Act Six: A Theory of Change for Campus and Community Transformation Through Strategic

Partnerships between Colleges and Community Ministries

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The intervention program that is described here traces its roots to the success of The Posse Foundation, a New York-based nonprofit program that recruits, selects, and trains youth leaders from seven major cities and sends them in cohorts (or "posses") with full tuition scholarships to 38 of the most selective colleges in the country. Having sent more than 3,600 underrepresented students, 93% of them students of color, to college since 1989, Posse maintains a 90% graduation rate (Posse Foundation, 2011). In 2002, through my work at Northwest Leadership Foundation, I led the development of a local program derived from the Posse model called the Act Six Leadership and Scholarship Initiative. Act Six now sends roughly 70 underrepresented students each year from five Northwest cities to eight religiously affiliated liberal arts colleges in Washington and Oregon and has experienced similar success to Posse, with 90% of participants who started college still enrolled or graduated (unpublished Act Six data, April 28, 2011). Similar to Posse in many regards, Act Six has several unique aspects that differentiate it from Posse. However, a comprehensive theory of change has yet to be developed to articulate how and why the many interventions of Act Six work together to affect the desired outcomes of the program. The theory I describe here, while reflecting the Act Six program, is not necessarily limited to the current implementation of Act Six and contains modifications and enhancements informed by the literature review in question one that may not be reflected in the actual practice of the program. For that reason, I refer to "the program" in generic terms.

Program Description

Unlike most retention efforts, this program emerges not from a college, but from the urban community. It is intentionally designed as a partnership between urban community-based nonprofits and residential, private, predominantly White, liberal arts colleges. It targets high

school seniors from historically marginalized urban neighborhoods and schools, particularly

students of color, students from low-income families, and first generation college students.

While the program functions as a strategy to increase college retention and completion, it

is unique in that it positions college completion as an outcome within a larger framework where

the ultimate goals are transformation of the urban community and the college campus, and where

the primary strategy for both retention and system change is affirming and developing the

leadership of underrepresented students. Central to the theory of the program is the underlying

assumption that in the midst of their dysfunctions and injustices, marginalized urban

neighborhoods are places of inherent value and beauty with important assets to offer (Kretzmann

& McKnight, 1993). Likewise, the students who grow up in these neighborhoods are not

deficient, empty vessels that need to be extracted from the community to be fixed and filled

through the charitable efforts of colleges that possess all the resources and answers. Quite the

contrary, these students possess unique experiences and perspectives that are sorely needed both

by the urban communities that raised them and by college campuses, where these students can

play a critical role in the colleges' transformation into more multicultural and inclusive

institutions. The program is rooted in a critical theory consistent with Tierney's (2000) cultural

integrity model that challenges the way that colleges traditionally view students from

marginalized communities. It implements interventions that are designed to support and retain

urban students in college environments that were not built with them in mind, even as those

students contribute to the transformation of those environments. In Tierny's (2000) words, we

"seek to enable students to come to grips with the multiple phenomena that hold them back. In

effect, we aim to equip students with the necessary cultural capital to succeed within the system

that exists, but in doing so we seek to disrupt the process" (p. 218).

Composed of 24 integrated interventions, the program begins in the fall of students'

senior year of high school and continues through college graduation and beyond. Program staff

who live and work in the urban community promote the program and recruit urban students by leveraging relationships with wide networks of school staff and community partners. Utilizing selection committees composed of both community members and college personnel, the program selects diverse, multicultural cohorts of up to 10 students for each college through an intensive three-stage interactive selection process that considers both traditional and nontraditional measures of college readiness and leadership potential. Selected students receive scholarships that fully meet their demonstrated need with no loans and a limited amount of work study. Once selected, students participate with their cohort in a weekly intensive precollege training program through the seven months prior to enrolling at college. The training curriculum addresses seven themes of the program (vision, leadership, service, diversity, community, preparation, and transformation) through units on intercultural communication, race and identity, time and money management, service and community development, service-minded leadership, and dynamics of change. Training also includes intentional team building activities for the cohorts, extended visits to the college campus, and writing instruction with college faculty. At the conclusion of training, students enroll in college with their cohort. They continue to meet together and receive ongoing support throughout college. Support includes individual and group meetings with college and program staff, individual faculty mentors, and career and graduate school assistance. Students are expected to participate in leadership on campus and in the community. After graduation, students are encouraged but not required to return to their home communities.

The program is built around five defining elements: (1) a central focus on *leadership* that operationalizes the conviction that urban students have just as much to contribute as to receive in the college process; (2) *cohorts* as a core structure, reflecting the belief that the support and encouragement of a close group of peers can provide the social support students need to successfully navigate the college environment; (3) the importance of *cultural integrity*, the concept that urban students' cultures and experiences are valuable, should be affirmed, and do

not need to be abandoned in order to find success in college; (4) an emphasis on *training* that

assumes that students can not only acquire effective skills to better understand and navigate the

classroom and campus environment, but can also be equipped as intercultural leaders to critically

analyze and improve those environments; and (5) the nurturing of *sense of purpose* as a primary

strategy, believing that students who go to college knowing that they have something important

to contribute to a cause bigger than themselves are more likely to persist through challenges and

contribute as agents of positive change.
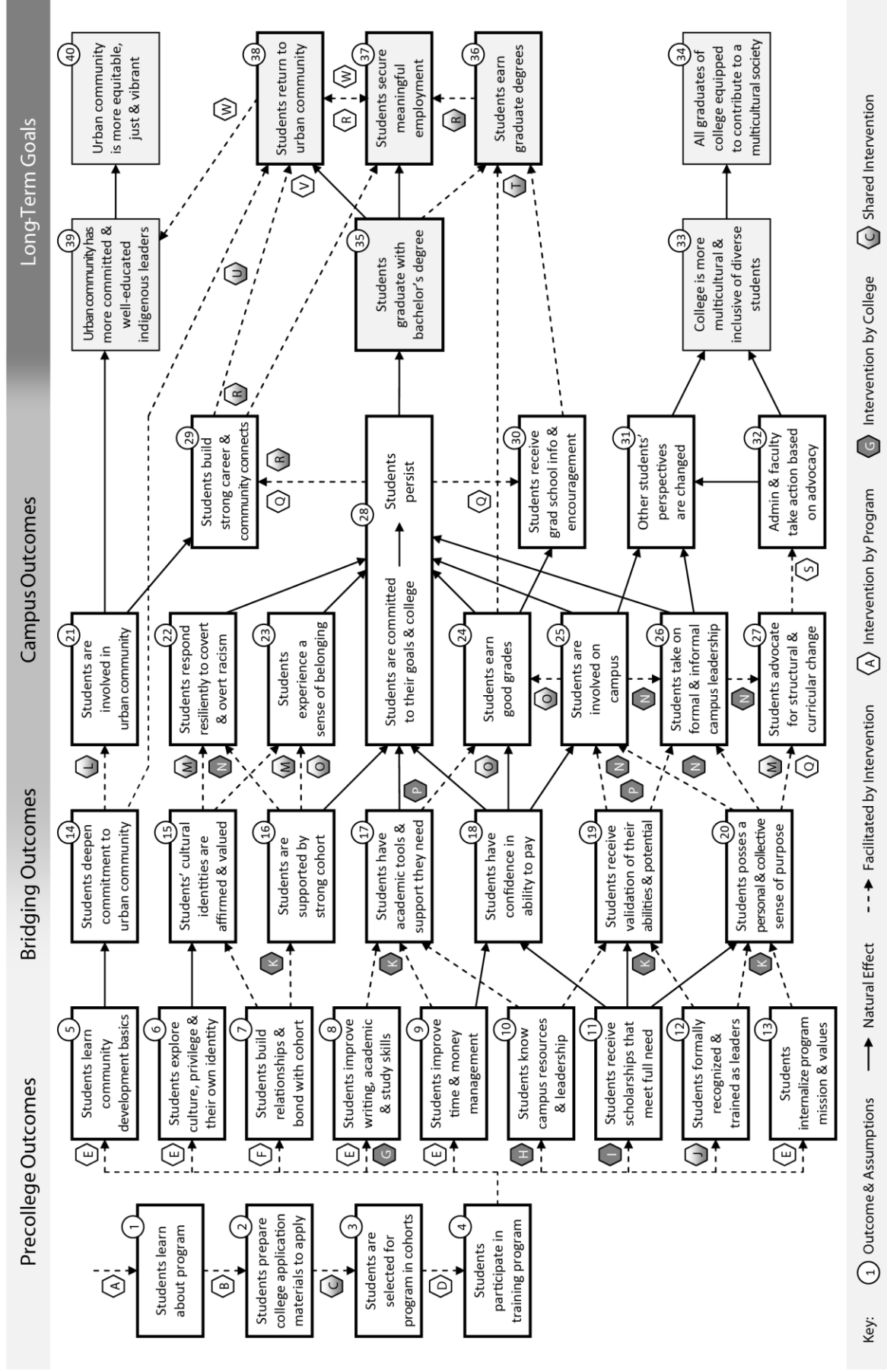
Theory of Change

In developing the underlying theory of change for the program, I adapted the five-step

methodology described in the Aspen Institute's *The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of*

Change: A Practical Guide to Theory Development (Anderson, n.d.). I began by identifying the

long-term goals for the program and then worked backward from those goals to develop a

pathway of change, a visual representation of the prerequisite *short-term and intermediate*

outcomes that must exist in chronological progression in order for the long-term goals to be

accomplished. The pathway of change also illustrates the causal links that are hypothesized to

exist between outcomes and that lead from the starting conditions to the long-term goals. Next, I

operationalized each outcome by proposing one or more *indicators* and corresponding *targets*

that can be used to determine if an outcome has been effectively reached. At that point, I defined

the program *interventions* that are intended to facilitate the outcomes on the pathway of change,

depicting them with a letter in a hexagon at the appropriate locations on the pathway and

distinguishing between interventions that are led by program staff (white), college staff (grey), or

both (graduated). Links between outcomes that are facilitated by intervention are illustrated with

dotted lines, while those that are likely to occur naturally without intervention are shown as solid

lines. Finally, I articulated basic *assumptions* and propositions about why each outcome is

necessary in the pathway and about how prerequisite outcomes in conjunction with the

associated interventions are sufficient to bring about that particular outcome. Many, but not all, of the assumptions are supported by existing theories and findings from the literature. Some propositions represent new applications of existing theories or findings. Others are informed by my own professional experience and extensive conversations with urban college students over the years. Each presents an opportunity for empirical testing in future research on the program. Outcome definitions and accompanying assumptions are referenced with a number in a circle on each outcome in the pathway diagram.

The resulting theory of change presented in Figure 1 and described in detail below is somewhat extensive, involving 24 interventions and 40 outcomes grouped in four phases. The precollege phase includes four interventions and four outcomes associated with the recruitment and selection processes, along with six interventions and nine outcomes associated with the training program where the largest portion of student preparation and skill development is addressed. The seven bridging outcomes and associated intervention deal with students' knowledge, perceptions, and resources that are influenced by the outcomes of precollege training and that continue to evolve and shape their experience throughout college. The 12 campus outcomes and eight associated interventions deal with students' experience and involvement on campus as they relate to persistence and completion, but also to the larger goals of institutional and community transformation. Finally, the eight long-term goals and four post-college interventions address the three major objectives of the program: student degree attainment and post-graduation leadership, community renewal, and institutional transformation.

Figure 1. Theory of Change

| Precollege Outcomes | Bridging Outcomes | Campus Outcomes | Long-Term Goals |

Key: ① Outcome & Assumptions — Natural Effect --→ Facilitated by Intervention (A) Intervention by Program (A) Intervention by College (G) Shared Intervention

Description of Interventions, Outcomes, and Assumptions

What follows are descriptions of each of the interventions, represented by letters, interspersed among descriptions of the numbered outcomes shown in the pathway of change in Figure 1. Each outcome is accompanied by assumptions and propositions about why each outcome is important and how it may be causally related to other outcomes as indicated by the links on the pathway diagram. Also included with each outcome are indicators and targets that suggest when a given outcome has been sufficiently achieved. Given the detailed and lengthy nature of the following descriptions, I suggest that it is best read after careful review of Figure 1 and with Figure 1 readily available as a reference. Note that interventions that appear in multiple places on the pathway are only described once in the list below, when they first appear.

A. Program staff leverage school and community networks to promote the program and actively recruit applicants in target communities.

1. **Students learn about the program.** There are large numbers of low-income, ethnically and racially diverse students in underserved urban communities with tremendous potential for leadership and academic success in college. By leveraging local networks, partner colleges build relationships with urban communities where they have not historically had a presence. Indicator: *count of contacts made in recruitment process*. Target: *contact 20% of eligible high school senior low-income and students of color in target communities.*

B. Program staff provide application workshops for students and support school and community staff assisting students in the application process.

2. **Students prepare college application materials to apply.** In completing by early fall an extensive application for the program that includes application to partner colleges, students gather all of the materials necessary to apply to other colleges and scholarships. As a result, a larger number of underrepresented urban students (including the majority of applicants who will not be selected for the program) increase their likelihood of being admitted to college

and receiving other scholarships. Many applicants who are not selected for the program will be admitted and enroll at partner colleges with regular financial aid. *Indicators: count of applications; enrollment rates at partner colleges. Targets: applications received from 5% of eligible high school senior low-income and students of color in target communities; 20% of applicants enroll at partner colleges.*

C. Program and college staff implement a three-phase selection process utilizing community-based selection committees, an interactive assessment event, and a multi-day campus visit.

3. **Students are selected for the program in cohorts.** Primarily because of the high financial cost of the program, the number of participants is limited and selection is therefore highly competitive. The three-stage process is multifaceted, includes extended personal interaction, and is purposeful in utilizing a range of noncognitive variables (Sedlacek, 2004) in addition to traditional measures of GPA and test scores to identify high potential urban leaders. At the conclusion, diverse cohorts of underrepresented urban students are selected for each school. Selected students can articulate a personal vision that aligns with the values and mission of the program and are judged to be able to succeed academically with program support. Indicators: *demographics of selected students*. Targets: *70% of students are low-income; 80% are students of color; 70% are first-generation college students*.

D. Program staff coordinate a seven-month training program with regular weekly meetings, weekend retreats, an extended campus visit, and a week-long summer wilderness expedition.

4. **Students participate in training program.** When students are selected for the program, they commit to an intensive seven month training program in the year prior to college. Through the training program and its accompanying curriculum, students build a wide range of knowledge, skills, and relationships that prepare them for successful leadership in college and beyond. Indicators: *training program completion and attendance rates*. Targets: *100% of students complete training with 90% attendance*.

E. Program staff deliver curriculum via training sessions, readings, and homework assignments.

5. **Students learn community development basics.** By studying basic community development principles and examining their urban neighborhoods in new ways, students better understand the strengths and struggles of their communities and deepen a love for and commitment to them. Indicator: *competence with basic community development principles*. Target: *90% of students demonstrate competence on end-of-training assessment.*

6. **Students explore culture, privilege, and their own identity.** By studying culture, race, and privilege and actively exploring the multiple dimensions of their own and others' identities, students increase their cultural competence, are more able to affirm their own and others' cultures, and better understand the dynamics of a predominantly White campus environment (Kuh & Love, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Students learn that they can successfully navigate a new culture without abandoning their own (see *biculturalism* in Rendón, et al., 2000, and Valentine, 1971). Indicators*: competence with basic intercultural principles; perception of own identity*. Targets: *90% of students demonstrate competence on end-of-training assessment; 90% of students report a better understanding of their own identity.*

F. Program staff facilitate personal story sharing sessions, community building activities, and social activities for cadres.

7. **Students build relationships and bond with their cohort.** By investing in long-term intentional relationships with a small group of peers, students build a family-like support system that provides encouragement, motivation, and accountability throughout and even beyond the college experience. Indicator: *perceptions of relationship with cohort.* Target: *90% of students report that they have strong relationships and a high level of trust with cohort members.*

G. College faculty provide writing instruction and grade writing assignments from training.

8. **Students improve their writing, academic, and study skills.** By learning and practicing

new study strategies and working to improve their writing skills, students better prepare themselves for the rigorous academic demands of a liberal arts curriculum. Indicators: *improved writing quality; competence with effective study strategies*. Targets: *80% of students improve writing scores as training advances; 90% of students demonstrate competence on end-of-training assessment*.

9. **Students improve their time and money management skills.** In college students have much more autonomy in the use of their time and money than in high school. By developing strategies to effectively manage these two important resources, students can avoid common pitfalls that contribute to academic and financial stress. Indicator: *competence with basic money and time management principles*. Target: *90% of students demonstrate competence on end-of-training assessment*.

H. College and program staff host campus visits that include resource orientations and meetings with faculty, administration, and student leaders.

10. **Students know campus resources and leadership.** By spending extended time on the college campus before they matriculate and by being introduced to campus resources (e.g., tutoring, writing center, diversity center) students increase their familiarity with the campus and its norms, building their support network and decreasing the stress of their initial transition to college (see *cognitive maps* and *anticipatory socialization* in Attinasi, 1989, and *proactive social adjustment* in Braxton et al., 2004). By meeting with campus leadership (e.g.., administration, faculty, student government) they receive validation of their leadership potential. Indicator: *ability to identify campus resources and leaders*. Target: *90% of students can generate sufficient lists of resources and leaders on end-of-training assessment*.

I. Colleges provide scholarships, leveraging government and private grant funds to meet full demonstrated need with no loans and limited work study.

11. **Students receive scholarships that meet full need.** By receiving scholarships that meet all

of their demonstrated need, students do not need to work long hours, avoid the burden of excessive debt, and can be confident in their ability to cover their costs. Receipt of the highly competitive scholarship also validates their leadership potential and contributes to their sense of purpose. Indicator: *financial aid awards*. Target: *100% of awards meet 100% of demonstrated need with limited work and no loan*.

J.   Program and college staff publicize scholarship recipients and host public community and campus events recognizing and celebrating the leadership and achievement of students.

12. **Students are formally recognized and trained as leaders.** By receiving formal public recognition of their leadership from the college and the community, students' abilities and potential are validated. Students begin to develop a sense of purpose for their college participation that goes beyond their own individual attainment. Indicator: *perceived recognition as leader*. Target: *100% of students report that they received formal recognition as a leader from authority figures on campus and in the community.*

13. **Students internalize the program's mission and values.** By continual exposure to the program's values of vision, service, leadership, diversity, community, preparation, and transformation, students internalize a mission that places their leadership at the center of a strategy for creating more just and vibrant college campuses and urban communities. The primary result is a strong personal and collective sense of purpose. Indicators: *articulation of mission and values; perception of personal impact of mission and values.* Targets: *90% of students can fully articulate the mission and values of the program on end-of-training assessment; 80% report that the program mission has influenced their future plans or goals.*

14. **Students deepen their commitment to the urban community.** Students who recognize clearly both the assets and problems in their urban neighborhoods, but none-the-less have a deep love for and commitment to the community are more likely to remain involved during college and to bring their gifts back to their community after college. Love of and

commitment to community can be nurtured through exposure to community development principles. Indicator: *self-reported commitment to urban community*. Target: *80% of students report high levels of commitment to urban community.*

15. **Students' cultural identities are affirmed and valued.** Underrepresented students who possess a strong, positive cultural identity that is affirmed by others are better equipped to navigate the cross-cultural experience of attending an affluent predominantly White college (see *cultural integrity* in Tierney, 1999, 2000). They are more likely to show resilience in response to racism and experience a sense of belonging on the college campus. Cultural identity can be affirmed through intercultural training and through close relationships with culturally competent peers. Indicator: *perceived identity affirmation*. Target: *80% of students report that their cultural identity has been affirmed by others*.

K. College staff conduct a weekly first semester seminar for the cohort with emphasis on utilizing campus resources, studying leadership theories, and team building.

16. **Students are supported by a strong cohort.** The strong personal and social support of a close group of peers who know, trust, and understand each other provides students with a built-in support system on campus. A cohort increases resilience to racism and sense of belonging by serving as a social enclave even as it provides a source of encouragement to engage the broader campus (see *communal potential* in Braxton, et al., 2004; *social enclaves* in Kuh & Love, 2000; and the value of segregated grouping in Tatum, 2003, Chapter 4). Strong cohorts require intentional relationship development and need ongoing effort and attention to maintain, but promote higher retention. Indicator: *perceived support by cohort*. Target: *80% of students report that their cohort provided strong support*.

17. **Students have the academic tools and support they need.** Even for the best students, the academic transition from high school to college can be difficult. Precollege training and skill development in writing, study strategies, and time management can equip students to be

more successful in the classroom. Awareness of campus academic resources (e.g., tutoring, writing center, study groups) adds to students' support system, resulting in better grades and increased retention. Indicator: *perceived academic support*. Target: *80% of students report that they have the academic tools and support they need to be successful.*

18. **Students have confidence in their ability to pay.** When students receive scholarships that fully meet need and develop effective money management skills, they are freed from worrying about how to pay for college and they do not need to work long hours. With confidence in their ability to cover costs, they more likely to persist (see *ability to pay* in Braxton et al., 2004, and Cabrera, et al., 1990) and can give more time and energy to their studies and involvement on campus. Indicator: *perceived impact of finances.* Target: *80% of students report that finances have not been a hindrance to their success in college*.

19. **Students receive validation of their abilities and potential.** When underrepresented students receive validation of their abilities and potential from people in authority, they are empowered to get involved and assume leadership on campus and in the classroom (Rendón, 1994). Receiving a competitive scholarship, being officially recognized as a leader, and being introduced early on to campus leadership all produce validation in students that their contributions really are valued, combating the common feeling that they are guests in someone else's home (see McNairy, 1996, p. 7). Indicator: *perceived validation*. Target: *80% of students report that authority figures have validated their abilities and potential.*

20. **Students posses a personal and collective sense of purpose.** When students possess a strong sense of personal and collective purpose, they believe that they are on campus for a reason, that they have something important and unique to contribute to improving the campus, and that they are part of something bigger than themselves. As a result they are more likely to get involved, to assume leadership, and to advocate for change. A sense of purpose emerges from formal recognition as a leader and is deepened through training as

students internalize program values that emphasize their crucial role in leading change. Indicator: *articulation of sense of purpose*. Target: *80% of students articulate a purpose for their participation in the program beyond their individual benefit.*

L. Program and college staff facilitate students' connections with the urban community.

21. **Students are involved in the urban community.** Getting involved in the urban community during college (e.g., volunteering, service learning, participation in religious or cultural groups, work study) is one result of students' commitment to urban communities and contributes to the vibrancy of the community. It also builds connections that can lead to internships and other career opportunities for students. Maintaining connections outside the college community increases sense of belonging and persistence for students of color at predominantly White universities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Indicator: *community involvement rate*. Target: *50% of students are involvement in community via service, work study, or cultural or religious participation.*

M. Program and college staff encourage regular cohort-initiated meetings after first semester, and continue to meet with each cohort once per semester and as needed in response to issues.

N. College staff meet individually with each student each semester and as needed for individual coaching and support.

22. **Students respond resiliently to covert and overt racism.** Racism, in both its covert and overt forms, is a reality for students of color at predominantly White colleges (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). When students are confident in their own identity, experience affirmation of that identity from others, and are supported by a strong peer group that understands the realities of racism, they are more likely to respond in resilient, productive ways (Tatum, 2003). As a result, students are less likely to become disillusioned and angry with their college and are more likely to persist. Indicator: *self-assessment of response to racism.* Target: *80% of those reporting experiences of racism or discrimination report that they*

responded constructively.

O. Program and college staff monitor grades, social satisfaction, and campus involvement, meeting personally with struggling students and connecting them to needed resources.

23. **Students experience a sense of belonging.** When students perceive that they belong on campus, they are more likely to persist.   Being a member of a close cohort of peers, they are more likely to experience this sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Feeling that their own culture is being affirmed and valued also contributes to belonging. Sense of belonging leads to heightened commitment to the college and to persistence. Indicator*: perceived sense of belonging*. Target: *80% of students report high level of belonging.*

P. College staff match students with individual faculty mentors who meet regularly with students to provide encouragement and to support students' academic progress.

24. **Students earn good grades.** Earning good grades is important for persisting in college and is prerequisite for gaining admission to graduate school. When students have the academic tools and support that they need and are free from financial concerns, they are more likely to earn good grades (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993). Indicator: *GPA.* Targets: *average cumulative GPA of all students at least 3.0; cumulative GPA of every student above 2.0.*

25. **Students are involved on campus.** When students get involved on campus, they experience more learning and personal development and are more likely to persist (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Involvement also opens the door to campus leadership and provides opportunities for influential interactions with other students. Involvement is more likely to occur when students are free from financial concerns and the need to work long hours, are validated in their contributions, and have a strong sense of purpose for being on campus. However, the kinds of involvement that matter most for underrepresented students may be different than dominant culture students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Indicator: *campus involvement rate*. Target: *90% of students regularly participate in one or more campus activities*.

26. **Students take on formal and informal campus leadership.** Participation in formal and informal campus leadership takes involvement to the next level and demonstrates that students have something important to offer to, not just receive from, the campus. Leadership makes students more invested in the campus and improves persistence. It also provides opportunity for powerful engagement with other students, faculty, and administrators. Entry into leadership can be more challenging for underrepresented students, but they are more likely to participate when their abilities and potential are validated and they perceive a strong personal sense of purpose. Indicator: *campus leadership rate.* Target: *70% of students serve in formal or informal campus leadership role.*

Q. Program staff host network-wide convention every other summer featuring encouraging and challenging speakers and workshops, as well as a career and graduate school fair.

27. **Students advocate for structural and curricular changes.** When underrepresented students are strongly committed to making the campus better, they can utilize their formal and informal leadership roles to advocate for change in campus programs, policies, and curriculum based on the challenges they have faced in their personal and collective experience. Indicator: *student advocacy rate*. Target: *50% of students actively advocated for a change in campus programs, policies, or curriculum.*

28. **Students are committed to their goals and college. Students persist.** Persisting in college is an obvious prerequisite for graduation and the most pivotal outcome of the program. Students are more likely to persist when they are committed to their college and to earning a degree (Tinto, 1993). Of the many factors that affect persistence, some directly influence persistence, some influence persistence by increasing commitment, and others do both (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). Indicator: *persistence to second year and persistence to fourth year rates.* Targets: *95% of students persist to second year; 90% persist to fourth year.*

R. Program and college staff build relationships with employers, connecting students with internships, employment, and service opportunities.

29. **Students build strong career and community connections.** Students who build strong career and community connections and participate in internships or volunteer experiences are more likely to find meaningful employment and return home after graduation. Community involvement during college often facilitates these opportunities. Indicator: *internship, employment, or volunteering rate.* Target: *80% of students have meaningful internship, employment, or volunteer experience in the community before graduation.*

30. **Students receive graduate school information and encouragement.** Exposure to graduate school and access to reliable information and resources early on in college is particularly important for underrepresented students and improves their attendance rates. Students with good grades are more likely to receive graduate school encouragement and information from faculty. Indicator: *proportion of students receiving graduate school information and encouragement.* Targets: *80% of fourth year students report receiving information and 50% report receiving encouragement from faculty or staff to attend graduate school.*

31. **Other students' perspectives are changed.** Personal interaction with peers that come from different backgrounds is one of the most effective means of confronting stereotypes and overcoming prejudices. When other students interact with participants informally (e.g., classroom, residence halls, dining hall) or through participants' formal leadership roles, their perspectives change and are broadened (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000). Administration and faculty also shape students' perspectives as they implement curricular and structural change in response to participants' advocacy. Indicator: *fourth-year program participant peers' self-reported changes in perspectives.* Targets: *70% of peers report that their interactions with program participants broadened their perspectives of others and improved their cultural competence.*

S. Program and college staff support and advocate for students with faculty and administration as problems arise or students suggest changes in programs and curriculum.

32. **Administration and faculty take action based on student advocacy.** Well-trained and well-supported student leaders from underrepresented groups, speaking from their personal and collective experience, can be highly effective in identifying and advocating for needed changes in campus programs, policy, and curriculum. Administration and faculty action in response to this advocacy can produce important change that directly influences students and improves the campus environment. Indicator: *number of student-initiated proposals implemented by faculty or administration*. Target: *one proposal is implemented each year*.

33. **College is more multicultural and inclusive of diverse students.** College campuses that are more multicultural and inclusive of people from all backgrounds experience more equitable outcomes across student populations and better prepare all students for a rapidly diversifying society and global economy (Shaw, 2005). The failure of institutions to commit the necessary resources to becoming more multicultural is a critical source of the disparity in retention rates across difference student populations (McNairy, 1996). Broadened perspectives among the student body as well as curricular and structural change from the faculty and administration contribute to this kind of environment, but must be accompanied by institution-wide efforts to fundamentally change the way the institution operates.

34. **All graduates of college are equipped to contribute to a multicultural society.** The United States is rapidly diversifying. To remain relevant, colleges must equip all of their graduates to navigate and contribute to a multicultural society and global economy.

35. **Students graduate with bachelor's degrees.** Earning a bachelor's degree is not only the goal of undergraduate college attendance, but is also essential to increasing the likelihood of finding meaningful employment. Indicators: *four- and six-year graduation rates*. Targets: *90% of students graduate from college within six years; 80% graduate within four years*.

T. Program and college staff provide encouragement for graduate school attendance, write

recommendations to support students' applications, and help identify financial aid.

36. **Students earn graduate degrees.** Graduate degrees increase options for meaningful work

and opportunities for career and community leadership. Good undergraduate grades and

access to information and resources are prerequisites of graduate school enrollment.

Indicator: *alumni graduate degree attainment rate.* Target: *20% of alumni at least four years*

out of college have earned a graduate degree.

37. **Students secure meaningful employment.** Finding meaningful employment is critical to

financial stability and contentment for individuals and families. It also increases the ability

of students to influence change via career or volunteer service. A college degree along with

career and community connections facilitate securing a good job. A graduate degree further

increases employment options. Indicator: *employment or service rate*. Target: *90% of*

alumni are employed or in volunteer service within one year of graduation.

U. Program and college staff host senior capstone experience on campus and in the community

to guide students in reflecting on their college experience and preparing for graduation.

V. Program staff create opportunities for a post-graduation year of service in the community.

38. **Students return to the community.** Young leaders are more likely to return to their home

community when they are committed to it and are able to utilize their college degree to find

meaningful employment or service opportunities through strong community connections.

Indicator: *rate of return to home community.* Target: *60% of alumni are living or working in*

home community.

W. Program staff resource and support an alumni association, facilitating networking and hosting

an annual alumni retreat.

39. **Urban community has more committed and well-educated indigenous leaders.** Urban

communities need more well-educated, committed, and highly-engaged indigenous leaders in

order to become more just and vibrant places. College students and graduates who grew up

in the community are an important source of this kind of leadership.

40. **Urban community is more equitable, just, and vibrant.** Historically marginalized urban

communities have both tremendous assets and deeply rooted problems. They need social,

economic, educational, political, and spiritual renewal to reach their potential as thriving

communities for all residents. Many of the needed resources, including the next generation

of leaders, already exist within these communities (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Conclusion

Rather than a final product, the theory of change articulated here is very much a starting

place. While the documented success of Posse and Act Six (Schultz, Mueller, Mohr, & Anton,

2008) have demonstrated that these programs can produce high levels of college completion and

campus engagement among underrepresented populations, the theory of change presented here

proposes an initial model of how and why those results come to be. It provides fertile ground for

empirical testing of its assumptions and for future refinement of both theory and program design.

By more accurately mapping and testing the causal pathways underlying the program, we

provide not only a better understanding of how the program currently works, but also a launch

point for innovation. Which interventions are most essential to the program's long-term goals?

What is likely to be the result of eliminating one or more of the program components? Are there

interventions missing from the program that could further increase its impact? How might the

program be adapted to other contexts, or scaled to address more students? The theory of change

presented here provides a helpful foundation for answering these and other important questions.

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