses. For example, in the quote below, a student shared his experience advancing to calculus 2.

> *"They might even cover different stuff. Like one teacher*
> *might focus on proofs in calculus 2 and somebody else just might*
> *focus on problem solving. If you took Math 7 with him you'd*
> *be good on proofs but if you didn't then you'd get screwed*
> *in Math 8 because you never did it before."*

The use of online software programs for math courses was also a challenge for students. Some students indicated that they did not have consistent access to the internet at home, which made it difficult for them to utilize this resource. Others expressed concern about the cost of the software, while some were frustrated by the limited number of online submissions that were allowed for homework assignments. One participant noted:

> *"I think it is because the professors they have a designated*
> *answer they want to see or an input of answers they want*
> *the computer to receive and if you don't put it in that*
> *format it is wrong, but my professor did go over that and then*
> *when you do enroll for classes, it does say to be sure*
> *that you have access to a computer because you have to do*
> *some online homework."*

Students highlighted challenges they had with the math courses offered, the curriculum, and the use of online software. The structure of the math courses played a critical role in the student's academic journey especially in developmental courses. Thus, students identified tutoring as a key resource they utilized to overcome these barriers. However, utilizing this resource did not come without its own set of challenges.

- **Challenges with tutoring services** – Tutoring was widely identified by the participants as a resource they relied upon to overcome the academic challenges they experienced. Some participants expressed the need for more tutors. Others conveyed that the time allotted for tutoring sessions was not enough. Participants who needed additional support mentioned that the limited availability of tutors resulted in them spending more time waiting than getting assistance. The wait time to receive help was particularly a challenge for students who worked off-campus or who had dependents for which to care. Reflected below are comments students shared about the tutoring services.

> *"Time and access to tutors is a challenge. It is a ton of homework, sometimes you're stuck on one problem that takes 20 minutes and you go to the tutors in the math lab and sometimes you have to sit there 20 minutes, 30 minutes to get help because there is a line of people in front of you. And you actually go there and you have 5 minutes with the tutor."*

> *"I actually think we need more tutors. Sometimes you wait 30 minutes just to get one question answered. Sometimes you have one tutor in the classroom and that's not enough."*

Both students stressed the challenge of not being able to spend adequate time with the tutor during their visit. More specifically, the high utility of the tutoring center results in longer wait times, which outweigh the time allotted with the tutor. Furthermore, participants expressed the need of expanding tutoring resources (e.g., space, number of tutors) to appropriately accommodate for students seeking help in math.

• **Students' perceptions of classroom faculty** – Having opportunities to engage meaningfully with faculty is an important factor in men of color's success and satisfaction in community college. Student-faculty engagement has been determined to influence students' self-efficacy and the extent to which they see faculty members as important resources in their academic experiences at SMC. When asked about their relationships and interactions with classroom faculty members, the participants shared a range of perceptions—some positive and some not so positive. Participants who shared not so positive interactions with faculty members described the learning space as static and authoritative, making students feel that they were not able to express themselves in class or unable to engage with faculty members. Positive perceptions were held of faculty who were engaging, conveyed a passion for the content they taught, and made themselves available to students beyond what was typical of most professors.

> *"He [a professor] is always saying 'you can come into my office hours.' Or the day before an exam, 'okay I can take some homework questions, or we would work on homework in class if we are done early with the lecture.' And he would do that and he just, he is just a really fascinating teacher. He teaches very well and he is very sure of himself. He is very confident."*

> *"…actually one of my favorite science professors, was professor [name], she is a black woman, and she actually used to teach at UCLA. I love the way she teaches, it is really engaging, she gets the whole class into it, she actually makes sure everybody is like learning, compared to my professor now, he just goes up there and talks, he doesn't really check around and make sure everybody is doing well in the class. But like she will actually make sure everybody, she will call you up if you're like doing bad on the test or doing bad in class she will talk to you about it."*

While the aforementioned quotes illustrated positive perceptions of faculty, some participants shared negative experiences they had with SMC professors. Professors whom participants did not appreciate were those who were rigid, unapproachable, and held unreasonable expectations, which served as barriers to their engagement and successful performance in class. For example, in a math course one participant described how the faculty member did not accept the student's method of solving a math equation:

> *"…in the end he wanted everybody to do it a specific way and like I would get the same answer as him, but I did it differently, it was something that was easier -- it was a more practical method and he just wasn't taking it, and I'm just like okay fine. Yeah I kind of just -- I don't know I just kind of gave up on that class."*

> *"…for some of the faculty that I have encountered, and I'm talking about they are in high positions, and I don't even trust telling them anything and that is sad, but that is me, and speaking to my peers, people don't want to open their mouths, they're scared they might get a bad grade, because we are all human at the end of the day, and the teacher could be like I'm going to fail you because I don't like you."*

Other students felt that some faculty members were not personally invested in student success and wanted students to fail. One participant shared his frustration about a faculty member who did not express care

for student learning or success by expecting students to do well on exams, but either taught the content poorly or did not mention it at all in class. This theme highlighted a mix of experiences students had with faculty members. Some students highlighted attributes of faculty members that were welcoming, genuine, and caring. While other students expressed difficulties communicating with faculty members because of the negative perception that was presented. Faculty-student engagement is an important component that affects how men of color perceive the college and how they may interact with their peers, other faculty members, and campus leaders.

- **Experiencing racial stereotypes and microaggressions** – There were some participants who felt stereotyped based on their identities as men of color. While discussing challenges they experienced as men of color at SMC, the focus group participants shared that, at times, they felt the pressure of negative stereotypes based on their race/ethnicity. According to the participants, these stereotypes were held by faculty, staff, and students at SMC. Participants also felt that faculty, staff, and students who held negative stereotypes underestimated their academic abilities and/or assumed they were at SMC for reasons other than their academic pursuits. The following quotes are representative of the perceptions that were shared by the participants regarding racial stereotypes:

> *"When we would have group projects. I would be the last one picked because they would assume that I don't know as much as they do."*

> *"Alright, I'm going to take more of a personal standpoint looking from inside out. Appearance. How I look towards a classmate, teachers. Asking too many questions. That right there has been a huge challenge. Um there have been times when I've answered a question and then I get responses like 'Wow, I didn't expect you to know that'."*

These experiences are consistent with what researchers have described as racial microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle remarks that intentionally or unintentionally communicate hostile and derogatory racial

insults towards people of color[1]. The racial microaggressions mentioned above could be understood as an "ascription of intelligence," which occurs when people make assumptions about an individual's level of intelligence based on their identity. Educational researchers have found that racial microaggressions limit students' potential to maximize their learning opportunities. In this instance, the quotes demonstrated examples of microaggressions that impacted the students class participation and engagement.

EXTERNAL PRESSURES

In addition to campus-based challenges, participants also mentioned environmental challenges that impacted their academic success. Environmental challenges are factors external to the campus that impact men of color's success in college. While these challenges are typically beyond the control of educators, it is important to recognize how they influence students' academic experiences. This section will highlight salient themes that emerged during these discussions.

- **Employment, transportation, and financial concerns** – The participants expressed challenges relating to balancing work, school, and family responsibilities. For students who experienced this challenge, having time to engage with faculty members and peers, and utilizing campus resources was difficult. Other students struggled with balancing school with family responsibilities. Two focus group participants had the following exchange regarding balancing school with other life pressures.

  > *"For me my biggest challenge is . . . balancing work and school, and extra-curricular activities, so some days right after class I have to go to work so I don't have that time allocated to study or visit my professor or seek tutoring from the math department. So I think that is my biggest challenge having to go to work right after class certain days a week."*

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[1] See: Sue, D.W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Buccerim J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilinm M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist,* 62(4), 271-286.

"It's kind of the same thing. More for me I was leaning
toward balancing family. You have certain obligations. You have
to go to school, but at the same time, there's family. Living with my
parents, you have to manage. There are certain things you have to
do and have to manage."

Regarding work, our research has found that men of color are concentrated in jobs that are physically demanding, occurring late at night, and temporary in nature. Scholars also found that men of color tend to be employed in jobs that are disconnected from their academic and career goals. While the type of work did not emerge as a salient theme across the interviews and focus groups, some participants noted that their employment was a barrier to their success.

Beyond employment challenges, the participants also experienced other external pressures that affected their college experience. Three main pressures that were salient among the focus group participants were financial hardship, transportation, and unstable living. Students also noted that these situations impacted their emotional well-being and living situations. For example, one of the participants discussed the impact of transportation challenges and related stressors.

"Yeah but I get sick of doing that drive, I don't really
have time to do it sometimes, so either I will have like
a friend that stays nearby, because I have a couple
friends that, you know one of my friends lives right
across the street and another one of my friends is like
10, 15 minutes away from [campus] so I will just migrate,
sometimes I will just one day I will stay at this friend's
house, and another day I will just stay at another
friend's house, and another day I will sleep in the car,
and another day I will sleep at another friend's house.
If it is a busy week for me I will probably drive home like
once during the week, so most of my time is either at a friend's
house or just sleeping in the car or something."

- **A desire for more opportunities to discuss societal issues** – In our work we have learned that a key strategy in facilitating success for men of color is to make course content relevant to their daily lives and experiences. Students in the focus groups expressed a desire for more opportunities, both in an out of class, to discuss social issues that

impacted their daily lives. For example, some students are concerned about the rash of police shootings that have resulted in men of color being killed. Others talked about poverty, crime, war, and related issues. The participants believed that having more opportunities to dialogue with peers about these important issues would not only help make sense of them, but also to craft viable solutions and strategies that may be useful in overcoming them.

> *"I am a student, I see what is going on in society,*
> *I speak about it and then you have got people who are*
> *in positions where what they say can make a big impact*
> *but they are not saying, they are not saying anything, but*
> *then you look at me I'm just a student and what I say means*
> *absolutely nothing to them even though it is, I'm painting the*
> *picture for them, whatever is going on."*

> *"I'm talking about everything, I'm talking about everything*
> *that I have seen on TV from racial profiling to the war to Paris*
> *to everything . . . I had to do current events and essays and stuff on that*
> *stuff so now I'm like I had to step back and see it for what it is and now*
> *I'm trying to figure out a solution amongst my peers and how*
> *we can make a difference, but I feel like we need to build*
> *more groups like this [focus group], larger groups because this is just not*
> *even a fraction of what we have in the world or in colleges.*
> *I was telling him we need to have this on like a UCLA campus*
> *where everybody comes out we have a big stage and*
> *everybody can voice their opinion and then have the*
> *people or the powers that be sit there and just listen, they*
> *want us to write, but I think nowadays I'm just speaking,*
> *maybe I'm speaking in general, but from what I perceive,*
> *we lecture, but with technology and everything really I*
> *feel like we are stuck in the traditional."*

Faculty, particularly those who teach courses in social science and humanities, are uniquely positioned to provide opportunities to students to address these concerns within the context of their course work. Yet, as noted in the quotes above, it is also important for campuses to create spaces for students and campus leaders to convene and engage in meaningful dialogue to address broader sociopolitical concerns that impact students beyond the campus setting. This is particularly critical for students given the accessibility of news through multiple mediums and the advancement of technology. Creating a safe space for students to share their experiences or vocalize their concerns

helps to engender a welcoming campus environment and sense of belonging for students.

During the focus groups and interviews we learned that the participants relied on a range of resources and supports to overcome challenges that impacted their experiences and success. These resources and supports will be the focus the section that follows.

ON-CAMPUS AND OFF-CAMPUS SUPPORT AND SERVICES

Having experienced and discussed a host of challenges that impacted their success at SMC, the participants shared the on-campus and off-campus resources they relied upon to overcome these challenges. These supports and strategies are discussed herein.

- **Student services** – Student services were identified as critical sources of support for the men of color in their academic journey. Nearly all the participants shared positive experiences with the campus-based student services they utilized. Among those services and supports that were most frequently referenced were the EOPS program and academic counseling. Participants were also appreciative of the financial support and advising they received. With regard to financial support, one participant shared the following reflection:

  "One of the factors that provides assistance for me is the EOPS program. After successfully being in the program for a semester there is a bonus so you receive -- depending on your financial need--$200 to $300 to purchase books at the book store, which is how I have been purchasing my books on campus. And usually that is enough for me to buy all my books."

- **Academic support services** – Academic support services were widely utilized by the focus group participants. They referenced a range of academic support services that were critical to their success at SMC, notably, the Counseling 20 course, STEM tutoring, and the Math lab. The participants stated that the Counseling 20 course helped them to build time management strategies that were needed to tend to the multiple academic and personal demands they had. It also exposed them to campus support services (transfer services, for example) that were critical to their success. One participant suggested making the course mandatory for all new SMC students:

> *"Yeah, taking this Counseling 20 class, making it mandatory,
> it is kind of, it is like telling you like here is the help if you don't
> seek it. If you're looking to transfer to UC's here is a workshop
> to help you with your personal statements, here is a workshop
> to help you to organize your classes and all this stuff."*

The Black Collegians program and the Adelante program, both of which serve students of color, were also frequently mentioned in the focus groups. Participants appreciate the targeted counseling support that are offered by these programs and the sense of community they provided.

- **Campus allies** – Campus allies are specific individuals at SMC that students identified as caring and helpful to their academic well-being and success. In addition, these individuals helped to foster a sense of belonging for men of color and an environment for students to express their concerns, thoughts, and aspirations. Campus allies can be faculty members, counselors, classified staff, student leaders or any other person who conveys support, validation, and belongingness. For example, one participant shared the influence another peer had on his academic success:

> *"Yeah and there was also another guy that was a tutor back when I
> was like taking pre-calculus and stuff like low level math. He was
> one of the math tutors, he was a Black guy and he was really on his
> stuff. He motivated me. I never really told him that. Maybe I should
> have, this guy was on his stuff. He is math tutor here, he is killing it he
> has a 4.0 GPA. You know he transferred out already, but now it is like
> I'm in that position he was in because I have his old job. I work in the
> math lab where he used to be -- and I have had people come to
> me and tell me 'dude, you motivate me.' So now it is kind of weird
> that I'm in that situation that the guy motivated me and now people
> kind of see me like that."*

The quote above illustrates an example of the impact institutional agents had in fostering a students' academic success. The student highlighted the tutor's math knowledge and willingness to help others excel in math. Beyond the academic support the tutor offered, the student was exposed to a model of success with which he could readily identify.

Participants spoke highly of campus allies as contributors to their success at SMC. More importantly, campus allies were dependable individuals

that consistently engaged with students and inquired about both their academic and personal lives. Regardless if the ally is a student, staff person, or a faculty member, these individuals are critical in men of color's postsecondary education experiences and success.

- **Off-Campus supports and resources** - In addition to discussing key sources of on-campus support, the men of color who participated in the focus groups also discussed a wide range of off-campus support that was valuable in overcoming challenges that impacted their academic success. Among the supports that were referenced by the participants were YouTube for online math support; Chegg for access to textbooks and other course materials at lower costs for purchasing; having "student-friendly" employers in the local area who provided flexible work schedules so that students could plan their work around their classes; and local businesses (e.g., coffee shops) that provided free access to Wi-Fi.

The interviews and focus groups with men of color focused primarily on understanding the barriers that impacted students' academic engagement and success, and the resources and strategies they used to overcome them. The participants were also asked to provide insights into the ways in which campus leaders (e.g. the president, vice presidents, deans) could best support men of color. The participants offered a host of insights regarding support from campus leaders, which will be discussed in the final section of this report.

RECOMMEDATIONS FOR CAMPUS LEADERS

The men of color who participated in the interviews and focus groups shared salient challenges and concerns that impacted their academic success. Some of the challenges that were discussed related to the structure of core math courses, having access to tutors, and experiencing racial microaggressions, to name a few. Perhaps more importantly, the participants offered recommendations for campus leaders who were concerned about the status of men of color and were interested in enacting practices to reduce the effects of or eliminating these challenges.

- **Offer additional support and services for students enrolled in math courses** – Given the challenges the participants shared about their experiences in SMC math courses, students provided suggestions for campus leaders to support the high demand of math services on campus. Students addressed their concerns about the services and as a result shared what they felt would benefit other students who utilize the services.

Recommendations:
- o Provide more supplemental support (e.g., tutoring)
- o Ensure textbooks and online materials are affordable and accessible
- o Ensure that the content in the Math courses is appropriately aligned across the curriculum
- o Extend the time (e.g., hours per week) allotted to math courses to reduce the need for professor to "rush" through the content.

- **Designate counselors to assist STEM majors**– Students in the focus groups who are pursuing STEM majors expressed concerns regarding access to counseling services. Some believed counselors had limited information regarding STEM-specific courses. Thus, students suggested designating "STEM counselors" who can advise STEM students.

  Recommendation: Hire or train counselors to focus on STEM pathways and courses for students majoring in the field.

- **Address racial stereotypes through cultural competency training and hiring diverse faculty and staff** - Faculty and staff members should become aware of the challenges that men of color experience in their academic and personal lives. By understanding the challenges that men of color experience, campus leaders and faculty members can become more cognizant of how to engage and support men of color in and out of the classroom. It is also important to tend to the racial diversity within campus support services, particularly services that are critical to the success of men of color, such as academic services and counseling.

  Recommendation: Offer professional development for faculty on (1) the experiences and challenges of men of color in education and (2) utilizing culturally-relevant teaching and learning strategies.

- **Build authentic relationships with students** - Participants felt as though campus leaders did not take the time to understand their experiences and challenges or simply take the time to walk around campus to meet students. Students shared that they would appreciate opportunities to engage with campus leaders and get to know them on a more personal basis. Developing relationships with students will enhance their academic experiences at SMC, as well as provide a positive environment to foster a sense of belonging.

Recommendation: Provide opportunities—both formal and informal—for men of color and campus leaders to engage each other and to build relationships. Formal opportunities might consist of sharing their academic journey in a presentation. Informal opportunities could be eating with students in the student union.

- **Offer accessible mental health counseling to students** – Students expressed emotional challenges that go unaddressed during their time at SMC. Students specified that in addition to offering counseling services, the time allotted should be scheduled longer or accordingly to the need of the students, include follow-ups, and provide more services or resources to alleviate emotional distress. If services cannot be offered on campus, campus leaders should identify community agencies that are willing to provide accessible services to students. In our work, we find that mental health counseling is a real need for men of color, however, we recognize that men of color are less likely to seek this type of assistance when needed and available. Thus, it is important to engage in intrusive practices to increase the likelihood that men of color will take advantage of this support.

    Recommendations:
    - Extend psychological services to students
    - Train faculty and staff to identify students who need psychological services and/or mental health assistance
    - Create a campus campaign to bring awareness to psychological services to all students with targeted messaging for men of color

CONCLUSION

The findings reported herein were derived from the qualitative component of a larger campus-based effort to improve student equity and success for men of color. These findings are not presented to be representative of a larger population of students at Santa Monica College. Yet, the data were collected and analyzed in a way that will enable them to be transferable to the experiences of students whose profiles are reflective of those who participated in the inquiry. Decisions that are made based on these findings should be informed and leveraged by other institutional data sources and inquiry efforts—including insights that are gathered from other key campus constituents and stakeholders.