

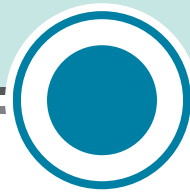
# WHAT WORKS NOW

May 2015

The Campaign for  
College  
Opportunity



LATINOS



BLACKS



ASIAN AMERICANS  
NATIVE HAWAIIANS  
PACIFIC ISLANDERS

## Umoja Community

*As the Campaign for College Opportunity releases its 2015 State of Higher Education in California: Black Report, we felt it was important to highlight best practices that can support Black student success. This profile is one of two that showcases initiatives that have been proven to help more Black students reach their college dreams.*

Umoja means "unity" in Swahili and in some California community colleges it signifies a community of people working to improve the educational experiences of Black students through evidence based practices and professional development for colleges.

Frustrated with the continual low success rates of Black community college students, in 2007 twenty-three college faculty, staff, and administrators from across California came together to create meaningful change. Although an overwhelming majority of Black college students (62%) in California attend a community college, less than half (37%) are awarded a certificate, degree or transfer within six years.<sup>1</sup> The Umoja Community, as they named themselves, were tired of these statistics and emerged as an all-volunteer, grass roots organization whose goal was to increase the retention and completion rates for Black students. The group knew that targeted programs for Black students already existed in several colleges across the state, but were concerned that a greater impact was needed. As a result, they decided to create a statewide model program that could be used at all community colleges. The model was informed by fifteen existing programs in the state that have proven to be successful and was designed by a leadership team made up of five of the program coordinators from those programs. The Umoja model takes the principle tenets of the successful programs but allows for flexibility in the program design.

According to the Umoja Community program requirements

<sup>1</sup> The Campaign for College Opportunity. (2015). 2015 State of Higher Education in California: Black Report.

however, all Umoja students "participate in a college orientation and assessment process, individual counseling sessions, the creation of a comprehensive Student Educational Plan, core Umoja-sponsored courses and activities, and financial aid workshops."

### Statewide Umoja students:

- are 25% more likely to remain in community college;
- have a higher grade point average;
- and are more likely to pass basic skills courses and be ready for transfer-level work in a shorter time frame.

The Umoja Community model asks colleges to implement one or more of the following options:

**Learning Community Model:** In this model a group of only Umoja students take two or more linked classes and remain together for at least one year. Sample classes that the program may offer are:

- Guidance/counseling courses (1st and 2nd semester)
- English course
- Math course
- Library information literacy course
- Other course(s) with a Black studies emphasis

**Cohort Model:** In contrast to the Learning Community Model, in this model subsets of Umoja students are enrolled in classes with students who do not participate in the Umoja program. Sample classes that they might enroll in are:

- Guidance/counseling courses
- Other identified course(s) with a Black emphasis

**Other Program Options:** Umoja sites can also offer additional programs that have been approved by the Umoja Community. For example:

- Mentoring program (staff/community mentors)

- Peer mentoring
- Tutoring/supplemental instruction
- Service learning

Colleges can choose from a range of approved student, instructional, and support service practices that support the model/s they implement. The flexibility in the practices allows colleges to tailor their program to best suit the needs of their local students over time.

The model was piloted at San Diego City College, San Bernardino Valley College, West Los Angeles College and Long Beach College in 2007-2008. After a comprehensive review of the pilots, Umoja leadership learned that additional training of faculty and staff at the colleges would be needed. As a result, Umoja created a **Summer Learning Institute (SLI)**. The five-day intensive training is meant to train faculty and staff on Umoja best practices, curriculum, and program design.

The statewide model program now consists of an expansive curriculum and serves as a professional development resource for community colleges. The Umoja Practices have been widely disseminated with hundreds of faculty receiving training in them. A few examples of the practices are: accelerated courses, integrated and intentional counseling, and a dedicated community space. These are critical to improving student success. In 2008, 87% of first-time California Community College students were placed into pre-college level courses. Of those students, only 33% earned a certificate, degree, or transferred within six years<sup>2</sup>.

“We were a group of people who were sick and tired of being sick and tired about the low success rates of our African American students.”  
 – Dr. Teresa Aldredge,  
 Umoja Community Vice Chair for Program Development

Given the high percentage of Black students enrolled in these courses and the low levels of success, over 95% of Umoja programs have accelerated curriculum to improve retention rates and to help students progress to transfer level courses

## Participating Colleges:

| College                       | Program                        |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| American River College        | Umoja Saku                     |
| Bakersfield College           | ASTEP                          |
| Chabot College                | Daraja Project                 |
| Chaffey College               | AMAN/AWOMAN                    |
| College of Alameda            | Amandla                        |
| College of Marin              | pilot Fall 2015                |
| College of San Mateo          | CSM Umoja                      |
| Cosumnes River College        | Diop Scholars                  |
| De Anza College               | Sankofa Scholars               |
| Diablo Valley College         | Ujima                          |
| El Camino College             | Project Success                |
| Fresno City College           | IDLE                           |
| Fullerton College             | Reach 4 Excellence             |
| Long Beach City College       | Sankofa Scholars               |
| Los Angeles Trade Tech        | LATTC-Umoja                    |
| Los Medanos College           | Umoja Scholars                 |
| MiraCosta College             | Umoja/EOPS                     |
| Moreno Valley College         | Renaissance Scholars           |
| Mt. San Antonio College       | Aspire                         |
| Napa Valley College           | Napa Valley Umoja Program      |
| Norco College                 | Talented Tenth                 |
| Orange Coast College          | OCC Umoja                      |
| Riverside Community College   | Ujima Program                  |
| Sacramento City College       | Umoja SBA                      |
| San Bernardino Valley College | Tumaini                        |
| San Diego City College        | Umoja/TSP                      |
| San Diego Mesa College        | Mesa Academy                   |
| San Joaquin Delta College     | AFFIRM                         |
| San Jose City College         | Umoja Academic Success Program |
| Santa Rosa Junior College     | Umoja                          |
| Sierra College                | Umoja Sankofa                  |
| Skyline College               | ASTEP                          |
| Solano Community College      | Umoja Program Scholars         |
| West Valley College           | SUCCESS Program                |

<sup>2</sup> The Campaign for College Opportunity. (2015). 2015 State of Higher Education in California: Black Report.

more quickly. Additionally, integrated and intentional counseling provides the much needed assistance that students need to navigate the college process. The reality is that many Black students lack the college knowledge or social capital and access to resources that are typically available to other students from higher-income or better-educated families. Therefore, without the proper assistance the college process can be too complex for them to navigate alone. The dedicated community space for Black students helps foster a sense of belonging which increases the likelihood that Black students will remain enrolled in college and graduate.<sup>3</sup>

## How to Join

Colleges that are interested in adopting the Umoja model must apply to join. The first step of the application is usually a letter of inquiry from a senior-level staff member of the college who will oversee the program. The college then goes through the assessment process to ensure they are ready to start a program. Once the program—learning community and/or cohort of students—has been approved, the college must agree to participate in the Summer Learning Institute to keep their Umoja practices up to date. Additional professional development opportunities include an annual conference and the northern and southern California regional symposia. Colleges with Umoja programs are also required by the California Community College Chancellor's office to collect data on their programs.

## Success to Date

Given the flexibility in the design of Umoja Community programs at campuses, success rates vary from college to college but here are a few highlights:

**Daraja Project Chabot College:** a linked course learning community that also provides counseling and mentoring.

- Between 1994-2004, Daraja students successfully completed the Basic Skills to Freshman Composition sequence at a rate 19% higher than other Black students not in the program

**Project Success at El Camino College:** addresses retention and persistence issues by providing counseling, early

registration, mentoring and supportive instructors who teach in learning communities.

- Project Success students have persistence rates at 96% and earn Associate Degree averages twice that of comparable Black students not in the program



## A Final Thought

Although the Umoja Community was officially endorsed by the California Community Colleges Board of Governors in 2008 as a viable statewide student success program, this is the first year that the program will be receiving funds to support its work from the system office. The program has been sustained over the years through consortium membership fees and a few small grants from the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation and Learning Works. However, new funds available for student equity and success will allow the Umoja Community to hire an Executive Director, regional coordinators, explore options for scalability, and allow for greater outreach to high schools and public four-year universities. In fact, demand to join has already been growing among community colleges and recently California State University, East Bay has also expressed interest and is working on an Umoja program on their campus. In addition, Umoja has signed an MOU with the University of California, Davis and is a partner with the HBCU Transfer Initiative to improve transfer rates. The Umoja Community serves 4,000-5,000 students annually but with increased state funding the potential for growth is extensive.

*For more information regarding the Umoja Community, please contact: Dr. Teresa Aldredge at [aldredt@CRC.losrios.edu](mailto:aldredt@CRC.losrios.edu) or Dr. Donna Colondres at [donna.colondres@chaffey.edu](mailto:donna.colondres@chaffey.edu).*

<sup>3</sup> Kim, Kristine. (2014). Black men: a case study of community college retention and graduation. Education Doctoral Theses. Paper 182. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20004988>.