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A Bridge Over Troubled Water: Designing and Implementing a Living-Learning Community to Produce Optimal Outcomes for Black Males

BLACK MALE RETENTION RATES in college tend to be lower than they are for Asians, Whites, and Latino males as well as their gendered counterparts in college. Various factors play a role in the higher attrition rates of Black males in higher education. However, there are programmatic initiatives that can contribute to the academic and career success of these students. For example, living-learning communities are recognized as a high impact practice for student engagement. Moreover, these high impact practices, such as first experiences courses, study abroad, and undergraduate research, contribute to student matriculation and retention. Therefore, this article will detail how the authors contributed to creating the Jamii House, a residential learning community charged with improving the graduation rates of Black males at a research-intensive university in the northeastern U.S.

The successful enrollment of Black men in college, as well as their following through to graduation, is vital to increasing diversity in the U.S. workforce. Black male success can improve their employment rates and quality of life and can increase the likelihood of their upward mobility (Carnevale et al., 2015; Hines et al., 2020). Moreover, educational attainment is a gateway to more opportunities in general (Carnevale et al., 2015). The benefits of college appear to span multiple ethnic groups in America. For instance, an article from Northeastern University highlighted a 57% job opportunity increase compared to those who do not graduate, and it was projected that 80% of online job recruitment in 2020 would be posted for individuals with a college degree (Joubert, 2020).

Unfortunately, many Black males are not afforded the opportunity to pursue or attain a postsecondary education (Hines, Mayes, et al., 2021). However, interventions such as living-learning communities (LLCs) can help them successfully transition to, matriculate, and complete college (Cintron et al., 2020; Hines, Mayes, et al., 2021). Initiative programs for Black males benefit their academic and social integration and can lead to their retention and persistence. According to Thomas Hill and Boes (2013),

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the purpose of an African American Male Initiative learning community is to “increase the likelihood that African American males are retained during their first year of college” (p. 39). These communities provide a unique cultural environment that enhances “students’ sense of mattering and belonging on campus through helping them access sociocultural capital, providing holistic support, focusing on Black male identities, and engendering students’ persistence” (Brooms, 2018, p. 59).

RATIONALE

Simon and Garfunkel’s musical hit “Bridge Over Troubled Water” is used in this paper as a metaphor to describe the obstacles and barriers (troubled water) that Black males must overcome in order to matriculate and graduate. These obstacles include but are not limited to racism, low graduation rates, imposter syndrome, being the only Black person in their course, and lack of a sense of belonging. The bridge is the living and learning community over the troubled water that will help them successfully navigate the college or university system. We will describe how a living-learning community model focused on improving the graduation rates of Black males was successfully developed and implemented. Also, we will offer research, practice, and policy recommendations for higher education faculty and staff. For the purpose of confidentiality and privacy, we have changed the name of the living-learning community to Jamii House (Jamii is a Swahili word for community).

BLACK MALES AT THE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Black students represent about 36% of traditional, 18–24-year-old college students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). Black men account for only 38% of Black students pursuing college degrees, lagging way behind their female counterparts (NCES, 2016). Though many Black males are enrolling in colleges and universities, their retention and graduation rates are relatively low (Brooms & Davis, 2017). In fact, the 6-year graduation rate of Black males from 4-year institutions is only 39% (NCES, 2021).

A well-established research base has identified several factors contributing to the lower admission and graduation rates of Black males. Researchers have highlighted issues such as underrepresentation (Cuyjet, 2006; Henderson et al., 2021), racism, and discrimination (Neville et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2007), to name a few. The underrepresentation of Black males who are in college earning degrees is a result of systematic neglect that starts long before they enroll (Guess, 2008; Moore, 2006). Academic problems among males from underrepresented communities begin as early as elementary school, when, for example, some teachers and counselors impose negative expectations about Black males attending college, which is not a perception they generally

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have of their White counterparts (Moore, 2006; Ogbu, 2003). In addition, Black males are disproportionately disciplined (Hale, 2001), underrepresented in gifted education programs (Ford & Moore, 2013; Hines, Fletcher, et al., 2021; Jackson & Moore, 2008), and overrepresented in special education (Haycock, 2006; Levin et al., 2007).

In spite of the difficulties that Black males face in the world of higher education, researchers and practitioners alike have sought to create and identify interventions and best practices to retain them through to graduation. Interventions like the Meyerhoff Scholars Program utilize a wrap-around approach as a best practice to serve students; in its early days, the program served only Black males (Maton & Hrabowski, 2004), an intervention that included a summer bridge program, a renewable financial aid package, study groups with peer support, personal advising, mentoring, and faculty involvement. Researchers have also shown that Black faculty mentors (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Dancy, 2011), supportive families (Palmer et al., 2014), peer relationships (Bonner, 2003; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2006), student organizations such as the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE, 2023), and social networks (Brooms, 2019; Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016) are essential for retaining and helping Black males to graduate. Though successful strategies have been implemented in various settings, interventions have often been designed in isolation (Flowers & Banda, 2018). One less explored, yet impactful, strategy has been implementing the Living and Learning Community Model, specifically for Black males (Cintron et al., 2020; Dohy et al., 2021; Hines, Mayes, et al., 2021).

LIVING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY MODEL

High impact practices (HIPs) affect

enhanced student learning and success by bringing to the teaching and learning process the intentional and integrative characteristics associated with how humans learn; not just in the moment but for sustained use and transferability from one instance to different instances of practice and application. (Watson et al., 2016, p. 66)

Generally, these practices deepen learning and bring one's values and beliefs into awareness. Students better understand themselves in relation to others and the larger world, and they acquire the intellectual tools and ethical grounding to act with confidence for the betterment of the human condition, and one such high impact practice is a living-learning community (Kuh, 2008).

Studies show that LLCs improve the retention rates, cognitive performance, and non-cognitive performance of program participants (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Murphy, 2010; Palm & Thomas, 2015; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Specific research on LLC participation has identified several benefits that include, for example, improved academic outcomes (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003), interpersonal skills (Hill & Woodward, 2013), and mental health (Fink, 2014). Brower and Inkelas (2010) indicate that participation

in LLCs results in improved academic self-confidence, a commitment to civic engagement, and easier academic and social transitions to college. Palm and Thomas (2015) report that students in an LLC had nearly a third of a letter grade higher grade-point averages than did non-LLC participants. Cintron and colleagues (2020) reported, using two-year follow-up survival and latent growth curve analysis, that Black male LLC participants had higher gains in retention and grade point averages than did matched Black male non-LLC participants (i.e., with propensity score matching). The authors note that there are many ecological or environmental influences that positively impact the outcomes of students in LLCs, in particular Black males.

BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Given the environmental influence on the recruitment and retention of Black males in college, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was used to guide the design and implementation of Jamii House. This theory asserts that human development (and thus human behavior) is impacted by several different environments, ranging from family and personal relationships to culture and life transitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For this LLC, we propose that Black males are impacted by their environment and that they in turn can affect the same environment.

Five systems make up the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). First, the *microsystem* is represented by the closest interactions between the person and their environment: for example, Black males interacting with their faculty director, parents, and professors. Second, the *mesosystem* involves the interactions between microsystems such as the faculty director interacting with professors to ensure that Black males have academic support. Third, the *exosystem* represents settings where the environment does not have a direct impact on a person but nevertheless plays a significant role. For example, the neighborhood in which Black males attended K-12 schools can have an indirect impact, and the funding of the school can affect the quality of education they received. Fourth, the *macrosystem* represents the sociocultural influences on individuals, such as the narrative and perceptions about Black men in the U.S. and abroad. Last, the *chronosystem* embodies events that happen across the lifespan of a person, such as the transition that Black males experience from high school to college. The authors used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as they believe the living-learning community, the faculty director, and programming have an impact on Black male success in Jamii House.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF JAMII HOUSE

The creation of Jamii House started as an initiative to increase the graduation rate of Black males at Jamii University, located in the northeastern region of the United States, which began when a senior administrator, through use of the university's institutional research data, noticed the disparity between this population and other racial and gendered peers. This administrator received funding from an external foundation to reveal the interests in and importance of improving the graduation rates of Black males at

an institution of higher education. The senior administrator asked a tenure track faculty member—a Black male with a research agenda centered on Black male academic, college, and career outcomes—to be the faculty director of this LLC. The director has a background in education and school counseling, with experience in helping prepare college students of color and first-generation students to matriculate as well as prepare them for graduate school. The preparation for this initiative took one academic year of designing and planning in order to successfully implement the LLC. Jamii House started out as a two-year living-learning community for first- and second-year students.

Designing Vision and Mission Statements

Given the charge to oversee Jamii House, the faculty director started the process by creating the vision and mission statements. The vision statement provides direction for the initiative and what the faculty director would like to accomplish; in the case of Jamii House, the vision statement focused on developing these brilliant Black men in their majors and in various career fields through academic achievement and moving beyond attaining a bachelor's degree to pursue further education such as a law degree, graduate school, or medical school. The mission statement details the purpose of the Jamii House initiative: to improve the graduation rates of Black males at Jamii University. The vision and mission statements were researched based on the underrepresentation of Black males in many careers and their having the lowest graduation rate at 4-year higher education institutions (Harper, 2012). Finally, the faculty director created a logo and name to create the narrative that Black men at this institution pursue academic and scholarly endeavors as well as excellence.

Planning and Collaboration

As previously stated, the faculty director had one academic year to design and plan the Jamii House. After doing extensive research on living-learning communities, high impact practices, and Black male college students, he brought in an expert on Black male academic and career outcomes as a consultant to meet with the university community, as there was some concern about having a Black male LLC at this institution. Currently, the consultant is the executive director of a center for Black males at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Midwest and has had positive results in improving the graduation rates at this particular university. An entire day was dedicated to the consultant to meet with students, vice presidents of various units, professors, and cultural center directors, and the evening ended with an open forum as well as a dinner with Black male alumni and students.

Beyond having a consultant come in to raise awareness of the national academic and collegiate status of Black males, the faculty director started meeting with departments on campus to forge partnerships of collaboration that were critical to the success of Black males. Specifically, meetings were scheduled with the department of public safety (university police), student affairs, the math tutoring center, the English/writing tutoring center, the African American studies department, the Black cultural center, the career center, the office of residence life, and several Black tenured faculty across

the university enterprise. Within these meetings, the faculty director articulated the purpose of the initiative and how the collaboration would benefit both Black males and the university.

Another point of collaboration was working with the university foundation to partner with alumni and to solicit external funding for academic resources and programming. Because of this partnership, the LLC provided scholarships for students to study abroad in Salvador, Brazil, over spring break and attend the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. Additionally, the university foundation hosted receptions in D.C. for the young men in the LLC to meet alumni as well as give alumni an opportunity to donate to the LLC. Finally, given the media attention that Jamii House attracted, the faculty director and the Department of First Year Programs and Learning Communities worked with university communications. The university spokesperson helped them navigate questions from the media as well as screening various media outlets. Controlling the narrative as much as possible was important to the success of Jamii House.

JAMII HOUSE LOGIC MODEL

A logic model—Hines and Colleagues' Logic Model for Black Male Living-Learning Communities (LLCs)—was developed to describe the inputs, activities, outcomes, output, and impact of Jamii House. The logic model was created with input from all authors on this paper (see Appendix A), who also solicited input from the Jamii House participants themselves. Note the sequential order of the logic model: The program inputs influence the program activities, which in turn influence the short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes that ultimately determine the output and impact of Jamii House. We briefly describe the components of the logic model here. Also, please see Appendix B for programming through the academic year (August–May).

Inputs

The input component of the logic model describes what resources were used to support Jamii House. The inputs included the faculty director, hall director, graduate assistants, resident assistant, LLC leadership team, university faculty, community stakeholders, and university support.

Activities

The activities component of the logic model describes the main activities that Jamii House provided, which were facilitated by the program inputs. The activities of Jamii House included providing a shared living space and a study hall; holding LLC, brotherhood, and leadership team meetings; offering GPA incentives; and providing

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opportunities for informal peer mentoring, success coaching, study abroad, learning excursions, a first-year experience (FYE) course, graduate school trips, and service learning and community engagement. For more information on these activities, see the description of programming activities in Appendices A and B.

Short-Term Outcomes

The short-term outcomes component of the logic model describes what the stakeholders of Jamii House anticipated would be a direct result of the inputs and activities of the LLC. Short-term outcomes included a sense of academic support, brotherhood, belongingness, mental support, and social support. Furthermore, Jamii House, through weekly LLC meetings, success coaching, and use of the study hall, provided participants with a better sense of their academic obligations and possibly facilitated short-term academic achievement. Other short-term outcomes we might anticipate as part of participating in Jamii House are improved academic motivation and connection with the community, increased awareness of community organizations, and collaboration with university faculty through learning excursions, service learning, and community engagement.

Mid-Term Outcomes

The mid-term outcomes component of the logic model describes what the stakeholders of Jamii House anticipated would follow the initial short-term outcomes. The mid-term outcomes included academic persistence (i.e., retention), academic achievement, internships, leadership positions on campus, employment opportunities, and improved networking and soft skills. For instance, leadership positions on campus might result from Jamii House providing participants with a better understanding of the campus community and faculty.

Long-Term Outcomes

The long-term outcomes component of the logic model describes what the stakeholders of Jamii House anticipated would be the impact of the house on participants. The long-term outcomes included graduating from college, demonstrating academic achievement, enrolling in graduate or professional school, receiving scholarships and obtaining employment, and being part of the improvements made to the broader conditions of the Black male community.

Output and Impact

The output and impact component of the logic model describes what the stakeholders of Jamii House believed would be the outcome (i.e., impact) of the house. The outputs and impact of Jamii House include community building, cooperative learning, campus involvement, leadership development, job opportunities, academic motivation and success, soft skill development, networking skills, exposure to graduate and professional school, and academic, cultural, and social capital. See Appendix A for

the logic model, Hines and Colleagues' Logic Model for Black Male Living-Learning Communities (LLCs).

BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY AND JAMII HOUSE

The authors considered how to view the Jamii House logic model through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (see Appendix C). At the microsystem level are the inputs in the logic model: the resources (e.g., faculty director, hall director, and graduate assistants) used to support Jamii House. At the mesosystem level are the main activities and interactions that go into Jamii House and include, for example, first-year courses, learning community meetings, and leadership team meetings. At the exosystem level are some of the observable, tangible results that we expect Jamii House provides (e.g., community building, academic motivation, networking, and soft skills). The macrosystem level represents the overarching culture of the university and the living-learning community in which Jamii House participants operate. Lastly, the short-term to long-term outcomes represent the chronosystem or pattern of events that we expect Jamii House participation to influence over time (e.g., graduate and professional school enrollment and strengthening of educational opportunities for Black males).

JAMII HOUSE OUTCOMES

The short-term and mid-term outcomes of Jamii House are reported in Cintron and colleagues (2020). Using the results of two-year follow-up survival and latent growth curve analysis, Cintron and colleagues reported that Jamii House participants had higher gains in retention and grade point average (GPA) than did two control groups (one matched group and one random selection group). Altogether, the results demonstrate examples of the measurable short-term impact of the Jamii LLC approach for Black males at a PWI.

The long-term outcomes of Jamii House are also starting to become clear. Since its inception in the fall of 2016, a total of 193 students have participated in Jamii House. Fifty-two of them have graduated, to date, with an average GPA of 3.131. The 2016-17 cohort included 50 students, 70% have graduated with an average GPA of 3.167, and another 8% are on track to graduate this year. The 2017-18 cohort had 49 students, 63% have graduated with an average GPA of 3.125, and another 17% are on track to graduate. The 2018-19 cohort had 48 students, and 71% are on track to graduate in 4 years (data retrieved from Jamii University).

Black males who enroll in Jamii House or another living-learning community graduate at a higher rate than all Black males on campus, 75% to 72% respectively. First-year retention for Black males who enter college through a TRIO program and

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who also live in a learning community is 90%, showing the cumulative positive effect of high impact practices in higher education to support this population (data retrieved from Jamii University).

A key driver of Jamii House is encouraging graduate school attainment from the start of students' academic careers. Tracking graduate school admissions has shown that 32% of the 2016 cohort are successfully enrolled in a graduate program or have completed an advanced degree. Some of the fields pursued have included biomedical engineering, business, higher education, medical school, physical therapy, and school counseling (data retrieved from Jamii University). Encouraging Jamii House students to develop academically and work towards graduate programs early is particularly important because close to 50% of the students are first generation, or first in their family to pursue a baccalaureate degree (data retrieved from Jamii University). To note, data was obtained from the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, surveys of participants in Jamii House, and focus group interviews.

The creation of a systematic review of the academic standing of the admission cohort in Jamii House has allowed stakeholders to recognize the barriers that prevent students from finishing their degrees. After each semester, the students' transcripts are reviewed by the Jamii faculty director and staff from academic support and the learning community leadership team to review students' progress to a degree. Oftentimes, this review will raise advising or financial flags that might prevent a Jamii student from graduating on time. This has become particularly crucial as the students move into their final 20–40 credits, as some students need to juggle course requirements, summer courses, and financial resources to finish. The ability for advising and other staff to intercede with resources helps prevent students from dropping out as they near graduation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy

Living-learning communities for Black males should have institutional support, specifically academic and financial support. Providing financial resources ensures quality programming that achieves objectives and goals with no disruptions. Assessment and research should also be an integral part of a Black male LLC as a way to measure the impact of programming, the effectiveness of the faculty director, and indicators of Black male progress, such as graduation, achievement, and belonging. Black males should be centered in the creation of this LLC, as they can discuss the issues they face on campus and the type of resources needed for their success in higher education.

Furthermore, a full-time faculty director (Black male) is needed due to the many roles and responsibilities of this position, as well as a Black male RA, preferably one who was a part of the LLC. Cintron and colleagues (2020) found that the role of the faculty director is instrumental in ensuring that Black males are successful in a living-learning

community. The faculty director should have experience working with Black males, and if a research faculty member, the research agenda should focus on the LLC as well as the Black male experience in education. A communication strategy should be implemented not only with the university spokesperson but also with senior administrators. Communicating the same (strengths-based) narrative and having all stakeholders be informed about the creation of a Black male LLC disrupts any negative or faulty information that can reflect on Black males or the institution.

Practice

Making an early arrival program (EAP) part of Black male LLCs can increase the chances of these students succeeding in college. At The Ohio State University, Black men arrive on campus a few days early, and the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male offers programming that helps them make the transition and learn about the various campus resources that can contribute to their academic achievement and social adjustment (The Ohio State University Office of Diversity and Inclusion, 2021). An early arrival program can make Black males aware of departments such as the Office of Financial Aid and can help them develop social capital by meeting campus stakeholders like Black male professors who can serve as mentors. Black male LLCs should also offer a first-year experience course that acclimates these students to campus. This course should incorporate guest speakers from different units across campus that first- and second-year Black males would interact with, such as individuals from the career center, academic advisors, and directors from writing and math tutorial centers. Additionally, faculty and senior administrators should be incorporated into the learning community so that Black males can develop relationships that may lead to research and leadership opportunities.

Success coaching, career development, and internship opportunities must be a mainstay in this community. The focus is to ensure that students are in a major that leads to a career and that they receive enough encouragement to persist if they run into academic, financial, and social obstacles. Success coaches also serve as resources to help Black males map out their curricular plans, seek out assistance on campus, and be motivated to continue on the path to successfully graduating. In addition, Black male LLCs should include a study abroad component that is culturally relevant as well as activities connected to Black culture in history.

Higher education institutions need to prioritize the mental health of Black males when developing an LLC. Black males experience racism, trauma, accusations of acting White, and other challenging adjustment issues. Mental health counselors can teach them techniques of self-care as well as informing them of the many resources that the counseling center offers; if possible, colleges and universities could designate a mental

We need evaluations of LLC programs that employ both quantitative causal and qualitative methods to explore what components of the program are working for the participants and why.

health counselor as a specific liaison for the LLC. The faculty director should work with Black males on their course schedule to ensure that they will have a balanced course load. In the past, the inaugural faculty director noticed students taking STEM-heavy courses their first semester, and, as a result, some students were overwhelmed and did not do well, resulting in academic probation. Making sure that students take a balanced load of general education courses (STEM, humanities, social science, diversity, etc.) is key to their making good grades, especially their first semester.

A Black male LLC should have an outreach component to parents and Black alumni. This outreach is needed to inform parents about the activities their sons will engage in as well as to connect them with Black alumni for mentoring and career opportunities. At Jamii House, the outreach efforts include a welcome reception for parents at the beginning of the fall semester and a Black History Month program honoring Black alumni of Jamii University.

Research

Additional research and evaluation on the effectiveness of programs like the Jamii House are needed to provide further evidence demonstrating the ability of LLC programs to advance the outcomes of Black males in higher education. This should include mixed-methods research. We need evaluations of LLC programs that employ both quantitative causal inference (e.g., see Cintron et al., 2020) and qualitative methods to explore what components of the program are working for the participants and why (e.g., Cintron et al., 2020; Hines, Mayes, et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is essential that evaluations on the effectiveness of programs like the Jamii House employ a critical race theory (Lynn & Dixon, 2013) lens for their evaluation activities.

QuantCrit draws on critical race theory to establish some essential tenets to guide the use and analysis of quantitative data:

(1) the centrality of racism as a complex and deeply rooted aspect of society that is not readily amenable to quantification; (2) numbers are not neutral and should be interrogated for their role in promoting deficit analyses that serve White racial interests; (3) categories are neither “natural” nor given and so the units and forms of analysis must be critically evaluated; (4) voice and insight are vital: data cannot “speak for itself” and critical analyses should be informed by the experiential knowledge of marginalized groups; and (5) statistical analyses have no inherent value but can play a role in struggles for social justice. (Gillborn et al., 2018, p. 158)

CONCLUSION

The graduation rates of Black males should be similar to those of their peers. Institutional support, collaboration with key stakeholders, appropriate programming, and a dedicated faculty director can create a transformative experience for Black males on a college or university campus and can improve persistence, retention, and graduation rates. A Black male LLC can serve as a gateway to successful career and education pathways for Black men in college and beyond. ■

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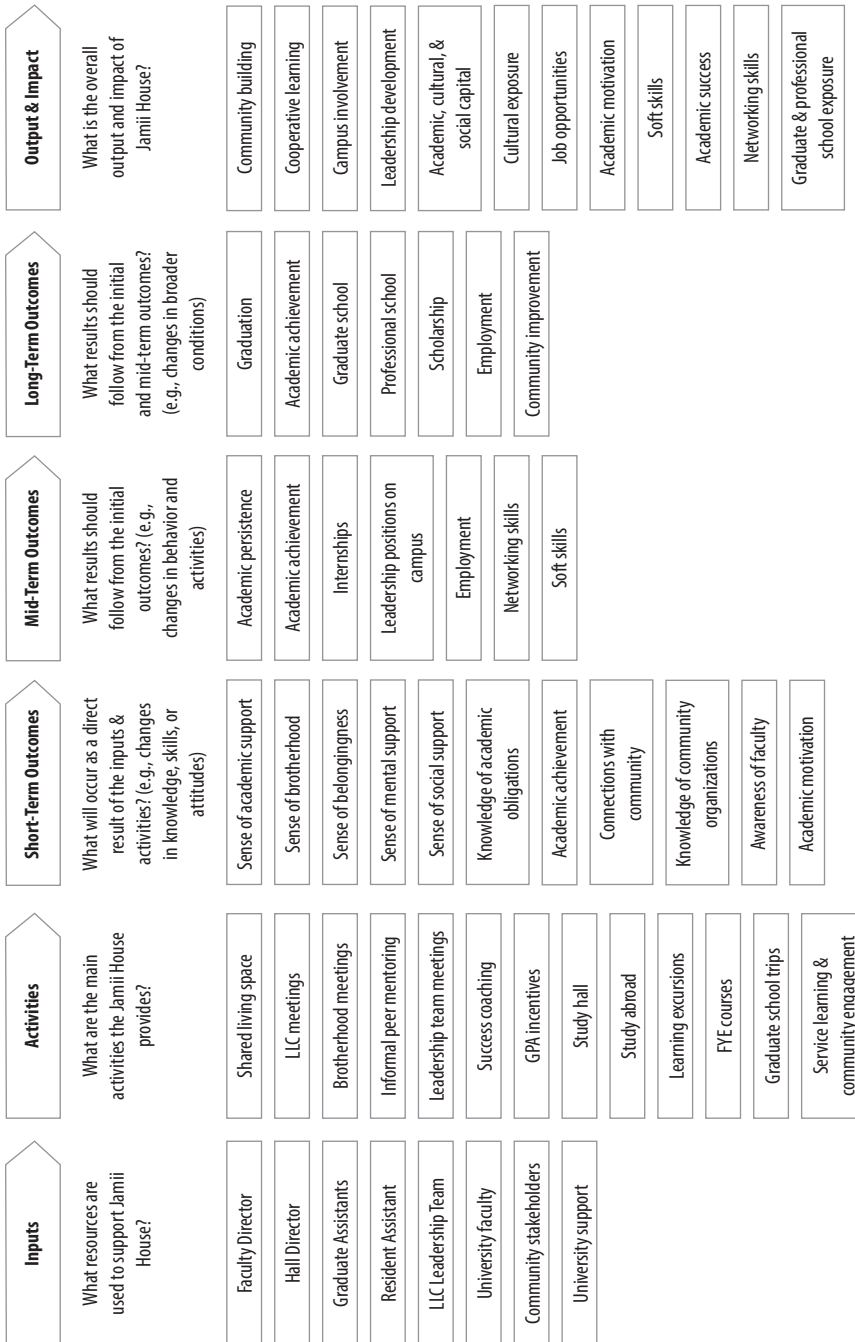
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APPENDIX A

Hines and Colleagues' Logic Model for Black Male Living-Learning Communities



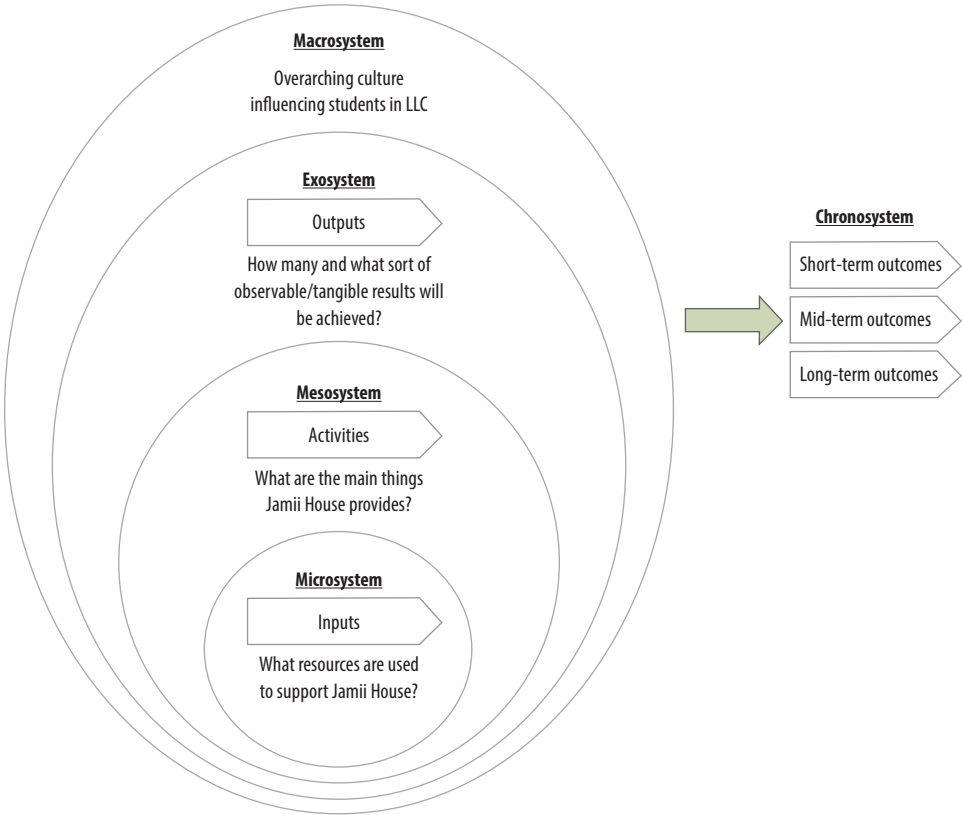
APPENDIX B

Jamii House Living-Learning Community Programming

Academic	Cocurricular	Living/residential component
First-year experience (FYE) course for academic preparation	Black faculty and staff speaker series/monthly dinners with Black male faculty	Individual monthly meetings with resident assistant
First-year experience course for graduate school and research	Study abroad component to countries in Europe and South America	Field day and other social activities with other living-learning communities
Success coaching	Black male entrepreneur/business summit	Brotherhood/community meetings focused on community, wellness, and living on the LLC floor
Weekly study hall with professors and tutors	Welcome reception with parents, faculty, staff, and current students	Floor and FYE mentors to help students transition into the LLC
Graduate school tours	February Black History Program with Black alumni	Residence life staff such as hall director and assistant hall director (graduate assistant)
Research opportunities	Community building trip to Washington, D.C., and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference	
Career development and internship opportunities related to student majors	Peer mentorship	

APPENDIX C

An Ecological Model of Jamii House



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What considerations should residence life and housing professionals think about and present to campus partners to begin to build this type of living-learning community? Are there any equity issues on campuses that should be discussed?
2. Who would be the appropriate campus partners to link to your LLC to have an effective bridge program for first-year students? Are you able to create summer employment and mentoring opportunities for former LLC participants?
3. What additional outcomes or themes (e.g., financial literacy, wellness) would your campus infuse in this LLC model to match your student population?
4. The authors mention specific staffing needs, such as a Black male full-time faculty director and a Black male RA. How can housing and residence life create and support people in these roles without creating tokenism?

Discussion questions developed by Dan Pedersen and Zac Birch, Northern Illinois University