Supporting Black Graduate Students During an Anti-Blackness Epidemic

Methodically identify and address their needs. Needs to encourage peer networking and self-empowerment for Black workshop based on the Socioecological Model and Maslow's Hierarchy of despite compounding challenges. They developed a 4-hour interactive organically to discuss their needs within the institution and move forward

Introduction
Despite the compounding stressors experienced by Black graduate students in an anti-black academic community, they still need to maintain a high level of academic performance while being repeatedly exposed to racialized trauma with little institutional understanding or support. This lack of institutional support significantly diminishes Black students’ sense of belonging, which educational theorists have identified as a vital component for academic success. Studies have shown that the creation of affinity groups enhances resilience, resistance, and positive racial identity, which is associated with better retention and academic performance. Focusing on organic, student-led empowerment of Black graduate students to identify their evolving needs while in graduate school, may help students create pathways for finding resources they need to excel.

Description and Methodology
An interdisciplinary collaboration of four Black graduate students formed organically to discuss their needs within the institution and move forward despite compounding challenges. They developed a 4-hour interactive workshop based on the Socioecological Model and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to encourage peer networking and self-empowerment for Black graduate students. The goal was to provide tools to help students meet their personalized vision of success and spaces focused on the empowerment of minoritized graduate students for academic success. Studies have shown that the creation of affinity groups is important for student retention and academic performance.

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What does self-actualization mean to you?

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- Self-actualization: achieving one’s full potential, including creative activities
- Esteem needs: prestige and feeling of accomplishment
- Belongingness and love needs: intimate relationships, friends
- Safety needs: security, safety
- Physiological needs: food, water, warmth, rest

Examples of Needs

- Graduate / Getting the job or Post Doc / Having a greater sense of self
- Getting funding for my research, consistent hair-stylist/barber
- Community of like-minded folks, people to do happy hour with, great therapist
- A roommate you can trust, anti-racist police force, reliable transportation, affordable health care
- Brita filter, favorite blanket, 8 hours of sleep every day + midday nap time, fresh air and sunshine, nutritious food

Discussion
Students were successfully able to contextualize their individual needs and define self-actualization in their own terms, thereby, creating a personal framework to define their own success. Workshop leaders identified that student-led self-empowerment was much needed for this group and is feasible for future iterations. Universities can augment orientation by investing in ongoing peer-led wayfinding programs. This may provide an opportunity to keep Black graduate students engaged and informed about professional and extra-curricular opportunities available to them. Future efforts to increase student self-empowerment should include deeper qualitative methods like focus groups to further inform culturally relevant programming. Additionally, quantitative evaluation of outcomes may provide more insight into efficacy of this and future workshops.

Implications

Culturally relevant learning environments matter
- Black students’ intersectional identities and academic competencies are strengthened in counterspaces and affinity groups.
- Centering curriculum around students matters
- Academic engagement and self-efficacy were supported by connecting curriculum directly to Black history and culture.

Experiential learning matters
- Peer-led discussions were rooted in the experiences of Black students in higher education to uplift their epistemologies and strategies for overcoming systemic barriers to success and well-being.

References