

Sita Nyame, Global Engagement and Assessments Analyst, University of Connecticut,
sita.nyame@uconn.edu

Foluke Akinkunmi, Student, University of Connecticut, foluke.akinkunmi@uconn.edu

Shariena Green, Student, University of Connecticut, shariena.green@uconn.edu

Ngozi Taffe Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Global Affairs, University of Connecticut,
ngozi.taffe@uconn.edu

Session Format:

In-Person

Benefits of Black Woman Focused Learning Communities in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

Having a sense of belonging, beyond playing an important role in students feeling secure and supported, is an important factor in students' academic persistence and success (Pascarella, 1985). It translates to how people feel seen, heard, accepted, respected, and valued in their respective spaces and communities. In the higher education space, students of color often struggle to find their sense of belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2011). In Black female students, being able to thrive in a space where they perhaps feel othered, can be a difficult task. As students struggle mentally, physically and emotionally (Cao et al., 2020) from the aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic, the need for more intentional living and learning spaces is even more evident. This paper examines the creation of a Black female themed Learning community in a PWI, whose structure also embodies the High Impact Practices (Kuh, 2008) for college persistence and success.

The Black female themed Learning community, created in support of Black Women, looks to provide support and sisterhood to young students through their academic journey at a PWI. Support is provided by way of collaboration, studying, mentorship, increased faculty engagement, the encouragement to engage in research, as well as experiential global learning. Having a community of this nature and structure will allow students to have that sense of belonging, and feel nurtured and affirmed.

In our session, we will explore some of the challenges faced by Black female students in a PWI, prior to the installation of a Black female Learning community, the support mechanisms incorporated in the structure of this unique learning community. This study is also aimed at following this new cohort of students, with the aim of identifying the benefits - if any - in increased student sense of belonging, acceptance and persistence.