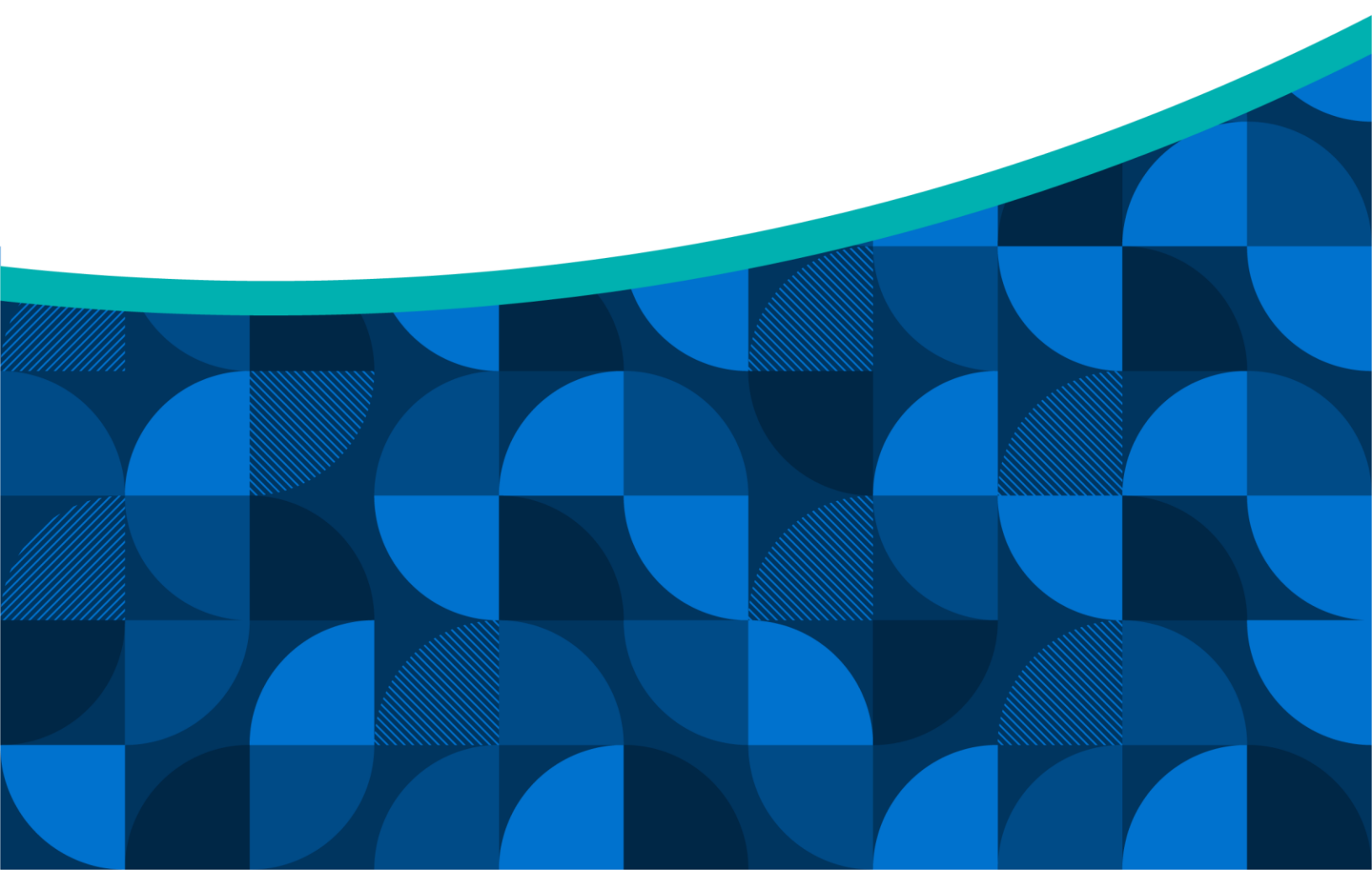




CASE STUDY

Bring Barbershop Sessions to Campus

How Three Universities Leverage the Barbershop as a Space for Black and Latino Men to Connect



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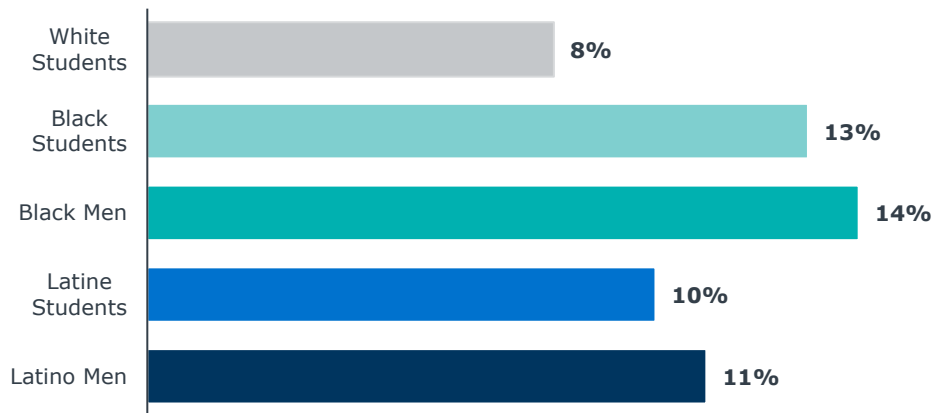
The Belonging Gap

Black and Latino Men Struggle to Find a Sense of Community on Campus

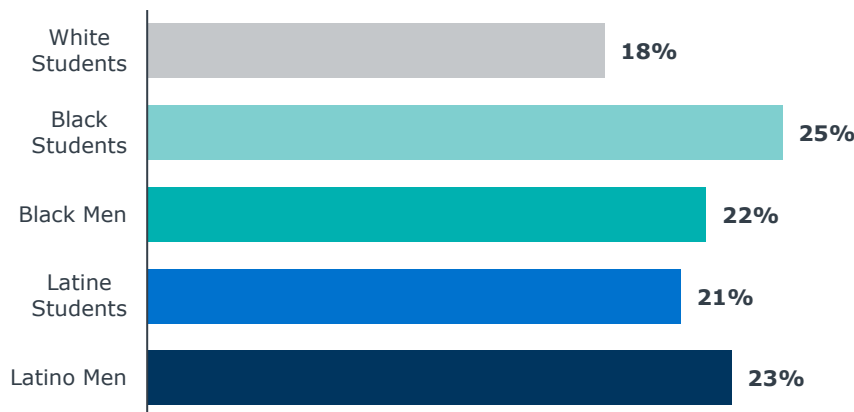
[Students who feel a sense of belonging on campus](#) are more likely to persist in college. However, some student groups feel more at home on campus than others. EAB analyzed sense of belonging data from the [2020 National Survey of Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#) and found Black and Latino students, particularly men, struggle to find a sense of community compared to their white counterparts at R1 institutions.

NSSE Survey¹ Shows Black and Latino Men Don't Feel as Connected as Their Peers

Percent² of students who disagree³ with the statement: "I feel comfortable being myself at this institution"



Percent of students who disagree³ with the statement: "I feel like part of the community at the institution"



One explanation for this belonging gap is that traditional student affairs programming doesn't go far enough to reach Black and Latino men. Institutions rely on identity-based student organizations (e.g., Black Student Union) and multicultural centers which often collapse the experiences of men of color with their larger Black and Latine student populations. As a result, Black and Latino men are left with limited campus spaces made specifically for them. On top of any financial and academic challenges, these conditions can result in Black and Latino male students feeling isolated and at risk of stopping out of college.

1) n=185,769 first year student respondents from 517 institutions in the US.

2) This percentage rate is calculated for students who attend R1 institutions.

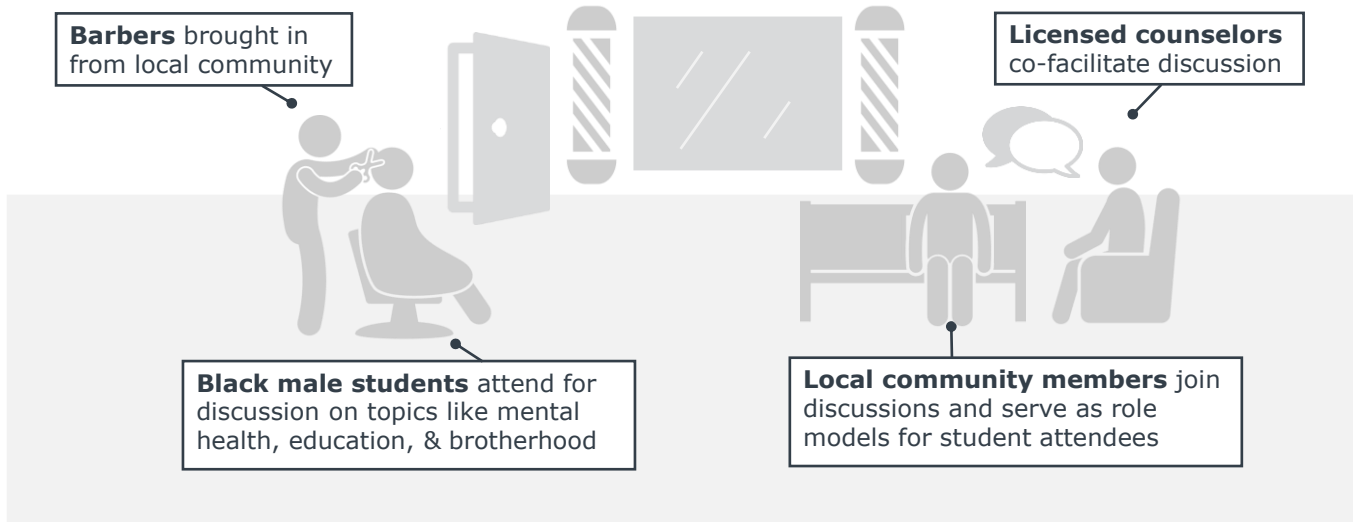
3) This represents respondents who disagree and strongly disagree.

Source: [National Survey of Student Engagement \(n.d.\) Sense of Belonging](#). NSSE Interactive Reports. Retrieved from nsse.indiana.edu. EAB interviews and analysis.

Barbershops Improve Belonging for Men of Color

Institutions Design Spaces with Black and Latino Men in Mind

A few leading institutions have taken steps to intentionally design a space on campus with Black and Latino men in mind to improve sense of belonging. That space is a campus barbershop, [a safe haven for Black and Latino men](#) to connect with each other and gain a better sense of self during their college years and beyond. Below is a snapshot of what these campus barbershop sessions can look like.



Typically, campus barbershop sessions occur monthly on campus grounds. Organizers invite local barbers to provide haircuts for students and welcome community members and alumni to engage students and serve as mentors. At predominantly white institutions, barbershop sessions are one of the few spaces where Black and Latino men come together and discuss a range of topics amongst themselves. These spaces mirror Black and Latino men's pre-college barbershop appointments in their hometowns and can help men of color feel more connected at college.

EAB has developed this mini-case study highlighting three institutions – **Virginia Tech, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, and Furman University** – that use barbershops to help Black and brown male students feel a stronger sense of belonging.


Building Community Through Barbershop Sessions

Virginia Tech, Michigan, and Furman Bring Barbershops to Black and Latino Men

In Black and brown communities, barbershops are more than places to get a haircut. Black and Latino men across generations can discuss both surface level topics like sports and music and more weighty subject matter such as masculinity and politics. [The barbershop is a communal refuge for men of color.](#) The below chart compares how **Virginia Tech**, **University of Michigan-Ann Arbor**, and **Furman University** each partnered with a different unit or program on campus to bring barbershops to Black and Latino men.



Three Locations to Create Spaces Exclusively for Black and Latino Men

| Unit or Program | Institutional Example |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Identity-based cohort program</i></p>  | <p>Virginia Tech developed the Black Male Excellence Network (BMEN) to improve retention and graduations rates for Black male students with academic success coaching and an annual Black Men Conference. BMEN emphasizes not just a student’s academic life but also his social life. BMEN’s Barbershop Talk Series is a forum held on campus that unites Black male students with peers, Black barbers, and community members to explore Black masculinity, dating, cultural production (e.g., visual arts, music, etc.), and more. At least 25-30 Black male students attend the barbershop talks. The session creates a space where Black men feel comfortable being themselves, particularly on a predominately white campus like Virginia Tech.</p>  |
| <p><i>Academic unit</i></p>  | <p>University of Michigan-Ann Arbor’s School of Education houses Men of Color Leading in the Classroom (M-CLIC), a program dedicated to serving Black, Latino, Asian, and Native male students interested in entering the teaching profession. M-CLIC hosts a monthly barbershop series connecting M-CLIC students with male teachers of color in the K-12 profession. While they receive free haircuts and food, students and teachers discuss challenges and best practices for male teachers of color.</p>  |
| <p><i>Multicultural center</i></p>  | <p>At Furman University, the Center for Inclusive Communities (CIC) piloted a barbershop series program, particularly for first-year black male students. Furman is based in Greenville, South Carolina. Black students can have a difficult time finding a Black barbershop in this predominately white community. The barbershop series connects Black male students with Black alumni who introduce them to local barbers. Students also get to know alumni mentors and explore topics like race and identity which is especially relevant as Black male students navigate a predominantly white institution.</p>  |

1) Pseudonym

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Three Key Roles in Virginia Tech's Barbershop Model

Invite Community Members, High School Students, and Counselors to Sessions

At a typical barbershop session, Black and Latino men gather monthly for haircuts to discuss topics like education and brotherhood. **Virginia Tech** takes this model a step further, inviting three important individuals who enhance the experience for Black and Latino undergraduate men: community members, high school students, and mental health counselors.

1

Provide Opportunities to Connect with Community Members

Virginia Tech's Barbershop Talk series brings together Black male students and community members at the Black Cultural Center on campus. Before these monthly gatherings, barbers and other community members receive email invitations, while students receive word via email or social media. When community members and students attend events together, the conversations mirror barbershop experiences pre-college where boys and men across generations connect and impart knowledge.

2

Connect Prospective High School Students with College Students

In addition to sessions for current students, the Black Male Excellence Network (BMEN) also hosts a pre-college Barbershop Talk for high school students planning to apply to the institution. Active BMEN members take on a leadership and mentorship role and share their academic and campus life experiences at Virginia Tech. Black male high school students learn that they won't be alone at a predominately white institution.

3

Embed Mental Health Counselors in Barbershop Sessions

At Barbershop Talks, students and community members occasionally engage in discussions on challenging topics like absentee parents, trauma, and conflict resolution. For these topics, a licensed counselor attends as an active participant and/or a facilitator to set guardrails for the discussion. These mental health experts encourage Black men to overcome the taboo of talking about difficult subject matter and raise awareness of the campus mental health resources available to them.





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