

# CONTINUING PROGRESS:

HOW URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE IMPROVING  
OUTCOMES FOR MINORITY MEN

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# INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have an important role in supporting economic opportunity in urban areas. While urban areas generally experience high levels of economic prosperity, especially compared to rural areas, individuals who have not participated in postsecondary education and training face barriers to taking full advantage of the opportunities available.<sup>1</sup> Low educational attainment and a resulting lack of economic opportunity are problems that negatively impact both men and women in America's cities; however, because they are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education, we focus specifically on men in this paper. This paper also pays attention to the barriers faced by men of color, who are disproportionately impacted by barriers to postsecondary education. In recent years, community colleges have made strides to improve educational attainment and success for men of color, yet still have more opportunity to support this student population.

Existing research shows a connection between postsecondary attainment and employment in urban areas. An analysis by researchers from the Brookings Institution found that the employment rate for men aged 25 to 54-years-old living in cities is only 79%, compared to 84% for men in surrounding suburban communities. In many cities, the male employment rate is below 70%.<sup>2</sup> One factor contributing to low employment in cities is low educational attainment, especially as more well-paying jobs require a postsecondary degree or credential.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, as of 2017, only 31% of Black men and 23% of Hispanic men age 25 years and older had earned an associate degree or higher, compared to 43% of white men. While Black and Hispanic men have lower levels of educational attainment than their white peers, postsecondary attainment among minority males has been increasing. From 2008 to 2017, the percentage of Black men who had earned at least an associate degree increased by 19% and the percentage of Hispanic men who had earned at least an associate degree increased by 28%.<sup>4</sup>

As affordable, open-door institutions, community colleges are first responders to the challenge of increasing minority male postsecondary participation and attainment. The U.S. Department of Education identifies 173 community colleges located in large or mid-size cities; these institutions enrolled more than 2 million students in Fall 2016, 46% of whom were Black or Hispanic. Men are in the minority at community colleges; 44% of all enrollees were male in Fall 2016. The gender gap is even larger among the Black and Hispanic community college students; only 41% of these students were male.<sup>5</sup>

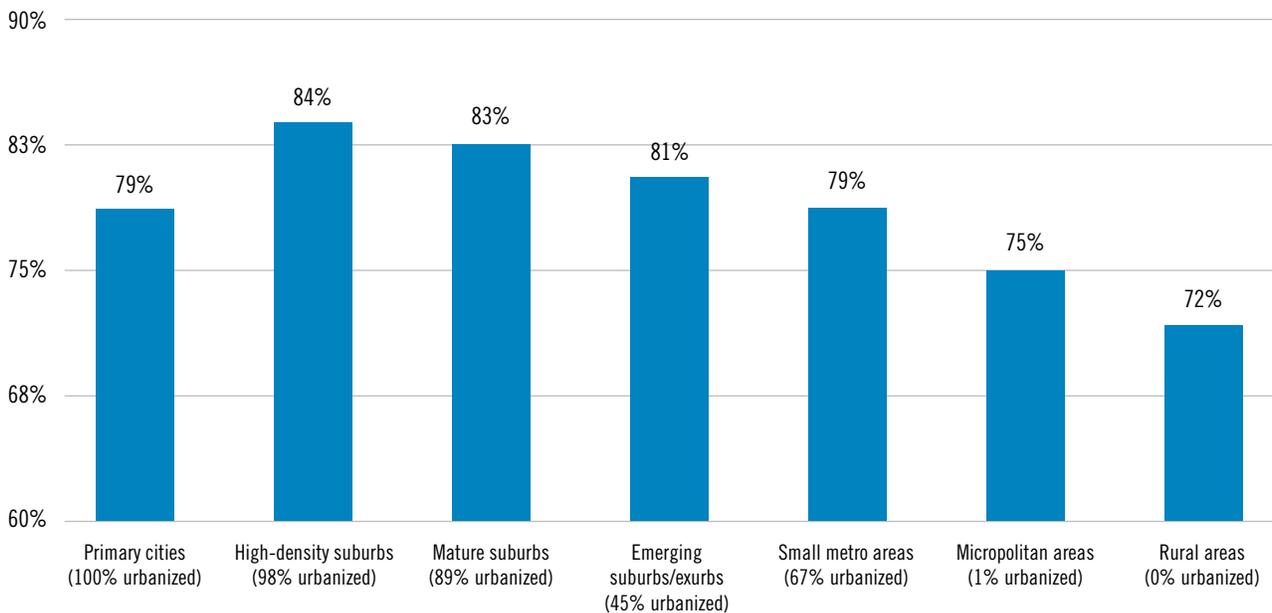
In the following sections, this paper takes a deeper look at the economic and demographic state of urban America and the connections to postsecondary participation and attainment among minority men. The paper discusses several barriers to postsecondary access and completion faced by minority men and strategies to overcome these challenges. We also present profiles of initiatives to support minority men at Tarrant Community College in Fort Worth, TX and the City University of New York (CUNY). ACCT hopes that this paper will serve as a foundation for further discussions and greater inquiry into the attainment disparities among men in urban communities and what can be done to improve equity.

# THE ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC STATE OF URBAN AMERICA

Since the Great Recession of 2008, cities across the country have experienced changes in their economies and populations. As recently as 2007, employment outside city centers was outpacing growth within. Between 2002 and 2007, the average annual job growth in city centers increased at a rate of only 0.1%, compared to 1.2% growth on the urban periphery. While cities were hit negatively by the recession, they are now experiencing greater prosperity. An analysis by the U.S. Department of Agriculture reveals that, as of mid-2016, employment in metropolitan areas had exceeded its pre-recession peak by almost 5%.<sup>6</sup> Over the past year from July 2017 to July 2018, unemployment rates decreased in 83% of metropolitan areas in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Improvements to the job market and employment are beneficial for all individuals living in cities. However, data on male employment shows how their economic well-being differs by geography. Analysis by researchers from the Brookings Institution found that men between the ages of 25 and 54 in primary cities are employed at a rate of 79%. While men in urban areas are employed at higher rate than men in rural areas (72%), their rate of employment is lower than those in suburban areas (84%), as shown in the graph below.<sup>8</sup>

**EMPLOYMENT OF MEN AGED 25 TO 54 BY AREA TYPE, 2010-2014**



Source: Berube, A. (2016) America's male employment crisis is both urban and rural. Washington, DC. Brookings Institution.



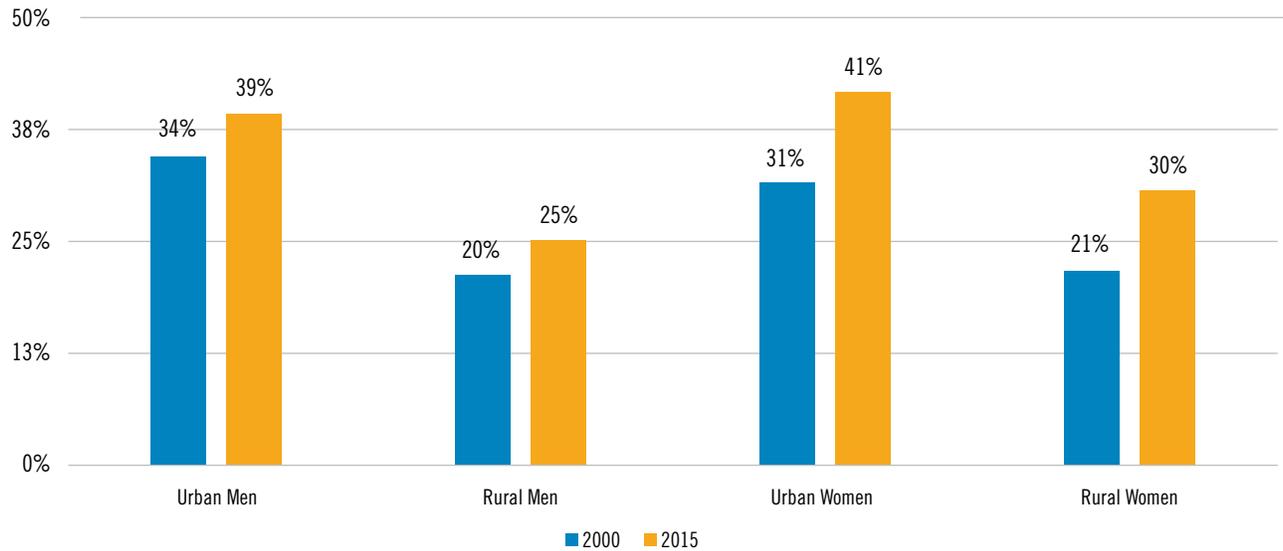
The demographics of urban America are also shifting. White individuals no longer constitute the majority in urban counties; from 2000 to 2016, the share of white individuals in urban areas decreased from 51% to 44%. This decline is expected to continue, with white individuals estimated to make up less than 50% of the population nationwide by 2050. Cities around the country are increasingly diverse. On average, 44% of city residents identify as white, 27% as Hispanic, 17% as Black, 10% as Asian, and 2% as other races or ethnicities.<sup>9</sup> With these demographic shifts, strategies are needed to support all segments of the population to benefit from postsecondary education and employment, especially low-income residents and individuals of color who have been historically excluded from these paths to prosperity.

## EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT OF MINORITY MALES IN URBAN AREAS

America deals with a longstanding challenge of educational disparities between white Americans and minority communities. These racial equity gaps exist throughout the educational system; here we focus on the impact of attainment disparities that impact minority male students' pathways from high school to postsecondary education to career. As of 2017, nationally, 86% of Black men aged 25 years and 70% of Hispanic men had earned a high school diploma or higher, compared to 90% of white men. These attainment gaps widen at the postsecondary level. As of 2017, only 31% of Black men and 23% of Hispanic men age 25 years and older had earned an associate degree or higher, compared to 43% of white men.<sup>10</sup> Further evidence shows that this drop-off educational attainment is not solely a result of academic preparation or college readiness. According to a study by researchers from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, more than 111,000 high-achieving Black and Hispanic high school students do not complete a two- or four-year degree.<sup>11</sup> While these racial gaps are troubling, it is also important to recognize improvements for minority males over the last decade. From 2008 to 2017, high school attainment increased by 6% for Black men 25 years and older and 13% for Hispanic men. During the same period, postsecondary attainment of at least an associate degree increased by 19% for Black men 25 years and older and by 28% for Hispanic men.<sup>12</sup>

In urban areas specifically, the percentage of all men with an associate degree or higher is also increasing, as shown in the graph below. From 2000 to 2015, the postsecondary attainment for urban men increased from 34% to 39%. While this improvement is significant, the pace of postsecondary attainment increases among urban men has been slower than increases among other adults. The comparison to urban women is especially notable. In 2000, postsecondary attainment was higher among urban men than urban women; however, by 2015 urban men had fallen behind their female peers in attainment.<sup>13</sup>

## PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WITH AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER BY GENDER AND AREA, 2000 AND 2015



Source: United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2017). Rural education at a glance, 2017 edition. Washington, DC.

One factor in racial and gender gaps in educational attainment is men's low enrollment in postsecondary education. As affordable, open-door institutions, community colleges are first responders to the challenge of increasing minority male postsecondary participation and attainment. The U.S. Department of Education identifies 173 community colleges located in large or mid-size cities; these institutions enrolled more than 2 million students in Fall 2016, 46% of whom were Black or Hispanic. Men are in the minority at community colleges; 44% of all enrollees were male in Fall 2016. The gender gap is even larger among the Black and Hispanic community college students; only 41% of these students were male.<sup>14</sup> This data highlights the significant opportunity for community colleges to increase minority males' educational participation and attainment and help them overcome many of the barriers to postsecondary education detailed in the next section of this paper.

## BARRIERS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Barriers to postsecondary education for minority males begin early, often due to biases leading to disproportional disciplinary action and assignment to special education. During the 2015 to 2016 school year, boys represented half of all public-school students but accounted for 69% of those who received law enforcement referrals or were arrested. The disparity is even larger for Black students who represented 15% of the public-school population and accounted for 31% of total law enforcement referrals or arrests. Comparatively, white students represented 49% of student enrollment and accounted for 36% of total law enforcement referrals or arrests.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Black and Hispanic boys are overrepresented in special education. Disciplinary action and assignment to special education can be the result of teachers' and administrators' stereotypes about minority boys. These actions can cause boys to disengage from school, reinforcing negative perceptions about their academic interest and aptitude.<sup>16</sup>

Young men also may become dissuaded from attending college because they either want to or feel that they must enter the job market and begin earning an income. When faced with the choice between education and work, men will often choose work.<sup>17</sup> However, education is important to obtaining a good job that offers a family-sustaining wage. Well-paying jobs have been in decline for those with only a high school diploma and have increased for workers with an associate degree. Men with an associate degree earn about \$4,600 more annually compared with men with "some college" in their educational background.<sup>18</sup> Forgoing college to enter the workforce may seem like the best economic choice in the short-term, but costs men significantly over the longer term.

While community colleges are widely known for being affordable, especially compared to four-year institutions, many of their students face financial barriers. For many low-income students, a full or partial federal Pell Grant is enough to cover the cost of community college tuition: \$3,500 on average.<sup>19</sup> However, beyond the price of tuition, many community college students face other large expenses, such as housing and other living expenses, which make up the bulk of their full cost of attendance.<sup>20</sup> In 2016, the net price (after grant aid) of tuition, fees, and living expenses at public two-year institutions made up 43% of Black students' incomes and 38% of Hispanic students' incomes, on average; comparatively, net price made up 33% of white students' incomes. Additionally, 82% of Black students and 76% of Hispanic students at public two-year institutions had unmet financial need, compared to 66% of white students.<sup>21</sup>

Minority men also are more likely to be first-generation college students and do not have the benefit of receiving the knowledge of their parents' college experience. In 2016, 32% of Black students at public two-year institutions and 44% of Hispanic students were first-generation students, compared to 21% of white students.<sup>22</sup> Many first-generation students face the challenge of having limited knowledge of the college environment or how to navigate often complicated financial aid processes, which can create a barrier to their persistence and degree completion. According to researchers from the National Center for Education Statistics, among college students who began in 2004, after three years from enrolling 52% of first-generation students had either stopped out or dropped out, compared to 47% of students whose parents had attended at least some college and 33% of students whose parents had earned a bachelor's degree.<sup>23</sup>

In the following sections, we detail initiatives at Tarrant Community College and the City University of New York focused on helping minority men overcome barriers like these and succeed in postsecondary education. Based on our review of existing research and best practices used by these colleges, we also provide several strategies that other urban community colleges can adopt to enroll more minority men on their campuses and help them earn a degree.

# COMMUNITY COLLEGE INITIATIVES TO ASSIST MINORITY MEN

## Tarrant County College

Nationally and regionally, too few men of color are making it into and through postsecondary education and earning a degree or credential. In Texas, only 20% of students who were in 8th grade in 2006 graduated from college by 2017. To address this problem, in 2015, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board launched the “60x30” initiative, working towards the goal of 60% of Texans between the ages of 25 and 34 having a credential or degree by 2030. Tarrant County College (TCC) in Fort Worth, TX, is a key partner to achieving the state’s postsecondary attainment goal, especially for urban, minority men.

Increasing success and completion for men of color is the focus of TCC’s Men of Color Collaborative (MCC). Launched in spring 2018, MCC expands on an existing men of color mentoring program with well-rounded student supports and ongoing monitoring of multiple academic success indicators. Led by the campus’ Intercultural Network Coordinators, TCC tracks the success of all students with a special focus on the progress and success of men of color. Targeted interventions in the form of individualized education plans, resources, and opportunities are provided to men of color as determined by their individual interests and needs. Needs assessment and individualized educational plans are facilitated using Ruffalo Noel Levitz’s College Student Inventory that measures non-cognitive indicators of student success. Through the Intercultural Network, the MCC not only leverages campus and community services, programs and partnerships, but also seeks to understand any barriers to success and completion.

Furthermore, through the MCC, students can find a mentor, participate in regional and national conferences, and pursue leadership and other experiential learning opportunities. MCC is committed to creating a sense of belonging and community within an environment that promotes student learning, success, and achievement for men of color at TCC.



## City University of New York Black Male Initiative

The Black Male Initiative (BMI) began at the City University of New York (CUNY) in 2005 at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, and now has chapters at campuses across the CUNY system. Despite the name, BMI's mission is to, "...increase, encourage, and support the inclusion and educational success of students from groups that are severely underrepresented in higher education, in particular African, Black/Black, Caribbean and Latino/Hispanic Males." The overall goal of the initiative is to increase the enrollment, retention, and graduation of underrepresented students, and to boost their academic achievement, such as by increasing their grade point average.

Funding for the initiative initially came from grants awarded by the New York City Council to support currently enrolled minority male students. Later, funding from the city was extended to help individuals without a high school diploma enroll in courses to obtain their high school equivalency, thus improving their ability to access postsecondary education. Though the BMI programs differ from campus to campus, common across campuses are the three components of: diversity recruitment; structured, individualized mentoring; and academic support.

Academic peer mentoring has been one of the most successful BMI strategies. BMI uses a "mentor-the-mentor approach", in which high-performing upper-classmen in the program receive extensive training to serve as mentors to under-classmen. Mentees meet with their mentors multiple times throughout the semester to create an academic plan and track progress towards their goals. To incentivize participation in the program, all BMI mentors are paid. Student mentors also have check-ins with an advisor responsible for overseeing student mentors to ensure they too are meeting their academic goals while serving as a mentor to other students. A major goal of the program is that mentees will have the opportunity to explore a variety of academic majors and career paths, so they can find a course of study that aligns with their passions and interests.

One example of the strong BMI programming is at CUNY's Kingsborough Community College. The college provides a Men's Resource Center (MRC) to connect new students with resources early in their academic careers. Students have the option to participate in a single-credit student development course, as part of a small, 25 student cohort providing a more intimate college atmosphere. Participating students learn effective strategies for transitioning to college, exploring career options, and accessing campus resources.

Part of Kingsborough's strategy for success is to encourage effective oversight from an MRC advisory committee. MRC committee members also serve as advocates for the program. The committee meets monthly and attends all institutional council meetings to plan and advocate for their program. Each member of the committee also must participate in the program by serving as a mentor for a full semester.

# STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT MEN OF COLOR AT URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Barriers that hinder postsecondary attainment can negatively impact economic prosperity and mobility for minority men. A first step to helping more minority men access and succeed in postsecondary education is recognizing many of the social and economic challenges these men face along the way. To overcome these barriers and resulting inequalities, and continue positive trajectories for minority men, there are several strategies that college leaders can use:

- **Foster a sense of community among male students.** Ensuring male students have a strong mentorship program to connect with is key to their success, especially for students who are unable to benefit from their family members' experiences in college and may need additional support to navigate the college environment. Additionally, male students can benefit from having a way to connect to fellow students who share similar experiences. Connecting students to a community at the beginning of their academic career can help them feel like they belong on campus.
- **Partner with high schools to encourage male students to go to college,** such as with dual enrollment programs. The importance of postsecondary education in minority men's lives can be introduced at a younger age, certainly before they finish high school, so that they might consider going to college as a route to achieving their personal and career goals.
- **Provide opportunities to connect college and career and recognize students' skills from prior work experience.** Minority men who are hesitant to enroll in community college could become more interested if presented with clear links between academic coursework and their career interests. Colleges can partner with local employers to offer on-the-job training experiences, such as paid internships or apprenticeships, that are connected to a student's course of study. Colleges can also recognize the skills gained from work experience, such as by awarding course credit using prior learning assessments, thus helping students connect college and career and potentially save them time and money towards earning their postsecondary degree.
- **Create programs that are targeted to local needs.** A good way to show students that their course of study will lead to employment is to create programs in partnership with local employers. Partnering with local businesses can encourage students to remain in their communities after completing their degree, thus boosting the local economy.
- **Ensure that students have access to all available financial resources and support services.** Assisting students with completing the FASFA application, providing personalized explanations of award packages, and helping students find and apply for scholarships could help students finance their education with reduced, or zero out-of-pocket expenses. Colleges can also help connect students to resources for other college costs including books, transportation, and living expenses.

By taking steps such as these, community colleges can build on their track record as engines of opportunity for minority men in America's cities.



## CONCLUSION

Urban community colleges are working to help minority men overcome barriers of entry into higher education and earn their degree or credential. Although minority men in urban communities have substantially increased their presence in higher education, they are still underrepresented in comparison to urban white men, and urban white and minority women. By understanding the challenges these students face, institutions can better design programs that give students the tools they need to succeed and feel welcome on campus.

First, community colleges must understand the socioeconomic backgrounds of their student populations and commit and be prepared to assist students with the challenges they may face. Second, community colleges need to recognize the financial hurdles that many students have to clear in order to attend college. Even if students are capable of covering their tuition, the percentage of their income that it takes to do so needs to be considered, as does the added cost of living expenses. Institutions need to ensure that they have robust mentorship programs in place and that students have easy access to career services. These are resources they should be connected with as soon as they enroll.

In this report, we have highlighted initiatives at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth, TX and the City University of New York to engage minority male students. Best practices learned from these initiatives include the importance of providing quality mentorship, academic support, and career counseling to help their male students navigate college and their career pathways. These efforts exemplify the kinds of activities urban community colleges around the country can engage in to promote access and success for men of color.

## ENDNOTES

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