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Luke Wood, *San Diego State University*

Frank Harris, III, *San Diego State University*



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THE EFFECT OF COLLEGE SELECTION FACTORS ON PERSISTENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF BLACK AND LATINO MALES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

J. LUKE WOOD

FRANK HARRIS III

San Diego State University, California

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship (if any) between college selection factors and persistence for Black and Latino males in the community college. Using data derived from the Educational Longitudinal Study, backwards stepwise logistic regression models were developed for both groups. Findings are contextualized in light of Paulsen and St. John's (1996) financial nexus model. In line with this model, this study found that financial matters indeed impacted college selection. In particular, this research illustrated that the availability of financial aid and low expenses at the institution were integral selection factors. Implications for future research are extended.

As students transition into their post-high school lives, they face several important decisions with significant implications for their futures. Among many potential pathways, some will choose to enlist in the armed forces, many will enter directly into the workforce, and yet others will decide to attend college (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). For individuals who attend college, a primary decision in the college selection process is whether to attend a university, proprietary college, or community college. The vast majority of men of color select the latter (Bush & Bush,

2004, 2005; Wood & Harris, 2013). Among Black males attending public institutions, 70.5% of these students will begin their postsecondary careers at community colleges. Similarly, 70.2% of Latino males have their initial postsecondary experiences in community colleges (Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS), 2009). As such, community colleges serve as a critical and primary pathway into postsecondary education for these men (Bush & Bush, 2010).

For students who enroll in community colleges, choosing the most appropriate institution to attend can be a confluence of many considerations, including: financial limitations, familial obligations, social class, location, degree and career aspirations, employment restrictions, and institutional characteristics (Kern, 2000; Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, & McCluskey, 2006). College selection factors provide insight into students' socio-cultural and economic realities as well as their future aspirations. These considerations not only affect what college they attend but can also have implications for how successful they will be in college. For instance, some prior research (e.g., Carter, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005) has shown that college selection factors are predictive of student persistence in college.

However, the vast majority of persistence research overlooks college selection factors. In fact, as noted by St. John, Paulsen, and Starkey (1996), the literature on college-choice and persistence has been developed as two distinct areas of inquiry without acknowledgement of the interplay between these concepts. As a result, St. John, Paulsen, and Starkey stated that college-choice serves as a stand-alone line of inquiry, primarily geared toward informing college marketing and recruitment practices while persistence research has informed retention-based programming. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of research studies on the effects of college choice on persistence woefully disregard the community college context. This is an important oversight given that a large percentage of students who enter college do not complete their studies. For example, only 12% of Black males and 14.6% of Latino males graduate from a community college in a three-year time frame (Digest of Education Statistics, 2010). These and similar trends provide the impetus for this study's focus on Black and Latino men in community college.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As a result of dismal persistence and attainment trends, researchers often generate models that can aid in predicting who will and will not persist in college. These models can be useful to college professionals, as they facilitate the identification of students who are at-risk of failure, before they enter the institution, and lead to more informed dialogue on student success. Armed with this data, college professionals can better design support services to enhance outcomes for at-risk students. As such, the lack of attention given to college-choice in prior research—in general—and in predictive modeling—in

particular—suggests that important information is being omitted from educators' understanding of student success. This is a concerning trend given that other initial commitments (e.g., field of study, highest degree expected, occupational aspirations) are included within predominant persistence theories from Tinto (1975, 1993) and Bean (1980) but no regard is given to college selection as one of these initial commitments (St. John et al., 1996).

Bearing the aforementioned gap in the college persistence research in mind, this study provides insight to the role that pre-college considerations have on Black and Latino men's success in college. The intent of this study is to provide information on college selection that may be useful for high school counselors and college student affairs professionals in meeting the needs of these students. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to identify what role (if any) college choice variables play in Black and Latino male community college persistence. Guided by this purpose, this study set out to address three primary questions. First, what are the primary college choice considerations for Black and Latino men in the community college? Second, are there differences in mean scores of college choice variables, examined in isolation of other variables, for Black and Latino men who did and did not persist? Third, holding potentially extraneous variables constant (e.g., prior academic achievement, finances, parent's highest level of education, educational goals), are college choice rationales predictive of persistence for Black and Latino men?

RELEVANT LITERATURE

This study represents a significant advancement in the literature on men of color in community colleges. To date, this is the first scholarly inquiry to examine the role of college selection factors on persistence among men of color in the community college. While there has been a marked increase in research on Black men in the community college (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, Hilton, & Lewis, 2011; Wood & Turner, 2011), scholarship on other men of color in the community college is largely absent from the literature.

In general, the body of literature on Black males in the community college indicates that social variables (e.g., campus friendships), have a small negative effect on persistence (Bush & Bush, 2010; Wood, 2012a) while academic factors (e.g., early major identification, study habits, relationships with faculty) are strong determinants of persistence (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001; Mason, 1998; Wood, 2012a; Wood & Turner, 2011). Other research has suggested that psychological outcomes such as satisfaction, sense of belonging, stereotypes, degree utility (the value students place on their academic endeavors), and academic focus (also referred to as action control) lead to enhance persistence (Perrakis, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012; Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012). However, the vast majority of variance in persistence is related to environmental concerns, such as family responsibilities, hours worked per week,

supporting others, life stress, and outside encouragement (Mason, 1998; Wood, 2012b; Wood et al., 2011). Some researchers has also examined the effect of institutional context on student success (Saenz, Bukoski, Lu & Rodriguez, 2013; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). For example, Vasquez Urias (2012) examined institutional characteristics associated with graduation rates among Latino men in community colleges and found that institutions with higher full-time enrollments have higher graduation rates for Latino men. Further, Latino men at suburban colleges outperform those at urban and rural institutions. Despite the important insights derived from these studies, no prior research on men of color in the community college has examined the topic of college selection on persistence.

Currently, ubiquitous efforts are underway at community colleges across the nation to enhance the success of men of color (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). These efforts include retention programs, clubs, organizations, conferences, lecture series, and other efforts designed to inform college professionals on how to best serve these men (Harper, 2010). This study provides empirical insight to these efforts by facilitating an in-depth understanding of what impacts students' continuation in college. To frame this conversation, the researchers begin by providing an overview of the literature on college choice. First, the researchers' will summarize the college choice process and then discuss the nexus of college choice and persistence literature. In general, there is a dearth of literature on college choice. As such, in contextualizing this research, we highlight both current and historical works in this topical area.

The College Choice Process

Selecting a college is not a static decision, but rather a process. According to Cabrera and Nasa (2000) this process begins around seventh grade and can be divided into three stages: predisposition to attend college, the general college search process, and the college-choice process. Parental encouragement, students' social class, and their access to information about college shape their initial aspirations and academic outcomes (e.g., high school grades, test scores). These outcomes position them for college-going. As students make a commitment to attend college, their general search process begins. In the choice process, student decisions are influenced by numerous factors, including their educational and occupational goals, social class, academic aptitude, and parental support. Students also consider the effect of institutional characteristics (e.g., academic opportunities, campus life) as well as their ability to pay for college. In particular, the latter point—financial matters—has been the focus of most college choice literature.

According to St. John et al. (1996), research on the college choice process has been dominated by econometric analyses. From an economic perspective, students select colleges by making informed decisions based on the cost of the institution and potential earnings. This perspective, rooted in human capital

theory, suggests that students see college as an investment in their own development and future economic well-being. As such, college selection is based upon a framework of *net-utility*, where students select institutions that they believe will have the greatest potential value for their future earnings and desired economic trajectory.

Indeed, economics have a strong influence on college selection. Research on background factors associated with college enrollment has generally shown that labor market challenges can lead to greater full-time attendance (Betts & McFarland, 1995) and increase college enrollment. For example, Pennington, McGinty, and Williams (2002) noted that community college enrollment is often correlated with economic indicators. In an examination of enrollment patterns across the nation, they found that unemployment rates are positively associated with community college enrollment. Thus, the greater the unemployment in the local community, the higher the enrollment rates at the local community college. Similarly, they found an inverse relationship between enrollments and disposable income, personal consumption, and gross domestic product. These findings suggest that economic factors may serve as drivers for community college enrollment; as individuals seek better labor market opportunities through enhanced academic qualifications. In a related fashion, Kern's (2000) study of urban high school students' college-choice process, found that nearly 83% of students reported financial aid as an integral consideration in selecting a college.

Research on adult learners has also corroborated the importance of financial considerations. Bers and Smith (1987) investigated factors impacting college choice among non-traditional students. Based upon focus groups with male adult returnees, they found that employment opportunities, workplace mobility, and needing additional training were motivations for their return to college. Students cited convenience with respect to institutional location and programming, and college cost as primary factors that informed their selection process. Yet another unique perspective on this topic comes from Bers and Galowich (2002). They examined college selection from the perspective of parents. Based upon their research, which notes that three in five parents make final college selection decisions, they sought to determine what influenced these decisions. Parents noted that college selection decisions were largely a function of financial concerns. Parents selected colleges primarily based upon money and students' certainty about college attendance. Parents were less concerned with the college's academic reputation.

Interestingly, limited evidence suggests that minority students' college choice process may not be as heavily influenced by economics as their White counterparts. For example, Kim (2004) examined college-choice using national data from the Higher Education Research Institute. Kim examined financial aid packaging and found that grant monies and loans had an effect on whether White and Asian students attended their first choice college. However, financial aid packaging was not a significant determinant for Black or Latino students

in attending their first choice institution. Furthermore, Black and Latino enrollment at their first choice institution was also not impacted by family income, financial concerns, or tuition cost. In contrast, Black students' college choice was a positive function of academic aptitude, academic and labor market reputations as well as a negative function of Black students' college choice. Latino students' college choice was negatively associated with the number of institutions they applied to and was negatively associated with their friends' recommendations for postsecondary education. Despite these isolated findings, too little is known about college-choice among students of color.

A few scholars have ventured beyond the econometric lens to include a more expansive set of college choice considerations. For instance, Kern (2000) surveyed 1,179 urban high school youth about their college aspirations and found that a college's reputation with respect to friendliness and academic quality were primary drivers for college selection. Further, she found that attending the same college as a friend was not a consideration in the college choice process. Additionally, students noted that college-going was not common in their family history, thus, attending college because a family member had done so was not relevant.

Perhaps the most comprehensive model of college choice is presented by Somers et al. (2006). While acknowledging the influence of economic factors, their framework also illustrates that other variables affect college selection. The researchers collected data using focus groups with 223 students at five community colleges. They found that there were ten primary factors that motivated students' college selection. These factors were grouped into three areas: aspirational factors, institutional characteristics, and financial matters. In terms of aspirational factors, students noted the importance of overcoming barriers and pursuing goals to earn a higher education degree. Findings regarding institutional characteristics indicated that college selection was a function of convenience, with open-access policies, the campus location, and ease of support services influencing their decisions to attend college. Students were also concerned with course offerings that would have direct relevance to their ability to succeed in the labor market. Financial considerations emerged from this study as well. For example, some participants noted the importance of the price of attendance, with lower cost enrollment being a primary selection factor.

In all, the extant research on the college choice process emphasizes the importance of financial considerations that inform students' and families' decision making. Primarily, college selection is inclusive of cost considerations such as students' financial goals, availability of financial aid, and cost of attendance. Selection is also a function of workplace outcomes, including employment opportunities, labor market preparation, and workplace mobility (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Bers & Smith, 1987; Somers et al., 2006).

College Choice and Persistence

As noted earlier, a relatively small body of research has examined the effect of college choice on persistence. This research has shown that there is a relationship between these concepts. In line with the general research on college choice, much of this literature focuses on economic choice factors (Carter, 2006). For example, Paulsen and St. John (1997) present the “financial nexus model,” which articulates how college choice around financial costs impacts persistence. In this model, they noted that students’ initial decisions to attend college are based on their social class and academic aptitude. In the college choice process, students’ perceptions of the benefits of college (e.g., academic, social, financial) as well as costs of attendance are weighed. Once a student enters college, they evaluate whether or not the perceived benefits and costs of college are in line with their actual experiences. When congruent, students are more likely to persist. However, when dissonance occurs between perceived and actual benefits and costs, students are more likely to leave.

Other research further reveals the effects of financial selection matters on persistence. Paulsen and St. John (2002) analyzed data from the National Post-secondary Student Aid Study to examine how fixed costs (e.g., financial aid, low tuition) and control costs (e.g., living costs, living near work) affected student persistence. Separate analyses were conducted for students by income class (e.g., low income, lower-middle income). With respect to low income students, they found that choosing college due to low tuition was negatively predictive of persistence. However, they found that control costs, such as choosing a college that would enable them to work or choosing a college due to low living costs, were positively predictive of their persistence. In terms of lower-middle income students, only one college choice variable was significant. Students who selected college due to lower tuition costs were less likely to persist. These findings are consistent with St. John et al. (1996) who found that, when isolated from degree aspirations, the cost of tuition is negatively predictive of persistence.

College choice and persistence research has also been extended to examinations of Black students. For example, St. John et al. (2005) investigated the effect of college choice on persistence for Black and White students. Specifically, they examined how fixed cost considerations (e.g., financial aid, low tuition, tuition and aid) impacted students’ success. In terms of findings for Black students, they found that financial aid cost considerations were predictive of persistence. As such, students selecting college due to aid offers were more likely to persist.

As indicative by the literature reviewed herein, most research on college selection has focused on a limited range of variables, primarily financial in nature. These studies, particularly Paulsen and St. John’s (1997) “financial nexus model” provided a loose theoretical underpinning for this research on men of color’s college selection factors and persistence. However, this study is a slight

departure from traditional research on this topic. While examining economic factors, institutional, familial, academic, and social factors are considered to determine what (if any) effect they have on persistence of men of color in the community college.

METHODS

This study employed data from the 2006 collection of the Educational Longitudinal Study (hereafter referred to as ELS). ELS is a national survey that tracks youth beginning in high school and into their post-high school experiences in college and/or the workforce (Bozick & Lauf, 2007). ELS employs a multi-stage sampling procedure that has collected data from participants in three waves (although there is a fourth wave currently under collection). Data were first collected from participants when they were sophomores in high school. The first collection, referred to as wave 1, took place in 2002 and included a sample of 16,200 high school students. As such, wave 1 serves as the base year for this study. In wave 2, data were collected from respondents in 2004, when most were likely seniors in high school. As expected, this excludes a small percentage of students left high school without completion, attained a GED, or graduated early. Many of the variables collected during wave 2 focused on students' high school academic and social experiences, resultant achievement, and future goals. In 2006, wave 3 of ELS followed-up with respondents to learn about their post-high school experiences. In this wave, respondents would have been sophomores in college had they enrolled immediately after high school or were employed in the workforce (Ingels, Pratt, Wilson, Currivan, Rogers, & Hubbard-Bednasz, 2007). As a result, wave 3 focused on students' access to college, college selection process (the primary focus of this study), workforce participation and satisfaction, and other post-high school outcomes.

The data that were used in this study were derived from waves 2 and wave 3, focusing on the effect of college selection factors (wave 2) on the Black and Latino male students' persistence in college (wave 3). This dataset was delimited to students who were enrolled in public two-year colleges who were male and either of Black/African American or of Hispanic/Latino descent. In this study, Black/African American men represented a weighted sample size of 32,587 while Hispanic/Latino men accounted for a weighted sample of 38,948.

Variables

As noted previously, this study examined the effect of college selection on persistence was examined in this study. Students who entered college and did not persist to the end of the report period in wave 3 were coded "0," while those who persisted were coded "1." Further, ELS collected data on numerous college selection measures. In all, 17 measures of college selection were used

from this dataset. The researchers conceptually grouped these variables into five factors: economic (job placement record, low expenses, availability of financial aid), institutional (racial/ethnic makeup, school's size, school's geographic location, low crime), familial (living at home, being away from home, one parent attended the same school), academic (courses and curriculum, degree in chosen field, academic reputation, school's acceptance of college credit, school's easy admission), and social (school's athletic program, school's active social life). Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which these factors were important in their selection of a post-secondary institution on a three point scale. This scale included the following response options, "not important" (coded 1); "somewhat important" (coded 2); and "very important" (coded 3).

This study also employed four control variables to account for the effect of potentially extraneous factors on the findings. These variables included: high school grade point average, the highest degree expected, parent's highest level of education, and family income. These variables were controlled because previous research had determined that they have an effect on the college selection process (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Somers et al., 2006) and on persistence (Hagedorn et al., 2001; Mason, 1998; Wood, 2012a, 2012b). High school GPA was collected as an ordinal variable, with six levels, from "0.00-1.00" to "3.51-4.00." Two variables, the highest level of education a student desired to complete and parents' highest level of education were coded using the same scale. The coding for these variables was: "less than high school"; "GED or other equivalency only"; "High school graduation only"; "Attend or complete a two-year college"; "Attend college, four-year degree incomplete"; "graduate from college"; "obtain a master's degree or equivalent"; and "obtain a PhD, MD, or other advanced degree." Respondents' total family income included data collected on a thirteen point scale, beginning with: "none" and "\$1,000 or less" to "\$200,001 or more." Employing the aforementioned outcome, predictor, and control variables, the next section discusses the analytical procedure employed in this study.

Analytic Procedure

To address the research questions, a three stage analytic process was employed in this study. In short, this process included exploratory data analysis and the calculation of descriptive statistics; investigating college choice mean scores for persisters and non-persisters; and using logistic regression models to examine the utility of college choice in predicting persistence. In stage one, the researchers' calculated descriptive statistics to examine the mean scores and standard errors of the predictor and control variables for all Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino male students in the dataset. These descriptive data are presented in Table 1. Predictor variable correlations are also presented in order to illustrate how each predictor is associated with other predictors in the model (see Table 2). In stage two, the researchers examined how mean scores for the predictor variables

Table 1. Estimates and Standard Errors for Study Variables

	Estimate	SE
High school GPA	2.96	.048
Parents' highest level of education	3.89	.094
Highest level of education (Goal)	6.27	.068
Family income	7.89	.102
Low expenses	2.35	.038
Financial aid	2.60	.031
Course and curriculum	2.61	.024
Athletic programs	1.90	.035
Active social life	2.19	.030
Living at home	2.11	.034
Away from home	1.92	.032
Low crime	2.23	.033
Job placement record	2.55	.030
Academic reputation	2.38	.029
Easy admission	2.26	.029
Degree in chosen field	2.69	.024
Racial ethnic makeup	1.86	.034
School size	1.76	.028
Geographic location	1.89	.029
One parent attended same college	1.30	.021
Acceptance of college credit	2.03	.032

differed for those who did not persist and those who persisted. Independent samples *t*-tests were employed to determine whether there were significant differences in mean scores for predictor variables across factor levels. *T*-tests allowed the researchers to examine differences in mean scores for each predictor in isolation of the control variables and other predictor variables. This information is depicted in Table 3 (for Black/African American males) and Table 4 (for Hispanic/Latino males).

The final stage of analyses employed a backward elimination logistic regression approach to identify those variables most significant in predicting persistence. Using this approach, a full model was created employing all predictors and

controls, then non-significant predictor variables that contributed the least amount to the model (as assessed by Wald F) were eliminated until only significant predictor variables remained in the model. Separate models were generated for Black/African American males and Hispanic/Latino males (see Tables 5 and 6). Logistic regression findings are reported in the form of odds ratios, a ratio that depicts the odds of success/failure for one outcome versus another (Rudas, 1998). Odds ratios infer a change in the odds of Y, holding all other controls and predictors constant, for each unit change in X (Peng, Lee & Ingersoll, 2002). Data from this study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) complex sampling module. Given the clustered nature of the data, the complex sampling add-on allows for accurate estimates and standard errors. The data were weighted using the cross-sectional weight from the second follow-up (F2QWT).

Limitations

As with all research, this study was not without limitations. For instance, the college selection factors employed in this study relies upon a scale that restricted responses to three options (e.g., not important, somewhat important, very important). Likely, a scale with greater response options would have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the effect of college selection factors on persistence. However, this three point response option is an improvement from other national datasets (e.g., Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study) that collect information on college selection using a dichotomous response type. Thus, the use of ELS data, while limited, represents the best data source for exploring college selection factors on persistence. Further, as noted by Bers and Galowich (2002), college selection is not static. Rather, students make decisions about selecting a college through a *process* where goals and other contextual factors are in flux. Thus, this study does not capture the full process and change over time, rather focusing on how selection factors at one point in time (wave 2) serve to effect college success at another point in time (wave 3).

Finally, as noted by Strayhorn (2009), secondary data analysis is often limited by missing values. Missing data can result in estimates that are not fully representative of the population for which generalization is intended. As a result, this study employed missing data analysis to investigate what percentage of data were missing and if data were missing at random. Using univariate statistics, it was concluded that all predictor variables were missing between 13.1% and 15.1% of their values. Given this, the researchers explored trends in the missing variables to determine the randomness of the missing values. This was done using separate variance *t*-tests table, cross tabulations, and a tabulated patterns table. These analyses appeared to indicate that the data were missing completely at random. To ensure this, Little's MCAR test of the expectation-maximization

Table 2. Correlations among Predictor Variables

	Low expenses	Financial aid	Course and curriculum	Athletic programs	Active social life	Living at home	Away from home
Low expenses							
Financial aid	.525**						
Course and curriculum	.314**	.301**					
Athletic programs	.103	.201**	.090				
Active social life	.282**	.284**	.225**	.450**			
Living at home	.171**	.224**	.093	.087	.180**		
Away from home	.225**	.192**	.161**	.331**	.380**	-.136*	
Low crime	.324**	.308**	.265**	.286**	.361**	.136*	.343**
Job placement record	.276**	.308**	.342**	.227**	.355**	.126*	.214**
Academic reputation	.194**	.201**	.373**	.299**	.299**	.099	.233**
Easy admission	.324**	.222**	.137*	.263**	.326**	.196**	.270**
Degree in chosen field	.282**	.302**	.444**	.208**	.205**	.185**	.169**
Racial/ethnic makeup	.136*	.188**	.159**	.341**	.330**	.245**	.246**
School's size	.189**	.173**	.120*	.300**	.354**	.167**	.307**
Geographic location	.177**	.149**	.081	.124*	.233**	.231**	.263**
School same as one parent attended	.016	.024	-.067	.342**	.240**	.118*	.191**
Acceptance of college credit	.262**	.257**	.165**	.254**	.283**	.300**	.182**

Table 3. Mean Scores and *T*-Values for Black Males'
College Selection Factors

	Dropout	<i>SE</i>	Persist	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>
Low expenses	2.32	.044	2.40	.071	1.082
Availability of financial aid	2.40	.045	2.67	.035	3.847***
Courses/curriculum	2.63	.044	2.64	.047	.177
School's athletic program	2.22	.075	1.95	.080	-2.472*
School's active social life	2.21	.057	2.32	.048	1.587
Living at home	2.01	.085	1.93	.060	-.991
Being away from home	2.04	.065	2.10	.048	.705
Low crime	2.22	.052	2.43	.067	3.162**
Job placement record	2.53	.039	2.67	.037	2.902**
Academic reputation	2.51	.045	2.48	.082	-.307
School's easy admission	2.31	.053	2.25	.053	-.815
Degree in chosen field	2.68	.034	2.75	.033	1.478
Racial/ethnic makeup	1.97	.061	2.08	.056	1.507
School's size	1.79	.068	1.96	.054	2.114*
School's geographic location	1.79	.079	2.08	.054	3.373**
School same as one parent attended	1.27	.041	1.52	.053	3.995***
School's acceptance of college credit	1.92	.068	2.22	0.65	3.101***

* < .05, ** < .01, *** < .001.

Table 4. Mean Scores and *T*-Values for Latino Males'
College Selection Factors

	Dropout	<i>SE</i>	Persist	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>
Low expenses	2.41	.072	2.28	.034	-1.97
Availability of financial aid	2.67	.072	2.56	.029	-1.62
Courses/curriculum	2.63	.070	2.57	.031	-.73
School's athletic program	1.84	.055	1.69	.037	-2.20*
School's active social life	2.20	.065	2.02	.034	-1.72
Living at home	2.28	.042	2.22	.042	-.94
Being away from home	1.75	.045	1.79	.040	.52
Low crime	2.03	.063	2.17	.031	1.88
Job placement record	2.46	.070	2.50	.033	.61
Academic reputation	2.34	.067	2.25	.033	-1.12
School's easy admission	2.28	.039	2.23	.033	-.97
Degree in chosen field	2.75	.071	2.62	.037	-1.50
Racial/ethnic makeup	1.74	.050	1.68	.042	-1.35
School's size	1.64	.047	1.64	.025	.10
School's geographic location	1.88	.052	1.78	.033	-1.48
School same as one parent attended	1.18	.030	1.19	.021	.10
School's acceptance of college credit	2.02	.059	1.93	0.36	-1.3

* < .05, ** < .01, *** < .001.

Table 5. Odds Ratios of Black Male Persistence from College Selection Factors with Controls

	OR	95% CI	Wald F
High school GPA	1.23	.99-1.51	4.49
Parents' highest level of education	.96	.83-1.11	.41
Highest level of education (Goal)	1.57***	1.32-1.86	32.47
Family income	.99	.94-1.06	.00
Availability of financial aid	1.97**	1.34-2.88	14.71
Courses and curriculum	.32***	.19-.53	24.51
Athletic programs	.49***	.38-.65	32.69
Active social life	1.73***	1.37-2.18	26.21
Job placement record	2.00***	1.30-3.09	12.02
Easy admission	.39***	.28-.58	29.34
Acceptance of college credit	2.25***	1.47-3.45	17.01
Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2	.32		
Cox and Snell	.24		
McFadden	.20		
Percent correct	71.2%		

* < .05, ** < .01, *** < .001.

tables was used to formally test these patterns. As expected, the data were found to be missing completely at random, $\chi^2 = 440,393$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). As a result, the researchers proceeded with listwise deletion of cases with missing values. The next section presents the findings from the resultant analyses.

FINDINGS

Table 1 illustrates several primary factors that Black and Latino males have in selecting a community college. In ranked order, the five primary factors include: degree opportunities in their chosen field ($M = 2.69$, $SE = .024$), course and curriculum offerings ($M = 2.61$, $SE = .024$), availability of financial aid ($M = 2.60$, $SE = .031$), the college's academic reputation ($M = 2.38$, $SE = .029$), and low expenses at the institution ($M = 2.34$, $SE = .038$). Based upon these variables, enrollment factors seem to be a function of academic matters and financial

Table 6. Odds Ratios of Latino Male Persistence from College Selection Factors with Controls

	OR	95% CI	Wald F
High school GPA	1.25***	1.12-1.40	19.23
Parents' highest level of education	.93	.84-1.03	2.53
Highest level of education (Goal)	1.11	.91-1.34	1.23
Family income	1.14**	1.06-1.23	14.47
Athletic program	.72*	.53-.99	5.03
Being away from home	1.43**	1.16-1.77	13.14
School's low crime	1.39*	1.07-1.82	7.17
Job placement record	1.72**	1.23-2.40	12.41
Academic reputation	.67*	.48-.92	7.26
Degree in chosen field	.48*	.24-.94	5.64
Geographic location	.74**	.59-.92	9.10
Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2	.15		
Cox and Snell	.11		
McFadden	.09		
Percent correct	67.2%		

* < .05, ** < .01, *** < .001.

considerations. The college selection variables with the lowest mean scores included the following: attending the same college as one a parent attended ($M = 1.30$, $SE = .021$), school size ($M = 1.76$, $SE = .028$), racial/ethnic composition of the college ($M = 1.86$, $SE = .034$), geographic location of the institution ($M = 1.89$, $SE = .029$), and athletic programming ($M = 1.90$, $SE = .035$). Primarily, these variables are comprised of institutional characteristics.

As noted, stage two of data analysis employed independent samples t -tests to examine whether mean differences existed between students who dropped out and those who persisted on the predictor variables. Of the seventeen variables examined, eight illustrated significant differences for Black/African American males. Black males who persisted had higher mean scores for attending college due to the availability of financial aid ($t = 3.847$, $p < .001$), the college's low crime ($t = 3.162$, $p < .01$), the college's job placement record ($t = 2.903$, $p < .01$), the school's size ($t = 2.114$, $p < .05$), the college's geographic location ($t = 3.373$,

$p < .01$), parent's attendance ($t = 3.995, p < .001$), and the school's acceptance of college credit ($t = 3.101, p < .001$). In contrast, students who did not persist had lower mean scores on these variables.

For Black males, one variable indicated significantly higher mean scores for drop outs. Black males who dropped out had higher mean scores for attending college due to the school's athletic program in comparison to those who persisted ($t = -2.472, p < .05$). In terms of Hispanic/Latino males, only one variable illustrated a significant difference. Students who persisted had lower mean scores for selecting a college based upon its athletic program than for students who did not persist ($t = -2.20, p < .05$). This finding illustrates a similar trend for mean scores on this variable between persisting Latino male and persisting Black male students.

In the third analytic stage, the researchers employed backwards stepwise logistic regression to determine the college selection factors most predictive of student persistence. In Table 5, the odds ratios and confidence intervals for control and predictor variables on persistence for Black males are presented. With respect to the controls, neither high school GPA, parent's highest level of education completed, nor family income were significant in the model. However, the control for highest level of education a student expected did have a significant effect on persistence ($OR = 1.57, p < .001$). The analytic procedure revealed seven predictor variables that were significant determinants of persistence. The odds of persisting were significantly greater for Black men who selected colleges due to the availability of financial aid ($OR = 1.97, p < .01$). With respect to academic matters, two variables were predictive of persistence. The model indicated that having the desired courses and curriculum and acceptance of credit from other colleges were both integral predictors of persistence. However, the relationship between these variables and persistence differed as courses and curriculum ($OR = .32, p < .001$) was negatively predictive of persistence while acceptance of college credit ($OR = 2.25, p < .001$) was positively predictive.

Two variables provided insight to the role of selecting college for social involvement on persistence. The odds of persisting were significantly lower for those who attended college due to athletic programming ($OR = .49, p < .001$) but greater for those interested in an active social life ($OR = 1.73, p < .001$). The job placement record of the college was also of importance in the model. Students who attended college due to their job placement record had significantly greater odds of persistence than those with lower interest in job placement ($OR = 2.00, p < .01$). Finally, while community colleges are extolled for their open-access admission opportunities, students who attended college due to easy admission had significantly lower odds of persisting ($OR = .39, p < .001$). Overall the model had strong prediction of the outcome, correctly classifying 71.2% of the cases. Further, the model accounted for 32% of the variance in persistence, as assessed by Nagelkerke Pseudo R^2 . Other pseudo R^2 measures also demonstrated the utility of the model in predicting persistence. Wald F values give insight into the usefulness of each predictor on persistence; in general, negative determinants of

persistence (e.g., athletic programs, courses and curriculum, easy admission) seemed to have the strongest effect in the model.

With respect to Latino males, two of the four control variables were significant in the model. These variables indicated that greater high school achievement (OR = 1.25, $p < .001$) and greater levels of family income (OR = 1.14, $p < .01$) were associated with higher odds of persistence. In this model, seven college selection variables served as significant predictors of persistence. In terms of academic factors, students were less likely to persist when selecting college based upon academic matters. For example, the odds of persisting were significantly lower for those who attended college due to its academic reputation (OR = .67, $p < .05$) or for a degree in their chosen field of study (OR = .48, $p < .05$). Social participation was also negatively associated with persistence as the odds of persisting were lower for students who attended college due to athletic programs (OR = .72, $p < .05$). The last factor negatively predictive of persistence was geographic location, as students selecting college due to this factor had lower odds of persistence (OR = .74, $p < .01$).

The remaining significant variables had a positive effect of persistence. Students desiring to be away from home was a positive predictor of success (OR = 1.43, $p < .01$). Further, students also had greater odds of persistence when they selected their college based upon the school having a low crime rate (OR = 1.39, $p < .05$). The remaining significant predictor in the model was job placement record. The analysis indicated that the odds of persisting when job placement record of the institution was a consideration in college selection was greater than when it was not a factor (OR = 1.72, $p < .01$). In general, findings seemed to indicate that the variables with the strongest effect on the outcome had a positive relationship with persistence (e.g., being away from home, job placement record). Overall, the model correctly classified 67.2% of the cases and accounted for 15% of the variance in persistence, as assessed by Nagelkerke's Pseudo R^2 . As such, the Latino male model accounted for a lower percentage of the variance in persistence and classified fewer cases than the Black male model. Despite this, both models provided added insight into factors that influence the persistence of Black and Latino men in the community college.

Few differences were evident in significant predictor variables in each model. Only two variables illustrated significance in both models, choosing college for the athletic program and job placement record. However, both variables indicated similar trends, as athletic programs had a negative effect on persistence while job placement record had a positive effect. Indeed, findings suggest that the effect of college selection on persistence differed greatly between Black and Latino male community college students. Furthermore, several variables were not significant in either model, these included familial variables such as living at home or going to a college that was the same as a parent. Moreover, institutional characteristics, such as a low-cost education, racial/ethnic composition, and institutional size, had no effect on persistence.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to answer four primary research questions. The first question examined the primary college choice considerations for Black and Latino men, as a whole, in the community college. In line with the econometric perspective that suggests that college choice is a function of economic considerations that weigh the benefits and costs of college (St. John et al., 1996), this study found that financial matters indeed impacted college selection. In particular, this research has shown that availability of financial aid and low expenses at the institution were integral selection factors. These findings are in line with prior research that has shown that cost of attendance and financial support were important college selection factors for minority men (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Kern, 2000; Somers et al., 2006). Further, this research counters Kim's (2004) findings that economic factors are not important in college selection among Black and Latino students.

The second research question inquired whether there were differences in mean scores of college choice variables, examined in isolation of other variables, for Black and Latino male students who did and did not persist. For Black males, this study found that students who persisted had higher mean scores for financial factors (e.g., availability of aid, job placement record), familial factors (e.g., school same as one parent attended), academic matters (school's acceptance of college credit) and institutional characteristics (school's size, geographic location, low crime). However, students who persisted had lower mean schools for athletic programs. For Latino males, athletic programming was the only significant variable, illustrating a similar pattern. Possibly, this relationship infers that students who attend college for this reason may not be more disconnected from academic endeavors as those who attend for other reasons.

Using a backwards stepwise logistic regression procedure, this study also set out to determine whether, holding background variables constant (e.g., prior academic achievement, finances, parent's highest level of education, educational goals), college choice rationales were predictive of persistence. This resulted in two separate models, one for Black males and one for Latino males. Prior research has affirmed the importance of economic considerations on persistence, particularly as it relates to financing college (Carter, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 1997, 2002). Specifically, St. John et al. (2005) asserted that Black students were more likely to persist when selecting college due to financial aid offers. Similarly, this research has shown that when the availability of financial aid is a selection factor, students have greater odds of persistence. Also in an economic vein, this study also showed that job placement record was positively predictive of greater odds of persistence. However, this study advanced current scholarship in this area by articulating the relationship of other variables on persistence. This was inclusive of findings regarding low odds of persistence for attending college due to its athletic program but greater odds of persistence when a general active social life was considered. In terms of academic matters, this study found

that attending college for particular courses or curriculum and for easy admission resulted in lower odds of persistence. However, students selecting colleges due to acceptance of college credit from a prior institution had greater odds of persistence.

The model for Latino males also illustrated the importance of job placement, an important economic outcome for college-goers. However, again, this study advanced knowledge of the effect of college selection on persistence by examining a more expansive range of predictors. For these men, selecting college due to social variables (athletic programming) and academic variables (academic reputation, degree in chosen field) resulted in lower odds of persistence. However, the desire to be away from home was positively predictive of persistence. Further, unlike Black male persistence, which was not a function of institutional selection factors, Latino males had greater odds of persistence when selecting colleges with low crime (or in low crime areas) but had lower odds when the geographic location of the college was a significant consideration. Given the limited prior research in these areas, it is difficult to contextualize these findings within current literature. However, it seems that the focus of prior research in examining the effect of economic college selection factors on persistence fails to account for other important predictors of persistence. With this in mind, the next section provides recommendations for future research.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND IMPLICATIONS

Future research investigating the role of college selection on persistence can expand upon the preliminary notions identified in this study. Clearly, this study has indicated that academic, familial, social, and institutional factors should be integral considerations in future studies. As such, researchers can investigate each of these areas in isolation, employing additional variables that were not accounted for in this study. Moreover, given that college selection has been articulated as a process, repeated measures and time-series analyses can be employed to better understand how college selection factors change over time (as independent variables on persistence). This will provide more understanding of the nuanced nature of college selection considerations.

Further, while this study focused on Black and Latino men in the community college, additional research can examine the role of college selection on persistence for other men of color, notably Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American men. These male groups also experience low success rates in the community college, yet research on these populations is sparse. Finally, the current study controlled for income to mitigate the effect of class on the models. In line with prior research from Paulsen and St. John (2002) who examined how the effect of college selection on persistence varied by income class, future studies can investigate how the relationship between selection and persistence changes by social class for men of color.

Findings from this study bear usefulness for college practitioners. Essentially, this study has shown that college choice variables do have a relationship with persistence for Black and Latino men. Thus, college professionals can use this information to identify students who may be at a greater risk of premature departure. Specifically, when students enter community colleges, they can be given a short questionnaire which inquires their rationale for enrolling in the institution. This can be part of the normal application or can be information that is collected during initial counseling and advising sessions. Then, based on this information, students at a greater risk of premature departure based on college choice predictors can be given priority access to campus-based retention programming and services (e.g., tutoring, learning communities, mentor programs, intrusive advising) that can serve to enhance their likelihood of success. Moreover, college choice data could also be used to inform the identification of students for more intensive tracking in early warning systems. Often, campus resources available to monitor the performance of students are limited. Thus, information on college choice could serve as one indicator (among others) to delimit the population of students being monitored to those at the greatest risk of premature departure.

In all, this study has provided added insight into factors that affect the persistence of minority men in the community college. Most notably, this study has expanded upon prior research by examining important college selection factors and their effect on persistence for men of color who are enrolled in community colleges. As apparent from this study's findings, college selection factors are indeed predictive of persistence and thus should be accounted for in future studies and empirical models that serve to articulate persistence considerations for Black and Latino males in the community college.

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Direct reprint requests to:

J. Luke Wood
Associate Professor, Community College Leadership
San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Way, EBA 299A
San Diego CA 92182
e-mail: Luke.wood@sdsu.edu