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## Factors for Success: Supporting Black Doctoral Students

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# Factors for Success: Supporting Black Doctoral Students

Shondra L. Marshall, PhD; Clyde Barnett III, PhD; Quentrese Hinton, PhD; Courtney BrieAnn Morris, PhD

The journey to completing a doctoral degree can be challenging for students of any race or social background. But for Black doctoral students, the challenges can be profound. The systemic racial inequities that have for so long characterized the culture at large do not stop at the gates of academia, and experiences of marginalization, dehumanization, and financial insecurity are widespread. The four authors of this paper, hailing from two cities in Michigan—Detroit and Flint—with long histories of racial inequity, violence, and poverty—experienced these dynamics firsthand during their own graduate school educations, and it was through our collective recollection of these experiences and the discussions that ensued that the current study emerged. The four authors were in doctoral programs when beginning to write this article. Two of the authors earned their PhD degrees in December 2019. One author defended in April 2023 and one author defended September 2023. Each author pursued and earned their degrees in universities in Michigan. Among the many issues that we explored was one that was especially potent: given the statistical cards stacked against us by virtue of our race and backgrounds, the chances of our reaching this point as fellow instructors, each with a graduate degree, teaching first-year students, were small indeed. In equal measure, we felt fortunate to be here and concerned for those who would come after us.

Our discussions eventually coalesced around four questions:

- What are salient limiting factors within our own experiences that, if addressed in intersectional ways, would drive each of us toward successfully completing our doctoral programs?
- What could our programs, departments, and educational institutions do better or differently to improve outcomes for Black doctoral students?
- How can exploring these factors assist those who come after us in successfully completing their doctoral programs?
- How can our full humanity be recognized without causing us to give up our individual identities to earn a credential?

Exploration of these questions led to the identification of four key factors defining our educational experiences, which we determined warranted deeper and more focused consideration: *socialization*, *mentoring*, *financial wellness*, and *belonging*. While there is scholarship in each of these areas (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016; Strayhorn, 2012; Turner & Thompson, 1993), discussion of Black graduate students generally and Black doctoral students specifically is notably limited. This gap in scholarship is troubling, especially when considering the under-representation of Black graduate students across programs and the subsequent over-representation of that demographic in student loan defaults at graduate levels (Jaschik, 2013; Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016). The purpose for this literature review, then, is to interrogate the scholarship surrounding these four key factors and to identify areas for additional research that could help inform those who work directly with Black doctoral students. This approach can work against reifying inequitable practices in doctoral programs while supporting Black doctoral students' full humanity. This body of work brings forward pertinent information for readers across disciplines. In particular, this literature is relevant to this journal as we center experiences often not visible in doctoral education and instruction. This work provides insight for multiple stakeholders to improve the experiences of Black doctoral students across the state of Michigan, the Midwest region and the nation. In particular, professors in English Language Arts (ELA) or related fields could use this work as guidepost to better support the educational experiences of their doctoral students

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and this work could also serve as a resource to those aspiring to pursue doctoral programs.

### Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework which elevates the social intersections of race identity, nationality, gender identity, and class. Acknowledging that each component is layered with social categories which creates systems of discrimination and disadvantage is why we used this framework as a lens to further understand inequitable experiences. Intersectionality elevates the overlapping social identities which relates to oppression, discrimination and domination.

Intersectionality is adopted as a theoretical framework for this review as it provides an avenue for analyzing experiences and understanding complexity in the world and ourselves (Crenshaw, 1991). This framework has been used for better understanding and honoring identity development of students, faculty, and staff, and situating individuals within larger structures of inequality (Crenshaw, 1991; Jones & Abes, 2013; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Means et al., 2017). Jones and Abes (2013) posit that intersectionality highlights the specific need to understand existing intergroup differences that stem from shifting “historical, political, and social contexts in which identities are embedded” (p. 112). Black doctoral students, for example, exist in spaces that often work, implicitly and explicitly, to further marginalize them as their identities, which are historically, politically, and socially impacted, are grappled with regularly. The situation of this framework is appropriate for understanding, highlighting, and elevating the voices of Black doctoral students. This theoretical framework is also ideal as it does not hold one identity at higher importance than another (Means & Jaeger, 2013). Considering these themes, or factors, from current scholarship, undergirded by an intersectional framework, allowed for the review, construction, and presentation of the following relevant literature.

### The Review of Literature

The literature examining Black doctoral students in higher education has grown significantly in recent years (Anderson-Thompkins et al., 2004; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Holland, 1993; Jones, 2000; Mabokela & Green, 2000; Milner, 2004; Nettles, 1990; Rogers & Molina, 2006; Willie et al., 1991). These scholars have all supported the argument that the experience of Black students in higher education overall is dif-

ferent from other students of color and White students. Black students experience discrimination, historically have lower enrollment rates, experience financial barriers, experience a heightened level of harassment, violence, and hate crimes in our nation. Additionally, Black students pursuing graduate degrees have historically lacked financial support, faculty/staff support, and recruitment issues (Strayhorn, 2005; Thomas, 1981). This difference is visible for both terminal degree seekers and master’s degree seekers, making the need for additional research to inform policy, practice, and recruitment efforts for Black graduate students critical. The need to expand this work and to understand the experiences of Black doctoral students is crucial to programs’ adapting ways to best support their Black doctoral students both during the program and after graduation. Felder (2010) further posited that many Black doctoral students experience educational barriers, resulting in low degree completion.

To review the literature of Black doctoral student experiences, we explored multiple databases of peer-reviewed published bodies of work. Search phrases such as “Black Doctoral Students at HBCU” (10), “Black Doctoral Students at PWI” (4), and “Black Students PhDs” (415) were used. The results included aspects of each of the four key factors. Based on patterns in the literature and from our personal experiences, the search was directed specifically to the four key factors that are at the heart of the study (socialization, mentoring, financial wellness, and belonging).

Reviewing past literature creates a chronicled context of the experiences of Black doctoral students at institutions across the United States. To situate this work in a historical context, Felder (2015) examined the life and educational experiences of Edward Bouchet, who in 1876 was the first Black person to receive a doctorate in the United States and from Yale. Felder’s work interrogated the experiences of Bouchet before, during, and after his doctoral program, highlighting funding, transition processes, and the journey to degree completion. Although Felder did not specifically examine these factors, socialization process, mentorship opportunities, and financial wellness are discussed in the context of the study. Earlier, Thurgood et al., (2006) reported that there is considerably limited information capturing Black doctoral completion prior to 1975, according to the National Science Foundation (2018). Given this, the story of Bouchet’s educational experience has been repeated by Black doctoral students for more than a century. Yet Felder’s work, which interrogated Bouchet’s experiences before, during, and after his doctoral program and

highlighted funding, transition processes, and the journey to degree completion, suggests remarkable similarities between the experiences of contemporary Black doctoral students and those of Bouchet a century and a half earlier. This extends the need to continue exploring the educational journeys of Black doctoral students as it relates to socialization, mentorship, financial wellness and belonging over time.

Further, in examining the experiences of Black doctoral students while enrolled in programs, looking particularly to post-graduation opportunities is critically important. Smith et al. (2012) asserted that among various institutional types, the smallest number of Black full-time faculty are at public research institutions. Smith (2016) reported challenges that Black doctoral students face throughout their programs, which ultimately impact their post-doctoral experience, including professoriate options. In their literature review, Blockett et al. (2016) examined how Black doctoral students were socialized and prepared for a professorship. This work highlighted the marginalization of Black doctoral students as it related to their transition to the academy. Findings illuminated how Black and Latinx faculty have also been marginalized. Blockett et al. (2016) identified fit, mentorship, professional involvement, and marginalization as themes that impact the socialization process for Black doctoral students. These works capture some of the many issues that Black doctoral students face and are consistent with the concerns and needs expressed by each of the authors of this literature review.

Gildersleeve et al. (2011), whose research was situated by critical inquiry (Myers & Klein, 2011) and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000), explored the notion that graduate school can be a challenging experience for students of color and provided a critical race analysis of the daily interactions of Latinx and Black doctoral students. The authors of this study, found that Black doctoral students face daily oppressive and dehumanizing cultural interactions, and identified the need for doctoral education practices that promote a greater humanizing experience for doctoral education for students of color. These findings engage and interrogate a sense of belonging, one of the four areas of focus for this review. Often, Black doctoral students have reported experiencing racial discrimination inside and outside of the classroom (Barker, 2011). These types of intersectional experiences illuminate overlapping disadvantages and discrimination. Some Black doctoral students have also reported experiencing unfriendly interactions campus-wide, embedded in stereotype threat and mar-

ginalization (Felder & Barker, 2013; Taylor & Antony, 2000; Willie et al., 1991).

The next four sections will consider literature in each of the areas highlighted here—socialization, mentoring, financial wellness, and belonging—to further inform how the Black doctoral student experience is an intersectional one needing specific attention for staff and faculty who may recruit and serve them.

## Socialization

Socialization has been defined as the process by which an apprentice is made a member of a community (Golde, 1998; González, 2006; Lovitts, 2001; Weidman et al., 2001), and as a set of skills, knowledge, and norms grounded in cultural and social capital that result in rewards of social and cultural attainment, status, and mobility in higher education (Bourdieu, 1986; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). As such, socialization is a critical component of academic performance, retention, student success, and degree completion (Turner & Thompson, 1993). When the process of socialization is compromised, as is often the case when individuals are not members of the dominant culture, positive attainments in these areas can be suppressed. Such has been the case for Black doctoral students, especially when their experiences are examined through an intersectional lens. How do Black doctoral students succeed under these circumstances in higher education? How are Black doctoral students socialized into their graduate programs? Socialization therefore addresses the perception of the expected behavior in a setting, which in this case is higher education institutions. How might these expectations be biased, particularly given the statistics related to faculty representation? Through an intersectional lens, this raises specific questions around the socialization of doctoral students, and more explicitly Black doctoral students including having awareness of intersectionality and acknowledging differences such as race, class, or gender which impacts the result of the educational experiences of Black doctoral students.

Baker et al. (2014) reported that race and racial experiences are significant to the socialization of Black graduate students overall. In efforts to holistically support the socialization process, racial identity, which is essential for Black student success, must be considered. Golde (1998) explained the process of graduate school as a double socialization process, because students must simultaneously manage the student-

life aspect of graduate school and become socialized within their respective future career. Golde (2005) later described six components that impact low attrition rates: incongruence between the department and the student's interest, academic under-preparedness, a poor relationship between advisor and student, student self-perception as lacking preparedness for professoriate, job market low expectations, and departmental structural alienation of the student. Given these factors, intentional socialization practices for Black doctoral students become increasingly important for building positive, constructive, and productive mentor relationships. Weidman and DeAngelo (2020) *Socialization Model* focuses on the following factors: student background, career life cycle development,

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disciplinatory/professional communities, and personal communities with higher education institutions. These areas inform the possibility of positive mentorship opportunities within institutions' scope. The authors describe student background as gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Weidman & DeAngelo, 2020). They describe career cycle development as the socialization outcome of declaring a major. Personal communities are articulated as the entry point to an occupation. For example, are there family members or community members in the desired professional field? Are there friends with similar aspirations? The disciplinatory/professional community factor outlines the journey and exploration of career aspirations. For example, this could include clubs/registered student organizations (RSOs)/affinity groups. In Weidman and DeAngelo's student socialization model of higher education experience centralized normative contexts (introductory courses grades, major and department climate) and highlights the socialization processes (role of the major introductory course and opportunities for peer-to-peer support). This model focuses on undergraduate socialization and was used to examine outcomes for students in (STEM) science, technology, engineering, math, fields. More plainly, this model was expanded by Weidman et al. (2001) to include a graduate socialization framework which focused on the fol-

lowing factors: prospective students, professional communities, novice professional practitioners, personal community and university in the center.

The authors of this literature review assume that institutions, which are enrolling ever higher numbers of Black graduate students, are committed to meeting Black students' unique needs, including the ability to finance their education in equitable and holistic ways. The authors also contend that socialization can be halted by implicit bias (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), that a lack of intentional relationship-building and mentorship on behalf of faculty can be detrimental (Noy & Ray, 2012), and that systemic and structural barriers diminish a sense of belonging for Black doctoral students (Strayhorn, 2012).

### Mentoring

Galbraith (2001) defined mentorship as a form of professional socialization, whereby a more experienced individual acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and patron of a less experienced individual, aimed at further developing and refining the mentee's skills, abilities, and understanding. Mentored students accrue multiple benefits that in turn enhance their overall socialization experience (Felder, 2010). Generally, strong mentorship positively correlates with increased productivity, self-efficacy, and career satisfaction (Baker & Griffin, 2010; Dawson, 2014), and several studies have explored the need for mentorship and engagement for overall student success (Badahdah et al., 2011; Davis, 2008; Noy & Ray, 2012; Spalter-Roth et al., 2013; Willie et al., 1991). Students report positive mentoring as the most important factor in achieving end goals such as degree attainment (Pfund et al., 2016). Mentorship serves as a means of improving student and faculty relationships, cultivating professional growth, and establishing faculty development (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Fedynich & Bain, 2011; Kram, 1985; Lechuga, 2011; Patton, 2009; Patton & Harper, 2003). Mentor relationships can widen educational and career prospects and assist students in building and realizing aspirations for the future (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; DeAngelo, 2009; DeAngelo, 2010; Eagan, et al., 2013; Girves et al., 2005).

Doctoral students with active and consistent mentoring are more likely to publish their research. These students are also more optimistic about their career prospects, report higher career satisfaction, and feel better about the support they received while in their program (Brunsma et al., 2017; Healy

& Welchert, 1990). Nettles (1990) even went so far as to assert that mentoring is essential for doctoral students.

Willie et al. (1991) pointedly noted the importance of mentoring for Black students, asserting that “their [mentors’] presence is essential in helping African Americans and other minority scholars through periods of doubt and indecision” (p. 67). Both Barker (2007) and Zachary (2000) recognized the critical importance to Black doctoral students of having mentorship opportunities with reflexive faculty. Research surrounding Black doctoral mentorship is still a common topic in research and scholarship in relation to faculty-student relationships (Felder et al., 2014). And although mentorship, as a component of socialization, is critical to successful matriculation of Black doctoral students (Pope & Edwards, 2016); bias and other racial dynamics may limit or prevent relationship building—the first step in the mentoring process—between White faculty and non-White students (Barker, 2012; Barker, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Felder, 2010; Milkman et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2007). With the current increase in Black graduate student enrollment, this topic is thus becoming more and more important.

These studies have examined the influence of mentorship on the educational experience of students of color, however, there is a lack of attention to Black students. Given the current makeup of the academy, specifically the ratio of Black and White faculty, in fall 2017 only 8 percent of faculty were Black, and 77 percent were White at degree-granting institutions. Of that 77 percent, 39 percent were White males and 38 percent were White women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Furthermore, the work of becoming aware, examining, and engaging in dialogue about difference is crucial for mentors in cross-race mentoring relationships (Turner & González, 2015). This supports the notion that Black doctoral students’ mentors do not have to be Black, but they must be socially aware and understand racial differences. Black doctoral students are at a distinct mentorship disadvantage. Mentorship and its impact should be examined in all doctoral programs for Black students. Recognizing that there is a need for mentors of Black doctoral students fits within the intersectional framing of this literature review.

## Financial Wellness

Financial wellness, too, plays a significant role in student academic performance. Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) identified it as a major predictor for doctoral student academic perfor-

mance, positing that doctoral students with research assistantships have greater opportunities for mentorship from faculty and are most likely to reach degree completion. They also note, however, that despite this clear benefit, only 40% of doctoral students hold a research assistantship. This repayable debt poses a significant financial burden for those majority of doctoral students without funded assistantships (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). Furthermore, graduate students of color are more likely to borrow at greater amounts than their White counterparts (Jaschik, 2013). Scott-Clayton and Li (2016) found that graduate school for Black students impacts the rising racial debt disparity significantly. Black college graduates have an average of \$53,000 in debt from student loans four years out from graduation encompassing interest and graduate school, double the debt of White counterparts (Scott-Clayton & Li, 2016).

Viewing this phenomenon through an intersectional lens presents a clear disadvantage facing students of color. Borrowing in greater amounts may present additional challenges post-graduation for these multifaceted learners. Although finances are a common concern among college students, there is limited literature linked to the stress college students face in financing their education (Heckman et al., 2014). There is also scarce literature connected to Black doctoral students and financial wellness. Institutions must pay particular attention to practices that prohibit financial wellness (Heckman et al., 2014). Additionally, institutions must decrease financial stress, and increase competency as it relates to students funding their advanced educational pursuits (Heckman et al., 2014).

Post-baccalaureate degree seekers qualify for fewer non-repayable forms of federal financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid process (FAFSA) than their undergraduate peers (Pyne & Grodsky, 2018). During the 2011–2012 academic year, graduate students received a total of \$51.7 billion in total financial aid, including federal loans and grants, institutional grants, employer support, and other forms of financial support (Woo & Shaw, 2015). Belasco et al. (2014) reported that many graduate students use loans to pay for their education and living expenses, which include unsub-

**Institutions must pay particular attention to practices that prohibit financial wellness, decrease financial stress, and increase competency as it relates to students funding their advanced educational pursuits.**

sidized direct loans. This is extremely important for many students who may also identify as low-income. Moreover, survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2015) found that 42.5% of graduate students take out the maximum

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direct loan amount for which they are eligible.

Financial wellness is a concern for all students (Rosa, 2006). However, students with underrepresented identities such as first generation students, students who speak English as a second language, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds—tend to be especially vulnerable to the stressors associated with financing higher education (Rosa, 2006). Goldrick-Rab and Kendall (2016) explained that higher education financing frequently leaves

students from low socioeconomic backgrounds with many unforeseen expenses, reporting that there are many hidden, non-tuition related costs associated with pursuing a postsecondary degree. The costs of research, conference travel, professional development, textbooks, course materials and supplies, health care, and transportation are not often discussed with incoming students (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). In addition, many graduate students have other financial responsibilities, including but not limited to past debt, housing finances, childcare, and other family financial obligations (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). While these commitments are not solely unique to Black doctoral students, these responsibilities greatly shape the journey to completion. Financial wellness has intersectional implications because if students are not financially well, their educational experiences can be significantly impacted and even thwarted.

### Belonging

While belonging has been acknowledged as critical to student persistence, scholars have differed in their definition

of the term (Anant, 1966; Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Osterman, 2000; Tovar & Simon, 2010). Strayhorn (2012) reported belonging as a universal characteristic and “a basic human need” and motivation, sufficient to influence behavior” (p. 3) that is “important for human functioning and a critical factor in the psychological wellbeing of individuals” (p. 9), a view shared by the authors of this study and echoed by other scholars (Hagerty et al., 1992). Strayhorn (2012) also noted that belonging refers to “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus” (p. 3). Just as the presence of a sense of belonging has shown consistent association with positive outcomes in the areas of prosocial and productive development within the context of education, the absence of a sense of belonging can lead to limited interests or reduced sense of buy-in to daily life (Strayhorn, 2012; Weiss, 1973). The literature reviewed did not infuse belonging as a part of the curriculum itself but rather in the form of additional support on campus. Therefore, there is an opportunity for campus leaders to include co-curricular activities to specific courses and programs aiming to sustain belonging.

Belonging is especially critical to the experience of graduate students, providing a shared sense of meaning and purpose leading to security and relatedness (Strayhorn, 2012). Graduate students typically look to feel connected, valued, appreciated, and qualified within organized group contexts such as graduate school programs. Faculty and staff, who have the greatest impact on outcomes, play integral roles in this process. To be most effective in this role, faculty especially must endeavor to develop a holistic understanding of each of their students. This holistic understanding should go beyond simple academic achievement alone but rather take into account students’ specific motivations for attending graduate school and the context that they bring with them into these spaces. Students take many things into account when considering graduate programs—acquisition of new skills and knowledge necessary for working in a field, particular degree programs, availability of faculty, level of financial assistance, and program structure (Ellis, 2001). “Understanding how students come to choose a particular graduate school may provide clues to meeting their needs, which, in turn, is likely to increase their chances of success” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 91). Socialization and the cultivation of belonging start as soon as students receive their acceptance letters. For example, what is the next communica-

tion a student receives about the campus, support offered, fellowship & scholarship information, and opportunities to join affinity groups or social clubs? Most institutions, especially PWIs, have a Black graduate student registered student organization. Department leaders could share a list of all graduate RSOs as a great next step to continue building the foundation needed for success and cultivating belonging.

Belonging is context dependent, meaning belonging in a particular context has greater influences on outcomes (Strayhorn, 2012). The context through which this literature review is situated is academe. Faculty should examine who is in control of the context, and with that, who will thrive based on unexamined points of bias both implicitly and explicitly. Socialization and adjustment, defined by Strayhorn, is the successful adaptation to the predominant norms, values, and expectations of the specific degree-granting department or field, and is critical to students internalizing a sense of belonging while pursuing their studies. The driving question then is, how do these norms, values, and expectations continue to uphold systems that lead to 50% of all graduate students leaving their programs before completing their degree (Nettles & Millett, 2006; Strayhorn, 2012)? Graduate schools must determine how their practices promote or inhibit belonging and implement strategies to facilitate activities leading to belongingness through multilevel engagement in the department, school or college, institution overall, and the specific profession.

Much of the literature that exists on belonging is from the perspective of first-year undergraduate students, students with disabilities and mental health challenges, and international students (Curtin et al., 2013; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2009; Mwangi, 2016;). Emphasis on Black student experiences at the undergraduate level have been examined in conjunction with analyses of specific subject areas, like STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education (Dortch & Patel, 2017). Graduate students, particularly Black graduate students, have been overlooked within this scholarly corpus. Acosta et al. (2015) noted that Black doctoral students who are successful had opportunities to connect with others in the Black community. This highlights the importance of doctoral programs intentionally acknowledging race, class, and gender. Using intersectionality as a framework sheds light on the oppressive educational experiences Black doctoral students may face. With this, the authors posit that it is time for the experiences of Black graduate students, including doctoral students, to be considered and emphasized within research, which will ultimately inform institutional practice.

## Implications for Further Research and Practice

While the authors of this work conducted a literature review that focused on four components that influence the success of Black doctoral students, we recognize that we entered this work with several assumptions and beliefs. Literature on Black doctoral student success often does not include discussions surrounding systemic and institutional racism. We recognize that there are campus-wide efforts underway to ensure equitable practices by colleges and universities based on the surge of diversity and equity/

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inclusion committees or offices. To that end, we do assume that there are programs that are interested in challenging adverse outcomes of Black students whom they enroll in their programs. We believe that there are other factors besides the four areas discussed here that impact the success of Black doctoral students. Therefore, it is necessary to research the educational experiences and factors impacting recruitment, retention, and success of both Black graduate students and Black doctoral students. This research is not solely beneficial for doctoral programs but rather to entire institutional communities. We argue that if these challenges exist at the doctoral level, they exist in higher education overall. Therefore, creating space to examine and address systemic challenges not only across fields and disciplines but at different academic levels of higher education is necessary. We believe this study can enhance the understanding of preparing professors in English Language Arts (ELA) or related fields. For example, professors across disciplines, including ELA, can utilize this study to understand the myriad of systemic challenges that Black doctoral students encounter. This study could inform training and professional development opportunities for ELA educators and faculty. This body of work provides narrative, accounts, and literature that support the overall Black student collegiate experience. We further believe that if stakeholders in the academy do not address these factors, issues will prevail. Finally, we believe that scholars and practitioners in the acad-



emy who may read this work will be able to critically identify areas of possible improvement using our experiences, research and four components as a starting point to further strengthen their respective programs.

This literature review urges reconsideration of how Black doctoral students are viewed and supported in the academy. We believe that additional research in this area is critical to informing theory, practice, policy, and recruitment methods that greatly impact doctoral programs. This literature review supports the notion that institutions must acknowledge the role of race in education overall (Milner, 2004; McNair, 2003). The educational experience of Black doctoral students is inseparable from the historical and structural racism that is visible in all levels of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Another implication involves the lack of socialization that Black doctoral students receive in their programs and the need for greater attention to this (Golde, 1998; Lovitts, 2001; Weidman et al., 2001; Twale et al., 2016). Additionally, Black doctoral students need ongoing mentorship and faculty need continual training so that they are intentional and purposeful in this pursuit. Department chairs along with the doctoral students' faculty advisor should have intrinsic knowledge on how to guide and connect students within their program. Black doctoral

**We argue that if these challenges exist at the doctoral level, they exist in higher education overall; thus, creating space to examine systemic challenges not only across fields and disciplines but at different entry points of seeking higher education is needed.**

students need the opportunities to apply for funding or financial support to sustain financial wellness while they are students in the program. This starts with concerted efforts around funding packages and should be supported by access to funding for research and conference opportunities. Further, through departmental established research groups, new doctoral students can begin to cultivate a sense of belonging by being included in these opportunities. While the implications above can apply to all doctoral students, centering Black doctoral student experiences and outcomes, informed by an intersectional lens, is particularly urgent. Thus, specific recommendations include the need for additional research surrounding how Black doctoral educational experiences impact their ability to persist. Although we looked at the four factors for this study more

research is needed examining additional factors which may impact Black doctoral students. Also, research exploring the educational experiences of Black doctoral students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominately White Institutions is necessary. Finally, understanding the time it takes for a Black doctoral student to graduate with their doctorate compared to that of their White counterpart is essential.

The National Science Foundation releases annual data on doctoral recipients and these reports do indeed show there are differences which permeate between racial and ethnic backgrounds (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2019). In 2019 it took Black doctoral students 12 years on average compared to 8.8 years of White doctoral students to complete their degrees (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2019). In 2019 there were 55,703 people holding doctoral degrees and out of that number 2,512 were Black, 24,248 were White, 2,848 were Hispanic, and 3,421 were Asian (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2019).

To that end, it took one author of this literature review seven years to complete the PhD program, one author four years, another author four and a half years, and one author is in year seven of the doctoral program. We do believe that mentorship could help Black doctoral students complete their programs in a timelier manner. There have been studies on the experience of Black doctoral students in STEM and computing (Miles et al., 2020; McGee et al., 2019) as stated above, agricultural science and education (Cropps, 2023), and geography (Darden et al., 2022). However, there is scant research which delineates the areas or fields that explain Black doctoral students' experience across fields of degree which is another opportunity for future promising research.

### Conclusion

There are many factors that impact the experience of Black doctoral students, who face systematic challenges, rooted in a long history of oppression of social identity, that continue to shape their educational experience and success. The factors explored in this literature review include socialization, mentoring, financial wellness and belonging. Mitigating these factors can significantly improve the social and cultural climate of campuses and thereby improve positive outcomes for Black doctoral students. Yet the full expression and implications of these factors is incompletely understood by in-

stitutions and educators. And although scholars have indeed probed these issues—as shown in this literature review—there remain important gaps in the available scholarship.

Our review was informed by an intersectionality framework, which provided the room to explore how racial identity impacts socialization, how the opportunity to build relationships impacts mentorship, how borrowing more money than their counterparts impact the financial wellness of students of color. We emphasize that our focus was on only four specific areas related to our own lived experiences; there are many other important factors bearing on the experiences and success of Black doctoral students, and all are potentially valuable avenues for additional investigation.

This literature review was a result of a dialogue we had about each of our doctoral experiences. We were all in different phases of our program when we had our first conversation. Additionally, we decided to meet again to dream about areas of doctoral programs we believed if included in our graduate programs as students we would thrive. There were some amazing department administrators, faculty, and program components which positively supported us through our doctoral programs. We talked about our experience in our respective departments which helped us to understand how having a sense of belonging should not only be a focus for undergraduate students but also for graduate students and specifically doctoral students.

We urge program directors of doctoral programs to encourage their department chairs and deans to review reading lists or literature used to ensure faculty members are including authors from minoritized backgrounds for assigned reading materials. Additionally, English Language Arts (ELA) in some ways encompasses writing, reading, listening, and speaking therefore using the four factors as a way to bolster academic performance could be considered. Also, as ELA educators in Michigan or the Midwest region or any other geographical area, understanding how specific experiences of schooling impact current or future students is critical to the success and wellbeing of students. We recommend the use of the four factors as evaluation components in a program plan of study agreement as a starting place to reach equity. Finally, the four factors of success in this study could be incorporated in lesson planning as an introductory effort to prepare future educators for their future students.

As more Black students enter graduate programs, it is increasingly important to find new and more potent ways for institutions and educators to openly and proactively acknowledge the challenges and triumphs unique to these learners en-

counter; status quo practices of socialization, mentorship, or financial support for Black graduate students are inadequate at best. In the absence of such an effort, Black graduate students are poised to have to make the ultimate sacrifice for survival, exchanging for a credential the very essence of who they are—their Blackness.

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