

First Year African American Students
At the University of North Carolina Asheville:
A Strategy for Retention and Success

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Abstract

Enrollment of African American students at predominantly white institutions has seen substantial growth since the late 1970s due in great part to federal legislation such as affirmative action and other access-focused policies. Broad specified judicial actions like these should have eased the path for public universities to welcome and retain African American students in large numbers (Bobo, 1998). However, multiple issues continue to exist that thwart university access and success, and African Americans continue to drop out at high rates, especially in their freshman year (Townsend, 2007). These problems include complex university cultures, continued lack of access, poor academic preparation, low sense of belonging, and challenging social and academic climates. Research demonstrates that African American students, once admitted to college, continue to believe they do not belong in these educational settings (Harper & Griffin, 2011). We must improve the retention and success of these students by providing programs and resources that facilitate their social and academic transition into the collegiate environment. In this disquisition, I address the impact of a residential living learning community specifically for African American students, called SANKOFA. The hope is that having a group of students with similar cultural backgrounds in addition to providing specific training of faculty and staff to facilitate coursework and educational programming for this population, the sense of belonging to UNC Asheville will increase for these students. Once integrated, their opportunities for success in that first year of college can improve, which enhances their chances of graduation by almost 40% (Smedley, B.D., 2000).

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Summary Description of Disquisition Process and Paper

As the current United States culture battles intense anger, conflict and division over issues of race, young African Americans wonder if the dream of equality for all and the American promise of prosperity can overcome the systems of oppression that consistently hold them back from achieving their dreams. When we, as fellow citizens, see the opportunities for others thwarted at every turn, we must seek solutions provoking us to engage positively with the problem. These thoughts have led me to create a disquisition attempting to research possible solutions regarding issues of discriminatory practices in a higher education environment.

Inspired by the Carnegie Foundation's Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), the disquisition is the cumulative product of researching, investigating, and improving upon a problem of practice using Improvement Science (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman & Provost, 2009). Improvement science is constructed so as to fast-track learning-by-doing. Through this method, teaching and learning are enhanced through a more user-centered perspective. As the improvement process progresses, previously unknown problems can emerge, and improvement practices may need to shift in new directions and the practitioner must be flexible enough to adjust appropriately. Improvement Research can be described as a focused learning journey (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018).

Similar to what would be done in preparing a traditional doctoral dissertation, the scholar practitioner chooses a relevant topic of research, collects data on that research topic, and then synthesizes available literature as well as their own research to support their conclusions. However, what differentiates the disquisition from the dissertation is that the focus of the researcher is on the total process of the scholar practitioner. The researcher engages in the Plan-Do-Study-Act steps of the improvement cycle to identify, assess, and apply previous and current

research and practice. The disquisition not only adds to or validates current research but also allows for the creation of a plan for advancement in the researcher's environment of practice (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, LeMahieu, 2015). As Lomotey (2016) states, "A disquisition is a formal, problem-based discourse or treatise in which a problem of practice is identified, described, analyzed and addressed in depth, including methods and strategies used to bring about change and to assess whether the change is an improvement" (p. 4).

My improvement initiative focuses on improving the experience of African American college freshmen by initiating a residential living learning community in which students reside together on the same floor of a residence hall and pursue academic coursework together. Providing support systems for academic and social connections promotes a sense of belonging to the institution leading these students toward retention into their sophomore year and hopefully beyond. I have pursued this project because I believe educational leaders must work to create higher education environments of equity for African American students in order to enhance the overall success of the entire United States.

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Enrollment of African American students at predominantly white institutions has seen substantial growth since the late 1970s, due in great part to affirmative action, various desegregation policies, and other supportive legislative actions (Bobo, 1998; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). Strategies like affirmative action and other race-preferential admission policies have improved university access opportunities for students previously facing intense discrimination regarding college admission (Bobo, 1998). Such legislative acts should ease the path for public universities to welcome African American students in large numbers (Bobo, 1998). However, consistent, systemic issues exist that continue to thwart university access and

success, and African Americans continue to drop out at high rates, especially in the critical freshman year (Townsend, 2007).

Higher education as a platform is characterized as one of the greatest hopes for individuals to attain intellectual and civic progress in this country. For African Americans in a discriminatory society, the hope of receiving a college education means possible elevation to stations seen as unattainable by previous generations (Harrell, Myers, & Smedley, 1993). However, many African Americans view higher education as part of their problems rather than as a pathway toward equality. Continued limitations in access even with positive legislation, racially discriminatory standardized entrance exams, and limited college preparation specifically for these underrepresented students, create barriers to success (Boyer, 1997).

In addition to providing hope for improving the individual's station in life, some have stated that higher education is a public good through which individual participation accumulates benefits for the greater society (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). This statement may be true for many, but African Americans do not see these advantages at the same rate as white Americans (Bobo, 1998). Unfortunately, higher acceptance rates of African Americans into colleges and universities have not facilitated higher achievement in the collegiate classroom. Instead, African American college students continue to have minimal grade point averages, lower retention percentages, and inferior graduation rates (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 1993).

Many policies related to the equalization of education at many levels began as early as the 1800s, even though such policies seem discriminatory by today's standards. For example, in 1833, Oberlin College became the first university to admit women and one of the first to admit African American students, and in the late 1800s, Jim Crow laws were widely enacted throughout the country, mandating racial segregation in public places based on a "separate-but-

equal" philosophy. This philosophy was strengthened in 1896 when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the separate-but-equal doctrine related to the schools in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) (Noltemeyer, Mujic, & McLoughlin, 2012).

The most meaningful legislation and actions took place in the twentieth century. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation, including the operation of "separate, but equal" facilities in public education would no longer be legal in K-12 institutions (Brown, 2001). This ruling did not instantly provide equality for African Americans, as many whites were unreceptive to the Court's ruling and fought adamantly against the progress such legislation promised. Because of the backlash, the Supreme Court had to reinforce the decision a year later demonstrating the significance of the continued and vehement anti-desegregation position taken by the dominant population (Brown, 2001). Kelly and Lewis (2000) suggest that if the Supreme Court had not created a 1955 "with all deliberate speed" ruling, many initial proponents of the Supreme Court legislation would have likely given up their quest for desegregation and implied progress for African Americans in education.

While the changes in culture prompted by legislation clearly had a national impact causing conflict and disruption across the country, these changes also prompted numerous local influences as nationally, college students participated in varied protests during the civil rights movement. For example, in North Carolina, students from North Carolina A&T University waged sit-ins at local lunch counters in establishments that would normally only serve white patrons and these students were confronted with violence and aggression as they fought for equity in educational rights. In 1957, a group of Spelman College students went to the Georgia legislature and ignored the separated seating labelled as "White" and "Colored", engaging in

protest by sitting in the “White” section (LeFever, 2005). Such protests took place all over the southern United States.

Conceivably, desegregation policies should have immediately extended access to previously segregated educational institutions. However, Brown (2001) contends “the mandate to desegregate did not reach higher education until one decade after Brown, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (p. 49). Title VI of the Act provided that “no person in the United States, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, or the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Malaney, 1987, p. 17). Title VI also prohibited the distribution of federal funds to segregated schools; this fiscal penalty provided strong motivation for institutions to abide by the legislation even if they disagreed.

Policy efforts meant to open many doors for African American students in higher education continued enactment through the late 1960s. However, to characterize the current state of college success for these students as equitable would be a gross over-statement. Over a century of gainful policy efforts have been undermined by:

- the steady and continued underrepresentation of African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs)
- sustained overreliance on racially biased college entrance exams
- consistent attempts to dismantle affirmative action, a policy meant to promote equitable practices as African Americans enter the workplace
- increased statewide admissions standards for public postsecondary education without corresponding advances in public K-12 schools
- African American students encountering racism and related negative experiences at PWIs

- low African American male student persistence and degree attainment rates
- forced desegregation of underfunded HBCUs
- the decline of need-based federal financial aid (Bobo, 1998; Harper et al., 2009)

A list of negative issues this extensive could create doubt that serious policy efforts enacted on behalf of African Americans actually exist and continue with their implementation. In fact, greater access to college has not improved graduation rates, grade point averages, or retention percentages for African American students attending PWIs (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 1993).

This information is especially troubling not only because of gross inequities, but also because our culture places great value on a college education. For example, in 2015, Americans with a college degree were better able to endure economic crises and had far lower unemployment rates than those without that education (Cook, 2015). In addition, a college degree is beneficial to overcoming obstacles of poverty as well as to lessen the economic and educational discrepancies that exist between African Americans and whites (Townsend, 2007). The low graduation rates of African American students not only cause our society to be weaker, but the lack of retention of these students affects the ability of African Americans to achieve and consequently have a higher quality of life (Townsend, 2016).

Additional problems at the university level result from this lack of stability with African American students. For example, most evidence demonstrates that diversity enriches the educational experiences of all students, as well as the extended university community (Kuh & Umbach, 2006). Our entire society is negatively impacted as African American students continue to seek ways toward success in higher education but are met with resistance at seemingly every level.

Analytical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytical framework was used in this disquisition. This race-based epistemology is particularly useful because it provides a lens through which to question, critique, and challenge the manner and methods in which race, white supremacy, supposed meritocracy, and racist ideologies have shaped and undermined policy efforts for African American student participation in higher education (Harper, Patton, & Woodson, 2009).

CRT is interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating intellectual traditions and scholarly perspectives from law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies to advance and give voice to the ongoing quest for racial justice (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While no single definition seems to exist for CRT, many scholars agree on the centrality of seven tenets:

- Racism is a normal part of American life, often unrecognizable and difficult to eliminate or address (Ladson-Billings, 2005).
- CRT rejects the notion of a “colorblind” society. Perceived colorblindness leads to misconceptions concerning racial fairness in institutions (Harper & Patton, 2007, p. 3).
- CRT gives voice to the unique perspectives and lived experiences of African Americans. According to Solórzano (1998), “CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of African American women and men is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education” (p. 122).
- CRT recognizes interest-convergence, the process whereby the white power structure “will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote white self-interests” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv).

- Revisionist history is another tenet of CRT. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), “Revisionist history reexamines America’s historical record, replacing comforting majoritarian interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minority experiences” (p. 20).
- CRT also relies on racial realists, or individuals who not only recognize race as a social construct, but also realize that “racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status” (Ladson-Billings, 2005).
- CRT continuously critiques the claims of meritocracy that sustain white supremacy (Bergerson, 2003).

CRT is particularly useful for examining policies affecting African American students in higher education, as racial subordination is among the critical factors responsible for the continued production of racialized disparities and opportunity gaps (Harper, Patton, & Woodson, 2009). For example, applying CRT as a framework demonstrates how challenges faced by African American students are multi-dimensional. Figure 1 illustrates how common biases are applied by different entities in various settings. These biases exist in addition to and alongside other systematic and historic challenges.

FIGURE I

APPLIED CRITICAL RACE THEORY MODEL FOR EDUCATION				
Ideological Basis <i>According to CRT the ideological foundation of this country is implicitly biased against all non-whites</i>	Institutional Basis <i>Major institutions in this country implicitly function to keep white privilege in place.</i>	Narrative <i>CRT uses narrative in research to substantiate the problem as well as in interventions that address inequity in education</i>	Applying CRT <i>Effective interventions should address equity problems using CRT tenets for the purpose of eliminating inequitable outcomes</i>	Importance of CRT <i>CRT is interdisciplinary and complements many other frameworks but serves a critically unique function in equity analysis in education</i>
Whiteness as Property- Possession of rights that are respected by laws default to whiteness	Institutional Racism- Inequitable outcomes for nonwhite groups consistently, for decades, all over the country	Counter Narrative- countering institutional bias of empirical process of inquiry & research	Race-based Intervention- Addressing the root cause, not the effect, being race specific, not race neutral	Naming the Oppressor- Proper diagnosis, Recasting the “blaming of the victim” not “blaming the oppressor”
Centrality of Whiteness- White ideology, values, and interests are at the center of all aspects of dominant culture & policy	Implicit Bias- Inequality is reproduced regardless of individuals in the institution or assumed institutional intolerance of racism.	Traditional Narrative- Affirming validity of humanity through story and narrative from the Subject, not interpretation from the observer	Parallel process- The necessity of both site-based interventions as well as broader institutional change on a fundamental level and over the long term	Demystifying Racism- Ceasing to view the effects of racism from the restrictive view. (no hood, no foul)
White Supremacy- All nonwhites are naturally inferior, (post-modern form- nonwhites are permanently disadvantaged)	Restrictive vs. Expansive view- The legal burden of the victim to prove racist intent of policy instead of proving race-based impact (explicit vs. implicitly racist)	Decentralizing Whiteness- Reframing and recasting the perspective from the experience of the Subject through narrative.	It's the Adults stupid! - Relentless focus on adults not children as the target for change with the indicators in the student outcomes	Addressing the cause not the effect- Refocusing attention on white supremacy, not those it impacts (going upstream)
	Interest Convergence- Power is shared when there is a mutual benefit. If there is a conflict in interest, all change, no matter how noble, will be resisted by the power group (Brown v. Board)		Institutional Nurturing- Individuals caring is not enough. The institution must function in a race responsive way toward equity. (ex. transformative leadership)	Picks the right target- Not confusing race-based impact with other overlapping forms of oppression like poverty, class, geography, etc.

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Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (Eds.). (2000). *Critical race theory: The Cutting Edge*

While the details listed above would suggest that policies and legislation have not met the needs of African Americans, certain in-college factors also exert negative influences on collegiate achievement (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Tinto (1993) argues that in-college perceptions and experiences may interact negatively with personal attributes and

attitudes to limit the institutional integration of African Americans on a consistent basis.

Perceived lack of self-efficacy and negative racial identity attitudes from peers, faculty and staff can constrain the integration of African American students into the college environment (Reid, 2013).

Complex institutional cultures, insufficient academic preparation, and lack of access to financial resources are some of the additional causes of attrition for African Americans from colleges and universities, especially in the very important first year (Strayhorn, 2011). For example, predominantly white institutions are often perceived as antagonistic and isolating for African American students (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 2016). Almost 25% of those students surveyed in one study identify substantial racial conflict on their campuses (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). When students are in the minority, such tension can lead them to believe they are unwelcome and do not belong on campus, contributing to their attrition (Strayhorn, 2011).

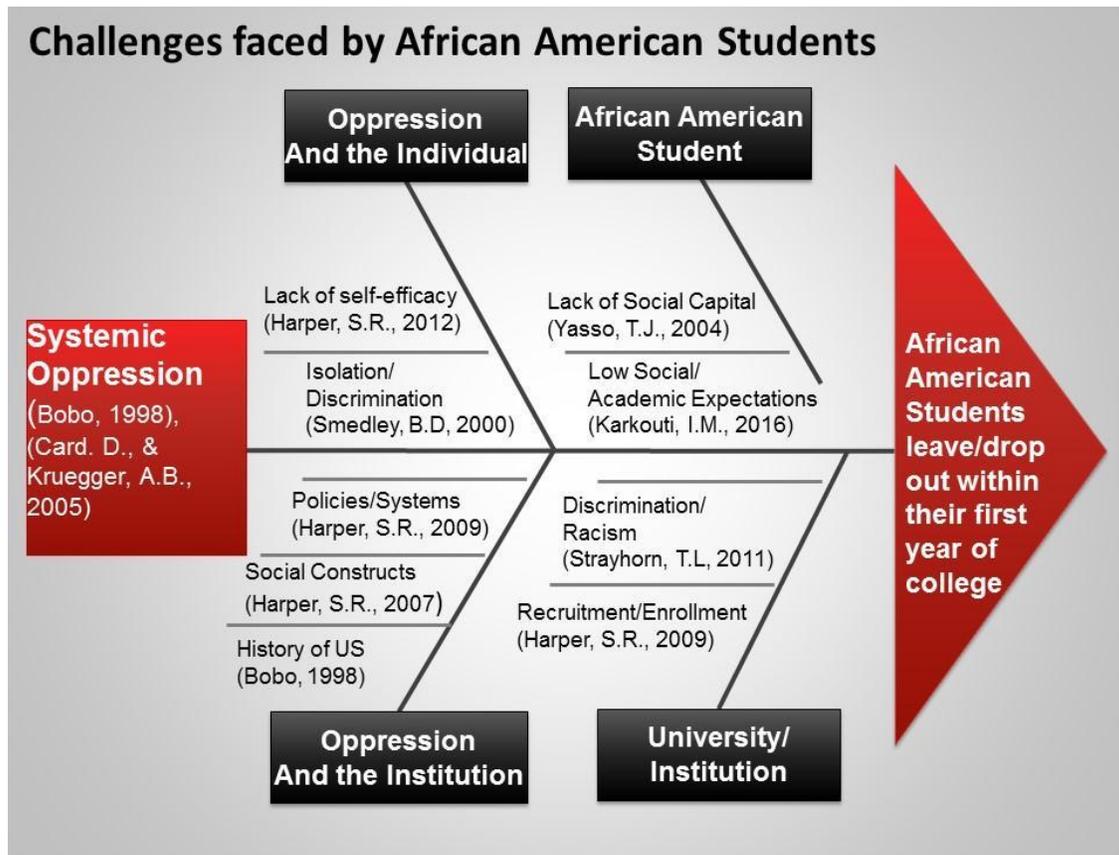
Another prevalent issue facing African American students is a lack of academic preparation. Limited academic preparation contributes to 33% of all enrolling African Americans requiring some form of remedial education (Strayhorn, 2011). Research states those who need remediation and who are required to enroll in curative courses as college freshmen, leave before graduating at a rate of almost 45% (Strayhorn, 2011). These data suggest that remedial coursework does not provide students with the academic skills or the confidence in their educational abilities to move forward in collegiate studies. In addition, having limited academic success throughout their collegiate careers can cause African American students to believe they do not belong in the higher education classroom (Reid, 2013).

Adding to the problems of inadequate academic preparation is the much too common stressor of limited financial resources (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 1993). African American

students are commonly among those receiving financial aid and are frequently working 10 or more hours a week while enrolled in college (Strayhorn, 2011). Often the received aid and money obtained through work are not enough to offset familial and other obligations. With limited academic preparation and the need for additional finances, African American students have numerous competing priorities in their attempts to achieve academic success. These numerous factors demonstrate how government policies do not navigate all problems associated with equity. For example, improving admission of African American students alone can be damaging to them long term because admitting these students who are underprepared without establishing practices on campus to address these shortcomings can set them up for failure before they ever set foot on a college campus.

The fishbone diagram shown in Figure 2 demonstrates that systemic oppression is foundational to the issues faced by African American students (Bobo, 1998, Card, D. and Kruegger, A.B., 2005). This subjugation is demonstrated through factors prevalent within both the individual and the university. For example, racial subordination leads to a lack of self-efficacy as well as a deep sense of isolation (Harper, S.R, 2012, Smedley, B.D., 2000). While in the university environment, oppression is prominent through various discriminatory social constructs and policies (Harper, S.D., 2009, Harper, S.D., 2007). When the individual becomes a student, racial repression demonstrates itself through obstacles such as low social and academic expectations (Karkouti, I.M., 2016). In addition, the university can encourage such problematic beliefs through climates that elicit discrimination and employ problematic admission practices (Strayhorn, T.L., 2011, Harper, S.D., 2009).

FIGURE 2



Despite numerous policies and legislative actions created with the purpose of improving access to universities, African American students, once admitted, continue to leave and drop out at high rates within their critical first year of college. We must improve the retention and success of these students by providing programs and resources that facilitate their social and academic integration into the collegiate environment. Once integrated, their opportunities for success can greatly increase (Smedley, B.D., 2000). The problem I address within this disquisition is that African American students leave predominantly white universities at disproportionately high rates between their freshman and sophomore years. I sought to determine if a residential living learning community comprised of like-minded peers and supported by both academic and social support systems would improve their retention rates.

Problem of Practice within the Local Context

North Carolina is a southeastern U.S. state with a landscape ranging from Atlantic Ocean beaches to the Appalachian Mountains. As of May 2018, the population for the state was approximately 10,559,767. Of those, 73% were white and 21.7% were African American (US Census Quick Facts, July 1, 2018). The western part of the state predominantly consists of the mountainous region. The population for this part of North Carolina is 147,658 (Point 2 Homes, July 15, 2017). Since 1990, the underrepresented population numbers in WNC have increased. This trend was particularly evident between 1990 and 2000 when both the Latinx and Asian American/Pacific Islander populations grew significantly. As of 2010, Latinx were the largest minority in WNC, followed by African Americans (WNC Outlook Report, 2014).

These numbers can be misleading, because while the city of Asheville has a higher representation of underrepresented populations, the surrounding rural towns and counties have minimal minority representation. Latinx members make up most of the minority populations in these areas due to their engagement in agrarian employment (WNC Outlook Report, 2014). However, not only is the presence of underrepresented populations more limited in the city's surrounding counties, the mindsets and political leanings of those in the more rural areas tend to be more conservative and harken to days of the Civil War, when African Americans were viewed as not equal to whites.

The city of Asheville as of May 2016 had a total population of 89,165 with 78% of the population being white, and 13% being Black or African American (US Census Quick Facts, July 1, 2016). The University of North Carolina Asheville is located within the city and has a total full-time student enrollment of around 3800 (College Portraits, July 16, 2017). The student population is from 37 states and 28 countries. UNC Asheville is a public liberal arts university

and is one of the 17 institutions in the University of North Carolina system. Eighty percent of the students are white and less than 5% are Black or African American (College Portraits, July 16, 2017). The college statistics for UNC Asheville indicate a lower percentage of African American students than is common for the region as well as for the state, which is approximately 8% (WNC Outlook Report, 2014).

In 2016, The *Princeton Review* ranked the University number one in the country in its listing of "Best Schools for Making an Impact," which is an honor provided to schools with the best community service opportunities, student governments, sustainability, and on-campus student engagement, as well as graduates with high job meaning ("UNC Asheville, has earned top marks," 2016).

While the minority presence--particularly African American students--on the UNC Asheville campus has increased steadily since 1997, the freshman retention numbers for these students (62%) are much lower than that of the general student population (79%) (*US News and World Report Best Colleges 2016*). These lower retention numbers have been consistent since 1997, ranging from a low of 61% to a high of 72%. Based on the results of a recent campus climate survey, many faculty, staff and administrators on UNC Asheville's campus attribute the low numbers to the antagonistic climate for African American students, faculty, and staff. When African American students do not see others like themselves in the classroom or on campus in general, they can feel isolated and as though others believe they do not belong in that environment (Harper, Patton, & Woodson, 2009).

With an average class size of 18 students, it is common for an African American student to be the only minority in a class. When topics related to race and ethnicity are discussed in the academic setting, normal practice is for the single African American student to be asked to

represent their race regarding experiences and history, again exacerbating their feelings of isolation.

Table 1 demonstrates the numbers of underrepresented student populations that the UNC Asheville Fact Book labels as minorities. African American students (labelled as Black in the table) are the second largest underrepresented population at UNC Asheville behind Latinx students, with multiracial students having numbers almost equal to those of African Americans.

Table 2 demonstrates the slow but steady increase in minority students at UNC Asheville from 1989-2017. While the numeric rises demonstrate seemingly small gains, translating these numeric increases to percentage points displays the continual advances more clearly and positively. In Table 2, minority refers to all students of underrepresented races, including all races and ethnicities represented in Table 1. For example, in 1988, the minority population is listed as 5.1%. In 2017, the percentage grew with minorities representing 17.7% of the campus student population demonstrating more than a 300% gain. Table 1 breaks down the races and ethnicities listed in Table 2 into actual numbers of students represented.

When an institution has such small numbers of students from minority populations as does the University of North Carolina Asheville, altering the percentages can be highly impacted by the departure or the retention of one student. Apart from the overall importance of the individual education of every student, progression or decline in terms of overall students from underrepresented populations are highly impacted as well when one or two students leave the university or decide to remain enrolled.

Table 1

University of North Carolina Asheville Head Count by Race and Ethnicity Percentages Fall 2017

Headcount by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2017*

Unduplicated Race/Ethnicity Category	Total N	Race Categories (students can check more than one)					
		American Indian	Asian	Black	Pacific Islander	White	Unreported
American Indian	19	19	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	74	0	74	0	0	0	0
Black	173	0	0	173	0	0	0
Hispanic	232	14	5	13	3	148	66
Pacific Islander	3	0	0	0	3	0	0
White	2,891	0	0	0	0	2,891	0
Multiracial	157	67	52	61	10	146	0
Nonresident Alien	51	0	7	1	0	31	12
Unreported	119	0	0	0	0	0	119
Total	3,719	100	138	248	16	3,216	197

* Does not include extension students.

Table 2

University of North Carolina Asheville Minority Presence by Year, 1989-2017

Minority Presence: Fall Semesters*

Fall Semester	Total Headcount	International Students	Minority Total	Percent Minority
1989	3,293	25	167	5.1
1990	3,310	23	190	5.7
1991	3,261	23	163	5.0
1992	3,277	20	191	5.8
1993	3,165	30	201	6.4
1994	3,195	38	205	6.4
1995	3,222	38	229	7.1
1996	3,092	41	218	7.1
1997	3,179	42	210	6.6
1998	3,175	43	214	6.7
1999	3,164	38	207	6.5
2000	3,234	44	216	6.7
2001	3,247	41	229	7.1
2002	3,294	31	221	6.7
2003	3,348	42	241	7.2
2004	3,488	47	262	7.5
2005	3,398	41	247	7.3
2006	3,497	39	248	7.1
2007	3,527	45	284	8.1
2008	3,460	44	296	8.6
2009	3,695	42	319	8.6
2010	3,765	42	345	9.2
2011	3,665	51	356	9.7
2012	3,587	41	379	10.6
2013	3,628	32	427	11.8
2014	3,704	41	482	13.0
2015	3,782	60	553	14.6
2016	3,715	48	623	16.8
2017	3,719	51	658	17.7

Note: International students are not included in the calculation of the minority total nor the percent.

The number of African American students is small on campus and the number of faculty and staff who identify as African American is negligible as well. Because of this, these underrepresented students do not have many role models who look like them and who can relate to their life experiences, further elevating their feelings of remoteness. Having strong, connected and committed African American faculty and staff can inhibit feelings of isolation, illustrating success of underrepresented populations in a predominantly white academic environment (Smedley, 2007). The success of others who look like them and who share in the cultural experiences and backgrounds can provide a sense of confidence and a belief that they too, can achieve in college and other settings.

Outside of the classroom, the isolation can continue with the African American student being the only one of color on their residence hall floor, in a student organization, or in a library study area. Well-intended white students can engage in micro-aggressions unknowingly adding to already challenging circumstances. The African American student can have little or no place of refuge, except for designated safe spaces, such as the Multicultural Student Center, which currently has two full-time professional staff members who are responsible for serving all students from underrepresented populations. These two staff persons are limited in how much they can do to address the needs of this challenged population given the breadth of their responsibilities and the depth of the issues at hand for African American students navigating a predominantly white environment.

PWIs of higher education across the country struggle with these same issues. Almost every college or university has a commitment to providing diversity-focused programs for all members of the campus community. The trouble lies in how so many diversity initiatives avoid or whitewash serious equity issues. However, African American students at UNC Asheville are

not leaving because of a lack of commitment or effort by the administration. This dedication is exemplified by many strategies that have been implemented over the years to improve African American student retention, especially for the critical first year.

A mentoring program, called Connections, was previously in place for first year students where each student was paired with a more senior African American student. In the first six weeks of their freshman year, mentors would meet with their mentee at least once a week, sometimes over a meal in the dining hall, to discuss academics, as well as social life. The mentors were trained to assist navigating difficult conversations and issues with their mentees. They also were well versed in the resources available, from health and counseling, to career services, to tutoring. The mentors were vulnerable and open in sharing their experiences leading the freshman student to understand that while they may be the only one who is African American in their classes, they are not alone in the feelings they experience. The mentors demonstrated and modeled how they have navigated their own feelings of isolation and frustration and still achieved and remained into their sophomore and further years, providing hope for the first-year students, that they too could persevere and excel.

Due to the departure of both the Director and Assistant Director of Multicultural Student Programs late last year, and the high volume of student needs for two professionals, the Connections program has gone on hiatus as leadership adjusts to their roles and the University campus and culture. The current managers of this department see other priorities as their focus. These include growing and enhancing current affinity groups, especially in the African American clubs and organizations.

Another strategy to improve the current racial experience on campus is the creation of a multi-disciplinary group of faculty, staff and students called the Diversity Action Council. This

assembly, facilitated by the Director of Multicultural Student Programs, meets regularly to discuss issues of diversity and inclusion on campus so they can create strategies to navigate and improve the diversity climate. These discussions include issues regarding recruitment of underrepresented students, faculty, and staff of color, micro-aggressions in the classroom, and national matters regarding race and politics.

In the summer of 2017, a summer bridge program called Summer Opportunity for Academic Success (SOAR) was created. “The SOAR program was designed to help a select group of recent high school graduates make the transition from high school to college. Within this program, students are exposed to UNC Asheville's academic expectations, as well as the culture of the campus and the greater Asheville community” (<https://admissions.unca.edu/soar>).

To be admitted to SOAR, students must have graduated in the previous spring, be Pell Grant-eligible, and be a first-generation college student. Currently, there are 21 students participating in the program, with 33% of the students identifying as African American. The curriculum offers students the opportunity to earn 7-8 academic credit hours prior to the fall semester, in a supportive environment, with tutoring and study halls readily accessible.

The students in the SOAR program gain an understanding of the college environment and academic expectations, with focused support systems in place--without the challenges of engaging with the entire freshman population – and with a reduced course load. In addition, the students participate in team building and social activities together to develop friendships and support systems that will hopefully continue once the fall semester begins. Based on the research, programs of this type have a lot of potential to positively address some of the primary issues causing minority students to leave, but the program is only in the beginning stages (Fletcher, et. al., 2001). In addition, leadership for this program has changed three times in the

last two years, causing the growth of SOAR to be slower than originally hoped.

Possibly the most important demonstration of University commitment to enhancing the racial climate at UNC Asheville is exhibited by the recently released strategic plan. A year long process took place involving all members of the campus community to determine the primary focus areas for the University for the next five years. Resulting from this process were three core values: Innovation, sustainability, and diversity and inclusion. The third core value is described below:

We must continue to foster a deep commitment to supporting diverse communities and appropriately encouraging frank and honest conversation. Our commitment leads us to envision a future where all UNC Asheville students, faculty, and staff know they belong regardless of their race and ethnicity, age, religion, disability, socio-economic status, gender expression, gender and sexual identity, national origin, culture, and ideological beliefs.

UNC Asheville's commitment includes ensuring that our curriculum and programs reflect the diversity of the world and our community; that our education embraces inclusive teaching and learning styles; that ongoing efforts are made to create a multicultural environment throughout the campus; that we include diverse perspectives in all conversations concerning the advancement of the university and our society; and that our recruitment, hiring and administrative practices place high value on all aspects of diverse identities. (<https://strategicplan.unca.edu/core-values-unc-asheville>).

The Strategic Plan was distributed in the fall of 2016, and since that time, divisional leaders have worked with department heads to develop goals and strategies surrounding all three core values. New and innovative initiatives and programs are currently being facilitated and

filtered through a thorough evaluation process conducted by the Office of Institutional Research.

The above listed initiatives are only a few of many facilitated at UNC Asheville with African Americans as a focus. These examples are provided as a demonstration of the commitment to improving the experiences of students, faculty, and staff as they navigate the institution.

Theory of Improvement

African Americans students are commonly retained at much lower rates than their white colleagues especially during their first year of college. This is true despite the efforts of institutions seeking to advance their satisfaction and tenure. Many factors contribute to the inability of African American students to be retained at higher levels. Some of the primary ones include: the history of systemic oppression of African Americans in the United States, discriminatory recruitment and admissions processes, and institutional racism and discrimination in academic environments (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009, Harper, 2009, Bobo, 1998).

In order to improve African American student retention in their freshmen year at UNC Asheville, I utilized causal system analysis. With this process I applied several steps, including: 1) Identifying the root causes of the problem; 2) Determining the specific problems to be addressed; and 3) Asking the “why” questions (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2015). Following these steps, causal analysis required the creation of a fishbone diagram (shown in Figure 2) that provided a format to visually represent the problem analysis performed. From there, a working theory of practice improvement was created, leading to another visual representation, called a driver diagram (shown later in Figure 4), which focused on a small set of hypotheses about the key strategies for enhancement (Bryk et al., 2015).

Increasing the success of these students included providing programs and resources that

facilitated their social and academic integration into the collegiate community. If we can improve the first-year retention rates of African Americans in college, they are more likely to graduate at higher rates, which will ultimately increase their future opportunities for success (Strayhorn, 2011).

Increasing graduation rates will provide these students with a greater likelihood of prospering and obtaining gainful employment (Cook, 2015). In addition, those with a college degree have better chances of overcoming the obstructions of poverty not only for themselves, but also for future generations (Townsend, 2007). As mindsets of racial subordination and interest convergence are broken down and replaced with those of belonging, African American student retention and graduation rates should consistently increase (Strayhorn, 2011).

By providing resources and programs in a supportive environment that address the historic and systematic oppression commonly faced by this population, African American students can be retained at much higher levels through the end of their freshman year. Creating atmospheres where faculty and staff are engaged with the students regularly and are facilitating learning through creative methods, will promote greater belief among all that African American students belong in a college classroom. Ultimately, in later iterations of the improvement initiative, providing grants, on-campus employment opportunities, and financial workshops will increase knowledge and confidence that has been previously limited or absent. Having active role models available who are committed to the development and growth of these students and facilitating positive peer relationships will enhance their sense of belonging. Creating and leading meaningful diversity training sessions for faculty, staff, and students that clearly address issues of race, privilege, and discrimination will lead to a less antagonistic environment.

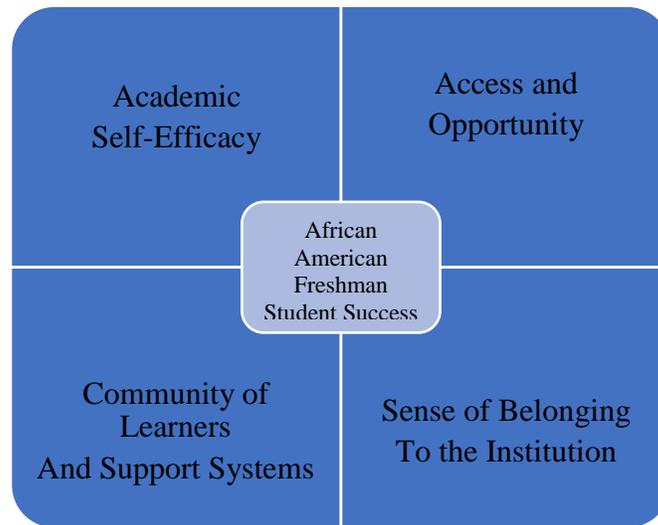
As Figure 3 demonstrates, African American freshman student retention and success in

this disquisition was positively impacted by four predominant contributors: Academic self-efficacy, access and opportunity, appropriate support systems, and a sense of belonging to the institution. Systemic oppression creates a belief that African American students do not belong in an academic environment, and therefore contributes to a mindset of academic in-efficacy (Harper, S.D., 2012). Racial subordination also creates atmospheres of discrimination and isolation further feeding the belief in African American freshman that a predominantly white environment is oppressive and unaccepting (Smedley, 2007).

Overcoming such deeply entrenched negative systems, mindsets, and practices is difficult, but can be achieved with intense university and individual effort. Attempts to conquer years of systemic oppression must have the commitment of institutional leadership at all levels. Creating environments of inclusion, equitable systems and policies, and support structures that lead to beliefs of belonging are critical to obtaining success and must include listening regularly and intently to African American students and trying to understand their experiences. A willingness, and in fact, a desire on the part of whites to look inside as members of the dominant population to see where we may be participating in micro-aggressions, meritocracy, and interest-convergence, is difficult, but necessary.

The Implementation Team decided to focus on the four factors listed in Figure 3 after engaging in research regarding impediments to African American student success. The contributors of academic self-efficacy, social integration, cultural competence, and financial aptitude contribute to a positive sense of belonging. The Implementation Team believed these four factors had the greatest opportunity to provide the sense of belonging to the institution necessary for students to be retained and successful.

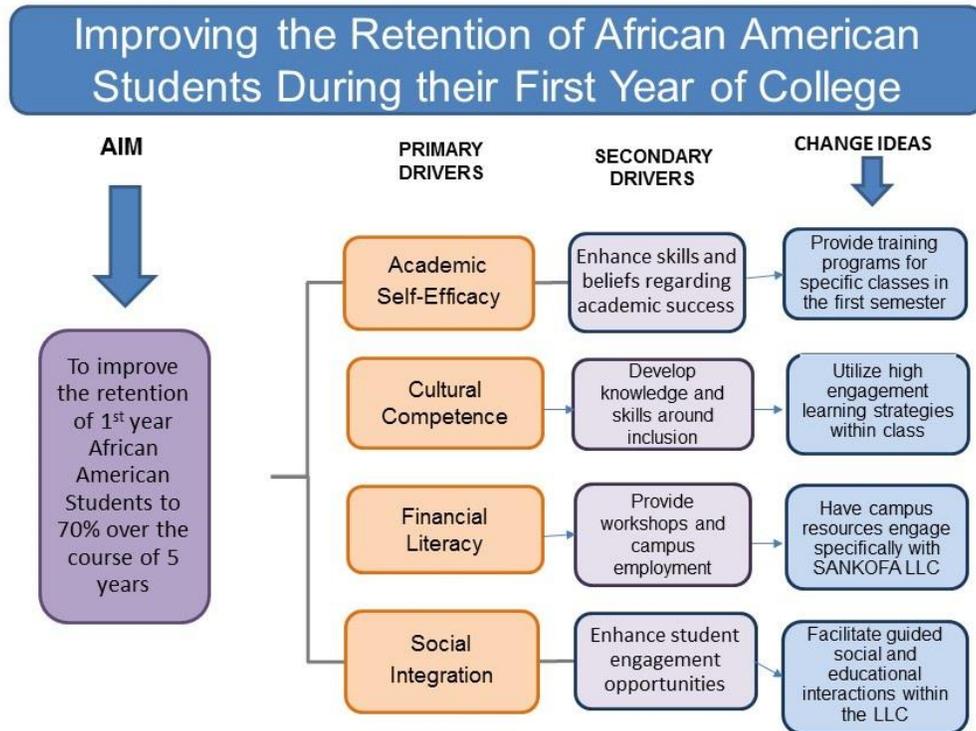
FIGURE 3

African American Freshman Student Success Contributors

Creating strategies and programs that directly relate to these individual contributors will improve the retention rates of African American freshmen, which will increase from the current rate of 62% to 70% over the course of five years. In addition, retention rates can further improve to 80% over 10 academic years at the University of North Carolina Asheville.

The four African American Freshman Student Success Contributors are described visually through the driver diagram shown in Figure 4. The predominant influential factors are the primary drivers shown in the figure that positively impact the goals for improving the retention of first year African American students. The secondary drivers are those factors that while less critical still have considerable impact on the stated goal. Further breaking down the diagram, change ideas provide specific concepts for improvement.

FIGURE 4



In the spring of 2018, UNC Asheville initiated (or created) SANKOFA, the first ever Living Learning Community (LLC) specifically for students from diverse ethnicities who entered the institution as freshmen in the fall 2018 semester at UNC Asheville. A Living Learning Community is a group of students who traditionally live on the same residence hall and share similar academic or personal interests. LLC's offer students the opportunity to engage in an intentional community experience with like-minded individuals. Students involved in LLC's live, study, and participate in programming that is specifically formed around their shared interests. Additionally, all participants of an LLC share in a curricular connection with their hall mates, which may include, but is not limited to, a joint class or workshop series. Research shows that students who participate in LLCs tend to have higher rates of student involvement outside of

the classroom, increased academic achievement, increased academic and social support networks, and higher rates of retention (Smedley, 2007).

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to engage students with the “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link “liberal arts” and “professional courses”; others feature service learning.” (National Study of Enhancing Student Success and Retention, 2014).

Regarding this Living Learning Community, the SANKOFA website states: “Sankofa is an Akan term that means, “To return, to go back and get it, to seek.” It is the idea that in our past we find the power and strength to create a brighter future, and how we need our past to give us context on how to move forward.”

At UNC Asheville, the SANKOFA Living Learning Community was an interdisciplinary and co-curricular program for first-year students of color and students who wanted to engage, explore, and foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through enrollment in *AFST 178: Thinking from the Margins*, students developed global and cultural perspectives, and examined structural inequalities and social engagement as they related to the student experience. Twelve students from underrepresented populations were involved in the program for the fall 2018 semester.

Students fostered a deeper understanding of respect for difference, community building, and leadership development through participation in varied programs that included opportunities to engage in Civil Rights Tours in Greensboro, NC, Charleston, SC, and Salem, Alabama, as well as additional cultural activities and festivals.

Living and learning in SANKOFA was intended to be a place where students welcomed the invitation to learn, embrace, and be open to new ways of seeing the world. The community was a place where students were able to connect with others comfortably, even in areas of conflict, and become the best version of themselves, building on historical experiences and perspectives relevant to their identities. In addition to the students participating in SANKOFA having similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds, most were also first-generation college students as well as Pell-Grant eligible.

Students from these identities also commonly struggle with college integration in their freshman year. Students were provided with intensive support systems including student mentors and were both individually and collectively engaged with faculty and staff to assist in the development of positive relationships and connections.

The SANKOFA LLC for the fall of 2018 was assessed during the academic year through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. These assessment methods assisted in determining what aspects of the community were most beneficial to them and what may have been missing that could have increased their integration success.

At the same time, preparations are beginning for the fall 2019 cohort, and the four primary drivers that were included in the initial program are being adjusted and improved as data has been collected. What follows is a list of specific descriptions of these drivers and change ideas.

Primary and Secondary Driver 1, Academic Self-Efficacy – The SANKOFA LLC course, ***AFRICANA STUDIES 178: Thinking from the Margins*** provided experiential instruction, intentional relationships, and vital campus resources that encouraged the promotion and the creation of academic confidence and success. Faculty members were trained and were

continuously consulted regarding successful and experiential teaching techniques. Group work and collaboration were common, with the faculty members acting more as facilitators and less like lecturers. Students were required to meet with faculty individually on a regular basis to remove some of the hierarchical separation and intimidation that initially existed. These individualized strategies allowed for positive relationships with faculty to develop that enabled opportunities for healthy social and personal development among the participating African American college students (Robertson et al. 2005). This constructive social adjustment was a factor that gave the opportunity for good academic performance.

Because of the importance of these connections, faculty for this program were selected through an application process to determine appropriate fit with the student populations that were involved in the SANKOFA program. Having the faculty go through the application process demonstrated a commitment and desire from the faculty to work with underrepresented students.

Primary and Secondary Driver II, Social Integration – Institutions often have difficulty engaging and connecting African American students within the campus environment in positive ways. This lack of affirmative connections can contribute to their lack of retention. These students enter the PWI setting with a clear understanding that society expects negative results from them (Robertson and Mason, 2008). It is important that campus administrators, if they are committed to the success of these students, provide opportunities (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, social adjustment) to counteract this mindset (Robertson and Mason, 2008). The SANKOFA LLC sought to build relationships and connections that should last through freshman year and beyond.

Important to the African American student experience is their connection with other students; both those who are like them as well as those with significant differences. SANKOFA

participants engaged with their social peer group through a variety of casual as well as formal interactive activities. In addition, mentors and staff from other departments connected with them throughout the school year, so the students learned about the resources these staff members provide and viewed them as accessible people with whom they could continue to connect in the future. These relationships assist in facilitating a sense of belonging at the institution.

One of the most noteworthy of these events was a dinner hosted by the Chancellor at her home specifically for the SANKOFA students and implementation team. This experience demonstrated a true commitment to improve their experience, to increase racial diversity at UNC Asheville, and to validate the need for continued and difficult work to continue. She also solicited their help and advice for the future in making these improvements.

Primary and Secondary Driver III, Cultural Competence - Discrimination and the prevalence of micro-aggressions at a PWI can be overwhelming to the psyche of African American students (Blackwell & Pinder, 2005). Encountering bigoted statements, practices and policies from any member of the community can be challenging to navigate.

White students, faculty and staff at PWIs often display attitudes created by a history of societal privileges that have fueled a superiority mindset over African Americans. These privileges can be unknown and unaddressed by whites causing them to engage with those from other races in harmful ways. Providing cultural competence training to the faculty, staff and students working most closely with the SANKOFA program created an understanding of those privileges and micro-aggressions and the deep impact they can have on others (Harper, 2012).

Primary and Secondary Driver IV, Financial Aptitude – African American students are often coming to college with limited financial resources (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 1993). They are also commonly among those receiving financial aid and are frequently working 10 or

more hours a week while enrolled in college (Strayhorn, 2011). Often the aid received, and money obtained through work are not enough to offset financial obligations. These financial hardships can become overwhelming emotionally, leading to undue stress and anxiety often causing African American students to drop out (Reid, 2007).

The SANKOFA program was offered to students often with limited financial responsibilities. However, once the fall semester began, there were not additional resources in place to assist, other than the Pell grants many of them receive. Implementation members provided guidance to individual SANKOFA members to search for on campus jobs, scholarships, and to assist with financial aid questions.

Within the next two years, the program hopes to add a financial literacy component where students work with a mentor who will help them secure additional scholarships and low-cost loans. Another benefit to be added in the future is a connection and priority for these students to secure on-campus employment, which commonly pays higher than minimum wage and works around student class schedules.

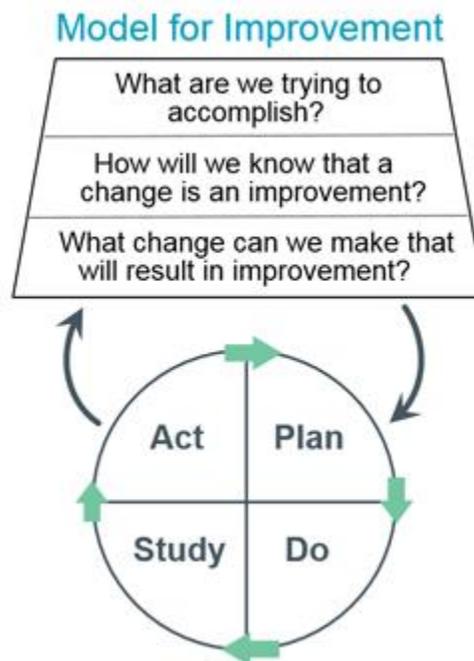
Improvement Initiative and Methodology

Improvement science is a methodology utilizing brief cycles to evaluate change for the purpose of guiding modifications and developments to improve programs. The improvement initiative aim of this disquisition was to increase the retention of African American freshmen students at UNC Asheville by increasing student belongingness through participation in a Living Learning Community called SANKOFA. I predicted that connections made through the multi-tiered program would increase retention through heightened connections.

Langley et al.'s (2009) Model for Improvement provided the organization for the improvement process. The model consists of three fundamental questions that guide

improvement efforts through the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PSDA) cycle (see Figure 5). The model takes a team approach to the improvement process by establishing a design team, and then later incorporating an implementation team. The teams are comprised of key individuals in an organization that will help develop as well as facilitate improvement initiatives. The work of the design team begins with answering the question “What are we trying to accomplish?” The team’s response to this question identifies the aim of the improvement work. Measures for improvement are determined by further asking, “How will we know that the change is an improvement?” Finally, the improvement initiative was selected by answering, “What change can we make that will result in improvement?”

FIGURE 5



*Figure 5. Model for Improvement. From *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance 2nd ed.* (p. 24), by G. J. Langley, R. D. Moen, K. M. Nolan, T. W. Nolan, C. L. Norman, and L. P. Provost, Belmont, CA: San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2009 by G. J. Langley, R. D. Moen, K. M. Nolan, T. W. Nolan, C. L. Norman, and L. P. Provost. Reprinted with permission.*

Literature Review

Consistencies exist within the literature regarding successful strategies for improving the retention and graduation rates of African American students. For example, many studies discuss how African American students engaging in academic learning communities, (settings where students are in one or more classes together during their first year of college), are retained from their freshman to their sophomore years at higher rates than the national average for African American students (Kilgo, Pascarella, and Sheets, 2015; Gomez, 2009).

Other studies speak about increasing academic support resources in addition to opportunities for student life involvement. With additional support services in place, students feel the commitment of the university to their success and can see themselves as belonging in an academic culture as they begin to demonstrate success in the classroom (Talbert, 2012). Becoming involved in clubs, organizations, and Greek life can assist in students viewing themselves as fitting in to the culture on a college campus that is critical to retention (Gomez, 2009).

Mentoring programs have also received high success ratings in the research. These initiatives have one student who has been through the college experience for more than one successful year, assisting new freshman in engaging with the institution throughout their initial experiences, helping them to address social, academic, and other issues needing navigation through the intense training they have received (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2016; Antonio, Chang & Milem, 2005). UNC Asheville has had brief success in this area with a mentoring program called Connections, which is currently in hiatus.

However, instead of a mentoring program, two Resident Assistants (RAs) lived with and connected with the students of SANKOFA on their halls through intentional methods, as well as

through informal interactions. The overall responsibility of the RA was to provide leadership, assistance, and support to residents of their halls, as well as the other members of the floor or building. Selected for their leadership abilities and experience, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, maturity, scholarship, and sense of commitment, the RA was a primary resource for information and assistance with any type of concern.

Successful programs demonstrated through the research to retain and graduate African American college students include Summer Bridge programs. The Summer Bridge program is one approach that compiles the positive attributes of those listed above into one comprehensive intervention (Townsend, 2007; Strayhorn, 2011). These curriculums commonly enroll a cohort of underrepresented and disadvantaged students in the summer prior to their freshman year. The group of students proceed through one to three classes together, receive academic support services, and engage in social activities jointly.

Mentoring programs, Summer Bridge programs, and academic learning communities are similar in that they each provide specific and directed support, as well as intense time and energy directed toward the success of African American students. In addition, the investment of resources by institutions hosting these programs demonstrates a commitment to serving underrepresented populations, as well as an allegiance to enhancing the diversity of their institutions. Students in learning communities tend to form their own self-supporting groups that extend beyond the classroom. Learning community students spend more time together out of class than do students in traditional, stand-alone classes, and they do so in ways that students see as supportive (Dugans & Komives, 2007).

Residential living learning communities can have an even greater impact than any of the above-mentioned strategies separately because this intervention combines several of the positive

aspects of the other strategies. Students who live in learning communities tend to interact more with their professors and diverse peers, study more, and excel at synthesizing material and analyzing problems (Kuh, 2007). Students participating in Living Learning Communities report gaining more from their college experience. Moreover, the engagement advantage for students in learning communities often lasts through the senior year, suggesting that the experience, which most students have in their first college year, positively affects what they will do later in college, both socially and academically (Kuh, 2004).

Research on learning communities and the collaborative pedagogy that underlies them highlights the ways they enhance student learning and persistence (Tinto, 1997; Tinto, Goodsell, & Russo, 1993). First, students in learning communities tend to form their own self-supporting group that extends beyond the classroom. Second, students in learning communities spend more time learning together both inside and outside the classroom. Class continues even after class. By encouraging continued student interactions, learning communities enable students to bridge the divide between academic classes and the social conduct that frequently characterizes student life. Students tend to learn and make friends at the same time, and as they spend more time together learning, they are prompted to learn even more naturally. In the research, this was true of both regularly admitted and provisionally admitted students who required academic assistance (Tinto, Goodsell, & Russo, 1993). Third, participation in the learning community enhances the quality of student learning. By learning together, everyone's knowledge is, in the eyes of the participants, enriched (Tinto, 1997).

Fourth, as students learn more and see themselves as more academically and socially Engaged, they persist at a substantially higher rate than do comparable students in the traditional curriculum (Tinto, Goodsell, & Russo, 1993). Their involvement with others in learning within

the classroom becomes the vehicle through which attachments are made and commitments to the institution are engendered. Finally, student participants' stories highlight powerful messages about the value of collaborative learning settings in fostering what could be called "the norms of educational citizenship," which promote the notion that individual educational welfare is tied inexorably to the educational well-being and interests of other members of the educational community (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Students in these programs report an increased sense of responsibility to participate in the learning experience and an awareness of their responsibility for both their own learning and the learning of others (Russo, 1995).

Living learning communities provide an academic structure within which collaboration among faculty and student affairs professionals is possible and is often required. In some cases, they serve as vehicles through which advising is provided to all first-year students. In other cases, they provide for the integration of academic assistance for topics learned in the linked classes. More importantly, they are a type of organizational reform that is rooted in the classroom, the one place where students meet each other and the faculty and the one place for which faculty and student affairs professionals have responsibility. As such, they are available to all students, faculty, and staff. Unlike other retention programs that sit at the margins of the student academic experience, LLCs seek to transform that experience and address the deeper roots of student retention (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015). In effect, they take student learning and retention equally seriously.

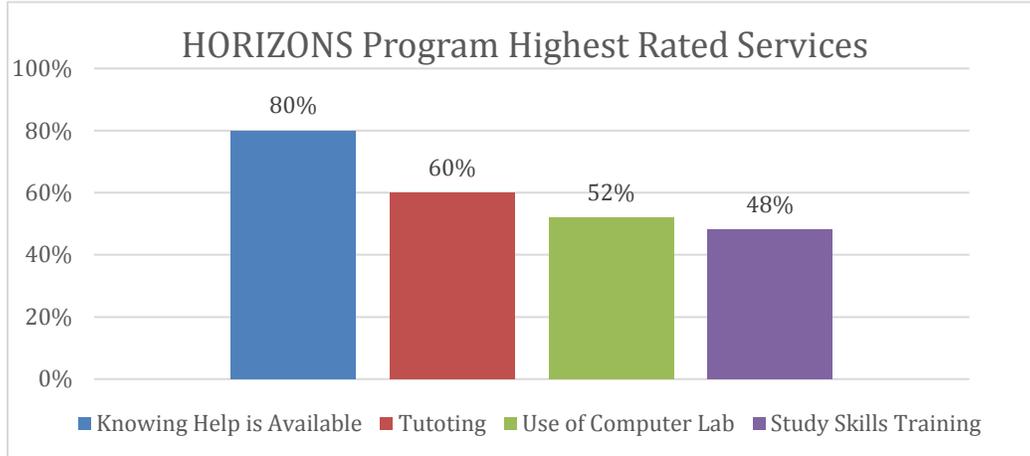
The National Study of Student Support Services conducted a longitudinal survey of low-income African American students participating in Summer Bridge programs, which are very similar to living learning communities, especially SANKOFA, due to the membership being comprised of students from varied underrepresented ethnicities. The findings of the study

demonstrate that these interventions facilitated improvements in educational outcomes for most participants. Freshman students achieved improved grade point averages and were retained into their second year at a 7% higher rate than similar non-participants (Myers, 2003).

In 2004, the Association of Collegiate Testing conducted a similar survey of higher education institutions across the country. Of the 82 retention interventions included in the survey, strategies cited by respondents as making the greatest contribution to retention fall into three main categories.

- First-year programs: including freshman seminar/university 101 for credit, noncredit freshman seminar/university 101, learning communities, and integration of academic advising with first-year programs
- Academic advising: including advising interventions with selected student populations, increased advising staff, integration of advising with first-year programs, academic advising centers, and centers that combine academic advising and career-life planning
- Learning support: including supplemental instruction, a comprehensive learning assistance center/lab, reading center/lab, summer bridge program and tutoring program (Habley & MacLanahan, 2004).

An example of such a successful intervention that combines the above attributes is the HORIZONS program at Purdue University. A research study was completed assessing students' perceived value on each of the 15 aspects of the program. Students completed a questionnaire, rating each service's usefulness as very helpful, helpful, undecided, not helpful, or never used by that individual. The top four services ranked as very helpful, in descending order, are presented in the chart below.

FIGURE 6

(Myers, 2003)

“Knowing that help was available” having the highest rating is not surprising. In such a complex, large environment as the Purdue campus, students found the HORIZONS center a comfortable environment serving as a “home base” giving students a place to come if they have a problem. Four other services tied with a “very helpful” rating at 36%:

- Assistance from the HORIZONS financial aid liaison
- Computer training
- Opportunity to receive financial aid for summer school
- Assessment of skills, interests, and attitudes through testing (Myers, 2003).

During the 1996-97 school year, 90% of all freshmen in the program returned for their second year, compared to the rest of the Purdue freshman population that was retained at a rate of 84% (Myers, 2003). As other programs illustrate, the success of the HORIZONS students shows that, while they may be less prepared upon entering Purdue, their opportunities for success will be positive.

Table 3 provides examples of the three successful Living Learning Communities programs described below. The table presents information from the individual programs

including a brief explanation of each, the results they have received from research, and implications for future improvements.

Table 3

Improving African American Student Success through Living Learning Communities

Study	Results	Implications
Retention and success of Meyerhoff Scholars, a first-year program for predominantly African American Engineering students and requires attendance at a six-week Summer Bridge Program.	Interventions employed, and resources provided increased these high-achieving student's ability to succeed.	The philosophy of the program is that all students involved can succeed if the necessary opportunities for resources are available. Providing these resources and opportunities can translate to other schools and other programs and increase the ability of African American students to succeed.
Studied four measures linked to student success in college of African American Students in Summer Bridge Programs at Predominantly White Institutions: self-efficacy, Sense of belonging, academic skills and social skills.	Results provided support for the hypothesis that precollege compensatory experiences effect the college readiness of academically underprepared low-income students of color.	While Summer Bridge Programs tend to focus on skill development, the improvement of only academic factors has a positive effect on other important student success outcomes like first semester GPA.
WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) Arizona State University was designed to prepare incoming female students to make the transition from high school to college. Studied positive aspects of program.	The connections and creation of a community of women assisted students in feeling a sense of belonging to the institution.	While academic preparation efforts are incredibly important for underrepresented student populations, social connections can create communities that also contribute to improving retention.

Along with the positive attributes of living learning communities, some studies discussed how certain strategies were unsuccessful when implemented by colleges to retain underrepresented students. For example, institutions who recruit diverse populations in large numbers, but offer minimal specific resources or programs to support these students tend to achieve low levels of success (Harper, 2012). In addition, universities that offer support programs, but do not view diversity as an institutional and cultural commitment, also reap poor results related to African American student success (Harper, 2012).

Research demonstrates that successful institutions place specific monetary, academic, and social resources toward programs dedicated to improving the opportunities for African American

students to achieve academically, culturally and socially in a college environment.

Improvement Initiative Components

To improve African American first year student success, we provided programs and resources that facilitated their social and academic integration into the collegiate environment, such as instituting the components that make a successful and comprehensive living learning community like SANKOFA. The implemented factors are listed below:

Primary and Secondary Driver I, Academic Self-Efficacy – The SANKOFA Living Learning Community provided experiential instruction, intentional relationships, and vital campus resources that promoted the creation and sustenance of academic confidence and success. Faculty were trained through a grant from the Carnegie Foundation regarding successful and experiential teaching techniques.

Primary and Secondary Driver II, Social Integration - SANKOFA sought to build faculty, staff and peer relationships and connections that will last through the freshman year and beyond. SANKOFA participants engaged with their social peer group through a variety of casual as well as formalized interactive activities. In addition, mentors and staff from other departments connected with them throughout the fall semester and will continue to do so through the remainder of their freshman year, so the students can learn about the resources these staff members can provide and view them as accessible people with whom they can continue to connect in the future. These relationships contributed to creating a sense of belonging at the institution.

Primary and Secondary Driver III, Cultural Competence - Providing cultural competence training to the faculty, staff and students working most closely with SANKOFA program created an understanding of discriminatory privileges and micro-aggressions and the deep impact they

can have on others. In addition, these trainings, through the development of understanding, assisted in changing behavior and created additional advocates within the white community.

Primary and Secondary Drive IV, Financial Aptitude – African American students often come to college with limited financial resources (Harrell, Myers & Smedley, 1993). They are also commonly among those receiving financial aid and are also frequently working 10 or more hours a week while in college (Strayhorn, 2011). Providing scholarships, employment, and grant opportunities will become a focus of SANKOFA. Currently, the University offers five scholarships through our AVID for Higher Education program. Discussions are currently taking place to offer some of these scholarships to SANKOFA participants. In addition, training will be provided regarding financial understanding and literacy in the future.

Improvement Initiative Design Team

The improvement initiative began with the creation of the implementation and design team. Several valuable campus community members accepted the call to serve on this multidisciplinary team, and all are members of the SANFOFA Living Learning Community leadership and planning team as well. Their names and credentials are listed below:

Director of Multicultural Student Programs, Luke Givens: The Office of Multicultural Student Programs facilitated outside of the classroom programming efforts that reinforced the learning from the course.

Assistant Director of Multicultural Student Programs, Megan Pugh: Megan Pugh and Luke Givens worked in collaboration with other members of the design team to facilitate resource development for the students of SANKOFA, and serve as valuable resources, role models and mentors.

Resident Assistant, Tia Foster: Tia Foster is an African American student at UNC

Asheville with a passion for issues of social justice. As the Resident Assistant who lived with the students, Tia has been a peer who has been successful at UNC Asheville and has provided guidance as the students of SANKOFA engaged life on the UNC Asheville campus.

Interim Director of Student Success Programs, Deaver Traywick. Deaver Traywick works closely with the AVID for Higher Education program on campus. AVID for Higher Education (AHE) is a national organization focused on reducing obstacles to college completion for all students. Specifically, the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) team at UNC Asheville supports incoming freshmen who have high financial need or who are first-generation college students (neither parent had previously earned a four-year degree) (<https://ahe.unca.edu/>). Because of Deaver Traywick's work with AVID, he has been able to provide insight into the SANKOFA program with knowledge regarding strategies for first generation students, as well as those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Residential Education Community Director, Jasmine Wilkerson. Jasmine Wilkerson is an African American professional staff member in the Office of Residential Education. She benefited in her undergraduate education from a program much like SANKOFA, called Posse, and has been able to offer a unique perspective to the team because of her knowledge as a former student. In addition, Jasmine has just completed a master's program in student development and has lived and worked in the residence hall where SANKOFA resides during the course of the first improvement cycle.

Assistant Title IX Coordinator, Keishea Boyd. Keishea Boyd is an African American female who has spoken in depth about her negative student experiences at a predominantly white institution. She, like Jasmine, offered personal as well as professional perspectives and individual student support to the improvement initiative.

Associate Professor of African Studies, Jeremias Enguze. Dr. Enguze facilitated the instruction of the SANKOFA freshman course in the fall semester. The course navigated topics of systemic oppression as well as European colonization in an environment where students live and study together. The development of an academic and residential community created relationships of trust to allow for the thorough and vulnerable processing of the course material in conjunction with the navigation of their freshman year experience on a predominantly white campus.

Director of the Interdisciplinary, International, and Africana Studies program, Dr. Agye Boakye-Boaten. Dr. Boakye-Boaten was the Co-Instructor for the SANKOFA course in collaboration with Dr. Enguze.

The Design Team

Ensuring the success of the design team was contingent on proper preparation prior to the beginning of the 90-Day Cycle. The Pre-Cycle tasks provided the opportunity for the team to develop a unified voice surrounding both the problem and the improvement initiative regarding African American freshman student retention at UNC Asheville. Through the development of fishbone diagrams and driver diagrams, the design team cultivated a common language and purpose directed toward the primary goal of a successful improvement initiative.

The creation of this design team provided the opportunity for members of the campus community who commonly work separately toward African American student success to collaborate on a project as a unit. We read and studied the same research and each team member has added to the body of knowledge shared by the group that contributed to unity as we embarked upon implementation of the SANKOFA Living Learning Community. Design Team work allowed for discussion of the problem in an integrated and predictable fashion with the

ultimate result being a possible solution that all worked together to create. A brief review of the work of the design team provides a lens into the development of collaboration to address a complex problem.

Methods of the Design Team

In preparation for this report, the 90-Day Cycle handbook, particularly the portion on pre-cycle tasks was utilized as a guide. The handbook assisted in preparation for meetings, planning, and further research. I met with both the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor of Student affairs, to share my meeting agendas and to seek their input. The steps taken by the design team are outlined below.

Initial Meeting and Charge Statement

The first gathering of the design team provided an opportunity for everyone to be in the same room and share their current roles, areas of expertise, and reasons for being invited to participate. Team building activities were facilitated to gain more understanding of individual members and their personalities. Discussion and orientation to the purpose of our design team was shared and discussed, as was the charge statement. Each member of the team provided input into group logistics and norms that guided us throughout the process.

Presentation of the Problem

In the second meeting of the design team, the problem was presented to the group members, which is that African American students leave college consistently during or at the end of their freshman year. Materials from appropriate research, with data from UNC Asheville, including the recently released 2017-2018 UNC Asheville Fact Book, and the University Strategic Plan were shared to ensure the participants understood the nature of the problem on our

campus and throughout the country. We also discussed how much the problem impacts our students, their own individual work, and our society. Group members shared their individual experiences with the problem and asked questions.

One of our current history faculty members, who has written books and does regular presentations on the history of African Americans in our country and especially in the south was invited to speak to the team. He shared how systemic oppression has impacted African Americans in society and briefly provided information regarding how that subordination can impact their ability to be successful in college. The goal was for everyone to share in both the understanding and ownership of the problem.

Having a faculty member and Asheville native be the one to share this information with the Design Team created an even deeper level of commitment for us as a group. Knowing the research shared was completed by one of our community members increased the dedication of the team members to the work of improving African American student success.

Fishbone Development

Development of the fishbone diagram was the focus of our third team gathering. The purpose was to (1) organize our thoughts, (2) develop a deeper understanding of the problem as well as its' causes from our perspective, and (3) determine aspects of the problem that are within our control as well as those that are not. This development continued the shared responsibility of team members for the project. I provided the team with my original diagram to demonstrate the commonalities between the one I created and the one developed with the team. That diagram is included as Figure 2 (see list of figures).

Development of System Improvement Map

As a team, we identified organizational attributes that may manifest during the improvement process. As with most institutions, UNC Asheville is filled with political dynamics that were discussed heavily as possible challenges. The team finished this meeting by determining which of these dynamics were within our control, which ones were not, and which ones had the most likelihood to impact our project negatively. The dialogue was quite rich and expansive. Everyone on the team brought their thoughts from the work they completed in preparation and we were able to move to the driver diagram creation. At the end of our second meeting, I provided the team with the driver diagram I completed, to demonstrate the commonalities between my individual work and the group's creation. The diagram is shown as Figure 4 (see list of figures).

Results of the Design Team

The culminating exercises for the Pre-Cycle tasks included the creation of the charter and the initiation of the scan. These final tasks provided direction as well as a framework by which to enter the 90-Day cycle. The charter was a culmination of all the work done thus far and served as a barometer for us to check regularly to ensure we remained on course as our team embarked upon the testing phase. The scan allowed our team to account for and navigate any issues prior to testing to avoid foreseeable pitfalls within the 90-day cycle.

Plan and Progress for Completing the Charter

The charter is a short and succinct document that provided direction for the group moving forward and was a source that will be reviewed periodically to ensure the team was staying on track. This charter created purpose, preferred outcomes and chronological time frames and was

also a document that was used to communicate to others in the University who were not on the team. Below are the steps that were taken to prepare for the charter (see appendix for charter).

Table 4

Steps to Charter Creation

Steps to Charter Creation	Guiding Questions or Statements
Develop Intent Statement	What is the rationale or business case for this cycle? What is the big picture goal?
Aim Statement	What do you want to accomplish through this cycle?
Background	What is the current state of knowledge on this topic? How will this cycle add to the knowledge base?
Initial Identification of Relevant Literature	What are some articles and research to read? List possible potential experts to approach; include Dr. Darin Watters
Key Deliverables and Intended results	How will we reach our aim? What will we accomplish during each phase and on what schedule?
Open Questions	What issues are we struggling with in determining the intent or aim of the cycle?

Taken from 90-Day Cycle Handbook

Plan and Progress for Completing the Scan

The scan served as a learning process for the design team. Institutions or experts who are performing at high levels or who are demonstrating promising new practices regarding African American student success were consulted to provide additional information. The interviews and visits during the scan joined the team together more strongly due to the shared experiences and common language that were developed. Below are the steps that were taken during the scan phase.

Table 5

Steps Taken During Design Team Scan

Steps in Scan	Guidance
Read Scholarly Literature	Initially read two journals or books in the field.
Interview experts from the field	Initially interview two experts in the field. Start broadly.

Interview out-of-field expert.	Start by interviewing one out-of-field expert to gain inspiration.
Record key points from reading and interviews.	Utilizing google docs to gather and summarize information.
Refine charter	Again, use google docs for gathering information.
30-day review	Use SBAR to analyze current status

Taken from 90-Day Cycle Handbook

Discussion Regarding the Design Team

Implementation and design teams are complex systems that require dynamic and adaptive participants. Leading such a team required flexibility and comfort with change. Instead of being authoritarian, I needed to obtain sincere commitment from all members, as the climate of the institution consistently adjusted, as did the culture. Traditional leadership methods are antiquated in working with dynamic environments that are bombarded with new information consistently (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Instead of operating traditionally, it was necessary to be highly adaptive and ready to engage with the demands of an ever-changing environment. Our design team experienced these challenges and opportunities regularly in our time together.

Complexity theory demonstrates that different parts of organizations acting separately become something different when joined together in positive and interactive ways. This was validated with my work on the design team for the SANKOFA Living Learning Community. In a limited time, a group of individuals at our first meeting grew into a team that had a common, collective purpose toward addressing a difficult problem. The navigation of such a complex organism required a great deal of flexibility, as well as a willingness to make and admit to mistakes. While I anticipated many challenges throughout the process, the more we worked together, the greater confidence I had in our opportunity for success. The work with the Design Team prepared us to navigate, address, and learn from the challenges we faced as we

implemented improvements through the 90-day cycle.

Improvement Initiative Action and Process Steps

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle was utilized in the testing and implementation of this improvement initiative. This cycle followed the logic of methodical experimentation and contains four steps that were navigated repetitively to answer new questions as the range of the investigation increased (Bryk, et al., 2015). Each cycle built on new knowledge until the team determined how to influence enhancements under diverse circumstances consistently (Langley et al., 2009).

The PDSA Improvement Initiative cycle provided in Table 6 is offered as a list of action and process steps that were implemented by the design team. The African American student success contributors of academic self-efficacy, social integration, cultural competence, and financial aptitude were navigated individually with programs, resources, and intentional strategies through the implementation of the SANKOFA Living Learning Community.

During the improvement cycle, the team was most interested in the influences of self-efficacy and social integration. Throughout this process, the design and implementation team continually asked themselves three questions:

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How will we know the changes we make will be improvements?
3. What changes can we make that will result in improvements?

During the “plan” cycle, the design team was coordinated. Through the work of this group, primary and secondary drivers were selected as focal points for the Improvement Initiative. Specific change ideas were chosen to implement and then study. Predictions were then made regarding what possible changes would actually occur after the

improvements were applied. Training for those involved in the facilitation of SANKOFA was planned and prepared and development of the methods for data collection were organized.

The “Do” portion of the cycle was when the Implementation Team carried out the change on a small scale, documented observations, and the data identified during the “plan” stage were collected.

The “Study” cycle was when we analyzed the collected data and determined if the change resulted in the expected outcome. We also summarized the lessons learned and looked for unintended consequences, surprises, successes, and failures.

In the “Act” cycle, we determined necessary adaptations, as well as the aspects of the change that would be adopted for future cycles. We also considered the expansion of the change to additional areas of the organization. Lastly, the Implementation Team determined areas where our approach needed to be changed as we prepared for the next PDSA cycle for the coming academic year.

Table 6

PDSA Improvement Initiative Cycle

PDSA Cycle	Action and Process Steps	Improvement Timeline
Plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinate a cooperative design team, comprised of 4-5 people with specialized skills and abilities that relate to the problem of practice and/or the methods of improvement. 2. Choose Primary and Secondary Drivers to focus on for the Improvement Initiative. 3. Determine who will be directly involved in the process, predominantly those who have direct involvement with the SANKOFA Living Learning Community. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spring 2018 2. Spring 2018 3. Summer 2018

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Choose specific change ideas to implement and study (1 to 2). 5. Determine the changes we predict will happen with the Primary and Secondary drivers chosen. 6. Determine what we predict will happen when we implement the change. 7. Plan one or two small changes regarding one or more of the Primary and Secondary Drivers. 8. Accrue training and other materials, as well as people directly responsible necessary to facilitate Primary and Secondary driver changes 9. Implement the change during the SANKOFA Living Learning Community, (16 weeks) 10. Collect data from students and staff members regarding effects of the implemented change. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Summer 2018 5. Summer 2018 6. Summer 2018 7. Summer 2018 8. Summer 2018 9. August-December 2018 10. August-December 2018
Do	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carry out the test on a small scale. 2. Document observations, including any problems and unexpected findings. 3. Collect data you identified as needed during the “plan” stage. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. August-December 2018 2. August-December 2018 3. August-December 2018
Study	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study and analyze the data. 2. Determine if the change resulted in the expected outcome. Were there implementation lessons? 3. Summarize what was learned. 4. Look for: unintended consequences, surprises, successes, failures. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. December 2018 2. January 2019 3. January 2019 4. January 2019
Act	<p>Based on what was learned from the test:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adapt – modify the changes and repeat PDSA cycle. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. August-December 2018, January-May 2019 2. March 2019

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Adopt – consider expanding the changes in our organization to additional residents, staff, and units. 3. Abandon – change your approach and repeat PDSA cycle. <p><u>Learning to Improve, (Bryk, et al. 2015)</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. March 2019
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One of the most important aspects of the PDSA cycle was the establishment of benchmark goals to assist the Implementation Team in determining if the change worked. The first goal was related to the SANKOFA student’s belief in their abilities to achieve in the collegiate classroom. As the literature demonstrated, African American students often do not envision themselves as achieving success in the collegiate classroom (Harper, 2009). The change was a success if this attitude was not present in the students participating in our living learning community.

Retention statistics and grade point averages were calculated to determine if the possible beliefs of the students in their academic abilities translated into actual achievement in their first semester. Their classroom success should have improved due to the goal of partnerships created with faculty and staff members. Since these staff members participated in collaborative training related to engaging teaching strategies and cultural understanding, students should have also gained a greater appreciation of those different from themselves.

Lastly, students should have reported greater ability to navigate their finances more effectively. This goal was an important aspect of the Improvement Initiative because African American students often drop out during their freshmen year because of a lack of monetary resources (Noltemeyer, et al., 2012).

Table 7

Benchmark Goals

Benchmark Goal 1	At the end of first semester of SANKOFA, (Fall 2018) 90% of surveyed students will report a strong to very strong belief that they can achieve academically at UNC Asheville. Achievement is defined as a 3.0 GPA average. Their beliefs are indicated by academic success and support from their SANKOFA Living Learning Community participation.
Benchmark Goal 2	90% of cohort participants will be retained from Freshman to Sophomore years, (from 2018-fall 2019).
Benchmark Goal 3	90% of SANKOFA Freshman will maintain a cumulative 3.0 GPA throughout their first year at UNC Asheville.
Benchmark Goal 4	90% of SANKOFA participants will report strong connections to faculty, staff, and peers at the end of their freshman year
Benchmark Goal 5 (Possible)	90% of SANKOFA participants will report greater cultural understanding through education from the program.
Benchmark Goal 6 (Possible)	100% of SANKOFA faculty/staff will report and demonstrate greater cultural competence through designated trainings.
Benchmark Goal 7 (Possible)	100% of SANKOFA participants will report greater financial aptitude based on program participation
Benchmark Goal 8 (Possible)	100% of SANKOFA participants report greater opportunities to improve their financial status through available, grants, scholarships, and job opportunities.

Formative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology

The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle of improvement (see Figure 6) was utilized to evaluate the various components affecting the program as well as the total program evaluation. The PDSA cycle was a living process, consistently adjusted based on data received. In addition, program implementation began on a small scale, allowing for testing and upgrades to occur prior to full scale implementation. Judging the worth of the SANKOFA program while the improvement activities were in progress was important. Doing so in a logical way required the establishment of a baseline. Currently, 62% of African American students at UNC Asheville are

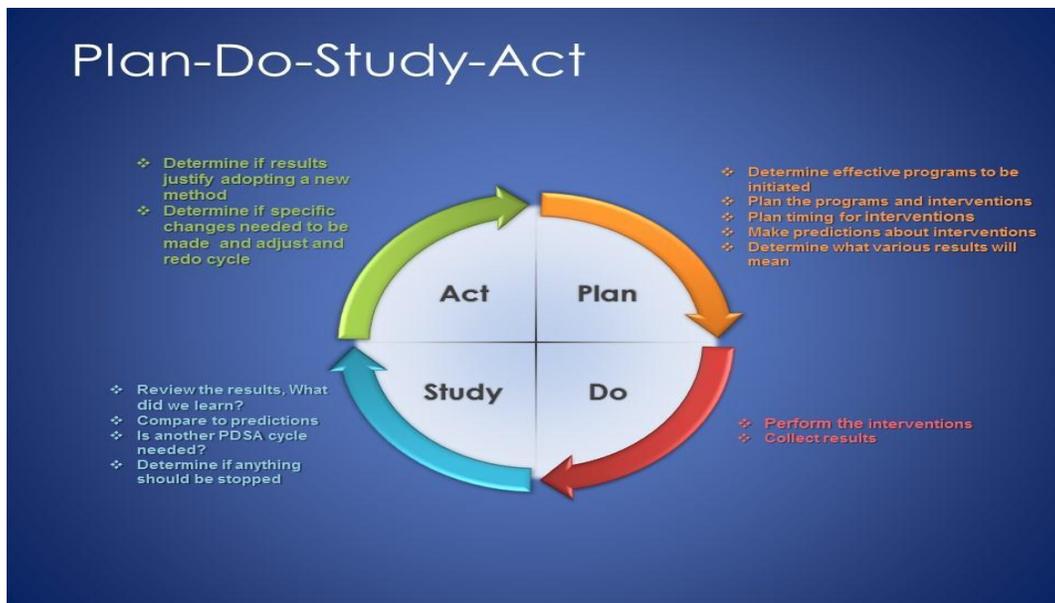
retained from their freshman to sophomore years. Retention began with the individual enrollment of each individual student from the fall to the spring semester. This year, of the 12 students enrolled in SANKOFA, 11 of those identify as African American, with three of those who classify themselves as African American also identifying as Multiracial.

To improve upon current retention statistics, 10 of these students needed to be retained until their second year of college. Because UNC Asheville is a small institution, and because African American student numbers are so low, each individual student’s retention was vital to improving those statistics. Those involved in the formative evaluation included the SANKOFA participants, the faculty and staff, the design and implementation team, and other African American freshmen students not participating in the Living Learning Community.

These students participated in pre-test and post-test surveys regarding their sense of belonging to the University. In addition, the SANKOFA students participated in focus groups as well as individual interviews.

Figure 6

PDSA Cycle Considerations



Additional important data were available that assisted in the establishment of a baseline. For example, African American students maintaining a 3.0 GPA or above are commonly retained at almost 90%, while those with less than a 2.75 return at a rate of only 61%, almost 30 total percentage points lower (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). This demonstrated that monitoring student GPA throughout the program was critical. Another important factor is that students who are commonly involved in a high impact practice (such as a student organization, student employment, study abroad, internships, etc.) are often retained at a level of almost 84% (Astin, 1993). Those students who live on campus commonly return at greater levels than their off-campus colleagues.

Several methods were utilized to encourage involvement in such high impact practices. For example, in the context of the academic course that students were enrolled in together over the fall semester, involvement in student organizations was a part of the course requirements. Students were required to report regularly on their progress as part of their class grade and were encouraged by the involved faculty to participate even more fully if time and energy allowed. In addition, as part of their participation in the SANKOFA program, students are being provided preferential access to sign up for their residence hall space for the coming year in advance of other students. Scholarships were also offered to some of the AVID scholar students, and their involvement in high-impact practices could provide a higher likelihood for obtaining such scholarships, as over half of the participants in SANKOFA are also AVID scholars.

Improvement to these baselines was demonstrated by regular academic success, including positive results on homework, quizzes, and other assignments. Additionally, students engaged with other students, faculty and with class material in positive ways. Students also had constructive relationships with others outside of the classroom and partook in engaging activities

that encouraged a sense of belonging. Initial success was demonstrated by SANKOFA students returning for the spring semester and then will ultimately be determined by their continued enrollment for the fall 2019 semester. Ultimately, accomplishment will come through the successful freshman to sophomore retention of these students at a rate of 80% or higher.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized to analyze progress from the beginning of the program through the end of the students' freshman year. The qualitative data collection processes included regular implementation of focus groups, individual interviews, and participation/observations. Because the sample size is so small, these processes worked positively as rapport was developed with the students over time. The predominant quantitative data collection method was the use of surveys at various times before and after the program. Surveys were not utilized as much as qualitative collection methods. The programmatic changes were small at the beginning of the PDSA cycle. As data was collected and programs were fine-tuned to enhance success, the changes were implemented on a wider scale and tested further. Once the implementation and design team believed the programs were at their most optimal stage, programs were implemented at full scale.

Including the faculty and staff in the evaluation methods was an important balancing measure. For example, interviewing and surveying individual professors regarding their perspectives of student progress in class, as well as surveying their own professional experiences in leading these students, was critical to the positive implementation of improvement methods.

By instituting the SANKOFA program, participating professionals had additional work through the planning, implementation, and assessment of the program. Increasing the workload of the faculty and staff could have had the unintended consequence of prohibiting them from completing their other required duties. To offset this potential result, the discussions with the

Provost, as well as the Chancellor were facilitated, and all were in full support of the initiative and understood the implications on workload. They were also able to visualize the connection of SANKOFA to the strategic plan and improvement of African American student retention. The possibility of additional work responsibilities was shared with the currently involved faculty and staff participating in SANKOFA. Their supervisors were included in their recruitment and sharing this knowledge with them was vital in offsetting this potential consequence.

We also invited African American students not involved in SANKOFA to participate in a number of the programs provided for the Living Learning Community. Not implementing support programs for those not involved in SANKOFA could have had the unintended consequence of non-SANKOFA students feeling less supported and more isolated than they did before a Living Learning Community existed. Such issues were discussed with the implementation team and some effective ways to provide programs for all African American freshmen students have been considered such as inviting other students to SANKOFA educational programs.

Evaluating the processes throughout the program was vital. If the processes were not working correctly, the program itself may prove ineffective. To assess programmatic effectiveness, faculty, staff and students were interviewed after programs were presented related to each of the drivers. These interviews helped to determine if the interventions were working and if their timing was appropriate. For example, if diversity training was administered during the first day, that time frame may have been proven inappropriate given that the group may not have developed a rapport yet, and individuals may have not felt safe divulging their thoughts to a group of strangers. Another negative result could have come from waiting too long to engage in diversity training. Perhaps the group dynamics could have been dampened by micro-

aggressions, and now members of the group would be skeptical of others in the group. To perform such a training late in the process could have had a negative effect on relationships rather than a positive one.

The outcome measures of the evaluations are the ultimate determinants of whether the programs and interventions are successful. Both leading and lagging measures were utilized to determine effectiveness. An example of a lagging measure was in determining the academic success that students attained. The ultimate measure of academic effectiveness of the program was a 3.0 GPA and retention through the fall semester and later, into their sophomore year. Ultimately, graduation will be an outcome measure when we have an opportunity for a graduating class after four years. Since this is SANKOFA's first year, we wanted to ensure retention and GPAs were measured first. Without those two positive outcomes in place, graduation does not become a factor.

The leading measures were gathered by determining the accomplishment of the individual interventions from the perspective of the faculty, staff and students. The attitudes and incremental academic and social progress of the participants was also measured, as this was vital to determine the ultimate success of the program. Did the strategies that were implemented lead to good test/homework scores, positive relationships and connections, and incremental cultural competence? If they did so, then the lagging outcomes should also have proved to be positive.

Throughout the PDSA cycle, utilizing the information created was vital in determining if certain thresholds were being achieved. Such thresholds led to adjustments along the way that resulted in heightened results. For example, several of the cohort students were having difficulty attending their combined class during the first few weeks of the semester. After some discussion with the students and the Implementation Team, we moved the class from a building located on

the other side of campus, to the Multicultural Affairs office, which is adjacent to their residence hall. This improved their attendance immediately. This level of intense implementation and concurrent evaluation was necessary to ensure optimal opportunities for students to reach the goals of academic, social, cultural, and financial success and retention.

Another adjustment was made early in the semester to assist with the SANKOFA common course attendance. Since the class met at 8am, many of the students claimed to oversleep through alarms and would awaken too late to attend. The Resident Assistant, who also lived on the hall, agreed for two weeks to knock on each student's door at 7am, to ensure the students were awake. We did not want this to become a regular and expected strategy because the Implementation Team desired the students to become disciplined and independent, not needing to rely on outside entities, especially for something like course attendance.

Results of the Formative Assessment – Grades

To improve the retention statistics regarding the number of African American students retained at UNC Asheville, 10 of the 12 SANKOFA students needed to continue both into the spring 2019 semester and subsequently into their sophomore year. After the completion of their first 16 weeks of coursework, exactly 10 SANKOFA students returned in January to begin the spring semester. On first look, this return would seem positive. However, out of the 10 who were retained, four of those are on academic warning for the spring semester with grade point averages below 2.0. Only one of the students attained a grade point average above 3.0, the marks hoped for by all the students. See Table 8 below for a visual demonstration of this information.

Table 8

SANKOFA Student Fall Semester Results

Student #	Ethnicity	Gender	Retained	Student GPA
1	African American	Female	Yes	1.832
2	African American	Male	Yes	1.088
3	African American	Male	Yes	2.228
4	Multiracial	Female	Yes	2.713
5	African American	Male	Yes	2.52
6	Multiracial	Female	Yes	1.066
7	African American	Male	Yes	3.5
8	African American	Female	No	2.452
9	African American	Female	Yes	0.977
10	Multiracial	Female	Yes	2.75
11	African American	Female	No	0
12	African American	Male	Yes	2.54
			AVERAGE	1.97

One of the more interesting factors gleaned from the SANKOFA fall grade point averages was the individual grades the students attained in their common course, *Thinking from the Margins*. The grades for that course proved to be much higher than their overall GPAs. The common course comparisons are shown alongside their semester GPAs in Table 9 below.

Table 9

SANKOFA Student Fall GPAs and Common Course Grades

Student #	Student Fall GPA	Common Course GPA
1	1.832	4
2	1.088	4
3	2.228	4
4	2.713	4
5	2.52	4
6	1.066	4
7	3.5	4
8	2.452	4
9	0.977	3
10	2.75	3
11	0	0
12	2.54	4
Averages	1.97	3.5

On the surface, positive grades within the common course taken by all SANKOFA students would suggest that student marks in this one class were because of the additional support, training of faculty, and consistent messaging received. However, students did not attend the class with regularity, did not consistently complete course work on time, and did not perform well on tests steadily. Students did report through survey results and focus groups that they enjoyed the class and found it engaging. However, their performance did not mimic these reports. The reasons the students grades were more positive in their common course is really the mercy extended by the faculty. Instead of providing grades based on their overall semester performance, they provided their scores based on the last four weeks of the semester, when students began to take their academics seriously and after the location and timing of the class were adjusted to better meet their desires.

The two faculty members for the course were confused regarding the poor student performance. Both faculty members, being African American and participating as members of the Implementation Team understood the additional challenges these students faced entering the predominantly white collegiate environment. Because of this understanding, throughout the semester they steadily made adjustments in an attempt to have the coursework meet the students at their skill and participation levels. However, the modifications did not equate to great improvements in scores and contribution. Over time, the patience of the faculty members began to lessen, as they provided guidance and amendments that were not accepted. They believed all their additional work was not leading to student improvement.

The point of greatest frustration for the faculty and the rest of the Implementation Team was when students had a class trip planned to participate in an expensive tour exploring Black Asheville called Hood Huggers. Only one of the students arrived to attend the mandatory

course event. After this, the Implementation Team discussed allowing the students to fail the course as part of their learning. One faculty member stated, “I’m truly confused why it’s taking so long for the light bulbs to go off in the heads of the students. They’re not gonna make it and there’s just no good reason for it.”

Ultimately, during the second part of the semester, student participation and scores began to improve somewhat, which led to the final grade results. However, these grades are a greater representation of the end of the semester, as opposed to their overall course performance.

Ultimately, the team of professionals decided that failure of this class was the least appropriate method to create current and future success. One of the students who ended the semester on a positive note shared, “I don’t know why it took me so long to see that I needed to be doing more, a lot more to get good grades. I think somehow I still thought this was high school, even though I knew it wasn’t. And I never had to try there.”

Many factors contributed to the poor grades other than lack of effort. A few students had significant mental health issues, which were challenging to navigate, but prohibited students from being successful. Three of the students had participated in organized football all their lives and struggled with that lost piece of identity. One student identified as Muslim, and could not find a significant number of other students who identified in the same way. While research places students into particular categories based on race, these were twelve distinct individuals, all bringing their own challenges and strengths to the program and to their collegiate experience.

In addition, the implementation team members felt that we had not provided the resources necessary at the right time. Perhaps waiting until the beginning of the semester to provide these areas of support was too late to see actual results. In addition, we may have placed too many

obligations on the students at the very beginning, possibly prohibiting natural interactions into the collegiate environment.

Adjustments during the Formative Assessment – Grades

The SANKOFA student issues regarding all classes became clear after the first faculty checks were received two weeks into the fall semester. Students were consistently not attending classes, not participating fully when attending, and not performing well on assignments. Seeing such a negative start to the semester caused the Implementation Team to begin making adjustments immediately. While the leadership group expected some issues, we did not anticipate those to be regarding attendance. Members of the Implementation Team met with the SANKOFA students in their residence hall to explain the importance of attending class, doing their homework, and making their presence known when in the academic environment. We also wanted to hear from them what we could be doing differently. Were there resources we weren't yet providing that could aid in their attendance?

Time and schedule management was a clear deficit that became evident from this meeting. While most universities teach these skills in first year experience courses, UNC Asheville does not have such a practice. Out of the 12 students, only two maintained a calendar of any kind, and those two had not taken the syllabi from the courses and placed important due dates on those calendars. In addition, four out of the five males in the group were spending approximately three hours a day working out in the fitness center, and none of the students were planning scheduled study and homework time into their weeks. Of the 12 students, eight of them reported usually going to bed after midnight, with four out of those eight often not getting to sleep until around 2am.

Because of these findings, the Implementation Team facilitated a time management session coordinated by our University Career Center, which provided students with appropriate and flexible tools teaching them to schedule their time effectively. As individual meetings with the students took place regularly, faculty and staff members reviewed their calendars and asked students how they were feeling about the navigation of their time.

Unfortunately, the themes of these individual meetings consistently exhibited similar concerning results. Perhaps the students did not understand the importance of planning their weeks because we, as implementation team members did not take the initiative to iterate that fact effectively. In fact, most were apologetic for not utilizing their newfound calendar knowledge and seemed to understand that taking the time and energy to schedule their time would yield positive results. They just could not seem to get motivated to put the practices learned into place.

From many discussions with the Implementation Team, the group decided that SANKOFA students were having issues with taking initiative. While the students knew what they should do to perform effectively, they could not seem to put that knowledge into action on their own volition. The leadership team found this to be a difficult quandary. We wanted to provide the students with support and assistance, but not to the point where we were enabling them to become constantly dependent on our leadership and guidance. Instead, we wanted them gaining confidence in their own abilities to achieve. The leadership found it difficult throughout the semester to find the appropriate balance between challenge and support.

One activity created for the spring semester is for all SANKOFA students to engage in a regularly scheduled group study time in their residence hall two nights a week. However, a challenge existed in hosting these sessions, because we did not have the ability to retroactively

make this study time mandatory to remain in SANKOFA. Instead, the group time together was strongly encouraged. Students are enjoying participating, but we are very early in the spring semester and anticipate that attendance could lessen as the semester progresses, especially since students are not in a common course together now.

Early on during the fall semester, the Implementation Team had hoped to add a spring course for SANKOFA students that would extend the learning from *Thinking from the Margins*. However, once we determined the students were not performing effectively, and often not attending, we hesitated to initiate such a course for the spring.

Results of the Formative Assessment – High Impact Practice Engagement

An important factor in African American student retention is engagement in high impact practices (such as a student organization, student employment, study abroad, internships, etc.). Students who participate consistently in such activities are commonly retained at a level of almost 84% (Astin, 1993). In the context of the academic course that students were enrolled in together over the fall semester, involvement in student organizations was a part of the course requirements. Students were required to report regularly on their progress as part of their class grade and were encouraged by the involved faculty to participate even more fully if time and energy allowed.

Below in Table 10 is a listing of the different high impact practices the students were involved in, as well as the faculty report of how that involvement affected each of the SANKOFA members. As would be expected, consistent and heavy participation in the extra-curricular activity resulted in the faculty member reporting more positive results achieved. However, as Astin (1993) concludes, not all participation in high impact activities is equal. For example, participation in intramurals does not develop the same level of leadership and organizational

skills, as does involvement as a Student Ambassador. An example of this is that one of the students coached an intramural team and the faculty member determined the impact of that experience to be higher than mere participation.

Unfortunately, there was an assumption made that the faculty members understood that different levels of participation in co-curricular activities offered different advantages. Because of this lack of knowledge, the course teachers allowed open enrollment in outside activities without vetting them first. In hindsight, and in the future, only those activities that have the opportunity for high engagement and learning will be listed as options, and rubrics will be in place to provide guidance regarding different levels of investment in those activities.

Table 10

SANKOFA High Impact Practice Participation

Student #	Student Fall GPA	High Impact Practice	Faculty Scores
1	1.832	Black Student Association	3
2	1.088	Played Intramurals	2
3	2.228	Played Intramurals	2
4	2.713	Worked on campus job	3
5	2.52	Poetry Club	3
6	1.066	No Participation	0
7	3.5	Student Ambassador	4
8	2.452	No Participation	0
9	0.977	No Participation	0
10	2.75	Muslin Student Association	3
11	0	No Participation	0
12	2.54	Worked on campus job	4
Averages	1.97		

An interesting comparison exists in the table above between those students who had heavy participation in high impact practices and those who did not. The SANKOFA students who received a heavy impact from their extra-curricular experiences also achieved greater than a 2.5 GPA, over .5 greater than the cohort average. Conversely, those determined to have minimum to no impact, all received less than a 2.5 GPA for the semester.

One could argue that heavy involvement in the high impact practices provided the SANKOFA students with skills and confidence that prompted them to perform better in the classroom. Perhaps, while their knowledge was improving through coursework, that experience gave them the ability to perform effectively in other areas of campus. However, one could also assert that those who performed better in their coursework were also more highly motivated naturally to function at a higher level in their extra-curricular activities as well. Without more evidence to determine specific relationships we cannot make a clear determination. Therefore, they cannot be analyzed effectively.

Results of the Formative Assessment – Faculty and Staff Feedback

All participating faculty and staff were individually interviewed midway through the fall semester to gain insight regarding their perspectives of the SANKOFA program, as well as opinions regarding their involvement. Three overarching themes were consolidated from those conversations.

1. The current strategies for this group of 12 SANKOFA students does not seem to be providing the appropriate support to create effective results regarding class performance, grades, and overall student success. Given the research regarding African American student success and the strategies chosen, the belief of the Implementation Team

members was that the success of these students would be higher than that of previous African American students at UNC Asheville.

2. Because there were so many resources and support services for these students, no seemingly legitimate reason existed for why they were not able to perform effectively. The overall faculty and staff explanation was that the SANKOFA students did not take appropriate advantage of the resources provided and did not give an equal amount of effort to that exuded by the Implementation Team and the University in general. One faculty member said, “I really don’t understand what’s going on. We do everything we can except take them to class, and they still don’t come. I’ve never seen anything like it.”
3. The overall time commitment of the involved faculty and staff was greater than originally expected. The professional leadership members did not begrudge the additional time, except for the fact that their increased effort did not lead to positive outcomes. One staff member stated, “I don’t begrudge the time spent at all, because I’ll do anything I can to get these students to succeed.”

Adjustments of the Formative Assessment – Faculty and Staff Feedback

Given the feedback provided by the faculty and staff, as well as the lack of noticeable success for this SANKOFA cohort, making noticeable plans for adjustment was important to maintain interest and commitment for those involved in the current Implementation Team. Since the team met weekly, several recommendations were made to improve the status of the program in real time as well as for the future.

1. Proposals were made by the SANKOFA faculty to adjust the common course for the fall to be a collaboratively taught class that would include having a Student Affairs professional teaching common first year transition issues such as resources, time

management, and communicating appropriately with faculty. This staff member would host the class one of the three class days per week. This is the current model utilized for AVID first year experience courses at UNC Asheville and those courses and students have seen positive results.

2. The Implementation Team believes that serious discussions with Admissions need to be navigated regarding the recruitment of African American students, in general, to UNC Asheville, but especially regarding the enrollment of African American students to the SANKOFA program. Are these students aware of the expectations of the program? Do they understand and desire to engage with the amount of support offered? Are they the ones desiring the program or is a parent or family member pushing them toward the program?
3. Bringing the SANKOFA students in approximately a week prior to the beginning of the fall semester for a pre-orientation training is an idea currently being discussed among members of the Implementation Team. During this time there would also be a day long training for family members regarding expectations of their students during the SANKOFA program. This time would be spent providing clear expectations and developing camaraderie prior to the beginning of classes. The Implementation Team is currently working with members of our Orientation leadership to plan this experience.

Results of the Formative Assessment – African American General Student Grades

Twenty freshman students who identified themselves as African American, and not involved with SANKOFA, were randomly selected and invited to participate in the research for this disquisition. The students were invited to take part in a focus group in which they were asked the same questions as were the students who were involved with the living learning

community. Where possible and reasonable, these freshmen were invited to attend programs facilitated for the SANKOFA students. For example, once a month, a social event called Fellowship Fridays was held, and the non-LLC students were sent invitations. Of the 20 who were invited to participate in the research, 10 students agreed. Table 11 below provides a summary of their fall semester GPAs.

Table 11

Summary on Non-SANKOFA African American Freshman Student Fall GPAs

Student #	Student Fall GPA
1	2.74
2	1.89
3	2.85
4	3.1
5	2.54
6	1.97
7	3.4
8	2.25
9	1.96
10	2.65
Average GPA	2.535

The fall semester average GPA for these students was over .5 a point greater than that of the SANKOFA students, and in addition, all 10 of these students were retained into the spring semester. Of the 10 students, three are on academic warning for the coming 16-week term, but the lowest GPA for this group was 1.89. The fall GPA comparisons are disappointing between the two groups of students, given the greater number of resources provided to the SANKOFA students did not lead to them performing better as a group academically. However, some explanations for the differences are possible.

1. All 10 of these students were invited to participate in the SANKOFA program but chose not to do so. Perhaps these students believed themselves to be better prepared for college

and did not see the need for the additional support provided. Given their overall average GPA, some of them were correct. However, for the three freshman on academic warning, participating in SANKOFA may have provided the guidance necessary to perform better in the classroom.

2. Perhaps these freshman students did not wish to be identified with such a formalized group and saw categorizing themselves as part of SANKOFA as identifying themselves as remedial. I mention this as a possibility because some of our students who participate in the AVID program have stated that same reason as some of their hesitancy to be involved with AVID. Students labelled as remedial by others could create the same mindset within themselves. Perhaps their choice to not participate gave them a level of confidence to succeed they may not have otherwise held.
3. This group of 10 students could have found both academic and social resources on their own, without the formalized SANKOFA program.

Summative Evaluation of Improvement Methodology

The summative evaluation of the improvement initiatives followed much the same course as the formative processes. However, the information provided at this stage of the progression provided deeper insight into how to move forward. The SANKOFA program was evaluated after its' completion and leading into the beginning of the spring 2019 semester. Again, both qualitative and quantitative measures were utilized to determine the success of the improvement initiatives. Those who were involved in the summative evaluation collection and analysis included members of the design and implementation team as well as associates from the University institutional research team.

Focus groups of African American students enrolled in the program took place both at the beginning of and at the end of classes to enable us to gather data regarding the programmatic elements and to also gauge which aspects were most helpful and which ones were perceived as not useful by the students. The timing of these focus groups was important to consider for both the Design and Implementation Teams. Often at the end of such programs, emotions are high and positive, but such sentiments can fade as those initial connections are not as strong and as frequent once the academic year begins.

The conclusive data of end of term grade point averages were important to consider moving forward. Students earning a 3.0 GPA or above were categorized separately from those who earned a 2.75 GPA or below as the data were analyzed and reviewed. Will those students achieving a B average or above have different beliefs regarding the improvement initiatives? Will those students believe the interventions were more helpful than will the students who earn C+ and below? If so, why were they less impactful for them?

During the time frame between the end of the fall semester and leading into the beginning of the spring 2019 term, faculty and staff, as well as Resident Assistants, were interviewed individually to determine successes and failures from their viewpoints. These interviews provided insight as to what they would adjust for the future. Once this data was gathered from both groups, they were analyzed to determine common positive and negative themes as well as any disconnections between them.

A survey was administered to the SANKOFA program students prior to their departure from UNC Asheville for the fall semester. This survey, much like the focus group and interviews, provided information about all aspects of the improvement initiatives. The data was compared to determine consistencies and inconsistencies as well as successful features of the

various strategies.

After the results from the focus group, interviews, and surveys were collected and analyzed the Implementation Team began meeting to review the results and start planning for the coming year. This planning determined what practices to maintain at their current state, which initiatives to adjust, and which ones should be eliminated. In other words, which changes will we implement as components of the program for the future? Once the team agreed on the strategies to be utilized moving forward, specific standardization of the curricula and changes began to take place.

Complicating, but also assisting in the planning, was the additional data collected throughout the fall and spring semesters. For example, SANKOFA cohort class progressions were checked during the semester, and grades were collected at the end of the fall 2018 semester. The students were also interviewed individually once during the semester to determine their progress in the other areas as presented through the primary and secondary drivers. Some unintended consequences may have occurred during the fall 2018 semester, and through these interviews and data collection, we were able to determine appropriate adjustments where necessary.

The largest and most conclusive data set will be the collection of information at the end of the freshmen year for the first SANKOFA cohort. Will the students be retained at higher levels than is normal for UNC Asheville? Will they return at higher rates than their African American peers who did not take part in the improvement initiatives? Will the grade point averages for those who are retained match what the research says lead to retention? If the answers to all these questions are positive, and the other data obtained reveal the change initiatives were a considerable part of that success, then we will believe that our improvement

strategies helped to achieve the desired aim. Since substantial amounts of data will be collected throughout the student's freshman year, the end results should not come as surprises once the final research is revealed.

In addition to the collection of data throughout the process, the research once analyzed, will be presented to an assortment of audiences who make up stakeholders at UNC Asheville. For example, the University senior staff leadership team and the Board of Trustees will have the results as well as proposals, presented to them to garner continued University support for the future of the SANKOFA program if appropriate. Those students who participated in the program and in the research, as well as other African American students on campus, will have a forum where the research will also be presented. After presenting the research, feedback from all parties will be garnered and included in future improvements to the initiative.

Data Collection

The primary qualitative instrument used to collect SANKOFA participant data was the African American Belongingness Survey created by Keona Booker (see Appendix C). This instrument has been utilized widely on all educational levels. The survey instrument was adjusted to include questions directly applicable to the setting of UNC Asheville. The survey was a self-report instrument that examined African American college students' perceptions of their college classrooms as communities. All other instruments utilized to collect data for analysis included qualitative or perceptual data. The perceptual data collected was not utilized to determine improvement in belongingness and success, but rather informed next steps and helped the team to study the process of the intervention.

To establish pre-intervention similarities and differences in belongingness, data collection was performed at the beginning of the fall 2018 semester for the participant groups. The survey

(see Appendix C) was administered electronically to all participants via an email invitation. The survey posed questions to determine individual student perceptions of their academic efficacy, social perceptions and university belongingness. The results of the surveys were used to foster discussion within the Implementation Team during the facilitation of the improvement initiative, which allowed us to introduce changes as necessary.

A post-intervention version of the same survey was facilitated at the end of the fall semester. The results of this second survey would assist in determining if the SANKOFA student perceptions changed positively after receiving all of the resources provided through the program implementation. The results of the two surveys were used with the additional summative evaluation measures to check for any improvements in the respondents' perceptions of belongingness and to determine if the results we received were reliable.

Quantitative Findings

A paired-samples t-test was administered to compare the conditions for the SANKOFA students regarding academic and social belongingness from the beginning of the semester to the end of the term to determine if the Living Learning Community positively contributed to their sense of belonging in these arenas. Because I utilized a repeated measures design in this intervention, a paired samples t-test was utilized in place of an independent sample t test (Warner, 2013). Warner (2013, p. 965) states that "the paired samples t-test can be used to compare means for groups of scores that are obtained by making repeated measurements on the same group of participants whose behaviors are assessed at two times or in two trials."

There was a significant difference in the scores for academic belongingness $t(df)= 11$, $p=.005$ ($M_{pre} = 4.167$, $SD_{pre} = .7177$) ($M_{post} = 3.250$, $SD_{post} = 9.653$). These results suggest that the programs and resources provided by SANKOFA did improve the belief that they collectively belong in the collegiate classroom (see Tables 12 and 13 below). Even though the students were over-confident in their academic abilities in the beginning, by the end of the semester, the students had rebounded and judged their needs to achieve collegiately in a right perspective. They had achieved study and testing skills that they began to utilize to finish the fall term.

Table 12

Paired Samples T-Test Results

		Paired Differences					t
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
Pair 1	PreAtmosp - PostAtmosp	-.1667	.9374	.2706	-.7623	.4290	-.616
Pair 2	PreLeave - PostLeave	.1667	.7177	.2072	-.2894	.6227	.804
Pair 3	PreBelongClas - PostBelongClass	.9167	.9003	.2599	.3446	1.4887	3.527
Pair 4	PreBelongSocial - PostBelongSocial	-.1667	1.0299	.2973	-.8210	.4877	-.561
Pair 5	PreBelongSocial - PostBelongSocial	-.4167	.6686	.1930	-.8414	.0081	-2.159

Table 13

Paired Samples T-Test Results Part 2

		df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PreAtmosp - PostAtmosp	11	.551
Pair 2	PreLeave - PostLeave	11	.438
Pair 3	PreBelongClas - PostBelongClass	11	.005
Pair 4	PreBelongSocial - PostBelongSocial	11	.586
Pair 5	PreBelongSocial - PostBelongSocial	11	.054

Triangulation was used to determine the validity of the test results. Triangulation is defined as cross-verifying the same findings by collecting and converging different data (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation of data can also occur when you combine multiple methods to collect data, including blending quantitative and qualitative research. In the next section, I describe the qualitative data analysis process used in this intervention.

Qualitative Findings

Two focus groups were facilitated during the course of the fall semester. One took place four weeks after classes began and the other was two weeks prior to final exams. Similar findings resulted from both focus groups. Drastic changes did not occur in the responses from the first convening to the second one. The following prominent themes resulted from those conversations.

In order to determine the following themes, pattern coding was utilized as a strategy. Saldana (2013) states that qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements in the

research story, that when clustered together according to similarity and regularity actively facilitate the creation of categories and thus the analysis of their connections. Through pattern coding I was able to determine both similarities and differences in the focus group data collected.

1. Students' consistently believed the faculty and staff involved with the SANKOFA community cared about their well-being and put a great deal of effort into their success both as a group and as individuals. This concern led them to believe they could approach professionals when they needed assistance and created the consistent belief they had the commitment of the University and its' resources working toward their success.
2. Coming to UNC Asheville, students had overestimated their academic preparation and abilities. All of them had achieved to some degree in high school, and many had been very successful. This achievement had provided a certain level of confidence that caused them to feel that improved studying and time management were unnecessary. Even though the first few weeks of class were consistently more challenging than high school for everyone, they all felt as though they could put in extra effort later and pull things together before the end of the semester. All SANKOFA participants reported in the second focus group that they wished they had taken advantage of the resources offered to them sooner; believing their GPAs would have been much better had they done so. For example, one student stated, "We just didn't hold up our end of the bargain, you know? We were given so much support, but just didn't take it. I don't really know why. I just think I was thinking about other things for some reason".
3. The students believed the social connections achieved through the Living Learning Community consistently were the most beneficial aspects of SANKOFA. Having each other to discuss their integration into a predominantly white environment, and knowing

they were going through the same challenges together gave them strength to proceed.

The community they developed as well as the individual relationships created, gave them a sense of belonging to the University. One SANKOFA student stated, “I really don’t know what I would have done without these people. I felt alone in class a lot of the time, and being able to come back to the dorm and see my friends, and just talk it out you know, made all the difference.”

4. While the SANKOFA students did not see the UNC Asheville environment as racist or discriminatory, they did all have individual experiences with micro-aggressions, both in and out of the classroom. They believed people had good intentions, and whenever discriminatory acts occurred, were not attempting to belittle or judge the students negatively based on their race. However, no matter the intent, the impact was negative. Many of the students said that if they were not a part of the SANKOFA program, they might have left before the semester was over. One student shared, “I sit in the front of the class in Computer Science, and every day my teacher comes to me asking if I need help. He doesn’t do that to any of the white students. I don’t think he means everything by it, but it’s embarrassing.”
5. All of the SANKOFA students who remain at UNC Asheville state they currently plan to stay at the institution all the way through to graduation. They all believe they must improve upon their study habits and academic commitment, but they enjoy their classes, their faculty and the atmosphere around them.

While the improvement initiative did not achieve the academic goals posited, plans are taking place now to address this issue for next year’s cohort. Having all students participate in a pre-orientation experience, improving the selection of the cohort in collaboration with Admissions,

and adding a co-teaching model for the common course are all part of these plans for academic improvement.

Socially, the students in SANKOFA had a high level of belongingness to UNC Asheville. These social connections are what kept them invested and involved. However, the social interactions could have had a negative impact on their academics. While they all underestimated the academic rigor of the University and had a difficult time adjusting to coursework, the relational connections came much more easily, leading them to focus on the social more than the scholastic.

Even though the academic goals as originally stated were not attained, I remain optimistic about the future of the SANKOFA Living Learning Community. As we continue to adjust the initiative through subsequent cycles, I believe we can improve the retention numbers of freshman African American students through this program.

Implications and Recommendations

Prior research at other collegiate institutions provide positive assessment results of improvement efforts focused on a collaborative partnership between university departments in implementing living learning communities. Although the advancement effort at UNC Asheville may help to inform practices at other universities, every institution has a unique subset of students with varying needs. For that reason, my focus for implications of the improvement effort and recommendations for future practice remain focused on efforts at UNC Asheville.

As reiterated within this paper, African American students who drop out of school during or after their freshman year of college are in disadvantaged positions, both socially and economically. Recognizing the negative consequences of dropping out of university during the

first year of college, I sought to address this problem by implementing a Living Learning Community specifically for African American students, called SANKOFA. This community was designed to increase connectedness, academic self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging for these students in a higher education environment. The members of the Implementation Team closely monitored student attendance, engagement on campus, and grades. They engaged with students through weekly meetings, educational programs, as well as through group and individual interviews. Members of the implementation team intervened based on the individual needs of students, as well as the needs of the collective community, often linking students to support structures offered within the University environment as needed throughout the semester.

Policy implications for UNC Asheville. Despite the fact that this intervention focused on improvement of belongingness for African American freshman students through programmatic means, the living learning community also helped me to identify two institutional policy implications. Currently, only freshman students can enroll in first year experience courses at UNC Asheville. However, throughout the semester, having positive peer role models in class with the SANKOFA students seemed to be lacking. In addition, recruitment of African American students to UNC Asheville and specifically to the SANKOFA program was in question throughout the semester. In other words, recruitment of the students who would most desire to be a part of the program and of those who would most benefit from the program is in question. Therefore, I recommend two policy options for consideration by UNC Asheville to be more proactive in making the SANKOFA program more successful. The suggested policy options are provided below:

The first recommendation is the inclusion of sophomore, and more senior-level students in the SANKOFA course. Several students expressed interest in the class this fall semester but

were unable to participate due to the restrictions in place. The implementation team has discussed that the majority of students would still be SANKOFA members, but a select number of slots would be reserved for sophomore or higher students to take part. The belief behind this shift lies in the lack of role modeling in this year's common course. Perhaps, having students who have a strong desire to learn, who have been retained into at least their sophomore year, and who have maintained a strong enough GPA to remain at UNC Asheville, would guide the SANKOFA students both directly and indirectly toward better practices, allowing them to succeed in not only this course, but in others.

The second policy recommendation relates to marketing the SANKOFA community appropriately, as well as the recruitment of the appropriate freshman to the LLC who would benefit most from the programs offered. In this year's cohort, the implementation team learned that two of the students really did not have a desire to be in college but were forced to do so by their families. Two others of the students, while wanting to attend a four-year institution, desired majors that UNC Asheville does not offer.

For last year's cohort, we cast a wide net in enlisting as many students as possible to the program. However, the results of this year's group suggest that strategy was not wise. The implementation team has engaged in strategic conversations with our Admissions staff and have prepared a recruitment plan accordingly. In addition, the leadership group has adjusted the SANKOFA application to include questions that will delve more deeply into the desire of the student to be a part of the community. Our hopes are that such shifts in policy will work together to improve upon the future SANKOFA cohorts.

Impact on Belongingness

Surprisingly, on the initial survey provided to students within the first two weeks of classes, SANKOFA students on average, believed they belonged in the collegiate classroom, but

now in the social fabric of the institution. Students rated themselves in belongingness on average as agreeing they belonged academically at UNC Asheville. This self-evaluation led me to believe that students could have been over-confident in their belongingness belief in the collegiate classroom given their overall sub-par semester performance

The possible explanation for the strong reports regarding academic self-efficacy can be somewhat explained because four of the students transferred over 30 hours of early college credits into the University from community colleges. In addition, two of the students transferred at least four credits for completion of advanced placement courses fulfilled during their high school tenure. Perhaps their previous experience with difficult classes led them to believe their transition to collegiate coursework would be seamless.

Unfortunately, the student's success pre-college did not translate to the same type of academic achievement in the college classroom. Many of the students seemed surprised and saddened by their inability to perform effectively once beginning their tenure at UNC Asheville. In the facilitated focus group, several students reported they had previously never had to study, nor prepare for exams or assignments, and they were shocked at the difference in their freshman classes regarding the amount of preparation necessary to achieve only average grades.

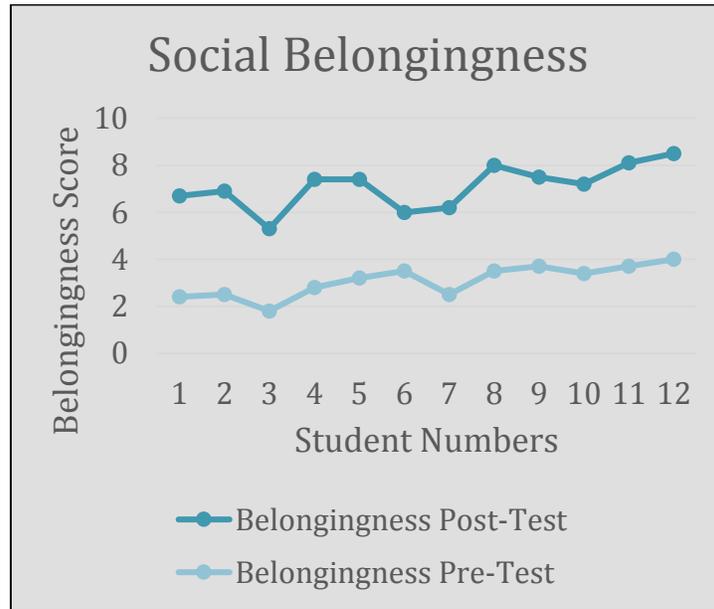
The students continued to perform poorly regarding grades, for the most part, throughout the semester. This poor performance took place even though resources and programs regarding study skills and time management were facilitated early in the semester to provide the skill development necessary for heightened academic performance.

Surprisingly, when the students completed the same survey at the end of the semester, the overall sense of belongingness in the classroom improved slightly, even though their grades did not exhibit success. Perhaps the student's knowledge of their inadequacies throughout the

semester allowed them to take advantage of the resources to improve. While their commitment to skill development was too late to make an academic impact, the students likely saw enough improvement at the end of the semester to believe they could perform at higher levels in the future. In addition, in interviews with faculty and staff, most made accommodations to provide support through office hours and individualized tutoring to assist the students to pass their courses. In the focus group, many of them admitted they had begun to take their classes seriously and utilized resources much too late in the semester to achieve the grades they desired. Even so, they finished the semester with a sense of confidence in their ability to make the grades necessary to remain at UNC Asheville.

The biggest improvement in the post-test was in the student's social belongingness (see Figure 8 below). Even those students who did not return to the institution in the spring semester reported strong connections to the institution and to others on campus outside the classroom. This success can be attributed to the cohesion developed by the students to one another through living on the same hall and participating in activities together regularly. SANKOFA students reported in the focus groups that without SANKOFA many of them would not have stayed at UNC Asheville, but because of the support and resources received from the group, they believed they could overcome struggles they faced.

FIGURE 8
Pre/Post Test Scores for Social Belongingness



Impact on Academic Self-Efficacy

One of the predominant benefits of living learning communities demonstrated in the research is the improvement of the participants’ belief that they can perform successfully in the classroom. Improving upon this belief was a predominant goal of the SANKOFA Living Learning Community given that one of the main reasons African American students are not retained past their freshman year of college is because they do not see themselves as fitting in to the collegiate classroom (Reid, 2013).

Both the design and implementation teams assumed that students would indicate their lack of confidence in their ability to achieve with college coursework on the first iteration of the survey. However, we were surprised to learn that students saw themselves as belonging in the university classroom. These self-reported results were surprising to us, especially after we received the first academic reports two weeks into the semester, illustrating that the positive student views of themselves were not demonstrated by their performance.

Again, the implementation team was alarmed when the poor execution was not due to the students engaging with great effort. In other words, we assumed the students were trying, but not achieving results. Instead, we found the students were rarely attending class, and when attending, did not seem engaged. There were a couple of exceptions; however overall these behaviors were consistent across the cohort.

One explanation for the difference between student perceptions and performance could have been because some of these students had succeeded in high school, in many cases completing early college classes or gaining advanced placement course credit that transferred to UNC Asheville. Having such success in high school could have led these students to believe that a four-year university would not be much more difficult. In the facilitated focus group, several students indicated they had not needed to engage in a lot of effort to perform well in high school. While they expected college to be more difficult, they did not anticipate the amount of work necessary, nor the amount of independence given in completing their course assignments. Many students reported they were surprised to learn that faculty often did not take attendance, and that their first projects or tests to be graded would not come until almost a month into the semester.

They claimed guidance was provided regularly in completing assignments and in performing well on tests in their previous academic settings and they were not prepared to navigate these components of college life on their own. Even though the implementation team members told them both collectively and individually they would need to adjust in creating new academic habits, the reality of the shift did not connect with them until they began receiving poor grades, and by then their confidence had faltered.

The good news is that over the course of the fall semester, through individual meetings, and collective trainings, the students began to improve. They saw themselves getting better

grades even though overall, they were still not satisfactory. The SANKOFA students began to use calendar systems. The members of the implementation team checked the student's time management tools regularly to determine if the processes used were individually working for the students. If the tools were not of benefit, adjustments were recommended to each SANKOFA member, in hopes the tools would continue to benefit them.

At the end of the semester, the second iteration of the survey again provided surprising results for the implementation team. We had assumed the student's results regarding academic self-efficacy would be lower than their first responses because they had seemed to overshoot their abilities initially and their grades had proven to be humbling for them. However, the students' results demonstrated they believed more than in the beginning of the semester that they belonged in the collegiate classroom. While the results did not come to fruition in the ways we had hoped, their belief that they belonged in university courses did increase.

Overall Impact

Even given the negative grade outcomes for the SANKOFA students at the end of the fall 2018 semester, both the surveys and the qualitative data collected demonstrate that the improvement initiative had an overall positive effect both on the cohort sense of belongingness to UNC Asheville, as well as to the student's academic self-efficacy. One explanation for the lack of success in the classroom could be that the treatments offered took more time to have an impact on the students' behavior than the implementation team anticipated. Perhaps as we continue to study, adjust and improve, we will see greater improvements overall in the spring 2019 semester.

By the end of the fall 2018 term, student academic grade reports had all seen progress except for the one student who did not pass any classes. Even the students with passing scores

who did not return for the spring semester demonstrated improvement. In addition, students were attending class more regularly and performing better on academic assignments. During their individual interviews close to the end of the term, while stressed over the upcoming final grades, they acknowledged growing confidence in their abilities to manage tasks and classes.

One aspect of the program maintained positive results from the beginning of the semester until the end of the term. The SANKOFA program provided the students both individually and collectively a sense of social connectivity and cohesion. This unity was demonstrated most effectively during the facilitation of the focus group. The students consistently stated having others who were like them living alongside them allowed them to feel connected and created an identity within the group. They were all going through the same things together at the same time and they found camaraderie through these shared experiences.

This camaraderie and friendship allowed them to overcome some of their most challenging experiences. In the focus group, each student was able to share discriminatory behavior experienced either in the classroom or in social situations. Being able to discuss these situations with one another as well as with members of the implementation team provided what they described as a release as well as a valued support system. Several of the students stated that if they had endured the discrimination on their own, they might have decided to leave at the end of the semester. Instead, on the final survey 10 of the 12 student participants stated they planned to graduate from UNC Asheville. The two who said they would not return are no longer present.

The friendship of the group did create some problems. From the beginning, SANKOFA participants were consistently enjoying each other so much that staying up and talking until 2am was a regular occurrence. Admittedly, their companionship would inhibit their desire to study in the evenings and they would end up passing on their work in favor of having fun. However,

their relationships were contagious to other students. While the implementation team was originally concerned about such a group isolating themselves, this cohort did the opposite. Their connectedness drew others to them, and it was common for people from other halls to engage with the SANKOFA group in their living spaces.

Lessons for Implementation

The SANKOFA Living Learning Community provided a collaborative educational environment for 12 African American freshmen students. This 16-week improvement cycle coincided with the beginning of the 2018-19 school year and concluded prior to the end of the first semester. Constraints during this implementation included a compressed timeline for data collection and an abbreviated PDSA cycle.

The 16-week improvement cycle was designed to coincide with my research timeline, which meant that analysis of the data collected would be constrained into a short time frame. The challenge was in analyzing both the qualitative and quantitative data, which included end of the semester grades, in ways that made sense holistically. Additionally, this improvement initiative contained several varied components as part of one PDSA cycle within the 16-week program. The number of programs needing assessment resulted in a compressed timeline between the administration of student surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. The reduced time between administrations may have not allowed enough of an interval for appropriate changes to occur and may have impacted the reliability of responses for these assessments.

Conducting implementation team meetings every week was ambitious and may have resulted in lower member attendance and reduced participation during the meetings. A recommendation for future implementations would be to make the improvement cycle duration

longer to capture the opportunity for student improvement and change and to allow more time between iterations. This also would provide more time for data analysis and more of an opportunity to implement needed adjustments for the improvement initiative without feeling rushed in decision making.

During the first individual interviews, we discovered that SANKOFA students were not attending their Living Learning Community course on a regular basis, putting them quickly behind in the academic course that was supposed to be of the most assistance to them. This discrepancy may have been a result of insufficient emphasis on attendance during orientation as well as the implementation team believing this was not an issue needing emphasis. A recommendation for future implementation would be to incorporate detailed guidelines for class expectations as well as for collegiate course conduct and attendance.

In several of the AVID for Higher Education courses, a Student Affairs representative co-teaches the freshman seminar course in collaboration with the faculty member. These courses have received positive assessment from both students and faculty who participate in this blended model. Such a collaboration allows the staff member to train students regarding transition issues such as note taking, time management, communicating with faculty, and other necessary skills to be successful in college, while the faculty member focuses on the primary course material. For the future, the implementation team believes this would be a good method to use and plans to move forward with enhancing the course through this collaborative model.

To allow for more preparation, the implementation team would also like to plan for a pre-orientation experience for both the students and the parents of at least a day prior to all freshman arriving at UNC Asheville. Such an experience would allow for the opportunity to explain

expectations and advantages of the SANKOFA, as well as to provide more detailed explanations to parents and to share with them how they can be most supportive of their student.

The course was scheduled for 8 am three days a week, under the assumption that students were accustomed to this early timeframe since they were coming immediately from the high school environment. However, we found that many of the students were early college participants, which meant that prior to coming to college several of them did not begin class each day in high school until 10 am. Therefore, attending class so early was an adjustment many of the students were not prepared to make at the beginning of their college careers.

The sustainability of this improvement initiative is dependent on the number of students who are willing to participate. Interested students must see benefits from their engagement with this Living Learning Community. In order to implement this program on a larger scale, (this year's cohort was 12 students), we must be able to demonstrate that student engagement creates a strong gateway to retention into the sophomore year, and a greater likelihood for graduation. With limited data at this point, continuing to engage and improve the SANKOFA initiative could result in increased student participation and hopefully stronger retention numbers for African American students at UNC Asheville.

The plans for expansion of this initiative are to add three incoming freshmen students each year. This would result in approximately 24 students in SANKOFA optimally each year. If students exit the program prior to graduation, additional students previously identified by the design team will be integrated into the Living Learning Community. As the program progresses, the Implementation Team hopes to continue to engage SANKOFA students in other ways after their freshmen year is completed and throughout their time at UNC Asheville. Ultimately, students will only cycle out of the program upon graduation.

The implementation team has created a SANKOFA cohort model that would ask students to develop their leadership skills by participating in different positions and programs starting during their first year, but not ending until graduation (see Appendix G). Former SANKOFA participants can serve as Resident Assistants the following year. The possibility also exists to have peer mentors serving as assistants in the common course. As the years progress, former SANKOFA students will continue to meet as cohorts and maintain contact with one another and with involved faculty and staff.

Lessons for Leadership

I established the ultimate aim of increasing the freshman retention of African American students at UNC Asheville. We were privileged in this improvement initiative to have a group of team members who were highly invested in this project and who provided numerous insights as participants on the Implementation Team. Having such strong investment from all involved contributed to the progression of the initiative. The design team meetings, implementation team meetings, and decision making were very important in establishing the why, what, and how of the Living Learning Community implementation and for establishing communication between me and the program participants. Langley et al.'s (2009) Model for Improvement takes a team approach to the improvement process by establishing a team comprised of key individuals in an organization that will help develop and guide improvement initiatives.

Another advantage of my university role was the ability to easily assemble both a design team and an implementation team with key professionals who provided expertise in varied and critical areas and were also highly invested in the success of the program. This expertise and investment contributed to the swift productivity of the team, which operated with leadership shared equally among the team members. This distributed leadership approach, as Northouse

(2013) explains, “involves the sharing of influence by team members” (p. 365), who individually step out to lead when needed and, when appropriate, step back to allow others to lead. In most cases, I facilitated the work of the design and implementation teams and relied on team members to make complex decisions on their own, as well as jointly, within the group. Northouse (2013) describes that leadership is not a linear, one-way event, but rather an interactive event.

I established the ultimate aim of reducing freshman dropouts for African American students at the University of North Carolina Asheville through a living learning community called SANKOFA. I worked closely with other invested leaders on campus within their respective University divisions and we were all based in the environment where the disquisition improvement initiative was implemented. I facilitated routine meetings with both the design and implementation teams. Having a common setting to meet when necessary, even when impromptu discussions were needed was an incredible advantage. While all team members were incredibly busy and could not be at every meeting, their involvement levels were high, and this created advantages in the implementation of SANKOFA. Leading the improvement initiative from within increased the ability in assessing fidelity of implementation and enhanced information exchange between me and the program participants. A high amount of personal interactions with me implementation team members, and program participants may have positively impacted the emotional investment of all involved in this program. The emotional investment or the human side of change can be more heavily impacted by understanding how individuals interact with each other in a system (Langley et al., 2009).

Advantages also existed specific to my and other implementation team members’ leadership roles; these roles provided the implementation team a broader perspective when addressing student needs. Awareness of and access to University and community supports were

some of the most evident and impactful of these advantages. Being at a small higher education institution was also beneficial, because it increased the connectedness and communication with higher-level administrators at our institution such as the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, the Provost, and the Chancellor. Having communication pathways open with these critical parties and having their full support of the initiative allowed the implementation team to act more freely when needed. The challenge with such high-level administrator involvement lies in maintaining appropriate communication so they feel abreast of how the program is progressing throughout the improvement cycle.

The design team meetings, implementation team meetings, and program development were very important in establishing the why, what, and how of the SANKOFA Living Learning Community program implementation and for establishing communication between me and the program participants. Langley et al.'s (2009) Model for Improvement takes a team approach to the improvement process by establishing a team comprised of key individuals in an organization that will help develop and guide improvement initiatives.

Lessons for Social Justice

Our culture has become inundated with injustices despite the efforts of many throughout United States history to abolish such inequities. Higher education institutions are symbolic of how society reacts on a grand scale regarding issues of discriminatory practice. Unfortunately, while Universities are viewed as the champions regarding social justice issues, these institutions can be the very purveyors of the discriminatory practices they seem to fight against so desperately. Despite constant and varied improvement efforts, educational institutions “continue to fall far short in attempts to provide quality education for students of African descent and other so-called minority and poor children in the United States” (Lomotey, 2013, p. 149).

Theoharis (2007) contends that “Marginalized students do not receive the education they deserve unless purposeful steps are taken to change schools on their behalf with both equity and justice consciously in mind” (p. 250). This improvement initiative took purposeful steps to ensure that freshman African American students participating in the SANKOFA Living Learning Community received an enhanced educational experience that empowered them to persist through their freshman year and return for the sophomore session. The steps taken directly addressed both the social and academic aspects required to achieve a successful environment and focused on equitable, individualized interventions for students throughout the process.

Paulo Freire (2018) states, “It is not systematic education which somehow molds society, but, on the contrary, society which, according to its particular structure, shapes education in relation to the ends and interests of those who control the power in that society” (p. 225). This statement has become evident throughout the process of this improvement initiative. While numerous support systems were created to protect against the systemic oppression commonly found in predominantly white institutions, this program could not shield the SANKOFA students from prevalent micro-aggressions and discriminatory practices that have become common practice by well-intended white members of the UNC Asheville community.

For example, during the focus group facilitation several students provided examples of micro-aggressions they had experienced. One student shared that he was the only African American student in his computer science class. The faculty member seemed to ask him regularly if he was doing ok with the material during class, while he never seemed to ask that of the other classmates.

Another student shared an experience they had on their way to class one day. They were running late and were trying to pass through two white male students who were walking more

slowly. They asked to pass through a couple of times and the two students did not comply. When he moved between them, he was called an extremely derogatory term by one of the students.

As further cycles of the improvement initiative are facilitated, considering productive methods to dismantle the overall culture of racially discriminatory practices within UNC Asheville will be critical to the ability of the institution to retain African American students at higher levels on a consistent basis. While the SANKOFA Living Learning Community can be a productive and supportive environment for students to be successful in their freshmen year, fighting against systemic oppression for three additional years without the overwhelming support received when they first arrived at UNC Asheville could prove overwhelming and debilitating.

While increasing the number of students each year to an optimal number of 24 will allow the program to become integrated into the fabric of the institution, providing education regarding teaching to diverse populations could also prove helpful for the future removal of systemic racism within the institution.

Limitations of the Improvement Initiative

Several limitations existed within the improvement initiative. Addressing some of these restrictions can improve with the appropriate focus, while others may be part of the natural framework of the institution and more difficult to overcome.

1. The number of African American freshmen students available to participate in the SANKOFA program at UNC Asheville is limited. Because of this issue, achieving a critical mass to join in the improvement initiative was a challenge. The studied group this fall was 12 students. A cohort of 24, twice the amount of the previous group, would be optimal. Having more students involved would

provide the opportunity for more relationship development and for a greater diversity of opinions to be processed. A larger group of students also would allow for more cohesion and accountability.

2. The time and energy investment of both faculty and staff was more intense than originally anticipated. Even though those involved knew the commitment would be great, the extra energy needed proved more noticeable because of the seeming lack of success of the students academically. Their inability to demonstrate positive performance in the classroom caused more meetings and adjustments than had been planned. When those adjustments only moderately improved results, the individual improvement team members and the group as a whole became disheartened. The belief is that with the future adjustments planned, the time investment will prove to be welcome as opposed to oppressive.
3. A limitation of this year's cohort was their lack of investment. In the focus group, many of the SANKOFA members admitted that while the University had placed a great deal of time and energy providing them with resources and support, they had not reciprocated with the same level of energy. With some of the adjustments for improvement listed below in the recommendations section, the opportunity exists for equal investment for implementation team members and student participants, creating greater prospects for success in the classroom and at the University as a whole.
4. The implementation team misjudged the basic skill level of the incoming SANKOFA students. For example, lack of rudimentary study and time management abilities had both the students and the faculty and staff behind before

the semester began. Once the skill levels of the students in these areas became evident, the semester was already two weeks old. One idea to improve upon this limitation is a pre-orientation program for the SANKOFA cohort where such skill development would be part of the program. This proposal for improvement is explained further in the recommendations section below.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

While the results of the improvement initiative regarding student grades and academic performance were underwhelming, several aspects of the SANKOFA program exhibited reason for optimism regarding future cohorts. The implementation team has learned what aspects of the program were beneficial and which ones need tweaking or revamping. UNC Asheville will continue the SANKOFA program for the future and will make ongoing adjustments in the improvement cycle as needed. Below are some recommendations for all educational leaders considering the creation of a program similar to SANKOFA.

In the future SANKOFA common course, a student affairs staff person who is a member of the implementation team will co-teach the class with the academic faculty member. This partnership will allow the student affairs professional to facilitate one of the three days of class per week. During that time, they will address common transition issues for freshman, as well as those matters that may be specific to African American students at predominantly white institutions.

Not only will this collaboration provide the ability to address topics specific to becoming a successful college student, but it will also demonstrate unity between faculty and staff members with the common goal of the individual SANKOFA student's success as their focus.

Creating a pre-orientation program that is required for all SANKOFA participants will

provide the opportunity for these students to have a week together with the implementation team prior to the beginning of the semester and before other students arrive on campus. During this week, team building, group development, and facilitated expectations will be among the topics covered. This will allow for the students and implementation team members to have developed trust and create bonds prior to classes beginning. In addition, the pre-orientation program will have a day where parents and family members will be present so they can learn what the expectations are of their students, and how they can best support them. Planning for such a program has begun for fall 2019.

In the current SANKOFA model, all of the activities provided are strongly encouraged, but not mandatory (except for those activities associated with course expectations). Since the group has developed such camaraderie and desire to stay together, this semester we have created a program point system, where SANKOFA students must participate in a certain number of activities to remain in the cohort and in their current living arrangement (See Appendix G). The plan for the incoming cohort is to create a social contract with the same type of programmatic listings as last semester. This contract will be processed in depth during the Pre-Rendezblue experience, so expectations are clear from the program's beginning. In addition, discussing group responsibility will set the stage for better participation and a more holistic experience.

A stronger collaboration with our Admissions department is a necessity as we move forward with the SANKOFA program. Ensuring that we are marketing to the appropriate students and doing so in a timely and effective manner can either set the program and the students up for success or for failure. This past year, a very broad marketing strategy was used to solicit as many applications as possible. In collaboration with the SANKOFA Implementation Team, Admissions has created an email plan with individualized templates that have already

began distribution and will continue through the summer.

The implementation team believes that our recruitment should be more directed and selective, with the hopes that the students who commit to the SANKOFA program will be the ones best able to utilize resources more effectively. All students who participate in SANKOFA complete an application to become part of the community. The application poses questions regarding their interest and need for such a program. This year we have created a rubric for the application process based on our experiences from this past year to assist the implementation team in selecting participants.

We also plan to have a visible presence at our orientation sessions this summer to solicit more interest and to have in-person conversations with possible applicants. We will be hosting a reception during our Orientation sessions for those students who are interested as well as their family members.

Conclusion

Living Learning Communities have demonstrated great potential in assisting African American students in developing the skills needed to succeed academically and socially through their freshmen year in college. By experiencing focused education in a supportive, but challenging environment, students can gain academic self-efficacy, social integration, and a sense of belonging to their institution. Paulo Friere (2018) said, “Why not establish an intimate connection between knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experiences of these students as individuals?”

By instituting its’ own Living Learning Community called SANKOFA in fall 2018, UNC Asheville provided an incredible opportunity to analyze successful and not so promising aspects

of the program, plan positive changes during the coming academic year, and make improvements for the SANKOFA 2019, cohort 2. Ultimately, success of the program will be determined by the positive completion of the freshman year and retention of these students into their sophomore campaign at the University, leading to the greater likelihood of their graduation.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group and Individual Interview Questions

Description of Focus Group Order:

After handing out consent and questionnaire forms, the researcher will introduce themselves and will explain the purpose of the study. After the introduction, the researcher will ensure everyone consents with recording their views and once everyone agrees, the recording will start.

Participants are asked to introduce themselves and the major that they are in. After the introductions, the following questions will be asked verbatim:

1. Overall Sense of Campus Climate. · Do you feel a sense of belonging on campus? Why or why not?
2. Promoting Diversity. · Do you feel valued as an African American on campus? Are you treated with respect and equality?
3. Discrimination. · Is discrimination an issue at UNC Asheville? If so, where have you experienced it? What have you experienced?
4. University Support of Diversity. · Do you feel the university is supportive of racial diversity? Explain.
5. Students Prepared to Relate to Diversity. · Have your experiences at UNC Asheville improved your ability to relate more effectively to different groups of people?
6. Institutional Support for Diversity. · Do you think this university supports diversity in general (e.g., within programs, centers, resources offered, student population, faculty, or resources to support your own group)? Why? How?
7. Involvement and Sense of Belonging to the Institution. · Are you involved in student organization(s)? What are they? · Do you feel you fit in at UNC Asheville
8. Diversity in Colleges and Curriculum. · What is your major? Do you believe your department offers a curriculum that values diversity? Does the major you are in at UNCA reflect the value of diversity in their curriculum?
9. Classroom Experience. · Are you an active participant in your classrooms? Do you always feel comfortable in your classes and within your major to voice your opinion?
10. Faculty and Diversity. · Do you believe the current faculty reflects the diversity of the student population? Do you think it matters to minority students whether faculty represent their racial/ethnic background? If so, how does it make a difference? · Do you feel the faculty are supportive of your academic achievement? Do you feel you can connect to your professors? Why? · faculty act as mentors to you?

11. UNC Asheville is “welcoming/unwelcoming.” · Have you had a welcoming or unwelcoming experience so far? Why do you feel the community here is welcoming/or unwelcoming?

12. UNC Asheville is “friendly/unfriendly.” · Do you believe UNCA is generally a friendly or unfriendly environment? Explain.

13. Barriers students face. · What is the major barrier you face in pursuing higher education? · What is the major source of support in pursuing higher education?

14. Financial Aid. · How do you pay for tuition? Has it been difficult for you to pay your tuition? How has your experience been with financial aid?

15. Emotional Support. · Do you feel you can get emotional support on campus? Do you feel you can seek emotional support informally from faculty, staff or peers in the campus community? Explain.

The students will be free to respond or skip each question and to end the interview when they wanted.

APPENDIX B

Western Carolina University

Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: A strategy for first year African American student success and retention at UNC Asheville

Principal Investigator: Dr. Kofi Lomotey, Bardo Distinguished Professor, Department of Human Services and Educational Leadership

Description and Purpose of the Research: African American students consistently leave college prior to the completion of their freshman year. Numerous factors including historical and systemic oppression, lack of academic preparation, problematic in-college factors, and financial challenges are among the obstacles African American students must overcome to be successful. Research demonstrates that student mentoring programs can assist these students by linking them with an upper-class male or female student peer, so they are retained into their sophomore year, providing a greater likelihood of their ultimate graduation. This project will incorporate a mentoring program at UNC Asheville to determine if student participation results in their retention and further success.

What you will be asked to do: You are being asked to participate in a peer mentoring program where you will be partnered with a sophomore or higher African American student. They will meet with you once a week for the first 8 weeks of the fall semester and then bi-weekly for the remainder of the year. These meetings will take place conveniently around your other scheduled time commitments. During these meetings, you and your peer mentor will discuss academic, social, or emotional issues, which meet your comfort and needs. These meetings will be prepared ahead of time and your mentor will have an agenda for each meeting.

In addition, you will be asked to take part in two surveys, two focus group and may possibly be interviewed individually to get information regarding your experiences in the mentoring program and at UNC Asheville in general. The surveys should take approximately 30 minutes each to complete, the focus groups will be 90 minutes each. Individual interviews will be 30 minutes each.

Risks and Discomforts: There are no anticipated risks from participating in this research.

Benefits: Students will be given guidance and direction regarding academic, social, and emotional aspects of being successful as a freshman in college. Hopefully, through this guidance, students will

gain confidence, as well as knowledge allowing them to understand how to navigate their first year effectively. Our American society places a great deal of value on a college education.

Research states that those who hold a bachelor's degree have much greater opportunity for obtaining gainful employment, elevating themselves out of poverty, and becoming effective citizens. When African American students navigate their freshman year effectively, their chances of graduating become much greater.

I will also be happy to share a copy of the results with you when the study is finished.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security: Participant data will be **confidential** (no identifiers collected; not even the researcher can match participant with his/her data).

Data will be kept confidential / secure using a coding system, secure storage, using summary data from a whole group, and by use of pseudonyms for direct quotes. Data will be shared/presented to university stakeholders, published in journal articles and as information towards the creation of a doctoral disquisition.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on your grades or academic standing. If you wish to withdraw at any time, please let me know through email at mrfox@unca.edu.

Contact Information: For questions about this study, please contact Melanie Fox at (828)251-6700 or through email at mrfox@unca.edu. You may also contact Dr. Kofi Lomotey, the principal investigator and faculty advisor for this project, at (828)227-3323, or through email at klomotey@wcu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you may contact the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Administration by calling 828-227-7212 or emailing irb@wcu.edu.

I understand what is expected of me if I participate in this research study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and understand that participation is voluntary. My signature shows that I agree to participate and am at least 18 years old.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the results, once the study has been completed, please write your email address (as legibly as possible) here:

I do or do not give my permission to the investigators to quote me directly in their research.

The investigators may or may not digitally record this interview.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

UNC Asheville SANKOFA Student Survey

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a survey of SANKOFA students regarding your experience at UNC Asheville. The results of the survey will provide important information about our climate and will enable us to improve the environment for working and learning on our campus.

Procedures

Your participation and responses are confidential. Please answer the questions as openly and honestly as possible. You may skip certain questions. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. Any comments provided by participants are also separated at submission so that comments are not attributed to any demographic characteristics. Quotes from submitted comments will also be used throughout the report to give “voice” to the quantitative data.

Your confidential identification number: _____

Please check the category that describes your gender identity best.

- Cisgender Man (denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex)
- Cisgender Woman denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex)
- Transgender
- Other Non-Conforming Gender Identity

What year are you registered for academically?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Please check the category that describes your race/ethnicity best (you may select more than one option).

- African American of Black
- Latinx or Hispanic
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- Asian
- White
- Other

Please check the category that describes your sexual orientation best.

- Heterosexual
- Lesbian or gay
- Bisexual
- Questioning
- Asexual
- Queer
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Please rate your degree of agreement with the following statement: The UNC Asheville climate is one that values the contributions of administrators, faculty, staff, and students from diverse backgrounds.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please rate your degree of agreement with the following statement: The atmosphere of diversity and inclusion helps me to feel like I am a valued member of the campus community.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please rate your degree of agreement with the following statement: The campus atmosphere at UNC Asheville allows me to be productive in all aspects of college life.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please rate your degree of agreement with the following statement: Overall, diversity and inclusion are appreciated on campus at UNC Asheville.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I have voluntarily participated in diversity related programs at UNC Asheville.

- None
- A few
- Many

Please rate the following statement with 0 being low and 100 being high: In my experience at UNC Asheville, members of the following groups express zero tolerance for harassment, bullying, and/or intimidation on the UNC Asheville campus from.

- _____ Administrators
- _____ Faculty
- _____ Staff
- _____ Students

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

Please rate your degree of confidence in the following statement: If I were to report a concern of unfair and inequitable treatment I believe it would be adequately addressed.

- Extremely adequate
- Moderately adequate
- Slightly adequate
- Neither adequate nor inadequate
- Slightly inadequate
- Moderately inadequate
- Extremely inadequate

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement for the different members of the UNC Asheville community listed below: I hear discriminatory comments made by members of the following group: 0 equates to never and 100 equates to daily.

- _____ Administrators
- _____ Faculty
- _____ Staff
- _____ Students

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements provided below.

How satisfied are you with the level of commitment to diversity and inclusion on campus?

- Extremely satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Slightly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Slightly dissatisfied
- Moderately dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

I have considered attending school elsewhere or leaving school all together because I don't believe I belong here.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

I believe I belong and can thrive in the classroom here at UNC Asheville:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

I am comfortable participating in class.

- Extremely comfortable
- Moderately comfortable
- Slightly comfortable
- Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- Slightly uncomfortable
- Moderately uncomfortable
- Extremely uncomfortable

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

I believe that faculty have equal expectations of me compared to students from other racial and ethnic backgrounds.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

My fellow students, regardless of race or ethnicity, are committed to providing an inclusive, anti-racist learning and working environment.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

I believe I belong and can thrive socially here at UNC Asheville:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide explanations regarding your response to the previous question below:

Do you experience any financial hardship at UNC Asheville?

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes to the above question, please respond below to the following reasons why you may experience financial hardship.

- Unable to purchase books
- Unable to participate in events with friends
- Other

Have you observed or personally been made aware of any conduct directed toward a person or group of people on campus that you believe has created an exclusionary (e.g., shunned, ignored), intimidating, offensive and/or or hostile (harassing) working or learning environment?

- Yes
- No

If you answered "yes" to the above question, please share below what you believe was the basis for this conduct.

Please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements.

I feel valued by faculty in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>						
I feel valued by other students in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>						
I believe faculty are genuinely concerned with my welfare.	<input type="radio"/>						
I believe staff are genuinely concerned with my welfare.	<input type="radio"/>						
I perceive racial/ethnic tension in the classroom.	<input type="radio"/>						
I perceive racial/ethnic tension in social situations.	<input type="radio"/>						
I believe the campus climate encourages free and open discussion of difficult topics.	<input type="radio"/>						
I feel confident in my ability to succeed academically at UNC Asheville.	<input type="radio"/>						
I feel confident in my ability to achieve socially at UNC Asheville.	<input type="radio"/>						

In your judgment, how strongly do you agree that each of the following would positively affect the climate on campus?

Provide diversity training for all students.	<input type="radio"/>						
Provide diversity training for all staff.	<input type="radio"/>						
Provide diversity training for all faculty.	<input type="radio"/>						
Increase the diversity of faculty and staff.	<input type="radio"/>						
Increase the diversity of the student body.	<input type="radio"/>						
Increase the opportunity for cross cultural dialogue among students.	<input type="radio"/>						
Incorporate issues of diversity and cross-cultural competence in the curriculum.	<input type="radio"/>						
Provide more opportunities for intentional mentorships.	<input type="radio"/>						
Provide more programs specifically geared towards the academic success of African American students.	<input type="radio"/>						

This survey has asked you to reflect upon issues related to your experiences at UNC Asheville and in SANKOFA, as an underrepresented student. If you would like to elaborate upon any of your survey responses, further describe your experiences, or offer additional thoughts about these issues and ways that the college might improve the climate, we encourage you to do so in the space provided below.

Thank you for your participation in this survey. The results will be compiled and presented in a report to campus administrators to better assist in serving our campus population. This report will also be sent to everyone who was asked to complete the survey.

If you have any questions, please contact Melanie Fox, at mrfox@unca.edu.

APPENDIX D

Project Name: First Year African American Students: At the University of North Carolina Asheville: A Strategy for Retention and Success

Start Date: June 2018

End Date: January 2019

What Are We Trying To Accomplish?

General Description

Implement a Living Learning Community for African American freshmen students to improve retention from the first to second year of college.

Student Impact

Improve student sense of belongingness both in the academic and social arenas

Improvement Objectives

- Improve the overall academic performance of freshman African American student
- Create a support system of faculty and staff to facilitate programs and resources beneficial to the individual students
- Increase the sense of community for freshman African American students

Estimated UNC Asheville Impact

- UNCA will increase the retention of African American students from their freshman to sophomore year
- Grade point averages and student involvement will improve

What Changes Can We Make That Will Result In Improvement?

- Provide educational and programmatic opportunities for SANKOFA LLC members
- Increase faculty and staff support systems for SANKOFA
- Create and facilitate a common course for all SANKOFA students

PDSA Cycles

PDSA No.	Objective of Initial Cycles
1	Validate baseline data – Acquired from meeting with the improvement team
2	Implement SANKOFA Living Learning Community
3	Implement adjustments for the subsequent cohorts

The Improvement Team

Multicultural Student Programs Director

Multicultural Student Programs Assistant Director

Faculty member for SANKOFA common course

Director of Residential Education

Community Director

Resident Assistant

Review Schedule

Review program information on a semester basis

Evaluate student outcomes on a semester basis

Evaluate adjustments on a semester basis

Meet as an improvement team bi-weekly

How Will We Know a Change is an Improvement?

Objective	Measure	Goals
Increase the academic sense of belonging for African American freshman students	Utilize the Belongingness survey to determine pre and post-test attitudes in the classroom, focus groups	Increase student scores on the survey by a difference of 2
Increase the social sense of belonging for African American freshman students	Utilize the Belongingness survey to determine pre and post-test attitudes in the classroom, focus groups and grades	Increase student scores on the survey by a difference of 2

APPENDIX E

Sankofa Cohort Overview

Potential Applicant Timeline

- February
 - Multicultural Student Weekend
- June/July
 - Embark Orientation
- August
 - Sankofa Pre-Rendezblue
- General
 - Facebook Live Event - helps engage, interested students can ask questions, etc.
 - OMA Interviews with 2-3 Sankofa students (can be sent out in admissions communication plan)

Beginning with August 2019:

YEAR 1 (August - July)

- Living Learning Community
- Fall Semester (August - December)
 - Course - Thinking From the Margins
 - (Potential Alternative Fall Break)
- Spring Semester (January - May)
 - Course - TBD
 - Prepare for Embark support
 - March
 - Sankofa Spring Break
 - April
- Summer (May - July)
 - Campus Job or Internship Placement
 - Embark support (e.g. Resource Fair tabling, OMA presentation involvement, etc.)
 - Begin coordinating Multicultural Student Weekend

YEAR 2 (August - July)

- Fall Semester
 - Finalize Multicultural Student Weekend
- Spring Semester
 - Facilitate MSW
 - Sankofa Application Review
- Summer (May - July)
 - Study Abroad Trip
 - Internship Placement

YEAR 3 (August - July)

- Fall Semester
 - Develop Pre-Rendezblue program
- Spring Semester
 - Finalize PRB program
- Summer (May - July)
 - Internship Placement
 - Facilitate Pre-Rendezblue

YEAR 4 (August - May)

- Fall Semester
- Spring Semester
- Summer (May - July)

Post-Graduation

- OMA Alumni Roster
 - Name
 - OMA Involvement (e.g. Sankofa, LEGACY, DI Educator, etc.)
 - Contact Info (Phone, Email)
 - Location
 - Postbac Plans
 - Gap Year; job industry; graduate school program
- Potential giving campaign for PRB, AFB/ASB, etc.
- Black Alumni / Alumni of Color Weekend

APPENDIX F



LA/FYC 174.001/178.002

**Thinking from the Margins: Intro to Subaltern Studies; MWF 8:00-9:15 AM, KAR 243
Syllabus¹**



Instructor: Dr. Jeremias Zunguze
Office Hours: MWF 3:00 -4:00 PM
 and by appointment
Office: RRO 246E
Phone: (828) 250-3972
e-mail: jzunguze@unca.edu

Readings: free reading materials are available on Moodle and GoogleDrive. Should you have questions about the readings, always refer to the syllabus and weekly readings on Moodle.

Course Description: *Thinking from the Margins* aims to introduce you to subaltern studies. These are ways of thinking from and about those groups who have historically been marginalized—in terms of race, class, gender, and sexuality—by the dominant power structure. We will ask how subaltern groups have struggled with the hegemony to empower themselves. Here’s a general example from American history and society: Although three ethnic or racial groups—Indigenous, European, and Black—are at the core origins of America, the white, mostly male and landowning, story of the “founding fathers” has dominated the historic narrative as well as the actual construction of American institutions of power; while the Black and Native-American stories, contributions, and systems have been made subordinate, often silenced. In other words, the colonized Indigenous and the enslaved Blacks have been placed in

¹ **Disclaimer:** This syllabus is subject to change to fit the pace and needs of the class.

the margins or periphery of the American society; whereas whites have placed themselves at the center. That is why American history predominantly glorifies European achievements, such as conquest, colonization, modernity, civilizing mission, etc. While these events certainly did shape the formation of America, the point of view from which they are told makes all the difference. In other words, the Eurocentric narrative is just one version of the American story. What do these very same events mean from a non-Eurocentric standpoint, particularly that of the marginalized African diaspora? How can we speak of colonialism, slavery, modernity, and the so-called civilizing mission from non-Eurocentric subaltern or marginalized perspectives? How do such thinkers, scholars, poets, and storytellers as W. E. Dubois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Angela Davis, among others engage powerfully with the consequences of colonialism, modernity, slavery, etc.? As Ramon Grosfoguel asserts, “an epistemic perspective from the subaltern side of the colonial difference has a lot to contribute to this debate. It can contribute to a critical perspective beyond the outlined dichotomies and to a redefinition of capitalism as a world-system.”² *Thinking from the Margins* will provide the basis for critical discussion of colonialism, slavery, civilization, capitalism, modernity-globalization, postcolonialism, civil rights, race, class, gender, revolutions, black nationalism, democracy, and relations of power.

Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes. As a First-Year Colloquium (FYC), LA/FYC 174.001/178.002: *Thinking from the Margins* fulfills the Liberal Arts and Africana Studies curriculum requirement. As such, the class not only will introduce you to the values of liberal arts education, but also it will help you make transition to UNCA, in particular, and to college lifestyle in general. The readings, guest speakers, and film/documentary resources selected here as well as the questions accompanying our classroom discussions will introduce you to subaltern studies or deepen your knowledge of the subject matter. They will also enhance your critical thinking and reading-comprehension skills and cultural knowledge not only in this particular field, but also in other related interdisciplinary areas, especially humanities and social sciences. Upon taking this class you may apply its components of critical thinking to various cultural issues both local and global and understand the value of approaching those issues from various viewpoints. Our hope is that at the end of this class you will have attained the following:

- ❖ Demonstrate critical thinking skills used to identify and solve problems by analyzing your own and others’ assumptions and to evaluate carefully the relevance of contexts when presenting a position
- ❖ Demonstrate the criteria of critical thinking to form judgments and interpret intercultural experience
- ❖ Articulate, in writing, the characteristics and benefits of a liberal arts approach to higher education and will be able to compare and contrast the liberal arts model with other models of higher education delivery

² Ramón Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality.” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts, UC Merced; 2011.

- ❖ Demonstrate familiarity with the policies, procedures, and practices that have been designed to support students, as well as develop positive relationships with peers, faculty members, and other university personnel
- ❖ Demonstrate having knowledge of resources for self-efficacy, coping mechanism, and resiliency in their student development transition

Weekly readings and discussion questions: For each class meeting there will be an assigned reading (an article or a book chapter) accompanied by, at least, three questions. In order for us to have a productive discussion, please complete these readings and answer all assigned questions. Our discussion will mainly be based on these questions. Because the readings are exhausted with information and abstract concepts, use these questions to guide your reading. First, read the questions and then read the text and try to answer the questions—in a bullet point form— as you move along. Also, make your own side notes about what stood out in your reading experience. In addition to the assigned questions, come to class with, at least, one question you have about a particular reading. This class is not purely a lecture, but rather a discussion. Our objective is to delve into each reading together and get the main cultural ideas—social, historical, and political— discussed in each book chapter. Please read the assigned pages **BEFORE** each class. An assignment listed for a date is due at the beginning of class on that day unless otherwise noted. More information about assignments will be presented in class, and details for each will be provided as they are assigned.

Attendance

Attendance is an integral part of your final grade. If you think you'll be missing class that day you have to let me know by e-mail, although that will not erase the absence. The only way you can excuse an absence is with appropriate documentation (doctor's or employer's note) stating the date and time equivalent to the day and time that you missed class. After three absences, each additional one will subtract one percentage point from your total semester grade. If you have too many absences, I will follow withdrawal policies set forth in the UNCA Catalog. If you miss a class for any reason, **it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, not during the class, but after or during office hours. Please do not call or e-mail me and ask what we talked about in class.**

Participation:

Participation is very important in this class. Participating in class does not necessarily mean always giving correct answer. Asking a question on a concept you don't understand, responding to the professor or classmates when they ask a question, working in groups or pairs when asked to, or pointing out to a typo or an error on the board is participating. So, pleeeeeeeeeeease be engaged in all activities. **There will be no side talking or texting permitted.** All questions are to be addressed to the professor or to the class.

Featured Films and Documentaries: There are also assigned videos, movies, and documentaries reflecting on the various cultural issues— social, political, and historical— pertaining to marginalized people and subaltern studies. It's a requirement to watch and listen to all these video and audio material at home, in the park, in the woods :) or in the library and write a one to two-page response paper answering the following questions:

1. What is the film or documentary about?
2. What did you learn from it?
3. What do you think about it? Why?

Guest speakers and field trips: Once in a while a guest speaker will come to our class to give a talk about a topic in the syllabus. Also, as a class we might go, at least, on two field trips. I'll let you know in advance when these activities will take place. After attending these events, listening to a guest speaker you are required to write a response answering the following questions:

1. What was the talk, the presentation, or the field trip about?
2. What did you learn from it?
3. What do you think about it? Why?

Paper assignments: While I will give you topic questions for each assignment you will be writing, a couple of weeks before it's due, I suggest you to develop your own topic. This option may sound a little bit challenging. However, it will give you freedom of writing about anything that interest you within the topic of subaltern studies or a comparative topic with different marginalized groups throughout the world (i.e.: Africans, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Afro-Latinos, Indigenous peoples, their experiences). The practice will, also, help you build creativity, confidence, independence in critical thinking, academic skills that you will need throughout your career as a student here at UNCA and beyond.

Requirements:

- ❖ 1st Paper (3-5 pages) 20%
- ❖ Mid Term Paper (3-5 pages) 20%
- ❖ Final Paper (3-5 pages) 20%
- ❖ Attendance and Participation 10%
- ❖ Talks, Presentations, Movie/Documentary Responses, and field trips 15%.
- ❖ Student Development Assessment 15%

Graded distribution: Letter grades will be determined in the basis of the following grading scale:

94-100: A	77-79.9: C+	60-63.9: D-
90-93.9: A-	74-76.9: C	59.9 or less: F
87-89.9: B+	70-73.9: C-	
84-86.9: B	67-69.9: D+	
80-83.9: B-	64-66.9: D	

Office of Academic Accessibility

UNC-Asheville values the diversity of our student body as a strength and a critical component of our dynamic community. Students with disabilities or temporary injuries/conditions may require accommodations due to barriers in the structure of facilities, course design, technology used for curricular purposes, or other campus resources.

Students who experience a barrier to full access to this class should let the professor know, and/or make an appointment to meet with the Office of Academic Accessibility as soon as possible. To make an appointment, call 828.232.5050; email academicaccess@unca.edu; use this link <https://uncaoaintake.youcanbook.me/>; or drop by the Academic Accessibility Office, room 005 in the One Stop suite (lower level of Ramsey Library). Learn more about the process of registering, and the services available through the Office of Academic Accessibility here: <https://oaa.unca.edu/>

While students may disclose disability at any point in the semester, students who receive Letters of Accommodation are strongly encouraged to request, obtain and present these to their professors as

early in the semester as possible so that accommodations can be made in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to follow this process each semester.

Sexual Harassment and Misconduct

All members of the University community are expected to engage in conduct that contributes to the culture of integrity and honor upon which the University of North Carolina at Asheville is grounded. Acts of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking jeopardize the health and welfare of our campus community and the larger community as a whole and will not be tolerated. The University has established procedures for preventing and investigating allegations of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking that are compliant with Title IX federal regulations. To learn more about these procedures or to report an incident of sexual misconduct, go to titleix.unca.edu. Students may also report incidents to an instructor, faculty or staff member, who are required by law to notify the Title IX Office.

Academic Alerts

Faculty at UNCA are encouraged to use the university's Academic Alert system to communicate with students about their progress in courses. Academic Alerts can reflect that a student's performance is satisfactory at the time the alert is submitted, or they can indicate concerns (e.g., academic difficulty, attendance problems, or other concerns). Professors use the alert system because they are invested in student success and want to encourage open conversations about how students can improve their learning, and students who respond to alerts quickly are consistently more likely to earn credit for the course. Please note, professors of 100-level courses are required to submit at least one alert about each student on or before the seventh week of classes.

When a faculty member submits an alert that expresses a concern, the student receives an email from Academic Advising notifying them of the alert and subsequent registration hold on their account. To clear the hold, the student must complete a short Google Response Form included in the alert e-mail; the results will be shared with their instructor and advising staff. Instructors may also request to meet with the student to discuss the alert.

Questions about the Academic Alert system can be directed to Anne Marie Roberts (amrober1@unca.edu) in OneStop Advising and Learning Support.

University Writing Center

The University Writing Center (UWC) supports writers in one-on-one sessions lasting 10 to 45 minutes. Consultants can help writers organize ideas, document sources, and revise prose. If you visit the UWC, bring a copy of your assignment, any writing or notes you may have, and the sources you are working with. Make an appointment by visiting writingcenter.unca.edu and clicking on "Schedule an Appointment," or drop in during open hours Monday-Friday.

Weekly Plan³

Week	Date	Topics, Themes, Events, & Questions	Readings, Films, & Documentaries	Assignments
1	M 8/20	Class Introduction What's <i>Thinking from the Margins</i> ?		Welcome, Introductions, Syllabus, Class Overview, Expectations, Community Building
	W 8/22	What are subaltern studies? Who is the subaltern/marginalized subject? How has the subject been defined throughout history?	El Habib Louai, "Retracing the Concept of the Subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical Developments and New Applications"	Read El Habib Louai's "Retracing the Concept of the Subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak"
	F 8/24	What are subaltern studies? Who is the subaltern/marginalized subject? How has the subject been defined throughout history?	El Habib Louai, "Retracing the Concept of the Subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak" cont.	Read El Habib Louai's "Retracing the Concept of the Subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak"
2	M 8/27	Papal Bulls: The Birth of the Modern Subaltern/Marginalized Subject What are Papal Bulls? What do these bulls have in common? What do they sanction?	Nicholas V, <i>Romanus Pontifex</i> 1455 Council of Castille, <i>Requerimiento</i> 1510 Alexander VI, <i>Inter Ceatera</i> 1493	Read Nicholas V, <i>Romanus Pontifex</i> 1455; Alexander VI, <i>Inter Ceatera</i> 1493; and Council of Castille, <i>Requerimiento</i> 1510
	W 8/29	Papal Bulls: The Birth of the Modern Subaltern/Marginalized Subject What are Papal Bulls? What do these bulls have in common? What do they sanction?	Nicholas V, <i>Romanus Pontifex</i> 1455 Council of Castille, <i>Requerimiento</i> 1510 Alexander VI, <i>Inter Ceatera</i> 1493	Read Nicholas V, <i>Romanus Pontifex</i> 1455; Alexander VI, <i>Inter Ceatera</i> 1493; and Council of Castille, <i>Requerimiento</i> 1510

³Please note the following schedule is *tentative*. The instructor reserves the right to make changes/modify assignments and points as needed to achieve course go.

	F 8/31	Papal Bulls: The Birth of the Modern Subaltern/Marginalized Subject What are the consequences of papal bulls?	Jeremias Zunguze, "Debunking the Myth of the Doctrine of Discovery of Africa"	Read Dr. Zunguze's "Debunking the Myth of the Doctrine of Discovery of Africa"
3	M 9/3	Labor Day Holiday	No Class	No Class
	W 9/5	Slavery and the Making of Black Atlantic World	M. Alpha Bah, "Legitimate Trade, Diplomacy, and the Slave Trade" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap. 5	Read <i>M. Alpha Bah</i> , "Legitimate Trade, Diplomacy, and the Slave Trade"
	F 9/7	Slavery and the Making of Black Atlantic World	M. Alpha Bah, "Legitimate Trade, Diplomacy, and the Slave Trade" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap. 4	Read <i>M. Alpha Bah</i> , "Legitimate Trade, Diplomacy, and the Slave Trade" Quantitative Reasoning Test
4	M 9/10	Slavery and the Making of Black Atlantic World	Raymond Gavins, "Diaspora Africans and Slavery" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap. 5 Willie Lynch, "The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making Of A Slave!"	Read Raymond Gavins, "Diaspora Africans and Slavery" Willie Lynch, "The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making Of A Slave!"
	W 9/12	Slavery and the Making of Black Atlantic World	Raymond Gavins, "Diaspora Africans and Slavery" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap. 5 Willie Lynch, "The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making Of A Slave!"	Read Raymond Gavins, "Diaspora Africans and Slavery" in <i>Africana Studies</i> Chap. 5 Read Willie Lynch, "The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making Of A Slave!"
	F 9/14	Slavery and the Making of Black Atlantic World	Raymond Gavins, "Diaspora Africans and Slavery" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap. 5 Willie Lynch, "The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making Of A Slave!"	Read Raymond Gavins, "Diaspora Africans and Slavery" in <i>Africana Studies</i> Chap. 5 Read Willie Lynch, "The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making Of A Slave!" Assign paper#1
	M 9/17	The consequences of Colonialism	Guest Speaker: Rudy Mondragón	Listen to Mondragón's

5		and Slavery on Blacks	Lecture: "There's a Drama To It: Race, Space, and Expressive Culture in Boxing" W. E. Dubois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903)	lecture, "There's a Drama To It: Race, Space, and Expressive Culture in Boxing" Read Dubois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>
	W 9/19	The consequences of Colonialism and Slavery on Blacks	W. E. Dubois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903) Malcolm X, "The House Negro and the Field Negro" https://youtu.be/7kf7fujM4ag	Read Dubois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>
	F 9/21	The consequences of Colonialism and Slavery on Blacks	W. E. Dubois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903)	Read Dubois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> Paper #1 due
6	M 9/24	Postcolonialism The Black Subaltern/Marginalized Subject and the Struggle for Freedom	Marsha Jean Darling, "Civil War to Civil Rights: The Quest for Freedom and Equality" in <i>Africana Studies</i> Chap. 7	Read Marsha Jean Darling, "Civil War to Civil Rights: The Quest for Freedom and Equality" in <i>Africana Studies</i>
	W 9/26	Postcolonialism The Black Subaltern/Marginalized Subject and the Struggle for Freedom	Marsha Jean Darling, "Civil War to Civil Rights: The Quest for Freedom and Equality" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap. 7	Read Marsha Jean Darling, "Civil War to Civil Rights: The Quest for Freedom and Equality" in <i>Africana Studies</i>
	F 9/28	Postcolonialism The Black Subaltern/Marginalized Subject and the Struggle for Freedom	Marsha Jean Darling, "Civil War to Civil Rights: The Quest for Freedom and Equality" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , chap. 7 Stanley Nelson <i>Freedom Riders</i> (2010) https://youtu.be/CMp9S7vD-8s	Read Marsha Jean Darling, "Civil War to Civil Rights: The Quest for Freedom and Equality" in <i>Africana Studies</i> See Stanley Nelson's "Freedom Riders" https://youtu.be/CMp9S7vD-8s

7	M 10/1	The Black Subaltern/Marginalized Subject and the Struggle for Freedom	Göran Olsson, <i>The Black Power Mixtape 1967 1975</i> Stanley Nelson, <i>The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution (2015)</i>	Watch Göran Olsson, <i>The Black Power Mixtape 1967 1975</i> Watch Stanley Nelson, <i>The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution (2015)</i> Quantitative Reasoning Test
	W 10/3	The Black Subaltern/Marginalized Subject and the Struggle for Freedom	Göran Olsson, <i>The Black Power Mixtape 1967 1975</i> Stanley Nelson, <i>The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution (2015)</i>	Watch Göran Olsson, <i>The Black Power Mixtape 1967 1975</i> Watch Stanley Nelson, <i>The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution (2015)</i>
	F 10/5	The Black Subaltern/Marginalized Subject and the Struggle for Freedom	Göran Olsson, <i>The Black Power Mixtape 1967 1975</i> Stanley Nelson, <i>The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution (2015)</i>	Watch Göran Olsson, <i>The Black Power Mixtape 1967 1975</i> Watch Stanley Nelson, <i>The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution (2015)</i>
	M 10/8	Fall Break	No class	No Class
	W 10/10	The Black Man and the Struggle for Freedom	Malcolm X, "On Wealth of Africa," "The Ballot or the Bullet" https://youtu.be/8zLQLUpNGsc Martin Luther King, jr. "I Have a Dream"	Read Malcolm X, "On Wealth of Africa," "The Ballot or the Bullet" Listen to Martin Luther King, jr. "I Have a Dream"
	F 10/12	The Black Man and the Struggle for Freedom	Guests Speakers: Dwight Mullen and Charles James	
9	M 10/15	The Black Woman and the Struggle for Freedom	Rosa Parks, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott"	Read Rosa Parks, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott"
	W 10/17	The Black Woman and the Struggle for Freedom	Assata Shakur, "Women in Prison: How It Is With US"	Read Assata Shakur, "Women in Prison: How It Is With US"

	F 10/19	The Black Woman and the Struggle for Freedom	Angela Davis, "Women, Race, and Class"	Read Angela Davis, "Women, Race, and Class"
10	M 10/22	The Black Woman and the Struggle for Freedom	Maya Angelou "Still I rise," "Phenomenal Woman," "Caged Bird," "On the Pulse of Morning," "A Brave Startling Truth" Toni Morrison, "Recitatif"	Read Maya Angelou "Still I rise," "Phenomenal Woman," "Caged Bird," "On the Pulse of Morning," "A Brave Startling Truth" Read Toni Morrison, "Recitatif"
	W 10/24	The Black Woman and the Struggle for Freedom	Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"	Read Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" Read Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"
	F 10/26	The Black Woman and the Struggle for Freedom	Guest Speakers: Nana Dee and Dolly Mullen	
11	M 10/29	Africa and the African Diaspora: Building Bridges	Michael Williams, "The Pan-African Movement" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap 10	Read Michael Williams, "The Pan-African Movement" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap 10
	W 10/31	Africa and the African Diaspora: Building Bridges	Michael Williams, "The Pan-African Movement" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap 10 Molefi Asante, "Afrocentricity"	Read Michael Williams, "The Pan-African Movement" in <i>Africana Studies</i> , Chap 10 Molefi Asante, "Afrocentricity"
	F 11/2	Africa and the African Diaspora: Building Bridges	"Dr Kwame Ture Pan Africanism vs Afrocentrism" https://youtu.be/uCm8HVMgLvQ	Watch "Dr Kwame Ture Pan Africanism vs Afrocentrism" https://youtu.be/uCm8HVMgLvQ Due: Paper#2
12	M 11/5	Colonialism in Africa	Mário Azevedo, Aimé Césaire, <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i> (1950)	Read Aimé Césaire, <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i>

	W 11/7	Colonialism in Africa	Aimé Césaire, <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i> (1950)	Read Aimé Césaire, <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i>
	F 11/9	Colonialism in Africa	Aimé Césaire, <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i> (1950)	Read Aimé Césaire, <i>Discourse on Colonialism</i>
13	M 11/12	African Liberation Wars: The Struggle for Independence	Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)	Read Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Watch Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)
	W 11/14	African Liberation Wars: The Struggle for Independence	Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)	Read Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Watch Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)
	F 11/16	African Liberation Wars: The Struggle for Independence	Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)	Read Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Watch Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)
14	M 11/19	African Liberation Wars: The Struggle for Independence	Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)	Read Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence" in <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (1961) Watch Göran Olsson, "Concerning Violence" (2014)
	W 11/21	Thanksgiving Holiday Break	No Class!	No Class

	F 11/23	Thanksgiving Holiday Break	No Class!	No Class
15	M 11/26	The Black Contemporary World	Alphine W. Jefferson, "Contemporary Diaspora and the Future" in <i>African Diaspora</i> , Chap. 12	Read Alphine W. Jefferson, "Contemporary Diaspora and the Future" in <i>African Diaspora</i> , Chap. 12
	W 11/28	The Black Contemporary World	Alphine W. Jefferson, "Contemporary Diaspora and the Future" in <i>African Diaspora</i> , Chap. 12	
	F 11/30	The Black Contemporary World	Alphine W. Jefferson, "Contemporary Diaspora and the Future" in <i>African Diaspora</i> , Chap. 12	
16	M 12/3	Last day of classes	Last day of classes	Last day of classes
	W 12/5			
	F 12/7			
Final	Our Final Exam: December 7, from 8:00-10:30 AM			