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UW BROTHERHOOD INITIATIVE | THEORY OF ACTION SERIES

ACADEMIC GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FOR MEN OF COLOR

WHAT DO WE KNOW...

about academic guidance and support for men of color?

Many undergraduate men of color lack sufficient or sustained access to timely, personalized, and consistent academic support from academic advisors, faculty advisors, and academic support staff. Just like their peers, men of color need personally tailored advising meetings, close student-faculty relationships, and validation from college faculty and staff to achieve academic success. With access to caring, knowledgeable, and supportive guidance, men of color can develop educational goals that are designed, defined, and driven by their own values and priorities.

WHAT DO WE DO...

to provide academic guidance and support for men of color?

Providing Personalized and Coordinated Engagement

The BI works to ensure that academic guidance and support are delivered in a culturally responsive and personalized way. As a foundational component of the BI's continuity of support¹ model, the BI Student Success team conducts one-on-one check-ins each quarter with Scholars to discuss academic and non-academic successes and challenges. In these meetings, the needs and questions of the student help guide what and how supports concerning academics, finance, or general well-being are provided. These check-ins serve as a critical

As an increasing number of campuses take on the critical work of designing and implementing supports for undergraduate men of color, defining and articulating a theory of action promotes clarity and consistency among practitioners within and across campuses. This brief is one of nine dedicated to various facets of the theory of action driving the implementation of the UW Brotherhood Initiative. In this brief, we describe the BI definition of Academic Guidance and Support and provide an overview of the research as it pertains to undergraduate men of color. We also provide some examples of the ways in which academic guidance and support are implemented in practice within the BI.

When it comes to supporting men of color, there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

¹ See [Continuity of Support for Men of Color](#) in the Brotherhood Initiative Theory of Action series for more information and examples of this practice.

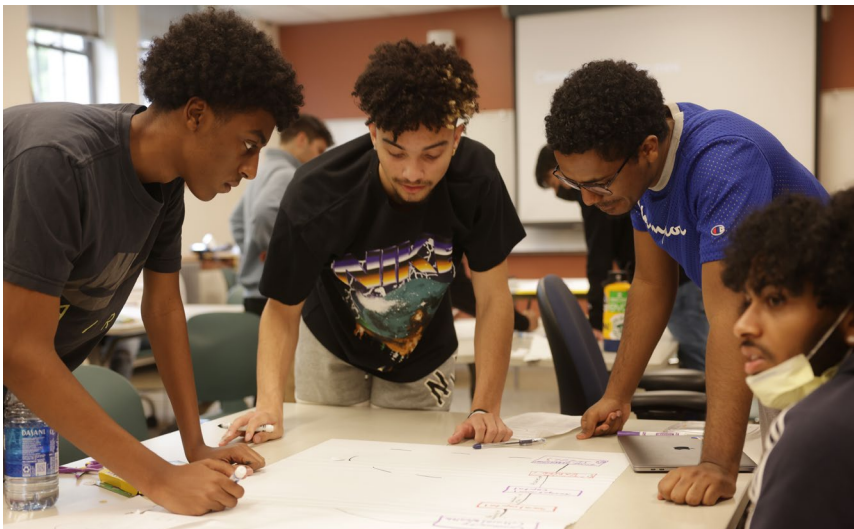
complement to formal advising and provide space for students to get the personalized resources or referrals needed to navigate academic decision-making.

Fostering Peer-Based Academic Support

Whereas formal academic guidance may be associated with one-on-one relationships, the BI leverages a variety of relationships to cultivate a multitude of academic support opportunities. Common across our annual surveys, roughly a third of our Scholars report that they seek academic advice and guidance from peers and family. The BI both acknowledges and attempts to strengthen these informal sources of navigational capital by integrating peers, community members, and alumni into class discussions and programming concerning academic planning and major decisions. As an example, the BI first-year course regularly features in-class peer panels on academic skills and engagement. Infusing peer and near-peer supports into the BI classroom and programming opportunities not only provides students the space to hear the perspectives and experiences of students that “look like them”, but it also allows our professional staff to help students understand the critical difference between experience-based academic advice from a peer and formal academic advising from a staff member.

Developing and Maintaining Cross-Department Staff Relationships

The BI develops a strong network of academic support through interdepartmental collaboration and relationship building. The BI staff work closely with other general and departmental advisors to identify the issues and barriers preventing academic success specifically for BI Scholars and to coordinate communication so that students are hearing



“One thing that I value a lot about the Brotherhood Initiative, is just knowing that we have these individuals on BI staff who were directly related to wanting to support us...I used to think it was a burden to them and I was bothering them, but I soon learned, the more you ask questions, the more you utilize their help and resources, the better that they feel, because that’s the exact reason why they’re here.” – Cohort 1 BI Scholar

*Academic guidance and support that is **accessible, proactive, and coordinated** is a critical part of increasing retention and graduation rates for undergraduate men of color.*

“My relationship with my mentor helped me realize how much I changed. Coming into university, I always enjoyed having others around me. However, my mentor helped me realize that sometimes I like working by myself and pushing through problems on my own. He understood that and let me grow and solve problems on my own. He was always there when I needed him and checked on me often, but he encouraged and pushed me in the right direction.” – Cohort 6 BI Scholar

consistent, relevant, and timely information. The BI Student Success team develops and sustains partnerships across campus by attending interdepartmental meetings, establishing and maintaining relationship-based connections, and expressing equal care and support for the well-being of staff and faculty of color who too often work in isolation to support marginalized students. Through an intentional and extensive web of cross-department staff relationships, BI Scholars benefit from a strong community of support.

WHAT SHOULD PRACTITIONERS CONSIDER to improve academic guidance and support for men of color?

When it comes to supporting men of color, there is no one-size-fits all approach. Improvements on academic guidance and support starts with practitioners and institutional leaders addressing what they know and what they do to serve as supports or barriers for the men of color they seek to serve.

- **Academic guidance and resources need to be accessible and relevant for men of color.** This means understanding when, how, and with whom men of color feel comfortable and confident in receiving support on campus. Using institutional data and practitioner knowledge to clarify patterns of service and resource use can inform the development of more personalized and better coordinated academic supports for men of color.
- **Professional staff, faculty, and trained advisors** are the best source of academic advising, but integrated peer-based (e.g. major peers, peer coaches, academic clubs) strategies can be an effective approach in strengthening academic supports and resources in ways that foster academic belonging, cultural capital, and community building.
- **Strong institutional partnerships between practitioners and their respective areas** are an important component of ensuring men of color get the guidance and support they need, when they need it. Practitioners are better positioned to support men of color when they cultivate cross departmental and cross cultural relationships that can both increase access to resources and opportunities while simultaneously challenging practices and policies that sustain racial inequity.

“There are meetings that I've had with students where we stopped talking about my list of [advising] questions and we started talking about life... and it was in those conversations where I learned more about them and what they are struggling with personally. Then I was able to say, let's think about what makes you well?” – BI Student Success Staff

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS TO REFLECT ON:

- *How can I reach out to men of color who may not know that I am available to support them?*
- *How can I more intentionally integrate peer-based strategies (e.g. major peers, peer coaches, academic clubs) into the resources I provide?*
- *Who can I collaborate with on my campus, to more effectively support men of color?*

The nine briefs exploring the BI Theory of Action include:

- Introduction to BI Theory of Action
- Sense of Belonging for Men of Color
- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Men of Color
- Culturally Responsive Guidance for Men of Color
- Continuity of Support for Men of Color
- Academic Guidance and Support for Men of Color
- Psychosocial and Identity Development for Men of Color
- Career Development and Professionalization for Men of Color
- Community-Based Learning and Leadership Development for Men of Color

These briefs are available at <https://brotherhoodinitiative.org/research>

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