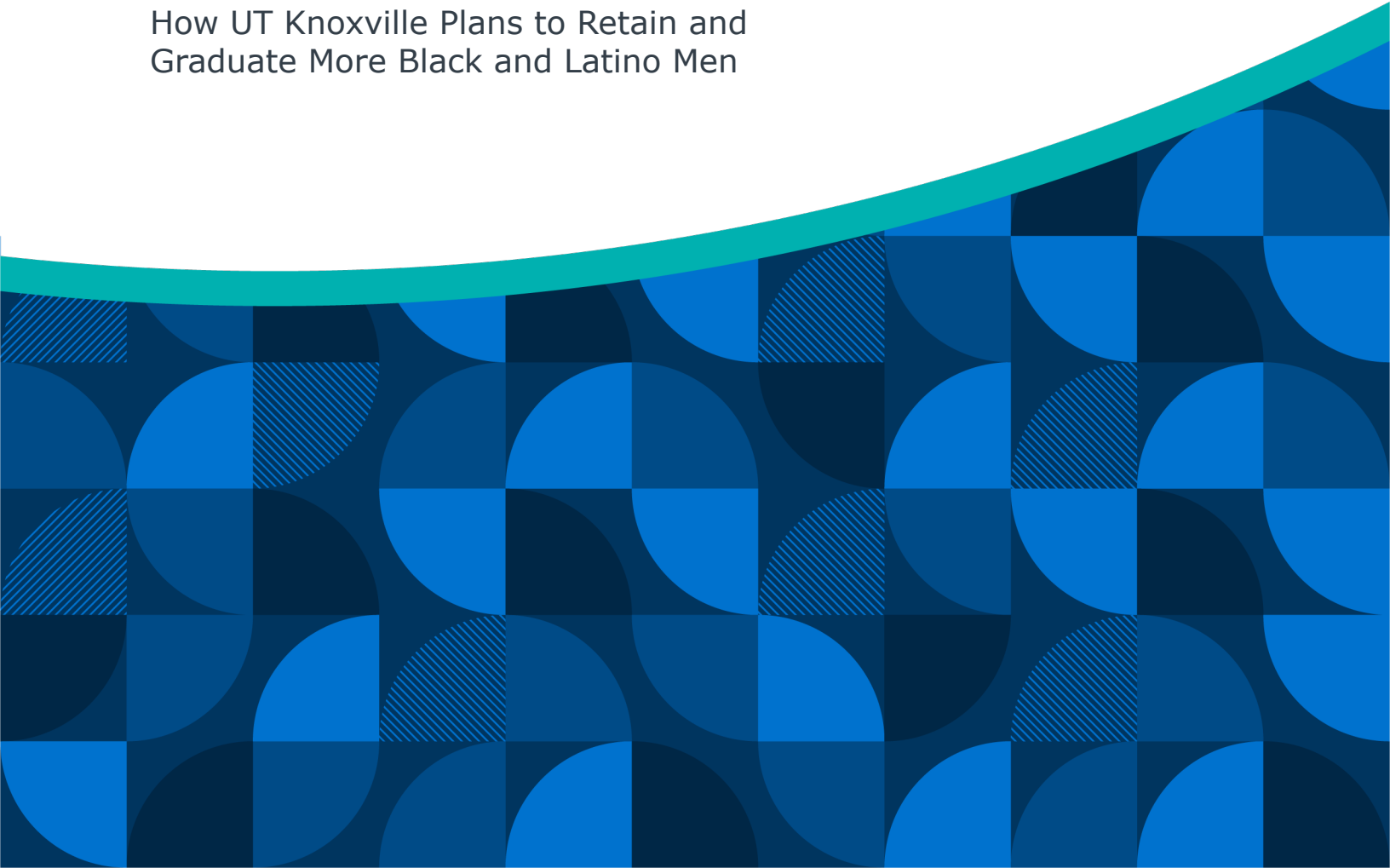




CASE STUDY

Four-Year Cohort Programs for Black and Latino Men

How UT Knoxville Plans to Retain and
Graduate More Black and Latino Men



Student Affairs Forum

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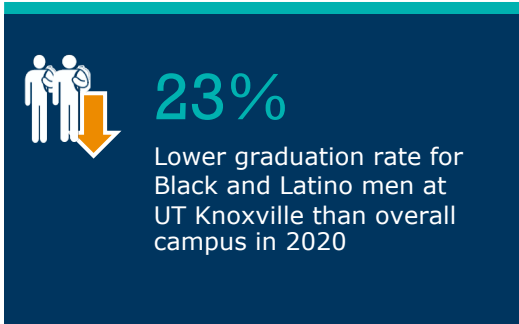
The Case of the Missing Black and Latino Men

UT Knoxville Identifies a Clear Need for Support

Peer cohort programs are a valuable tool for facilitating student's [sense of belonging](#). Many institutions have cohort programs, such as summer bridge programs, where students attend workshops and sessions as a group, but they rarely extend beyond the summer of students' first year. These short-term programs, even when they are specially designed for Black and Latino men, do not provide sufficient opportunities to find spaces where they are not the only Black or Latino man in the room. Black and Latino men who participate in extended cohort programs have the opportunity to talk about shared experiences and be a part of the majority throughout their time in college.

This gap in offerings at predominantly-white and majority-female campuses can impact Black and Latino male retention and graduation rates. The Vice Provost for Student Success at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville saw these impacts firsthand. UT Knoxville analyzed student success data and found that the Black and Latino male graduation rate was 23% lower than the university-wide graduation rate. The Vice Provost and her team conducted a survey of Black and Latino men and discovered that improving students' sense of belonging inside and outside of the classroom could improve student outcomes.

UT Knoxville Identifies Significant Disparity for Black and Latino Men



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Year-by-Year Decline for Black and Latino Retention

When you look at [Black and Latino male] retention and persistence rates ... there's a good chunk of them that come back after year one, but [the rates] continue to decline every year for four years.

- Dr. Amber Williams
Vice Provost for Student Success, UT Knoxville

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Source: Wright, Becca, "[New University of Tennessee Program Strengthens Success for Black and Latino Students](#)," IPEDS Institutional Characteristics and Fall Enrollment Data; *Knox News*, December 28, 2021; EAB interviews and analysis.

Extending the Cohort Program to Four Years

UT Success Academy Creates Tailored Programming for Black and Latino Men

In 2021, The University of Tennessee – Knoxville welcomed its first cohort of students to the Success Academy; a four-year cohort program specifically designed to increase retention and completion rates for Black and Latino men. The program offers Black and Latino men continuous opportunities during college to connect as a cohort rather than leaving them in an environment where they are unlikely to interact with other minority males after a year. The Success Academy allows Black and Latino men to engage with peers from similar backgrounds in academic and social settings and provides them with a space where they aren't the minority, increasing students' sense of belonging.

Students enter the program in their first year and remain with that cohort throughout their time at UT Knoxville. The Success Academy proactively recruits Black and Latino male students by inviting them to apply to the program the summer before their first year.¹ Students meet the program's entry criteria by showing interest and a desire to participate. There are no other requirements. Success Academy provides students with peer mentors, academic advising and tutoring, opportunities to build skills that will help them professionally, and socialization with their peers. Its academic programming includes first- and second-year seminars, and it hosts social events on the first Friday of every month.



UT Success Academy

- ▶ Four-year cohort program for Black and Latino men
- ▶ All first-year Black and Latino men invited to apply
- ▶ Launched fall 2021, now in its second year with 250+ students participating

Three Required Activities Where Students Connect with Peers and Staff



Academic engagement through group meetings, peer coaching, and seminars



Career advising and tutoring through UT Knoxville's Academic Success Center



Social convenings such as a reception for students and families and study parties

The Success Academy is in its second year, has around 250 students across its two current cohorts, and operates with three full-time staff: a director, an assistant director, and a coordinator. It offers \$2,000 scholarships to students to cover any need gaps and 25 scholarships for upper-class students to study abroad. Success Academy determined the amount of its scholarship award by assessing the need gap for its current students.

Robust Staffing Model Ensures Year-Round Support for Students



Director

Runs the program and ensures student accountability



Assistant Director¹

Assists with student recruitment and family outreach



Coordinator

Organizes activities, family orientation, and peer mentors

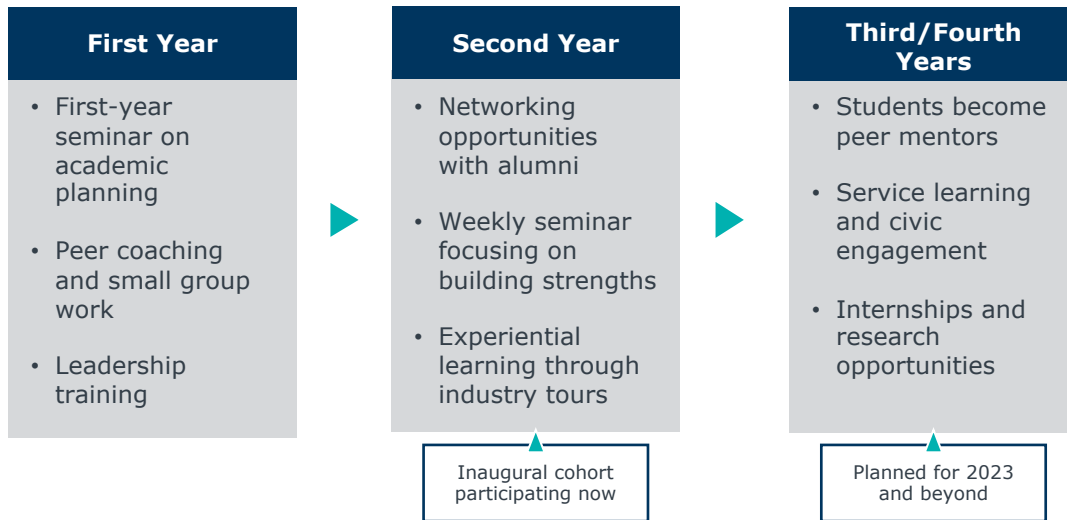
1) Women are allowed to participate as well, though the program is primarily advertised to men. Federal anti-discrimination laws prohibit the program from denying any student the opportunity to participate.

Source: [UT Success Academy](#); EAB interviews and analysis.

Year-by-Year Support for Black and Latino Men

Planning Student Programming Around Each Phase of the Student Lifecycle

Success Academy is unique because it is a four-year cohort program with academic and social programming intentionally designed for Black and Latino men. Students participate in different programming during each year they are involved in the Success Academy; focusing on building and strengthening the skills they will need for the next stage in their academic or post-graduate careers.



During their first year, students focus on understanding their strengths, participate in leadership training, attend a first-year seminar on transitioning to the University of Tennessee – Knoxville, and receive peer coaching from upperclassmen in the program.

Their second year, students build their strengths through networking and career opportunities and touring local industries to gauge their professional interests. Second-year students participate in a one-credit seminar to help them develop critical thinking skills, manage their relationships, and understand how their values will help them in their careers.

In their third and fourth years, students learn to apply their strengths through study abroad opportunities, peer coaching first-year Success Academy students, and service learning. These opportunities allow Black and Latino male students to learn skills that will help them interpersonally and in their careers, while they socialize and work with students in their year group who look like them and share similar backgrounds.

Source: "[UT Success Academy: Curriculum & Program Requirements](#)," accessed June 23, 2022; EAB interviews and analysis.

Early Success for Success Academy

UT Knoxville Sees Higher Retention Rates and a Larger Incoming Class

Success Academy has evolved since its inception. In the program's first year, students in the program provided feedback that they felt deficit framed – treated as if they are intellectually inferior to other students – when required to attend sessions at the study center. Academic counselors from the study center now attend social mixers hosted by the Success Academy to make students more comfortable attending the Academy-specific study sessions.

Student Feedback Makes Program Stronger

“We required our young people to go to the Vol Study Center. They hated it. They felt like we were deficit framing them. So, we flipped the script. Instead, we brought the Vol Study Center to them. We had these **study parties with food and music, and we'd have math coaches and all these [other coaches and tutors] there**. And we found that, one, they saw the benefit, and two, they started going to the Vol Study Center on their own!”

*Dr. Amber Williams
Vice Provost for Student Success, UT Knoxville*

Though the program is still only in its second year, and the first cohort will not graduate until 2025, Success Academy has seen early success in retaining Black and Latino men and has continued to grow. The program increased its incoming class size 67% by beginning the application process earlier than the previous year. Its first-year retention rate was 91%, which is 13% higher than the 2021-2022 non-Success Academy first-year retention rate for Black and Latino men.

67%

Increase in new students participating (from 100 in 2021 to 167 in 2022)

91%

Retention rate for Success Academy, 13% higher than non-Success Academy Black and Latino men

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.



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