Synthesis of US literature relating to the retention, progression, completion and attainment of black and minority ethnic (BME) students in HE

Dr Jacqueline Stevenson and Pauline Whelan
Centre for Social and Educational Research across the Life course (SERL),
Leeds Metropolitan University

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1. Introduction

In the UK, there are substantial differences across all ethnic groups in relation to their retention and attainment in higher education (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; ECU/HEA, 2008; HEFCE, 2010). Singh (2011), in the HEA-funded *A synthesis of research evidence. Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation in higher education: improving retention and success*, outlines key research and interventions designed to enhance BME success in UK higher education.

Building on Singh's work, this synthesis seeks to evidence the data relating to the retention, progression, completion and attainment of ethnic minority undergraduate students in the US and, in doing so, draw out implications for UK stakeholders.

The synthesis draws primarily on data from the last decade and purposefully samples from literature relating to diverse ethnic groups and different types of educational institution. As noted by Swaner and Brownell (2009) many studies are either purely descriptive in nature, focus on a single institution or programme and/or fail to measure the longitudinal impact of retention and attainment practices on students. Efforts have therefore been made to provide a robust synthesis of US literature relating to the retention, progress, completion and attainment of ethnic minority undergraduate students by drawing on a wide range of literature sources, including national studies, peer-reviewed reports, US statistical data relating to population rates and academic journal articles.

2. Terminology

In the UK, the term 'black and minority ethnic' (BME or BaME) is most commonly used to describe all those who are non-white British (and thus may also include those who describe themselves as 'white other'). This term is not used in the US. Although, as described below terms such as 'minority' or 'multiracial' are used, non-white individuals are generally described in a much more disaggregated way, such as Latino/a, Native American or black. While Jesse Jackson, during the 1988 presidential campaign, announced that members of his race preferred to be called 'African Americans', a series of Gallup polls from 1991 to 2007 showed no strong consensus for either 'black' or 'African American'. Indeed, more recently, many black Americans are actually eschewing the term 'African American' arguing that it tethers them to a distant past to which they feel no connection. A recent NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll, found that 42% of respondents said they preferred 'black', and only 35% 'African American' (Washington, 2012). In addition, many of those labelled 'African American' do not perceive a connection to Africa since their historical roots lie in the Caribbean[1]. Furthermore, the noun 'blacks' (as opposed to the adjective 'black') does not have the same pejorative connotation as it has in the UK, and the term 'blacks' is frequently used to describe Americans of African descent, as is the term 'non-whites'.

We have, therefore, taken the decision to use the same terms as the authors whose work we present in this synthesis. This means we have mirrored the use of the terms 'blacks' or 'whites' rather than 'black students' or 'white students', except when other terms have been used, where we have done the same, or where a specific racial or ethnic group has been researched.

In addition, the generic terms 'college' and 'university' do not have the same distinction from each other as they do in the UK. Thus, as described below, 'tribal colleges' includes colleges and universities that are members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, and 'associate's colleges', while predominantly offering only degrees at Associate level, may also award a small number of Bachelors degrees. We have therefore, again, used the terms used by the authors in their work, making distinctions only where this is necessary to contextualise the data.

[1] Though, of course, prior to their arrival in the Caribbean the majority of slaves came from Africa.

3. Explanatory context

3.1. 'Race' and 'ethnicity'

Considerable scholarly debate surrounds the concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity'. While the historically contingent and socially constructed nature of both concepts is widely recognised, the term 'race' is intimately connected to issues of power, globalisation, colonialism and hierarchical relations among social groups (Cornell and Hartman, 1998). Ethnicity, also widely understood as a socially constructed identity category, is guided by notions of shared cultural heritage, common languages, religious beliefs or notions of kinship (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998). Research by Morning (2009) with undergraduate students from diverse ethnic backgrounds at four north-eastern US universities, however, found that the majority of her respondents equated race with culture and ancestry and, in so doing, "effectively cast race as ethnicity: a group identity that depends on a sense of common origins or history, coupled with shared values and behaviours" (p. 1,174). Markus (2008) offers an integrated definition of race and ethnicity, namely "dynamic sets of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices", but notes that race, unlike ethnicity, also "indexes an asymmetry of power and privilege between groups" (p. 21).

3.2. Racial and ethnic categories in the US

US federal standards for classifying racial data identify 'five minimum categories' for the collecting and reporting of data on 'race', including American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and white (OMB, 1997). The following racial distinctions are defined in US federal guidance, based on the 1997 revision of a 1977 standard:

- **American Indian or Alaska Native**: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- **Asian**: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Black or African American**: a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Terms such as 'Haitian' or 'Negro' can be used in addition to 'Black or African American'.
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander**: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- **White**: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

  (OMB, 1997)

The US Census of 2010 also allowed respondents to select the category 'Some Other Race' (US Census Bureau, 2011a).

The federal guidance for collecting and reporting data on ethnicity describes two 'minimum categories': 'Hispanic or Latino' and 'Not Hispanic or Latino' (OMB, 1997). 'Hispanic or Latino' is defined as a "person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. The term, 'Spanish origin', can be used in addition to 'Hispanic or Latino'".

The federal documentation acknowledges that the ethnic and racial categories listed above are "not anthropologically or scientifically based" (OMB, 1997), but states that the categories have been developed to "represent a political-social construct designed to be used in the collection of data on the race and ethnicity of major broad population groups" (OMB, 1997). The OMB standards have been widely adopted by federal agencies, including the US Department of Education (US Department of Education, 2007),

which provides guidance to higher educational institutions on the official collection and reporting of student data.

The rigidity of using such limited categories has, however, caused significant distortions to datasets. For example, since Hispanics, along with North Africans, Middle Easterners and Arabs, are viewed as an ethnic and not racial group, 18 million Hispanics, more than a third of the total US Latino population, choose 'some other race' when asked their racial classification in the most recent census (United States Census Bureau, 2011a). In response the Census Bureau are considering major changes to survey questions on race and ethnicity, including dropping use of the term 'negro' leaving a choice of black or African American (Brown, 2012).

In the 2010 US Census, 72.4% of people identified as 'One Race' white; 12.6% identified as 'One Race' black or African American; 4.8% identified as 'One Race' Asian; 0.9% as 'One Race' American Indian or Alaskan Native; 0.2% as 'One Race' Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; 6.2% as 'Some Other Race'; and 2.9% as 'Two or more Races'. 16.3% identified as 'Hispanic or Latino'. (United States Census Bureau, 2011a; Humes *et al*., 2011).

The US 2003 revision of the standards for vital certificates (for example, registration of births, deaths, marriages, divorces) goes beyond the 1997 OMB minimum requirements and recommends the following race and ethnicity categories:

- **Hispanic Origin**: No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino; Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano; Yes, Puerto Rican; Yes, Cuban; Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.
- **Race**: white; black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native (with space to write in principal tribe); Asian Indian; Chinese; Filipino; Japanese; Korean; Vietnamese; Other Asian; Native Hawaiian; Guamanian or Chamorro; Samoan; Other Pacific Islander and Other).

3.3. Alternative definitions

3.3.1. Biracial

'Biracial' refers to having parents of two different races. Historically the US adopted the 'one-drop' rule, which defined any child with 'a drop' of black blood as being legally black, enshrined in law in the early 20th century. During the Jim Crow era[2] many biracial individuals chose to 'pass' as white. However, recent work by Khanna and Johnson (2010) highlights the reverse pattern of passing in contemporary US society: the respondents in their research were significantly more likely to pass as black, primarily for affirmative action purposes (affirmative action policies are discussed further below), including when making applications for college or for educational scholarships.

3.3.2. Immigrant

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA, 1952) broadly defines an immigrant as "any alien in the United States, except one legally admitted under specific non-immigrant categories" (INA, 1952, section 101(a), p. 15). A clear distinction is, however, made between an immigrant who is a legal permanent resident (LPR) of the US, of whom an estimated 13.1 million LPRs were living in the US on 1 January 2011 (OIS, 2012a), and the unauthorised immigrant population of whom 11.5 million were calculated to be living in the US as of January 2011 (OIS, 2012b). The unauthorised immigrant population is the remainder or 'residual' after the legally resident foreign-born population (LPRs, naturalised citizens, asylum seekers, refugees and non-immigrants) is subtracted from the total foreign-born population. The distinction between non-immigrants, LPRs and unauthorised immigrants is used in much retention and degree attainment research; for example, Bennett and Lutz's (2009) work exploring the difference between immigrant and non-immigrant blacks and whites, and Mukhopadhyay's (2011) research, which draws on religious rather than racial differences among immigrants.

[2] From the 1880s to the 1960s, the majority of American states enforced racial segregation through 'Jim Crow' laws (named after a black character in minstrel shows). The laws legalised segregation between blacks and whites, with the most common forbidding intermarriage and ordering both businesses and public institutions to keep black and white people separated.

3.3.3. Minorities

'Minorities' is a term typically used to categorise people who do not identify as 'white', and was originally positioned in opposition to the majority white population. The term has attracted criticism because shifting demographic trends and geographical variations across US states can render it statistically unrepresentative of local populations. Other critics have claimed that it connects an inferior discursive term to 'People of Color'. The term is, however, used in reporting the national participation and attainment rates of different ethnic groups via the American Council on Education's biennial reports on 'Minorities in Higher Education'.

3.3.4. Multiracial

Multiracial Americans are those who identify as of 'two or more races'; the category may also include Americans of mixed-race ancestry who culturally and/or socially identify with just one group. Approximately 9 million individuals, or 2.9% of the population, self-identified as multiracial on the 2010 US census (United States Census Bureau, 2011a).

However, the term 'multiracial' is not a homogenous one. In her work exploring the experiences of mixed-race college students, Renn (2004) identifies five patterns of multiracial identity:

- **monoracial identity** (e.g. black or Asian);
- **multiple monoracial identity** (those students who identified with more than one monoracial identity such as Hispanic and Asian);
- **multiracial identity** (those students who chose to not specifically identify their ethnicity but referred to themselves as 'mixed' or 'biracial');
- **extraracial identity** (multiracial students who chose not to identify themselves based on the US racial categories);
- **situational identity** (students who chose their identity based on situational context).

3.3.5. 'People of color'

'People of color' is a category that was formed in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see, for example Safire, 1988) as a purposeful claim to a common group identity, as a positive alternative to 'non-white', which, it was argued, perpetuates a deficit account of other races, and as a move to understandings of race beyond the black-white binary. The term 'People of color' encompasses all categories of people who do not identify as 'white'. It is, however, a contested term with not only some white but also some mixed-race individuals arguing that the term places too much emphasis on skin colour and not enough on race or ethnicity.

3.4. Types of higher education institution in the US

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classifies institutions delivering higher education qualifications into six 'basic classification categories', namely:

- **Associate's colleges:** includes those institutions, both public and not-for-profit, where all degrees are at Associate level, or where Bachelors degrees account for less than 10% of all undergraduate degrees.
- **Doctorate-granting universities:** includes only those institutions that awarded at least 20 research doctoral degrees during the update year.
- **Masters colleges and universities:** includes those institutions that awarded at least 50 Masters degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees during the update year.
- **Baccalaureate colleges:** includes institutions where Baccalaureate degrees represent at least 10% of all undergraduate degrees and where fewer than 50 Masters degrees or 20 doctoral degrees were awarded during the update year

- **Special focus institutions:** includes institutions awarding Baccalaureate or higher-level degrees where a high concentration of degrees (above 75%) is in a single field or set of related fields, for example theological, medical or engineering specialist colleges, etc.
- **Tribal colleges:** includes colleges and universities that are members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. There are 34 federally recognised tribal colleges and universities in the United States, located mainly in the Midwest and Southwest.

An Associate degree is an undergraduate degree that can be earned in approximately two years. Bachelors, or Baccalaureate, degrees are four-year degrees.

3.5. Historically black college or university (HBCU)

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are defined by the US Higher Education Act of 1965 as "any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation".

There are 105 HBCUs across the US, the majority created after the Civil War, enrolling 13% of all black undergraduate students. Outcomes of students attending HBCUs are positive, as summarised by Dwyer (2006), in that retention rates among black students at HBCUs are significantly higher than at predominantly white institutions, HBCUs report better outcomes in student learning and self-confidence including higher grade point averages, better psychological development, greater satisfaction with campus activities, and greater academic growth and maturity. In addition, students have better relationships with staff and are more likely to aspire to a higher degree. Flemming's (2004) study comparing black students attending HBCUs with their peers in similar predominantly white institutions (PWIs) found that HBCUs were actually more effective than PWIs in promoting confidence and high aspirations, and that there was a higher level of intellectual engagement among black students attending HBCUs than among those attending PWIs. In addition, research by Gilbert *et al.* (2006) with 154 African-American undergraduates attending an HBCU found that, unlike African-American students at PWIs wherein racial identity was found to be predictive of psychological distress, those studying in settings where they were not in the minority did not suffer in the same way. In contrast, Harper's (2012) research highlights the pressures faced by those students experiencing 'onlyness', defined as "the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" (see Harper *et al.*, 2011, p. 190). The students in his research at PWIs not only felt overwhelming pressure to be the spokesperson for minority students in general and black men in particular, but that their 'onlyness' threatened their achievement and sense of belonging.

Although they comprise only 3% of the US institutions of higher learning, HBCUs are responsible for producing approximately 22% of all Bachelors degrees, 11% of all Masters degrees, and 22% of all first professional degrees earned by African Americans annually (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Research by Kim (2006), drawing on national longitudinal data, found that African-American students have a similar probability of obtaining a BA degree whether they attended an HBCU or a historically white college or university (HWCU)[3]. The comparable outcomes across HBCUs and HWCUs is particularly striking, because, as the authors argue, HBCUs are significantly underfunded relative to HWCUs[4] and African-American students at HBCUs have typically lower levels of attainment in high school.

[3] We use the distinction between HWCU and HBCU here, drawn by Kim (2006).
[4] Harper (2007) identifies that less than 2% of the $140 billion in federal grants for science and engineering were awarded to HBCUs in the 1990s. In addition, in 2001, HBCUs (along with Indian tribal institutions) were removed from the list of those institutions that the House Committee on Higher Education would consider for additional government funding.

3.6. Degree classification in the US

Grades and degree classifications differ between the UK and the US and there is no direct comparison. In most US universities, at the end of each semester, students are assigned a letter grade for each course taken – typically A (excellent) to F (fail). A grade point average (GPA) is then calculated for each student. The GPA is a single cumulative number representing all marks acquired during undergraduate (or postgraduate) study and is based on the following: A = 4.00, B = 3.00, C = 2.00, D = 1.00 and F = 0.00 (Fail).

There is no hard and fast rule of converting between UK degree classifications and US GPA, and different US institutions compare differently. However, the Fulbright Commission have created 'an unofficial chart' with approximate grade conversions between UK results and US GPA:

Table 1: Approximate grade conversions between UK results and US GPA

UK class	UK percentage	US grade	US GPA
First	70-100	A	4.0
Upper second	60-69	B+/B	3.0-3.33
Lower second	54-59	B/B-	2.67-3.0
Third	42-53	C	2.0
Pass	38-41	D	1.0
Fail	0-37	F	0

Source: The Fulbright Commission (undated)

Many United States universities and colleges also rank their students according to their GPA: graduating as valedictorian means that the student has achieved the highest GPA with the salutatorian being the student with the second highest. In addition, other students can graduate with Latin honours such as 'cum laude' (with honour), 'magna cum laude' (with great honour) or summa cum laude (with highest honour).

4. Attainment and achievement gaps in the United States

In the United States, white children and adults are significantly more likely to be successful than their ethnic minority peers, with racial differences continuing to result in socio-economic disadvantages across all domains of life , including education, health, employment and housing. The median income level of African-American families is less than two-thirds that of white families, while the median net worth of white households is more than ten times that of black households; African Americans and Latinos disproportionately occupy low paid and low status jobs, while their unemployment rates far exceed that of whites (Barnes *et al*., 2010). It is unsurprising, therefore, that one in every three African-American children and one in every four Latino children live in poverty, twice the rate for white children. In addition, even after controlling for poverty, education and unemployment, white report better overall health than black Latino/as, and Asians (Lin and Harris, 2008). Since, as Barnes *et al*. (2010) argue, higher levels of educational attainment generally correlate to improved economic outcomes, it is somewhat predictable, therefore, that blacks and Latinos also experience significant disparities in educational achievement. The high school dropout rate of blacks and Latinos, for example, is almost double that of whites: approximately 42% of Hispanic students, 43% of African-American, and 46% of American-Indian students do not graduate on time with a regular diploma from high school, compared to only 17% of Asian and 22% of white students (EPinE, 2011).

There is also an educational achievement gap between white children and their ethnic minority peers. The 'achievement gap' is the disparity in academic performance between, for example, African-American

and Hispanic students – who are at the lower end of the performance scale – and white students. The achievement gap can be measured by comparing academic performance among African-American, Hispanic and white students on standardised assessments, and/or comparing the highest level of educational attainment for various ethnic or social groups. The achievement gap can be seen at the point children arrive in kindergarten. It then increases during elementary school and persists through the secondary school (ACT, 2012). The attainment and achievement gaps also affect the access, retention and attainment of ethnic minority students in higher education.

5. The access, retention and attainment of minority students in the US

In the past, US educational research on race/ethnicity typically discussed racial inequalities in relation to the access and participation of black or African-American students. However, there is now more attention to the disaggregation of racial/ethnic data and a closer examination of distinct racial categories, beyond a black-white divide (Lundy-Wagner, 2012).

5.1. Access to higher education

In the United States most standard post-compulsory school age academic programmes are based on the four-year Bachelors degree. Across all ethnic groups the percentage of adults holding a Bachelors degree has increased over the last decade: as of 2011, 30.4% of those over age 25 held at least a Bachelors degree, up from 26.2% ten years earlier; 41.2% of those aged 25 to 64 holding a college degree (United States Census Bureau, 2011a). However, compared to the dramatic increase in degree attainment rates across much of the rest of the globe the US has been overtaken by many of its economic competitors: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ranks the US as only 12th out of 36 developed countries in the number of 25- to 34-year-old adults possessing some form of college degree (cited in Pell Institute, 2011). The flattening of the degree attainment rates has led President Obama to identify higher education as a key component of his Administration's agenda (Obama, 2009).

There are also considerable gaps in formal educational achievement and attainment across racial and ethnic groups, with the least advantaged groups typically still comprising African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans, and the most advantaged comprising Asian Americans and whites (Kao and Thompson, 2003; Kim, 2011). Although the number of Hispanic adults holding a Bachelors degree rose from 11.1% in 2001 to 14.1% in 2011, and that for black adults rose from 15.7% to 19.9%, the percentage increase for whites and Asian Americans was significantly higher (United States Census Bureau, 2011a), it rose even faster among non-Hispanic whites (up from 28.7% to 34%), while Asian Americans remain the best-educated racial group in the US, with 50.3% holding Bachelors degrees, and 19.5% (post) graduate degrees.

The Asian student group is often termed the 'model minority' because they exemplify high formal educational achievement. However, such generalisations obscure in-group differences, with the Asian-American group; for example, having vastly different rates of educational attainment and achievement when the group is further subdivided (Kao and Thompson, 2003). Within the Asian-American category, Chinese, Koreans and South Asians frequently constitute the 'high-achievers' of US higher educational discourse, but this obscures the relatively disadvantaged positions occupied by, for example, Cambodians and Laotians (Kao and Thompson, 2003). The rate of Bachelors degrees among Asian-American ethnic groups ranges from 12% for Laotians to 73% for Taiwanese (Asian American Center for Advancing Justice, 2011).

In addition to the Bachelors degree, many US community colleges, technical schools and some universities offer an Associate degree, a two-year undergraduate degree, which may stand alone or be used as credit toward completion of the four-year Bachelors degree. Traditionally, community colleges have enrolled high numbers of African-American, Latino/a, and Native-American students as well as those from low-income backgrounds (Rhoades, 2012). However, while 38% of 25- to 34-year-old Americans

have at least an Associate degree, only 26% of African Americans, and 18% of Hispanics do so (Kim, 2011), highlighting further differences across ethnic groups in educational attainment. As tuition fees at four-year institutions have risen and caps have been placed on enrolments more middle-class and white students are enrolling in community colleges constricting the access of lower-income and ethnic minority students (Rhoades, 2012).

However, while black, Hispanics and American-Indian students are less likely than white and Asian students to enrol full-time and to enrol in disproportionately higher numbers in public two-year colleges and for-profit academic institutions, for those who do enrol the degree patterns (e.g. subject area studied) are similar to those of white students (National Science Foundation, 2011).

5.2. Student persistence and completion

The United States also has one of the lowest college and university completion rates. For most countries listed by the OECD completion rates were 70% or higher, with some exceeding 80% (OECD, 2008). In the United States, however, only 65.1% of all students completed their Bachelors degree within six years (US DoE, 2011) and less than a third of students at two-year institutions gained their Associate degree within three years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The attrition rate is greatest at the end of the first year: in 2009, retention rate from first to second year for four-year college undergraduates was only 73.0%, down by 1.7 percentage points since 1989 (ACT, 2009; Burkum *et al*., 2010).

There are significant variations across types of institutions, however, with 67.1% of those studying at a private university completing within four years rising to 79.6% after six years, compared to only 28.1% of those studying at a public college – rising to 47.4% after six years (Astin and Oseguera, 2005).

In addition, there are also substantial differences across ethnic groups in relation to completion rates: 65.2% of Asian Americans and 58.8% of whites complete within six years, compared to only 46.3% of African Americans, 42.1% of American Indians, and 41.8% of Puerto Ricans do so. It is notable that women across all ethnic groups, with the exception of American-Indian women, are significantly more likely to complete within six years than American-Indian men (Astin and Oseguera 2005).

5.3. The higher education achievement gap

In higher education, the achievement gap shows up in course and college selection, as well as in attrition and completion rates for all ethnic groups including American Indians and Alaska Natives (Freeman and Fox, 2005), black African Americans (Rovai *et al*., 2007) and Latino/as (Fry, 2004).

From 1980 to 2011 the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with a Bachelors degree or higher increased from 25% to 39% for whites, from 12% to 20% for blacks and from 8% to 13% for Hispanics. However, across the same period, the gap in the attainment of a Bachelors degree or higher between blacks and whites increased from 13 to 19 percentage points, and from 17 to 26 percentage points between whites and Hispanics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The Education Trust, in their analysis of the graduation-rate gap, excluded for-profit institutions and HBCUs from their College Results Online database (http://www.collegeresults.org/) to focus on those public (n=293) and private (n=163) not-for-profit colleges with sufficient numbers of both white and non-white students to calculate reliable gaps. They found that the graduation rate for whites is 73.4% but for African-American students only 54.7% – an 18.7% gap (The Education Trust, 2010a).

As evidenced in Table 2, there is a direct correlation between achievement and employment and earnings, which may, in part, account for the fact that African Americans continue to earn far less than whites (United States Census Bureau, 2011b).

Table 2: Correlation between achievement and employment and earnings

Qualification	Median weekly earning in $ (2011)	Unemployment rate % (2011)
Doctoral degree	1,551	2.5
Masters degree	1,263	3.6
Bachelors degree	1,053	4.9
Associate degree	768	6.8
High school diploma	638	9.4
Less than high school diploma	451	14.1

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (2012)

To date little attention has specifically been given to the US degree attainment gap as it is understood in the UK – that is the gap between those achieving the highest grades and those the least. There is some evidence, however, that minority students achieve significantly lower grades than their white contemporaries, although much of the research is small scale and samples across only one institution: Roth and Bobko's (2000) research evidenced that college GPA for white students in one specific institution was 0.26 points higher than for black undergraduate students. However, they only examined college GPA at one point in time. Their findings are, however, backed up by McKinney's (2009) research, which gathered cumulative college GPA data over three years for admitted and enrolled students: actual college GPA as reported at the end of the first semester was 2.69 overall, with the highest GPA for white students of 2.72 and the lowest for Native-American students of 2.43. For black students the mean GPA was 2.65 and for Asian students 2.47. The cumulative GPA values remained relatively stable over the three years examined, with only slight variations. Massey's (2006) research, however, drawing on a larger dataset, the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen, also found significant ethnic differences with grades for Latino/as averaging almost a quarter point below (0.24) those of whites, and those for blacks more than a third of a point lower (0.37).

6. Theoretical models explaining the achievement gap

The causes for the achievement gap are both complex and contested. Introducing the special edition of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2004, 27 (6)), Song (2004) writes that "in the USA, there appears to be a fairly widespread view, both among many academics and the wider public, that white Americans are at the top of a racial hierarchy, African Americans at the bottom (with sporadic reference to Native Americans as an equally oppressed group), and groups such as Asian Americans and Latinos somewhere in between" (p. 861). Within the US this 'racial hierarchy' operates such that "blacks occupy multiple locations of disadvantage while whites occupy positions of power and privilege, with Asians and Latinos occupying the space in the middle" (Bennett and Lutz, 2009, p. 72)[5]. Historically biological determinism provided justification for the perpetuation of racial hierarchy and thus white privilege. The notion that whites have superior cognitive ability compared to blacks had, by the mid-20th century, however, become an outdated proposition among much of the scientific community.

The publication of Herrnstein and Murray's controversial work, *The bell curve* (1994), however, reignited the controversy, with the *New York Times* (Herbert, 1994) stating that the book is "a scabrous piece of racial pornography masquerading as serious scholarship". The central argument of *The bell curve* is that not only are IQ differences genetic, but biological determinism is the most significant cause of financial income, job performance and involvement in crime among other areas, than either parental socio-economic status, or level of education. In other words, innate dimension of human intelligence predicts

[5] Some authors on 'whiteness' argue that a wide range of ethnic groups now accepted as 'white' were initially racialised when they first entered the US as immigrants (see, for example, Doane and Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

the underachievement of blacks. The response to the book was widely negative, and biological determinism remains largely disregarded and discredited.

However, the notion of ethnic minority 'deficit', 'lack' or cultural deprivation has persisted, with the poor performance of minority students frequently considered the result of an impoverished home life, lacking parental support for education, and/or a language-poor environment. The deficiencies that appear to operate within many ethnic minority families (other than Asian) are perpetuated when white familial values are regarded as the norm. Yosso (2005) has argued that, because of the racist nature of many educational institutions, the cultural capital of 'students of color' is devalued or disregarded as 'lacking', while the experiences of such students "expose the racism underlying cultural deficit theorizing and reveal the need to restructure US social institutions around those knowledges, skills, abilities and networks – the community cultural wealth – possessed and utilized by People of Color" (p. 82). Lindley's (2009) qualitative study exploring the academic and social experiences of Northern Arapaho women also focuses on the forms of community cultural wealth drawn upon in order to be successful at a predominantly white university, including aspirational, familial, nation-building, navigational and resistant cultural capital. Harper (2012), without denying the evidence on the low attainment of black male students, also seeks to reframe the ways in which black men in particular are deemed to be lacking, by focusing on what resources they bring with them and the successes that some black men have despite the barriers they face. In his 2009 work Harper objects to the ways in which education researchers continually recycle questions of black failure rather than attainment. He also describes the ways in which 143 black male undergraduates at 30 PWIs resist subordination, racist stereotyping and the low expectations for blacks, as well as the ways in which the men in his study oppose being "niggered", i.e. resist "being told that he is unlikely to accomplish much in life; that he is no good, just like the rest of them; and that being successful in school is an anomaly for people like him" (Harper, 2009, p. 698). Strategies adopted by his research participants include confronting racist stereotyping, taking on leadership positions in mainstream clubs and organisations in order to foster relationships with white students, faculty and administrators, and ensuring high level academic achievement in order to counter stereotypes of the 'black athlete'.

Yosso and Harper are not alone in calling for a reframing of what ethnic minority students are considered to bring with them to higher education. Across the literature there is an increasing recognition and empirical evidence that "African American, Hispanic, and white students bring a different constellation of background experiences, social and cultural capital, and educational and career experiences to the postsecondary experience" (Pascarella *et al*., 2004, p. 301) and that higher education researchers need to attend to these differences. However, many theorists argue that much of the existing research on ethnic minority student success in higher education focuses too much on race without exploring other factors, such as class. Individuals who share the social class, and possess the forms of capital valued and reinforced by the university will be privileged, regardless of their race (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986).

Nuñez and Crisp (2012), draw on Bourdieu's constructs of capital (economic, social or cultural resources that have 'value' in a particular social arena) and habitus (dispositions formed by an individual's history) to explore the choice making of Latino/a students in deciding whether to access two- or four-year colleges. They found that (lack of) parental education as well as low social and cultural capital significantly informing Mexican American students' choice of enrolling in two-year rather than four-year colleges, unlike their Puerto Rican contemporaries (the authors also highlight, however, that most Puerto Ricans have US citizenship, whereas many Mexican American immigrants do not and, therefore, lack access to financial aid from federal or state governments to pay for college enrolment). Griffin *et al*.'s (2012) qualitative study of 23 black immigrants attending a public, selective research university also explored how individual habitus shapes the college choice-making process. They found that individual habitus is strongly influenced by both culture and the value parents place on education, to the extent that "for many of our participants, habitus was shaped explicitly by their ethnic background: Being a good Nigerian or Haitian or Jamaican meant valuing education, having high expectations, and attending a good college" (p. 107).

Torres' (2009) research examines the effect of social class and cultural capital for black students once in higher education, highlighting how poorer black students struggle to fit in as a consequence of both the racism and the 'classism' perpetuated on campus. Of particular importance were students' ways of speaking and socialising. Such theorists do not discount racism as significant but argue that an intersectional approach is vital when examining issues facing students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Marin's (2012) research with Latino/a students also highlights the struggles faced by non-white students who 'lack' the dominant forms of cultural capital and whose habitus is at odds with the prevailing habitus of the institution. This 'lack' may result in feelings of difference, 'a sense of guilt' for being in college, or accusations of 'acting white' in order to fit in.

Critical race theory (CRT) focuses on the structure of institutions and highlighting the ways in which racism is manifested in higher education through the privileging of white middle-class Americans to the detriment of poor people of colour (Patton *et al*., 2007; Yosso 2005). CRT aims to question and challenge both the discourses and structures that produce and maintain racial injustices. Hiraldo (2010) describes the importance of interrogating the 'five tenets' of CRT if racism and racist practices are going to be countered and overcome. These are 1) counter-storytelling (personal, composite narratives of people of colour that expose and critique the dominant (male, white, heterosexual) ideology, and legitimises the racial and subordinate experiences of marginalised groups); 2) the permanence of racism (which suggests that racism controls the political, social and economic realms of US society, privileging white individuals over people of colour); 3) whiteness as property (in that, due to the embedded racism in American society, whiteness can be considered a property interest with the right of possession and disposition, seen, for example, in the ways in which white faculty own the curriculum); 4) interest conversion (wherein white women are acknowledged as being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation); 5) and the critique of liberalism (which stems from the ideas of colour-blindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all, but which is in effect a mechanism that allows people to ignore racist policies that perpetuate social inequity).

An early criticism of CRT was that it was expressed purely in black v. white terms. This black/white binary was increasingly challenged by black American feminists (such as Collins 1990, 1998) "who felt their gendered, classed, sexual, immigrant and language experiences and histories were being silenced" (Yosso, 2005, p. 72) and that oppression could not be fully understood in relation only to black and white. The increasing recognition that racism works with and through not only race but also gender, class sexuality, etc., has lead to much contemporary CRT now drawing upon paradigms of intersectionality.

7. Intersectionality

7.1. Race/ethnicity and gender

At the intersection of race and gender, there is a raft of research and policy literature documenting the under-representation, disengagement, high attrition rates and low levels of degree attainment of black males in US higher education (Harper, 2012). Across all racial/ethnic groups, the gender gap in enrolment is the widest among black students, with black females outnumbering black males (King, 2010; Harper, 2012). Presenting the data on enrolment rates, King (2006) clarifies that it "does not appear that women's success is coming at the expense of men, but rather that women's college participation is rising faster than men's" (p. v). The college completion rates are lower for black students than for any other racial or ethnic group, while black women outnumber black men in completion rates at every degree level (Harper, 2006, 2012). Researchers seeking to explain and reduce the high attrition rates of black males have argued for greater financial resources for black students, enhancements to faculty-student relationships and greater attention to students' home lives (Palmer *et al*., 2009). Other researchers have indicated the importance of factoring gender and institutional context into an explanation of the adjustment processes of African-American students (Chavous *et al*., 2004).

Responding to the deficit model of black males constructed in researcher reports and accounts in the popular media, which typically sensationalise problems of US higher education, some researchers have sought to promote an 'anti-deficit' model of black male students by investigating factors that promote black male success in higher education (Harper, 2012). While dominant deficit accounts of black male students construct this group as possessing 'low aspirations', Wells *et al.* (2011) advise that programmes aimed at raising educational attainment among black males should consider concentrating "on how to *realize* already-high expectations rather than raise them" (p. 23).

Differences across racial/ethnic groups have also emerged from intersectional studies examining race/ethnicity and gender in relation to college completion rates. While completion rates for African-American students are thought to be impacted by gender, for example, gender does not appear to be a key factor for Latino/a students (Lundy-Wagner, 2012).

7.2. Race/ethnicity and socio-economic status

The term 'net black advantage' refers to 'a long-standing pattern' of college enrolment in which "black high school graduates are more likely than white high school graduates to attend college, net of differences in socio-economic background and academic performance" (Bennett and Lutz, 2009, p. 70). Research has indicated that the net black advantage holds for both African Americans and first- and second-generation black immigrants (Bennet and Lutz, 2009).

In socio-economic analyses, black and Hispanic students are more likely to belong to the first-generation college student and low socio-economic groups, than Asian and white students (Fischer, 2007). Black and Hispanic students are more likely than Asian and white students to belong to low socio-economic groups, and are frequently heavily dependent on financial aid, which, as Fischer notes, is particularly pertinent to understanding the issues around transition and adjustment to post-secondary education.

Walpole's (2008) research highlights how social class affects the outcomes for African-American students in four-year colleges and universities. Findings from a national, longitudinal database indicate that African-American students from low socio-economic backgrounds have less contact with academic staff, study less and have lower grades than their better-off peers. In addition, nine years after entering college, these students have lower rates of degree attainment.

7.3. Race/ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status

Lundy-Wagner (2012) identifies the historical paucity of existing higher education research that engages in an intersectional analysis of race/ethnicity, gender and social class, but she cites a number of relatively recent qualitative research projects in the area (e.g. Barajas and Pierce, 2001; Constantine, 2002; Mullen, 2010; Winkle-Wagner, 2008). In presenting an empirical, quantitative analysis and arguing for further intersectional research, Lundy-Wagner describes the "pervasive role of socio-economic status for all ethnic/racial and gender groups in relation to six-year graduation rates" (Lundy-Wagner, 2012, abstract).

7.4. Race/ethnicity and age

Research by Kim (2011) identifies that, overall, the younger generation in the US no longer achieves a much higher level of education than the previous generation. Only Asian Americans and whites had made significant gains over their elders (65.6% v. 54.2% and 44.9% v. 38.5%, respectively). However, there were no gains for African Americans and Hispanics (24.7% v. 25% and 17.9% v. 17.9%, respectively), while for American Indians attainment rates for young adults were actually lower than for the previous generation (16.9% v. 21.6%). These rates are, however, gender specific, with young women in their late 20s actually surpassing their elders in all racial/ethnic groups, except American Indians. Interestingly, however, older (>25) female African Americans and female American Indians outnumber younger undergraduate college entrants (King, 2006).

7.5. Race/ethnicity and religion

There are numerous, and conflicting, debates over the impact of religion on academic attainment. Sander's (2010) research, for example, indicates that Judaism and Islam have positive effects on attainment relative to Christianity. Lee *et al.*'s (2007) research examining the relationship between high school students' religiosity and Bachelors degree attainment indicate that high school students' religiosity was significantly related to Bachelors degree attainment when other variables (i.e. locus of control, self-concept, parental involvement, and prior academic performance) were controlled for. Religious fundamentalism, however, is evidenced as having a negative effect on educational attainment. Research by Glass and Jacobs (2005), for example, shows that both Christian and secular fundamentalism has a substantial negative effect on educational attainment, particularly for women. Research by Cole and Ahmadi (2010) revealed that there were no statistical differences across religious groups in relation to average college grades. There were also no significant difference between Muslims and Christians in relation to satisfaction with their college experiences. However, Muslim students reported being less satisfied with their overall college experience than their Jewish peers.

Little of this research, however, specifically disaggregates the data by race or ethnicity. Mukhopadhyay's (2011) research quantifying the association between religions, religiosity and educational attainment of new 'lawful immigrants' to the US, for example, indicates that affiliation with religion is not necessarily associated with an increase in educational attainment other than for Jewish men. However, 'immigrants' are not disaggregated by ethnic origin. Indeed Barber (2010) reviewed all the papers within the 2000 to 2009 issues of *Sociology of Religion* and the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* looking for examples of research that explored the intersectionality of religion with at least one other identity category such as race or gender and found only one paper. Exceptions include Fife *et al.*'s (2011) study investigating the relationship between academic self-efficacy, ethnic identity and spirituality in African-American STEM students and Riggins *et al.*'s (2008) research, which explored the relationship between spirituality and academic performance among African-American male students enrolled at an HBCU. The authors found that, through prayer, the students received guidance that helped them to continue with their studies and they used their spirituality to avoid 'temptations' present on the college campus (namely drugs, alcohol, female students and becoming involved with 'the wrong crowd'). In addition, social support from churches and other religious institutions was deemed to be critical in helping support retention.

8. Enabling BME student success: key approaches

8.1. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is an approach for engaging with cultural diversity that has tended to focus on theories and strategies for securing the rights and enhancing the conditions of ethnic and religious minority immigrants, minority nations, indigenous people and other socially marginalised groups (Song, 2010; Altbach *et al.*, 2011). Multicultural approaches to education are widely reported in the school-based literature but significantly less so in the higher education literature. Swaner and Brownell's (2009) literature review, however, identifies a range of ways in which multicultural approaches have been incorporated when developing higher education learning communities. Boyle-Baise (2002), for example, evidences how different paradigmatic approaches to students' service learning practices[6] – 'charity', 'civic education', 'community building communitarian' and 'community building social change' – may or may not foster multiculturalism. She argues that the charitable paradigm often operates from a deficit view; the civic education paradigm, which involves raising social awareness and promoting civic responsibility, may function only as 'temporary redress' for social problems; while the community-building communitarian paradigm, through which students can learn to integrate their own interests with the needs of the larger

[6] In most service-learning practices students are involved in non-paid work in a community setting (Swaner and Brownell, 2009).

community, "is constrained by lack of direct attention to diversity and pluralism" (p. 32), and provides little opportunity for confronting issues of race, power, and/or inequality. In contrast, the 'community-building social change' paradigm works to "search for root causes of injustice and to build a sense of collective power" (p. 27), by confronting and reflecting on issues around race and power and developing long-term solutions to improve the welfare of disadvantaged groups.

While multicultural theorists have focused on inequalities between groups, some opponents of multiculturalism argue that protecting minority groups from oppression by the majority can exacerbate inequalities within minority groups. In addition, other opponents argue that the politics and policies of multiculturalism in the US prevent, for example, immigrants from needing to assimilate into the country's dominant culture and, therefore, works against achieving unity in American culture. The entrenchment of multiculturalism in American universities is a particular subject of debate with some commentators (e.g. D'Souza, 1991) arguing that multiculturalism undermines the 'universalist values' that liberal education once attempted to cultivate. In addition, opponents of the multicultural higher education curriculum argue against including, for example, African-American or gay and lesbian studies, asserting that such issues should be discussed within the political not the academic arena (Board, 2010).

8.2. Affirmative action

The term 'affirmative action' was introduced in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy as a method of actively redressing discrimination that had persisted in spite of civil rights laws. It is defined by the US Commission on Civil Rights (1995) as "any measure, beyond simple termination of a discriminatory practice, that permits the consideration of race, national origin, sex, or disability, along with other criteria, and which is adopted to provide opportunities to a class of qualified individuals who have either historically or actually been denied those opportunities and/or to prevent the recurrence of discrimination in the future" (p. S-87). Institutions with affirmative action programmes prioritise the inclusion of minority groups (ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities and other under-represented groups) over non-minority groups in employment, education and public contracting among others.

In a US higher education context, affirmative action typically refers to taking deliberate, preferential action designed to increase the admission rates of historically under-represented students in order to correct racial imbalances and move towards racial diversity. In 2003 the US Supreme Court ruled that public colleges and universities could consider race when making decisions about admissions. While most institutions have subsequently developed and implemented affirmative action admissions policies, their right to do so is currently under scrutiny as a white student, who failed to get in to the University of Texas, is currently suing the institution claiming discrimination (Jaschick, 2012). The Supreme Court has been flooded with briefs from other education institutions defending the University of Texas, with their main concern being that they would be unable to maintain sufficient diversity[7] without affirmative action, and that there would be a subsequent decline in black and Hispanics accessing higher education. Using institutional data on race-specific college enrolment and completion, Backes (2012) examined whether minority students were less likely to enrol in a four-year public college or receive a degree following a state-wide affirmative action ban in California. He found little evidence that overall black enrolment at public universities fell, but did notice that there was a shift in applications from minority groups towards less selective University of California campuses.

One of the goals of affirmative action is to give minority students an opportunity to catch up to their peers once given equal access to quality education. A controversial (unpublished) paper by Arcidiacono *et al.* (2011) at Duke University finds some support for such a catch-up: for example, the median GPA of a white student at Duke is 3.38 compared to black median GPA of 2.88, but by year four the differences have reduced to 3.64 and 3.31 respectively. However, the paper's authors argue that the shrinking of the black-white gap can be explained by the large movement of black students away from engineering, natural sciences and economics to the humanities and the social sciences – considered to be 'easier' courses that

[7] At the point of going to press the Court had not ruled on the case.

have 'higher grades'. This, they claim is a consequence of black students who benefit from affirmative action programmes being less prepared for more difficult majors, and therefore needing to switch to less demanding areas of study in order to graduate.

While affirmative action was perhaps the zeitgeist of late 20th century, however, the term 'post-racialism' has become part of the US national zeitgeist of the early 21st, following the election of Barack Obama as US president. The fact that an African American was elected as leader of the nation has led to claims that race matters much less than it used to, that the boundaries of race have been overcome, or indeed that race has literally been transcended (Trice, 2012).

The term 'post-racialism' does not have a commonly accepted definition, however. Cho (2009) defines 'post-racialism' in its current iteration, as "a twenty-first-century ideology that reflects a belief that due to the significant racial progress that has been made, the state need not engage in race-based decision-making or adopt race-based remedies, and that civil society should eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action" (p. 1,594). Critics of post-racialism, including Cho, argue that post-racialism obscures the centrality of race and racism in society, and allows whites to oppose civil-rights remedies and advocate race-neutral policies by claiming that racial eras of the past should be transcended. Post-racialism, therefore, "serves to reinstate an unchallenged white normativity" (Cho, 2009, p. 1,593). In addition, while there has been little research into post-racialism and higher education to date, that which has been undertaken challenges the view that either race or racism has been transcended. Trice's (2012) research with black students in higher education, for example, evidences that not only was race an integral part of their conceptualisation of the world, to the extent that they could not detach from it, but their everyday experiences rendered it impossible to do either physically or mentally, with both white and black students consistently reporting that black students seemed to be being neglected by their professors.

The term 'post-racialism' means different things to different authors, however, including those who argue that "at the centre of the expression of 'post-race' … is the creation of a context which enables racialised subjects to step through and beyond racially constructed subjectivity" (Cowden and Singh, 2012, p. 18-19). Post-racial practices in this sense move away from diversity-based approaches, such as 'managing difference' or 'cultural sensitivity' towards 'nurturing cosmopolitan identities' (ibid.). To date there is little research outlining post-racial pedagogic practices in the US, though Williams (2012) describes how a 'values-based pedagogy' can transform the teaching of Law "by developing cognitive perspectives on our similarities, rather than our differences, in the quest for legal remedies and legal norms" (p. 23).

8.3. Supporting transition and persistence

Much of the existing research on student attrition and retention has been driven by student-institution fit models of persistence. Tinto's (1993) integration theory is among the most widely cited on students' persistence in higher education. Tinto posited that persistence increases when students are integrated into both a college's academic and social community. Tinto's hypothesis (that students who are able to successfully make the transition from school to university as well as become integrated into campus life are more likely not only to remain in college, but also to excel academically) has been tested by many. Fischer's (2007) research, for example, focusing on the adjustment process, examined the experiences of people of colour in higher education including their grades and college satisfaction. She found that for blacks and Hispanics, being involved in formal activities led to both greater levels of college satisfaction and academic success. In their survey of 229 African-American freshmen at a historically black college and university (HBCU), Schwartz and Washington (2002) found that among other factors, students' academic and social integration on campus and feeling a part of the academic and social environments were strong predictors of African-American males' persistence in college.

More recently, higher education researchers have begun to explore the impact of specific programmes on college student persistence. In his research for the Association of American Colleges and Universities,

Kuh (2008) specifically describes those 'high impact educational practices' that have most effect on student persistence. These are:

- first-year seminars and experiences;
- common intellectual experiences;
- learning communities;
- writing-intensive courses;
- collaborative assignments and projects;
- 'science as science is done'/undergraduate research;
- diversity/global learning;
- service learning, community-based learning;
- internships;
- capstone courses and projects.

Drawing on the National Survey of Student Engagement, Kuh (2008) evidences that, in particular, students who participated in learning communities, service learning, study abroad and student-faculty research, described greater gains in learning and personal development than other students, were more likely to persist and, in some instances, demonstrated higher grades. Kuh argues that participation in high-impact activities leads to successes because they require a high commitment of time and effort as well as meaningful interaction with academic staff and peers, which in turn provide opportunities for frequent feedback about students' performance (for a summary of practices and overall impact on outcomes see http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/hip_tables.pdf).

There is particular evidence that participation in freshman learning communities (FLCs) lead to positive outcomes for minority students. FLCs aim to integrate and retain specific populations of students. In most FLCs, a small group of students register for a block of linked courses, typically part of the first-year or general education curriculum, that integrate a common theme and may, or may not be, residential. As Jaffee notes, "theoretically … the small class size increases the likelihood of active learning, small-group interaction, social bonding, student participation, and a closer relationship with the faculty" (2007, p. 65-66). Tinto and Engstrom's research on campuses with ethnically diverse, low-income and first generation students, found that FLC students had significantly higher rates of persistence than non-FLC students (almost 10% higher at four-year universities and over 5% higher at two-year colleges) (Engstrom and Tinto, 2008). There is also some evidence that participation in FLCs can lead to higher grades for students. Hotchkiss *et al.* (2006) found that participation in FLCs led to white women performing as predicted but to more than a full letter grade increase for black men, 0.93 higher for black women, and 0.78 higher for white men.

However, as Swaner and Brownell's (2009) literature review evidences, few FLCs have been rigorously evaluated. In addition, Tinto's model (1975; 1993), it is argued (Wei *et al.*, 2011) does not acknowledge that college persistence is complicated for minority students, who often experience stress related to their minority status and tension created by interacting with predominantly white others. For example, Wei *et al.*'s (2011) research with 160 African-American, Asian-American and Latino/a students attending a predominantly white university indicates that many suffered from what they term 'minority status stress', which has a direct, and negative, link with college persistence attitudes.

8.4. The role of culture in minority student persistence

Larimore and McClellan (2005) argue that for many minority students, especially Native Americans, social and familial support "and connections to homeland and culture" (p. 19) are highly significant in affecting persistence, characteristics that are prevalent in tribal colleges. Guillory and Wolverton (2008) also found the most significant factors influencing the persistence of Native-American students were support gained from their tribal community and family, social support and giving back to the tribal community. Moore's (2006) study demonstrates that individual, institutional, and family factors all affect black male students' retention and graduation.

In contrast, a key concept in Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration is that students must integrate into the cultural milieu of their college or university in order to persist. In support of the theory of student integration, it is argued that the greater the congruence between a student's home and campus cultures the more likely a student is to persist in higher education (Museus, 2007). The need for this form of 'cultural suicide' (Tierney, 1999) has been challenged by those calling for a form of 'cultural integrity' (ibid.) that allows students to become successfully acclimated to the culture of their campus while remaining a part of their traditional culture. Museus's (2007) research across three institutions identified as being effective in fostering persistence and Baccalaureate degree attainment among racial/ethnic minority students, distinguishes four cultural elements that "interact to engender holistic and integrated support systems aimed at serving large numbers of historically under-represented student populations" (p. 161). These are:

- the importance of incorporating a human element into the educational experience (care and commitment of staff; the fostering of meaningful relationships, focus on serving the 'whole' student);
- the strong valuing of networks (characterised by high levels of communication and collaboration);
- a commitment to providing targeted support (with the necessary resources to provide racial/ethnic minority students with purposeful academic, financial, and social support; key individuals who serve as advocates; cultural resources for racial/ethnic minority students; targeted support programmes including educational interventions, integrated into broader cultural networks);
- an ethos of institutional responsibility, that is the institution is responsible for the success of racial/ethnic minority students, rather than assuming that such burden should be placed solely on their students. Consequently students are not expected to seek out services on their own; policies are established to ensure administrators are aware of their students' progress; administrators maintain a sense of personal responsibility for ensuring students have access to information and services.

Research at HBCU's also shows that focusing on students' culture can increase the chances of students having a positive experience, to the extent that "improving the first-year experiences of students from low-income families and those of black and Hispanic men may have the potential to narrow modestly – although not eliminate – disparities in graduation rates between these groups and more advantaged students" (Bowen *et al*., 2009, p. 56). This is mirrored by Cortez's (2011) research, which also highlights the importance of a campus climate that values and validates the culture of Hispanic students. Of particular importance is including these students in supportive academic peer groups since, as the author argues, Hispanic students are commonly raised in extended-family environments, and the peer groups provide a similar network of support and responsibility.

9. Key research reports: retention

Engle, J. and Theokas, C. (2010) Top gainers: some public four-year colleges and universities have made good progress in closing graduation-rate gaps. College Results Online. Available from: http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/CRO%20Brief%20Top%20Gainers.pdf [accessed 20 August 2012]

The goal of the Education Trust is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement experienced by those, in particular, who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families. The Trust works alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country to transform schools and colleges into institutions "that serve all students well". This particular brief draws attention to those public colleges and universities that have narrowed or closed the graduation-rate gaps between African-American, Hispanic and Native-American students and their white and Asian peers. The majority

(60%) of institutions have improved graduation rates for minorities by, on average, an eight percentage point increase in minority graduate rates over five years. However, 25% of those institutions who have seen an increase have improved by ten percentage points or more; 10% by 15 points or more; and a small number by 25 points or more over five years.

Strategies identified across the best performing institutions include: partnering with local schools to improve students' college-readiness; focusing resources on the first year including transition programmes; improving teaching on introductory courses; closely monitoring student progress through early warning systems; connecting students with support services such as tutoring, study skills and counselling; targeting institutional grant aid to meet the full financial need of low-income students.

ACT (2010) 'What works in student retention?' reports

ACT (originally American College Testing) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that provides, among other areas, assessment and research in education and workforce development. As part of their 'What works in student retention?' programme they produced a series of reports highlighting information on practices in college student retention drawing on their national surveys, which include more than 1,000 colleges. Overall findings suggest that retention practices differ according to institution type with four-year public institutions using more retention practices than either two-year public or four-year private institutions. Institutional selectivity and size were the most significant predictors of retention rates in the four-year institutions, but, overall, retention practices accounted, at best, for just over 3% of the variance in institutional retention rates.

ACT (2010a) ***What works in student retention? Fourth national survey. Community colleges with twenty percent or more black students enrolled*****. Available from: http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/Community_BlackEnroll.pdf [accessed 4 July 2012]**

This report describes findings for those community colleges with 20% or more black students that participated in ACT's 2010 'What works in student retention?' survey. The survey was returned from the Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 83 community colleges enrolling ≥ 20% black students.

Most significant reasons for attrition were: in/adequacy of personal financial resources; lack of student preparation; inadequate study skills; low socio-economic status; inadequate financial aid; family responsibilities; part-time working; commitment to earning a degree and level of student motivation to succeed.

Respondents reviewed 94 retention-related practices to identify the three that were considered to make the greatest contribution to retention at their specific institution. Only seven specified practices were chosen by 10% or more of the institutions. These were: mandated placement of students in courses based on test scores; compulsory remedial/developmental coursework; tutoring; training for faculty academic advisors; early warning system; pre-enrolment; financial aid advising; freshman seminar/university 101 (credit)[8]; academic advising centre and having a comprehensive learning assistance centre/lab.

ACT (2010b) What works in student retention? Fourth national survey. Four-year colleges and universities with twenty percent or more black students enrolled. Available from:

[8] These forms of seminars introduce students to the 'intellectual world' of the university, through, for example, a focus on critical thinking, verbal and written communication, and academic exploration

http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/FourYr_BlackEnroll.pdf [accessed 4 July 2012]

The report summarises findings from the Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 95 four-year colleges or universities enrolling ≥ 20% black students. The most significant reasons for attrition were identical to those identified by the community colleges enrolling ≥ 20% black students; however, the retention-related practices deemed likely to make the most difference were slightly different, namely: the provision of freshman seminar/university 101 (credit) courses; provision of an early warning system; mandated placement of students in courses based on test scores; tutoring; interventions with specific groups of students; supplemental instruction; instructional/teaching techniques, and the presence of an academic advisory centre.

ACT (2010c) What works in student retention? Fourth national survey. Community colleges with twenty percent or more Hispanic students enrolled. Available from: http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/Community_HispanicEnroll.pdf [accessed 4 July 2012]

The survey was returned from the Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 37 community colleges with Hispanic enrolments ≥ 20%. Rationales for attrition were similar to those for black students although Hispanic students also reported a lack of emotional support from family and friends. The most relevant retention-related practices were also identical to those identified for black students with the addition of the need for a Mathematics centre/lab.

ACT (2010d) What works in student retention? Fourth national survey. Four-year colleges & universities with twenty percent or more Hispanic students enrolled. Available from: http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/droptables/FourYr_HispanicEnroll.pdf [accessed 15 July 2012]

The survey was returned from the Chief Academic Affairs Officers at 33 four-year colleges or universities with Hispanic enrolments ≥ 20%. Rationales for attrition were similar to those for both black students and for Hispanic students at community colleges, as were retention-related practices, with the addition of an identified need for learning communities (non-residential).

10. Key research reports: student success

The Education Trust (2010a) *Big gaps small gaps in serving African-American students*. Available from: http://www.edtrust.org/dc/publication/big-gaps-small-gaps-in-serving-african-american-students [accessed 1 August 2012]

This brief draws attention to those institutions that have 'horrendous' graduation-rate gaps between white and black students – at the worst performing universities only about 40% of white students graduate within six years; however, only about 10% of black students at the same institutions do so. The brief also focuses on the strategies employed by those institutions that have no gaps at all, having excluded for-profit institutions and HBCUs from their data. Examples include Winthrop University in South Carolina that enrols 5,000 undergraduates, and has graduated African-American students at higher rates than whites every year from 2002 through 2008: 62% of black students graduate within six years, compared with 57% of white students.

Those institutions that consistently show high rates of minority student success demonstrate practices such as: developing plans and setting realistic goals to raise retention and graduation rates; taking a comprehensive approach to student success and expecting all students to graduate; offering Summer bridging programmes; and developing an early alert system, in which staff flag up those students who are struggling academically and who can then receive support and counselling.

The Education Trust (2010b) *Big gaps small gaps in serving Hispanic students*. Available from: http://www.edtrust.org/dc/publication/big-gaps-small-gaps-in-serving-hispanic-students [accessed 1 August 2012]

This brief highlights the practice of colleges and universities that have small or non-existent graduation-rate gaps between Hispanic and white students, as well as drawing attention to those institutions with particularly large gaps. The report indicates that institutions on the 'small gap' list have a strong commitment to student success, and have implemented strategies to promote equality and high academic achievement. Strategies identified include: having an institutional commitment to social justice and a willingness to embrace traditionally underserved students; intentional recruiting of Hispanic students from local, predominately Latino areas in order to foster a diverse student body that is representative of local communities; setting high expectations for all students; strong leadership at the top; an intentional focus on data and monitoring results; early intervention strategies including reaching out to students who could benefit from academic support services; and using key indicators of success to track students that trigger support mechanisms when the data show that students are falling behind.

The Education Trust (2012) *Replenishing opportunity in America: the 2012 midterm report of public higher education systems in the Access to Success initiative*. Available from: http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Replenishing_Opportunity_2.pdf [accessed 30 July 2012]

The Access to Success (A2S) initiative aims to help public college and university systems boost attainment. The A2S leaders have pledged that by 2015 their systems would halve the gaps in college-going and completion rates that separate African-American, Latino and American-Indian students from their white and Asian-American peers, as well as low-income students from more affluent ones. Access to Success has developed a set of metrics, protocols and tools to track overall enrolment and completion rates, including those missing from national higher education data systems such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), for example low-income, part-time, and transfer students. The 22 A2S higher education systems represent 312 two-year and four-year campuses, and serve more than 3.5 million students.

The report gives specific examples of the work that has been undertaken as part of the initiative such as leveraging resources including financial aid, analysing and employing data on student progression, building implementation processes leading to systemic change, redesigning developmental education courses, and improving 'near' degree completion.

Fletcher, J. and Tienda, M. (2010) Race and ethnic differences in college achievement: does high school attended matter? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 627 (1), 144-166

The authors use ten years of administrative data (first semester college GPA, academic probation (defined as first semester GPA lower than 2.0), and sixth semester cumulative GPA) for students at four Texas public universities in order to examine the significance of high school attended on racial and ethnic disparities in college achievement. The dataset includes almost 200,000 individuals across the four institutions.

The authors found substantial racial and ethnic differences in GPA, academic probation, and college persistence. At the University of Texas at Austin, for example, black students achieve a first semester GPA 0.4 points below that of white students, while the average Hispanic-white GPA gap is 0.23 grade points; first-year black students are nearly 12 percentage points more likely than their white peers to be on academic probation, and Hispanic students are 6.5 percentage points more likely; in addition the black-white and Hispanic-white gaps for cumulative sixth semester GPA are .39 and .21 points respectively. Results are similar across the other three institutions. Their findings indicate that

educational disadvantages persist through college and that the quality of high schools attended by minority students contributes to collegiate achievement gaps.

Harper, S.R. (2012) *Black male student success in higher education: a report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education. Available from: http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1049&context=sharper [accessed 20 July 2012]

Drawing on interviews with over 200 black male undergraduates at 42 campuses, the study aims "to move thinking beyond deficit perspectives on achievement by highlighting persons, policies, programmes, and resources that help black men succeed across a range of college and university contexts". By reframing deficit-oriented questions the authors have developed an 'Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework', which can be used to help better understand black male student success in college.

Results from the interviews, drawing on the framework, highlight six categories of major findings: getting to college (the importance of parental aspiration, even when parents had no prior higher educational experiences; significance of one or more influential teachers in school; holding leadership positions in clubs and societies); choosing a college (academic credentials, financial aid, institutional reputation – including support for black students, guidance and advice – although many students critiqued school-based counsellors for their low aspirations); paying for college (grants covering tuition and fees); transitioning to college (bridging programmes, support from same-race peers; asking for support); matters of engagement (extensive engagement as student leaders on their campuses, particularly compared to their less highly achieving black peers); responding productively to racism (developing skills, taught by their same-race peers, which enabled them to both simultaneously embarrass and educate their peers by calmly questioning and challenging misconceptions).

Massey, D.S. (2006) Social background and academic performance differentials: white and minority students at selective colleges. *American Law and Economic Review*. 8, 390-409

Drawing on the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF) the author highlights, among other areas, that ethnic minority students from segregated backgrounds attended second-rate schools, received lower quality instruction and were less prepared socially for university or college. The same students also experience higher levels of stress within their social networks while at college, while those who attend selective colleges and universities average lower GPAs than white or Asian students: grades for Latinos averaged almost a quarter point below those of whites, and those of blacks by more than a third of a point lower. The authors argue that controlling for prior segregation experienced in schools and neighbourhoods reduces the black-white differential by 30% and the Latino-white differential by 33%, although the achievement gap is not eliminated.

McKinney, A.P. (2009) Race-based differences in performance measures: implications for diversity management in higher education and the workforce. *Journal of Diversity Management*. 4 (4), 23-30

This study examined race-based differences in academic measures of SAT, high school GPA and college GPA to better understand the influence of these factors on diversity management in higher education. The research explored the validity of SAT and high school GPA in predicting college GPA, group differences that may exist within these study variables, and college GPA levels and group differences during the academic tenure. Data were collected from over 2,000 first-year students at a large university. The cohort comprised 70% white, 19% black, 3% Native American and 1% Asian (the .01% Hispanic, and those who denoted 'Other' were excluded from the study). Among other data cumulative college GPA was collected over three years. Results showed that using the predicted GPA programme, college GPA was fairly accurate for white students, but resulted in an overestimation for Native-American and Asian students and an underestimation for black students.

Swaner, L.E. and Brownell, J.E. (2009) *Outcomes of high impact practices for underserved students: a review of the literature.* Prepared for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Project USA. Available from: http://www.aacu.org/inclusive_excellence/documents/ProjectUSALitReviewrevisedMar10.pdf [accessed 4 August 2012]

This literature review examines effect of five high-impact practices (learning communities, service-learning, undergraduate research, first-year seminars, and capstone courses and projects[9]) on under-represented minorities, low-income students and first-generation college students. The authors present a highly informative table summarising the outcomes from 'high impact practices' as well as the variables that affect outcomes and the limitations of the existing research. In addition, the authors note a range of concerns relating to the existing US literature, namely: the inadequacy of much of the overall research on the experiences of underserved students; that student success is almost exclusively limited to grades and persistence; that the majority of studies are descriptive in nature, and/or focus on a single institution or programme; that there is often a selection bias (e.g. self-selection, or selection by admission); that most studies are short-term in nature, and so do not measure the longitudinal impact of practices on students; and, finally, that much of the research involves self-reporting as opposed to direct measures of outcomes.

United States Department of Education (2011a) Enrollment in postsecondary institutions, Fall 2009; graduation rates, 2003 & 2006 cohorts; and financial statistics, fiscal year 2009: first look. Available from: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011230.pdf [accessed 4 August 2012]

This report draws on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which collects institution-level data from postsecondary institutions in the United States. The 2010 graduation rates (GRS) component of IPEDS collected counts full-time, undergraduate students beginning college in the reference period, and their completion status at (150 and 200% of normal programme completion time) at the same institution where they started.

The report presents data tables including, for example, enrolment by race/ethnicity, broken down into data on American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, white, two or more races, race/ethnicity unknown and non-resident alien. The report also includes a useful glossary of IPEDS terms.

Yosso, T.J. (2005) Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education.* 8 (1), 69-91

Yosso's article draws on critical race theory (CRT) to challenge traditional interpretations of cultural capital, and focuses instead on the cultural knowledge, skills and contacts possessed by marginalised groups that often go unrecognised. Yosso extends Bourdieu's forms of capital to include six forms of capital variously possessed by 'people of color', and brought with them into the classroom, namely: resistant (the ability to challenge inequity and subordination); navigational (the ability to manoeuvre through social institutions); social (access to networks and community resources); linguistic (being able to communicate in different languages or styles); familial (cultural and/or family knowledge and history) and aspirational (maintaining aspirations and hope despite facing challenges).

[9] Capstone experiences are "summative curricular approaches such as courses synthesizing all of the content to date within a particular major (and often attempting to connect that concept back to the institution's basic theme of general education and the liberal arts)" (Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998, p. 15).

11. Recommendations for the UK

As the final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme evidences (Thomas, 2012), higher education institutions in the UK are actively engaged in a range of strategies to enhance the experiences of those students at risk of not 'fitting in', who may be failing to engage in academic and/or social activities or who are considering, or actually, withdrawing from higher education. In addition, increasing attention is being given to the specific experiences of black and minority ethnic students (Stevenson, 2012; Berry and Loke, 2011; Singh, 2011). While there are differences between UK and US higher education systems and practices, there are also a range of successful approaches towards retention and success developed in the US that have applicability to UK higher education:

- The differences across racial and ethnic categories in relation to access, retention and attainment to HE in the US suggest the need to attend more carefully to distinctions across racial and ethnic groups in the UK. In addition, there is a need for more nuanced research, to explore, for example, the intersectionality between ethnicity and part-time, disabled or mature students' degree attainment in the UK.
- The considerable debates in the US around the terminology used to classify racial and ethnic groups, and the opposition to particular terms of classification can inform UK approaches to identifying, categorising and monitoring what are generally termed 'BME' students in UK. As discussed in the synthesis, the term 'minorities', has attracted criticism in the US because of its misleading representation of the underlying student population. This also has resonance in a UK HE context.
- There is potential to learn from successful strategies for enhancing retention identified in the US, which include: partnering with local schools to improve students' college-preparedness; targeting resources on first-year transition programmes; enhancing teaching on introductory courses; establishing early warning systems; providing student support services such as tutoring and advice centres, study skills and counselling; providing full institutional grant funding for low-income students and financial aid advice; implementing compulsory remedial/developmental coursework; providing training for faculty academic advisors; providing freshman seminar/university 101 (credit) courses (or similar); mandated placement of students in courses based on test scores; developing (non-residential) learning communities (Engle and Theokas, 2010; ACT, 2010a, 2010b, 2010d). Significant work has already been undertaken in the UK exploring retention strategies – see, for example, the recent final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme (Thomas, 2012). However, further evidence-based research by every higher education institution in order to closely examine which of their educational practices are 'high impact' (Kuh, 2008) is strongly recommended.
- The type of higher education institution, in relation to selectivity and size, appears to be a key factor in the retention rates of students in the US. Further research is needed to explore this gap in a UK context and to determine how the gap in retention rates across institutional types can be narrowed. It is likely, however, that the further stratification of the higher education sector under the new fees and student number cap regimes may do little to mitigate the narrowing of this gap in the future.
- There is potential to learn and engage with strategies that have consistently shown high rates of minority student success in the US, including: developing both institution- and faculty-wide plans and setting goals to raise retention and graduation rates; taking a comprehensive, holistic approach to student success, from 'aspiration raising' activities onwards, and expecting all students to graduate; offering Summer bridging programmes; and developing an early warning system (The Education Trust, 2010a). At present in the UK institutional degree attainment data are not made openly available across the sector. More open and transparent evidence of success is recommended if institutions are to draw on successes across the sector.
- Evidence from the US suggests the importance of ensuring a broad institutional commitment to social justice as well as support and commitment from "leadership at the top" (The Education Trust, 2010b). This links in to the cultural elements highlighted by Museus (2007) and deemed to

be effective in supporting minority students, in particular: establishing an ethos of institutional responsibility from the top down, with all staff recognising the role they have to play; the fostering of meaningful relationships between staff and students; high levels of communication and collaboration between the institution and students; and the focus on serving the 'whole' student.

- Administrative strategies need to be put in place to monitor the progress of BME students, which can facilitate intervention and early warning systems – strategies widely cited as key to improving student success and retention (The Education Trust, 2010b). These need to be more nuanced than, for example, simply monitoring attendance. Strategies which, for example, focus on those students who do or do not access the library, engage with an institution's online learning platforms, or draw on extra academic skills classes are strongly recommended since these are all indicators of student engagement and likely success.
- There is a need to move beyond and challenge deficit models of BME students and to engage with BME students who have successfully navigated the HE system. Insights from the experiences of successful BME students can be used inform and develop strategies to enhance BME student success (see, for example, Harper (2012) in the US).
- There is a need to attend to the multiple identity categories inhabited by BME students, including but not limited to gender, class, age, race and religion. Attention is needed to address both the paucity of research on the intersectional effects of ethnicity and other identity markers on progression, retention and attainment in HE and to inform the development of strategies to enhance BME success.

12. Conclusion

In 2007, Barack Obama commented that "we have more work to do when more young black men languish in prison than attend colleges and universities across America". Although he was in fact wrong (Kessler, 2007), Obama signalled the continuing level of educational inequalities, including access to higher education, experienced by minority ethnic groups in the US and by poor, young, black men in particular. This synthesis has presented just some of the research highlighting the stark differences in access, retention and success in higher education experienced by minority groups in the US.

The situation in the UK is somewhat different in that, overall, students from ethnic minority backgrounds are over-represented in the higher education population. There are also significant differences in the ethnic profiles of the US and the UK, as well as their higher education systems, which render as incomparable some of the causes of under-representation. In addition, there is little, if no, data to evidence how minority students perform in relation to the level of degree they attain, unlike in the UK where the degree attainment gap is a national concern. Minority students in the UK as in the US do, however, experience higher levels of dropout from university than their white peers (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; ECU/HEA, 2008; HEFCE, 2010; Singh, 2011). Some of the work cited in this synthesis that is being undertaken to scaffold the retention of minority students in the US can, and should, therefore provide lessons for the UK. In turn the work currently being undertaken by the Higher Education Academy[10], among others, to enhance the degree attainment of black and minority ethnic students may have much to offer to the US.

[10] See, for example: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/retention/black_minority_ethnic_student_resources

13. Useful web-based resources

ACT
http://www.act.org/education/

ACT, among other areas, conducts research on student recruitment, student retention, student success and the college selection process. The website also provides access to the ACT® test "a curriculum- and standards-based educational and career planning tool that assesses students' academic readiness for college [which] motivates students to perform to their best ability and often results in increased college enrolment, especially for underrepresented students".

American Council on Education
http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home

Founded in 1918, the American Council on Education (ACE) is "the only higher education organization that represents presidents and chancellors of all types of U.S. accredited, degree-granting institutions: community colleges and four-year institutions, private and public universities, and non-profit and for-profit colleges". Their online information centre offers data and analysis on a variety of higher education topics including: access persistence, attainment and student demographics, including their annual 'Minorities in Higher Education' report.

American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)
http://www.aihec.org/

AIHEC is "the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities – a unique community of federally recognized public institutions working to strengthen tribal nations and make a lasting difference in the lives of American Indians and Alaska Natives". It serves its network of member institutions through public policy, research and programmes relating to American-Indian higher education. The consortium's landmark data collection initiative, 'American Indian Measures of Success' (AIHEC AIMS), was launched in 2004 to define specifically, context-relevant measures for tribal colleges and universities success. AIHEC AIMS publishes a 'fact book', the latest of which can be found here: http://www.aihec.org/resources/documents/AIHEC-AIMSreport_May2012.pdf.

Association of American Colleges and Universities
http://www.aacu.org/

The AAC&U was founded in 1915 and now comprises more than 1,250 member institutions, including public and private community colleges and universities, and is the leading US association "concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education … committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career". The association offers a range of publications, including some freely available to download (see: https://secure.aacu.org/source/Orders/AACUWebPubs.cfm?section=unknown&activesection=Orders).

The Education Trust
http://www.edtrust.org/

The Education Trust aspires to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement experienced by black, Latino/a or American-Indian students as well as those from low-income families. The Trust works alongside key stakeholders to provide practical assistance to help transform schools and colleges into more equitable institutions as well as analysing local, state and national data, using this to help build a better understanding of achievement gaps and the actions required to close them. The Trust, along with the National Association of System Heads (NASH), also funds the Access to Success initiative.

The Fulbright Commission
http://www.fulbright.org.uk/

The Fulbright Commission aims to foster cultural understanding through educational exchange in two ways: an awards programme and their Education USA advisory service. Among other activities the Fulbright Commission works with British universities to help them advise students on exchange opportunities for their current students and to attract American exchange participants to their campuses.

HBCU CONNECT
http://www.hbcuconnect.com/

HBCU CONNECT was founded in 1999 in order to provide "a platform for networking, professional opportunities, educational opportunities and connections with the savvy organizations that are looking to hire from or brand themselves with this tight knit community". Members are provided with information on HBCU scholarships, jobs and internships as well as social and networking opportunities.

National Center for Educational Statistics: Digest of Education Statistics
http://nces.ed.gov/Programs/digest/

The website presents an annual compilation of statistical information, the Digest of Education Statistics, from pre-kindergarten through to graduate school, drawing on Government and other data as well as surveys and activities carried out by the Center itself. The Center's website also publishes supplementary information on population trends, attitudes on, for example, education characteristics of the labour force, Government finances and economic trends – providing background for evaluating education data. In addition, the website provides access to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/), which provides institution-level data on enrolment, completions, faculty, staff and finances for public and private postsecondary institutions from the late 1980s to the present.

The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education
http://www.pellinstitute.org

The Pell Institute conducts and disseminates research and policy analysis to encourage policy makers, educators and the public to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for low-income, first-generation and disabled college students. The Pell Institute conducts independent research in three areas: access, success and innovation. The Institute also publishes a research newsletter, the purpose of which is "to inform those who formulate, fund, and administer public policy and programs about the condition of and influences that affect postsecondary education opportunity for all Americans". The newsletter's website (http://www.postsecondary.org/) contains additional resources for subscribers, including data spreadsheets, presentations and state-specific data.

United States Census Bureau
http://www.census.gov/

The United States Census Bureau serves as "the leading source of quality data" about the nation's people and economy. Sources of data include the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bureau of Economic Analysis and many other Federal agencies and private organisations. Information includes data on 'degrees earned by level and race/ethnicity' and 'college enrollment by sex, age, race, and Hispanic origin', available at: http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/education.html.

United States Department of Education (ED)
http://www.ed.gov/

The ED's mission is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access". Among other publications the website offers free access to the annual *Digest of Education Statistics* (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/), *The Condition of Education* (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/introduction3.asp) and *Projections of Education Statistics to 2020* (http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2020/). All report on post-compulsory education.

Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering
http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/wmpd/

The organisation provides statistical information about "the participation of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in science and engineering education and employment". A formal report is issued every two years, the latest of which can be found at: http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/wmpd/pdf/nsf11309.pdf.

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Contact us

The Higher Education Academy
Innovation Way
York Science Park
Heslington
York
YO10 5BR

+44 (0)1904 717500
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk

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