

Believe And Succeed: Creation Of A New Media Tool To Coach Undergraduates Of Color
Through The Graduate School Application And Interview Process

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ABSTRACT

Recent data indicate that the number of psychology doctorates received by African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians are dwindling. This trend persists despite the fact that psychology is one of the most popular majors on most university campus. Studies suggests that compared to their white counterparts, undergraduate psychology majors of color are woefully underprepared and for the graduate school process, seldom seek advice from the appropriate persons, and receive little encouragement to pursue doctoral study. In this interactive presentation, the audience will become familiar with the interactive new media CD-Rom *Believe and Succeed: Applying and Getting into Graduate School for Students of Color* and the rationale underlying its creation. The audience will learn how technology can be use to enhance program designed to increase the number of students of color entering graduate school, the value of cultural competency in developing new media tools for students of color, as well as the feasibility of using the *Believe and Succeed* model on their own campuses.

Believe and Succeed Creation of a New Media Tool to Coach Students of Color Through the Graduate School Application and Interview Process

The number of psychologists of color is disparagingly small. Recent data indicates that the number of psychology doctorates received by African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians are dwindling. This trend persists despite the fact that psychology is one of the most popular majors on most university campus. Studies suggests that compared to their white counterparts, undergraduate psychology majors of color are woefully underprepared for the graduate school process. Specifically despite high GPAs, undergraduates of color lack undergraduate research experience, have failed to develop an advising/mentoring relationship with a faculty member, and lack familiarity with the graduate school application process. For these reason, many students of color are denied admission to psychology doctoral programs. Among those who gain admission, a significant portion fail to complete their programs.

Compounding these problems is the fact that many psychology majors of color are reluctant to seek information and advice about graduate school from white faculty members. This reluctance stems, in part, to the fact that, fairly or unfairly, students of color perceive an ethnic minority faculty member as a role model. Students appear more likely to trust the information disseminated by a faculty member who is similar to them and believe that the faculty member has a vested interest in their success (Blackwell, 1987; Nettles, 1990).

The mean number of ethnic minority psychologist on faculty in psychology departments is one. This individual(s) is inundated with requests form students of color for information, mentoring, and advice. The numerous requests pose a dilemma for faculty member(s) in doctoral-granting departments. How does one best provide the needed guidance to

undergraduates of color who wish to pursue doctoral level working psychology and, at the same time, meet their department, university, and own demands for academic productivity?

The advent of new media technology provides a solution. Drawing on this technology, faculty of color can create materials that allow them to focus on the needs of undergraduates as well as the demands of their faculty position. Furthermore, cultural issues and factors may be addressed in a more literal fashion than is possible in a classroom or face to face conversation, faculty can incorporate in the necessary components. A CD can be created that is much more than an instructional aid, rather it can become a motivational coaching piece that realistically addresses the graduate application process.

Research and Development of *Believe and Succeed*

Every topic covered in *Believe and Succeed* was meticulously researched. Extensive literature searches were conducted and over a period of three years workshops were run and surveys were conducted with undergraduate of colors regarding their preparation for graduate study, important issues related to graduate study, and FAQs. The results revealed that students of color had inadequate knowledge on (a) using their undergraduate experience to prepare for graduate school, (b) financial support available for graduate school and graduate school interviews, (c) differences between a master and a doctorate degree, and (d) various psychology subfields. Furthermore, well-meaning advice by white faculty was often perceived as being racist or discriminatory by students and 99% had never been taught by a psychologist or graduate student of color. Most telling, among the students surveyed many received very little encouragement from family or friends about pursuing graduate studies. Through the workshops and surveys it became apparent that students of color were looking for information about

graduate school that addressed not only the traditional questions but questions and situations specific to being a person of color. In addition, students of color wanted these questions answered by an individual of color who they felt would relate to them better be truthful, yet at the same time provide encouragement, motivation, as well as information. This data was then transformed into the Believe and Succeed CD.

CD DESCRIPTION

Believe and Succeed provides students with access to the knowledge, skills, and vision to successfully apply to graduate school in psychology or psychology related fields. The CD includes original animated sequences and drawings and audio and video clips that guide students through every step of the application process. Interactive menus throughout the CD highlight useful resources and tools for the application process, including:

- Web links to financial aid information
- Video sequences showing “good” and “bad” applicant interviews
- Answers to questions that students of color in particular may have during the often lengthy and sometimes stressful application process from a faculty member and graduate students of color.

The remainder of the presentation is devoted to audience members interacting with the CD. Throughout, participants will observe how culture is infused in the various segments.

CONCLUSION

Believe and Succeed is making a difference in the career paths of undergraduate of colors. Various departments and divisions around the county are using the CD. In addition, the profits from the CD are being used to endow a scholarship program administered by the

Cleveland Foundation that assists students of color in defraying the cost of graduate application and interview process.