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# Postsecondary Policy Forum: The Central Arkansas Movement for Equity in Higher Education



A product of the Postsecondary  
Success for Men of Color Project  
Spring 2019

## EXECUTIVES' ALLIANCE FOR BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR

### About the Executives' Alliance

The Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (EA) is a network of national, regional, and community foundations driven by a bold vision that all boys and men of color will enjoy full opportunity and inclusion in the economic, educational, leadership, and wellness opportunities that America has to offer. EA's mission is to grow the breadth, depth, and coordination of philanthropy's commitment to an investment in the safety, wellness, and success of boys and men of color. Learn more at [www.funders4bmoc.org](http://www.funders4bmoc.org).

### About the Advancing Postsecondary Success for Men of Color Project

Through generous support from the Lumina Foundation, the Executives' Alliance provided grants to six nonprofit organizations to support demonstration projects designed to build the capacity of nonprofits, networks, and advocacy efforts to improve post-secondary outcomes for boys and men of color. The grantees were pre-selected organizations in six cities where EA member foundations and allies have supported place-based efforts to improve outcomes for boys and men of color: Detroit, Newark, Buffalo, Los Angeles, Little Rock, and Oakland.

Together, these six projects represent a diverse range of strategies to promote post-secondary success. Their innovative endeavors included building the capacity of individual postsecondary education institutions; establishing or strengthening collaborations among institutions; and forging alliances between and among postsecondary institutions, nonprofits, the public sector, data experts, and local advocacy efforts.

Amidst increased national attention to disparities in college admissions, persistent gaps in college completion compelled the grantees and their partners to examine patterns and seek solutions based on a shared conviction: that systems must be aligned and policies retooled to ensure that male students of color graduate. The underlying assumption of the project is that higher education institutions must reframe the narrative about male students of color to appreciate their talents and critically examine how institutional systems and policies may adversely affect these students. A greater awareness of the positive traits that help these students overcome and address difficult institutional systems and policies will help to improve opportunity for all students.

Each grantee organization received grant funding and extensive customized technical assistance throughout the duration of the grant period from a team of national experts:

Christine Robinson – Project Director

Ronald B. Mincy – Maurice V. Russell Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice, Columbia University School of Social Work,

Luis Ponjuan – Associate Professor of Educational Administration and Human Resources, Texas A&M University

### Acknowledgements

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## Foreword from Cory Anderson

Dear Arkansas Leaders,

One cold winter day in 2011 my brain hurt from turning numbers, facts, and aspirations round and round in my mind. I stood in my office at the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (WRF), staring out at a busy President Clinton Avenue in downtown Little Rock, Arkansas. My job was to increase prosperity and educational attainment statewide, and I was having a tough time trying to figure out how to do that as the world around me rapidly shifted to an information-based economy. The parallel between what WRF was trying to do and Governor Winthrop Rockefeller's legacy didn't escape me. Governor Rockefeller led Arkansas into the industrial economy by increasing access to jobs for everyone who paid family-supporting wages, and he intentionally cleared the way for Black Arkansans to earn livelihoods, learn, and lead. But what did that look like for us in the 21st century?

I knew that we also had to account for shifts in the racial and cultural makeup of Arkansans. Data from the 2010 U.S. Census showed that Little Rock—Arkansas's capital and largest city—was, for the first time in history, a city populated by more people of color than White people. Add to the mix that the immigrant population statewide was growing faster than that of nearly any other state.

I thought hard, but I was struggling. Compared to its neighbors, my state had a historically progressive environment. In recent years, though, a statewide narrative of scarcity and personal responsibility had grown louder. But if Arkansans did not take action to support individuals and communities of color, deeply entrenched systemic barriers to academic and career success would only become more insurmountable.

Then something clicked as I looked down at the piles of reports covering my desk. There it was. The leverage point for opportunity was higher education. The difference in lifetime income with a degree or certificate was tremendous, and data showed that more people in Arkansas were enrolling at Arkansas's higher education institutions than ever before. Data also showed that first-generation male students—regardless of race or ethnicity—simply were not graduating. If we could fix that, we could fix a lot.

However, WRF didn't have the resources necessary to directly support all male students enrolled at higher education institutions statewide. And it didn't seem right to try to find a silver-bullet approach. Some of the challenges faced by a Black student compared to a White student were just different. But what if we could fund colleges and universities to help them learn how to more effectively support male students of color? The numbers were clear: just as the state's demographics were shifting, male students of color were enrolling in colleges and universities across Arkansas in greater and greater numbers. However, the majority of men of color were not graduating within 150 percent of the anticipated postsecondary completion time, and a greater proportion were not graduating compared to any other subset of postsecondary students. If our state's higher education system could dramatically increase the percentage of male students of color who earned degrees and certificates, we could develop strategies to support higher graduation rates for ALL students.



So we started a conversation with higher education leaders and explored what we could accomplish, and we have continued to identify how we can support men of color to succeed in colleges for more than seven years. Not everything we have done has worked, but we have learned an enormous amount and valued the relationships we have built along the way.

The *Boys and Men Opportunity Success Team Postsecondary Policy Forum Agenda* outlines the next chapter in our journey toward increasing postsecondary educational attainment in Arkansas. We will make our vision a reality: when a male student of color enrolls at a college or university, he will earn a degree or certificate that enables him to build a career, support a family, and strengthen his community. And with the right data, coordinated partners, and action, we will provide the specific care, attention, and resources all students need to succeed in higher education, earn high-skilled jobs, and build prosperous, thriving communities that benefit all residents.

Sincerely,

Cory Anderson  
Chief Innovation Officer, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

## Introduction

Postsecondary enrollment in Arkansas has increased by 34 percent between 2012 and 2017. Civic, business, and education leaders statewide assert that Arkansas is ready for a movement toward economic, educational, social, ethnic, and racial equity. To get there, Arkansas will need to recreate and enhance its higher education system.

At present, most Arkansas students are not entering higher education prepared to succeed. Colleges and universities must go the extra mile to ensure that students graduate equipped with the knowledge and skills to join the state's future workforce and increase Arkansas's participation in the information economy (even though, as the *Expect More Arkansas: Our Jobs, Our Future* study has shown, 70 percent of jobs in Arkansas require a high school diploma or less). **Higher education institutions must commit to ensure that entering students obtain degrees and certificates** in two to four years, and postsecondary institutions must generate innovative, creative solutions to achieve this shared goal.

Fewer than 15,000 men of color are enrolled in Arkansas's higher education institutions in any given year. Their numbers have grown—along with total enrollment—but comparatively speaking, the total remains small. What Arkansas can learn from supporting the postsecondary success of these students will contribute to a thriving and prosperous state that benefits all residents.

While this is true for all postsecondary students, the 15,000 male students of color in Arkansas provide a sample size for researchers and their philanthropic partners. These students come from rural and urban communities, from stellar and lagging school districts. Postsecondary institutions could identify how to support male students of color and expand that knowledge to increase higher educational attainment for students statewide.

This insight led Arkansas colleges and universities and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (named after the former governor) to create the Marginalized Males Workforce and Education Consortium to draw attention to the barriers that male students of color face in higher education. Over seven years the consortium convened institutions to create programs and hire staff that would support male students. Colleges and universities made slow and steady progress.

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men of color are enrolled  
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education institutions  
in any given year.



## Advantages of Scale



Together, Marginalized Males Workforce and Education Consortium partners recognized that male students of color simply did not have the resources and support needed to succeed despite institutions' investment in new programs and positions to embrace these men. Early arrival programs brought men to campus a few weeks before their first year in college to become familiar with the learning environment, develop peer networks, connect with faculty and peer mentors, and complete remedial courses. Moreover, year-round programs brought students together to maintain these networks and continue conversations started during the early arrival programs.

Even as evidence surfaced that these programs were effective, program leaders still struggled to recruit and retain students. In short, they did not have what they needed to help male students of color rewrite the script, to create a story where they were likely to succeed. They learned that intentional, direct, and data-driven support for male students of color could generate opportunity—just as it could for all students—but they lacked evidence to suggest how to support this sub-section of the state's higher education student population.

The Marginalized Males Workforce and Education Consortium laid the groundwork to more intentionally support male students of color, but institutional focus on programs and positions prevented partners from shifting the higher education system toward greater inclusion and fulfilling the unique needs of men of color to succeed in higher education. If the state's higher education system lacked data and strategies to increase the postsecondary success of 15,000 men of color, how could it increase acquisition of degrees and certificates for all students?

## Shared Commitment to Find Answers

The Boys and Men Opportunity Success Team (BMOST) convened higher education institutions in Central Arkansas, which enrolled the most men of color in the state, to establish the Postsecondary Policy Forum in the fall of 2018. BMOST is an initiative of The Urban League of Arkansas to convene postsecondary institutions, nonprofit organizations, and state and municipal agencies to build capacity and resources to realize partners' shared vision that boys and men of color, empowered to succeed in school and careers, strengthen the Central Arkansas community. The goal of the Forum was to identify how these institutions could systematically and consistently change the higher education experience of male students of color so that more of these students would graduate with degrees and certificates. The Forum, which included representatives of public and private postsecondary institutions and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, crafted an agenda that outlined "quick wins" that could be achieved by higher education within 18 months. Postsecondary Policy Forum partners audited participating institutions to see what each was doing to support men of color; conducted meetings to identify themes related to retention, persistence, and completion among men of color; and engaged the Arkansas Department of Higher Education to see how it could provide resources and data to make progress on these goals and apply the findings to institutions throughout the state.

Seven public and private colleges and universities in Central Arkansas agreed to examine how they were committed to diversity among students, faculty, and staff; how many men of color they enrolled and graduated; how they intentionally recruited as well as provided financial, mentoring, and other support for those students; and what challenges men of color were most likely to face in the higher education context. These partners recognized that on the institutional and state levels they lacked the data to adjust policies, programs, and practices to increase the postsecondary success of men of color. This was true in part because none of the partner institutions had disaggregated data by gender combined with race and ethnicity. Eventually, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education and individual institutions were able to disaggregate data for the 2016-17 academic year to help explore how men of color succeeded and struggled compared to peer groups. A review of the data raised one important question for Postsecondary Policy Forum partners: "If we don't know how we're doing—where we've been and to where we've come—how can we effectively increase the postsecondary success of male students of color?"

That question underscored the importance of disaggregated data. Retention and attrition patterns varied by the demographic characteristics of students. For this reason, disaggregating data on retention and attrition by race, gender, and academic major could enable Forum partners to identify the academic majors and courses that posed particular threats to persistence and completion for male students of color. Armed with this information across years, Forum partners could dramatically shift lifelong outcomes for men of color and their families. Besides building systems of support based on evidence, Forum partners learned that they needed to take steps to increase a sense of belonging among men of color on campuses. Forum partners also acknowledged that it was critical to engage these students as assets and to use an equity lens to design targeted ways to support these students.

How can higher education institutions systematically and consistently change the experience for male students of color so that more of these men graduate with degrees and certificates?

The median retention rate of male students of color was

**55%**

and the graduation rate for these students was

**30%**

at the end of 2017.

## Useful Insights from the Internal Audit of Postsecondary Institutions Detailing the Success of Male Students of Color



Among male students of color in Central Arkansas, the top five academic majors were

- business management, marketing, and related services
- liberal arts/science, general studies, and humanities
- health professional and related programs
- computer and information sciences and support services
- engineering

The participating institutions experienced difficulty finding the resources to fund programs that would support men of color. They also explained that it was challenging to increase a sense of belonging for men of color on campus when staff and faculty seldom represented this demographic. Still, some exciting trends emerged from data collected in the initial audit. Collectively, all the institutions represented approximately 6,000 male students of color and employed 342 men of color as staff and faculty members. All but one of the partner institutions intentionally recruited—and provided scholarships for—male students of color. All except one offered mentoring programs for this cohort. The median retention rate (the percentage of a school's first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year) for male students of color at these institutions was 55 percent. In addition, the graduation rate (students who complete and earn a degree) for these students was 30 percent at the end of 2017.

Among male students of color in Central Arkansas, the top five academic majors were business management, marketing, and related services; liberal arts/science, general studies, and humanities; health professional and related programs; computer and information sciences and support services; and engineering. Men of color were least likely to pursue courses of study in library science; military technologies and applied sciences; science technologies; communications technologies and support systems; and construction.

## Male Students of Color Enrolling at Participating Public and Private Colleges and Universities in Central Arkansas for the 2016-17 Academic Year\*



330 total students

**Arkansas Baptist College** is a four-year, private historically black college affiliated with the Baptist church.



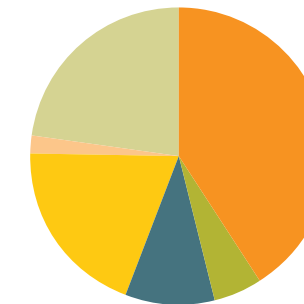
225 total students

**Hendrix College** is a four-year, private institution affiliated with the United Methodist church.



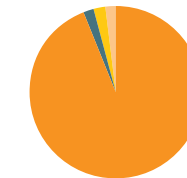
310 total students

**Philander Smith College** is a four-year, private historically black college affiliated with the United Methodist church.



1750 total students

**The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UA Little Rock)** is a four-year, public institution that is part of the University of Arkansas system.



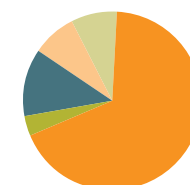
1020 total students

**The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB)** is a four-year, public historically black university that is part of the University of Arkansas system.



130 total students

**Shorter College** is a two-year, private historically black college affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal church.



1080 total students

**The University of Arkansas Pulaski Technical (Pulaski Tech)** is a two-year, public institution that is part of the University of Arkansas system.

\* Size of charts proportional to the percent of total students (4,845) enrolled at higher education institutions that participated in the Forum. Charts provided to reflect where men of color generally enroll in Central Arkansas.

Legend:

- Black or African American
- Asian
- Hispanics of any race
- International student
- Race and ethnicity unknown
- Two or more races



## Implications of the Work Completed So Far

Thanks to nearly a decade of collaboration and networking through the Marginalized Males Workforce and Education Consortium, Arkansas colleges and universities are ready to take actions that will increase the postsecondary success of male students of color. Postsecondary Policy Forum institutions hope that the information learned from this process can help increase certificate and degree attainment for all students, especially if relevant data is disaggregated by race and gender. Clear, segmented data can show how well the entire student population is doing and generate opportunities to match targeted support for students based on their specific needs. Participating institutions in the Postsecondary Policy Forum could convene higher education institutions statewide to determine how to accomplish similar goals with leadership from a broad cross-section of faculty, staff, and student leaders at individual institutions.

Forum participants created recommendations based on nearly two centuries of combined experience working in higher education.

Forum participants developed recommendations for how Arkansas's higher education system leaders could create a #BetterNow for male students of color as well as their community. Participants crafted these recommendations based on their nearly two centuries of combined experience working in higher education, conversations with colleagues at their respective institutions and across the state throughout the fall of 2018, and what disaggregated data for the 2016-17 academic year revealed. The Forum's recommendations are documented on the next page.

It is worth noting that representatives of historically black colleges and universities in the Forum observed that a sense of belonging was not a given for male students on their campuses. Although the environments of these institutions were generally supportive, male students often struggled with new and dramatically different academic contexts, socioeconomic differences, and lack of mentorship and leadership opportunities directed specifically toward them. These partners have seen increased retention, academic achievement, and graduation rates when they have created distinct spaces and conversations for male students on campus.

A sense of belonging was not a given for male students on their campuses.

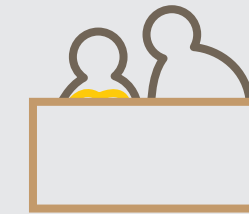
**There is a need to build and maintain a collaborative body to improve the higher education system to create a #BetterNow for male students of color as well as their communities.** Based on the eagerness of partners to participate and their desire to expand the initiative statewide, BMOST may be the right entity to recruit additional state and national funders to continue and expand the Forum's work. The Postsecondary Policy Forum will likely continue under the leadership of the Philander Smith College Social Justice Institute, which has the skills, knowledge, and network to continue to make progress toward the Forum's goal and share findings to increase postsecondary success for all students in Arkansas. In a majority-White state, the Forum could be a practical and attainable strategy toward boosting retention, persistence, and completion of male students of color. What is learned along the way could be used to increase the postsecondary success of all higher education students in Arkansas.

## Forum Recommendations

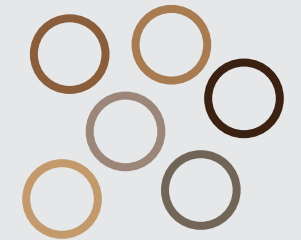
### Actions we can take to create a #BetterNow in Arkansas



Develop and implement core courses that are culturally relevant and responsive to male students of color



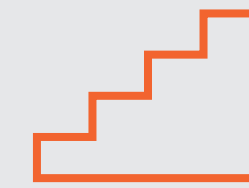
Provide more direct support for students to complete basic courses and avoid mandatory remedial coursework



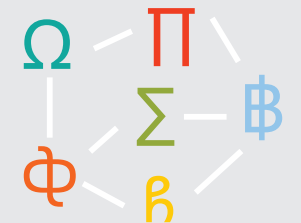
Increase the number of male staff of color who are accessible and relatable to the student body to generate a greater sense of belonging



Create and maintain mentorship networks that further promote a sense of belonging



Increase leadership and personal development opportunities for male students of color related to areas beyond major- and minor-related coursework



Formalize networks of support, including Greek organizations, to offer mentorship and tutoring



Reframe recruitment for science, technology, engineering, and math courses and majors to emphasize that male students of color belong in these academic fields



Offer early on-campus programs for first-generation, first-year students that supply relatable mentors who can help students build peer groups and complete necessary remedial coursework to ease difficulties during the traditional first semester



Create spaces on campus for conversations about maintaining and improving physical and mental health

## Addendum

### Shorter College – A Glimpse at What is Possible

This African Methodist Episcopal institution, established in 1886, is a private two-year historically black college in the United States. The initial image on its website—a young man of color perusing the stacks in a library—underscores the intention to cultivate the sense of belonging inherent in Shorter’s slogan: “You Fit Here.” During the 2014-2015 academic year, 32 percent of its 236 students were African American men. Slightly less than three-quarters of all students that year were enrolled full-time, and the rest attended part-time.\* Shorter offers open enrollment and on-campus residency.

In addition to maintaining credit transfer and articulation agreements with six higher education institutions in Arkansas, the college has similar agreements with other African Methodist Episcopal colleges, including Wilberforce University and Payne Theological Seminary. Its programs include dual enrollment for high school students in the surrounding North Little Rock public school district, along with outreach and enrollment focused on people on parole and probation from Arkansas correctional institutions and youth in the state juvenile justice system.

In 2016, BMOST Postsecondary Policy Forum partner Shorter College became one of 69 postsecondary institutions in the U.S. to participate in an experimental government program referred to as Second Chance Pell. Based on national research conducted by Rand Corporation and funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, every dollar invested in an individual’s education while incarcerated resulted in a \$4 to \$5 annual savings to taxpayers. During its first semester participating in the program, Shorter College enrolled 239 students from five correctional facilities in Arkansas.

“To be involved in a program that would serve persons who are incarcerated is simply an extension of what we would already do normally [for] a population that we did not have access to,” Shorter College President Jerome Green told a public radio reporter.

Shorter demonstrates a clear commitment to innovate as it makes progress toward its goal of supporting male students of color as well as other historically disenfranchised groups.

\*In recent years the enrollment has exceeded 400 students, but more recent disaggregated data were not immediately available.

## Call to Action

We hope this report has inspired you to take action to build a #BetterNow for men of color.

For even more inspiration, visit the Boys and Men Opportunity Success Team (BMOST) website at [www.bmost.org](http://www.bmost.org) to see BMOST partners in action.

## Postsecondary Policy Forum Leaders

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Dr. Margaret Ellibee, Chancellor, The University of Arkansas Pulaski Technical College

Jerome Green, President, Shorter College

Dominique Kelleybrew, Coordinator of Multicultural Student Services, Hendrix College

Dr. Richard Moss, Director of STEM Programs, The University of Arkansas Pulaski Technical College

Brian Miller, Dean of Student Affairs, Arkansas Baptist College

Dr. Amber Smith, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and Student Experience, The University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Dr. Zollie Stevenson, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Philander Smith College

Dr. Jessie Walker, Senior Associate Director for Academic Affairs/Research and Analytics, Arkansas Department of Higher Education

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Enormous thanks to the Boys and Men Opportunity Success Team Postsecondary Policy Forum partners who took time out of their busy schedules to build a movement to provide an equitable higher educational experience to young men of color in Central Arkansas. Without their insight, experience, and sheer brilliance, we could not have created action steps to increase the postsecondary success of male students of color.

Also, we are humbled and inspired by the original Marginalized Males Workforce and Education partners as well as Arkansas Summit on African American Males and Boys and Men Opportunity Success Team partners. For more than seven years, all of these committed leaders have continued to steadily drive progress to create a #BetterNow for boys and men of color throughout Arkansas.

We would also like to thank organizations and agencies that have provided resources to advance our movement toward equitable support for boys and men of color in our state. We are incredibly grateful to the Lumina Foundation, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, City of Little Rock, Kresge Foundation, Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, and Casey Family Programs. In addition to providing resources, they have connected Arkansas to a national conversation about how we can and will unlock the full potential of men and boys of color in America.

Thank you,

Dr. Joseph Jones and Brad Cameron-Cooper



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