The Ethic of Love: How Umoja Supports Students’ Academic and Life Success

SSS Conference Presentation
October 10, 2019

Dr. Darla M. Cooper
Katrina King
Dr. Rogéair Purnell
Agenda

• Overview of Umoja program, its purposes, and its practices
• Presentation of key evaluation findings
  – Students’ vs. peers’ academic outcomes
  – Students’ experiences
  – Umoja and Guided Pathway linkages
• Recommendations for program improvement
• Future research considerations
• Key takeaway
Learning Outcomes

Participants will have…

- Clarity about the Umoja program structure and its 18 practices
- Insight into the Umoja student experience
- An understanding of the programs’ social and academic benefits for students
- An understanding of how Umoja can inform and support Guided Pathways design
- Ideas for how to adapt Umoja practices and elements for their students
Umoja Program and Practices

Overview
Umoja, (a Kiswahili word meaning unity) is a community and critical resource dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of our California Community College students. The Umoja Community serves as an umbrella organization, which provides programming, curriculum, training, assessment, and knowledge sharing to colleges across the state in order to close the achievement gap, especially for African American students. Umoja actively promotes student success for all students, with an emphasis on African American student success, through culturally responsive curriculum and practices. Chancellors and college presidents from across the community colleges act as a consortium to advise the Umoja Governing Board on program implementation and generate strategies for securing additional funding.

Decade of service to the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) System, from 2006-2015 functioned as an all-volunteer organization.

Our Vision
To transform, enrich and advance the lives of students by infusing culturally relevant pedagogy and practices.

Our Organizational Structure
Umoja is governed by an 11-member board of directors. The day-to-day operations of Umoja are managed by the executive director, office staff and regional coordinators. The regional coordinators serve as a resource to our 71 affiliate campuses across California and Washington. More than 4,000 students are served through our programs annually.

ABOUT UMOJA COMMUNITY EDUCATION FOUNDATION

SOCIAL MEDIA
Facebook: @UmojaCommunity
Instagram: @UmojaEdu
Twitter: @Umojaedu

CONTACT US
P.O. Box 188067
Sacramento, CA 95818
UmojaCommunity.org
916.661.6455
Umoja, (a Kiswahili word meaning unity) is a community and critical resource dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African American and other students. We believe that when the voices and histories of students are deliberately and intentionally recognized, the opportunity for self-efficacy emerges and a foundation is formed for academic success. Umoja actively serves and promotes student success for all students through a curriculum and pedagogy responsive to the legacy of the African and African American Diasporas.

OUR TARGET POPULATION

We Serve Students
Students are at the core of what we do. We are engaged in policy, programs and research that focus on student success and matriculation. Our work is guided by 18 practices.

Learn about our practices on our website: Umojacommunity.org/Umoja-practices

The Numbers
- Umoja serves 71 Affiliated California Community Colleges and universities, a nearly tenfold increase since our founding in 2006
- Served over 10,000 students since our founding in 2006
- Currently serve over 4,000 students annually and growing fast; goal of serving 10,000 students annually by 2019
- We’ve doubled the number of programs, from 28 to 71, since our initial funding from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) in 2015-16
- Trained over 1,000 faculty and staff since our founding in 2006
- Strong outcomes data—retention, success, transfer-directed status (see website), including a large-scale project in partnership with the CCCCO and Sacramento State’s Institute for Social Research (ISR) to provide system-wide outcomes data that mirrors the CCCCO Student Success Scorecard

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MISSION

The core of Umoja’s mission is to enhance the cultural and educational experience of African, African American, and other underserved students. Our community consists of educators and learners committed to the academic success, personal growth, and self-actualization of our students. This commitment manifests through a variety of conferences, institutes, and webinars. Our events engage more than 2,500 students, faculty, and staff each year. Our annual events include:

Annual Events
Umoja plans and hosts the following events each year:

• Umoja Annual Conference
Our annual conference is a two-day event that brings over 1,000 attendees. Formally recognized as a Student Success Program by CCCC0 Board of Governors, Statewide Academic Senate, Statewide Student Senate, the conference is one of the largest student professional development programs in the California Community College System. This event takes place each November.

• Regional Symposiums
The annual Symposia are annual events hosted in Northern and Southern California each March. The event provides space for Umoja students, practitioners and partners to have a dialogue about student development, community building, and matriculation.

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**MISSION**

**UMOJA PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES**

- **Umoja Program Winter Retreat**
  Umoja practitioners and partners gather to discuss best practices, campus trends, and curriculum updates.

- **Umoja Summer Learning Institute (SLI)**
  The SLI brings together Umoja practitioners from across the state of California to reinvigorate and re-engage them in the Umoja principles of practices. This week-long event supports the Umoja mission to enhance the cultural and educational future of African American and other students. This event takes place each June.

- **Student STEM Transfer Academy**
  The Umoja Community hosts an annual S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, And Math) Transfer Academy for our students. This event is designed to expose future transfer students to discipline faculty, university student mentors, industry professionals, and others who can provide them with foundational skills in math, engineering, science, and other related fields.

- **Student Leadership Summit (SLS)**
  The SLS empowers student leaders to further develop personally and academically. The event features student-centered presentations and engages students in skill development that results in campus and community impact. This event takes place each August.

*Learn about our events on our website:* Umojacommunity.org/events

Umoja is a 501c3 nonprofit organization.

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**MISSION**

Umoja has 18 practices organized around these 7 values

1. **Students Are Our Highest Priority** (serving to promote student success for all students)
2. **Touching the Spirit** (using a holistic approach to reach each student—Body, Mind, and Spirit)
3. **Building Community** (creating an environment that encourages students to be accountable to each other’s learning)
4. **Connections to the African Diaspora** (expanding students' cultural awareness of the diaspora and articulating their place in that experience)
5. **Ethic of Love** (expressing compassion and care in the learning community)
6. **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Practices** (developing curriculum relevant to the students' lives for learning)
7. **Ritual** (engaging in cultural practices rooted in African traditions to strengthen the community and the people within the community)

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Why do we have to do something special for Black students?

We must return and claim our past in order to move toward our future. It is understanding who we were that that will free us to embrace who we now are.

Sankofa meaning (Degruy, 2005)

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Study Methodology
Overarching Research Question

In what ways does Umoja affect the overall college experience for Black and African-American students and facilitate these students’ ability to successfully navigate and succeed in a college environment?
Study Samples

Focus Groups

- 79 students
  - 30 males
  - 49 females
- Umoja Involvement: 1 to 12 semesters
- Main Goal: Transfer

Comparative Analyses

- African-American/Black students enrolled between summer 2010 and fall 2014
- Umoja group (22 colleges; 1,466 students)
  - Students who were flagged in COMIS with SG08
- Comparison group (56,316 students)
Key Findings

Quantitative Analysis
Umoja makes a positive difference in students’ first year (leading indicators)

- Attempt (14 vs. 11) and complete (12 vs. 10) more units in their first year
- Much higher persistence rate from their first summer/fall enrollment to the next year (94% vs 79%)
- Higher one-year English throughput rates (25% vs. 12%)
Umoja students outperform peers on certain long-term outcomes (lagging indicators)

- Much higher three-year English throughput rates (50% vs. 26%)
- Higher three-year math and English throughput rates (16% vs. 9%)
- Greater proportion are transfer ready within four years (16% vs. 8%)
- Greater proportion earn awards within four years (10% vs. 5%)
Areas where differences were not statistically significant

- First-year cumulative GPA (1.9 vs. 1.7)
- Completion of both transfer-level English and math within one year (2.4% vs. 1.7%)
- Transfer within four years (17.2% vs. 16.7%)
Key Findings

Qualitative Analysis
Umoja builds a sense of community for students

Shared specific ways program had:
- Sparked their motivation and focus
- Nurtured their personal growth
- Boosted their academic success

Reported most important Umoja program elements as…
- Supportive faculty, staff, and student relationships and bonds
- Sponsored courses that provide safe, supportive space to share, with focus on relevant curricula and assignments
A Closer Look At Transfer

Interesting Result
Popcorn Report Out

Umoja students are more likely than their peers to be transfer ready, but not necessarily more likely to actually transfer.

- What college barriers may be hindering students’ transfer?
- What are one or two ways for ensuring that more students are successfully transferring?
Conclusion, Recommendations and Future Research Considerations
Umoja components complement Guided Pathways

Students tended to rank many of the Umoja program components that align with Guided Pathways as important to their success:

- Clarifying a path
  - Mandatory guidance course
- Entering a path
  - Comprehensive ed plan
- Staying on a path
  - Intrusive advising and follow-up
- Ensuring their learning
  - Culturally-relevant pedagogy
Future Research Considerations

- Deeper dive into outcomes that were not statistically significant (transfer, GPA)
- Longitudinal cohort analysis that examines interaction between leading and lagging indicators of student success
- Examination of the linkages between specific program components and student outcomes
- Analyze the impact of Umoja program participation on closing equity gaps
- Repeat study post-AB705 implementation
- Investigate impact of program participation on employment and wages
Student Recommendations for Strengthening Umoja

- Increased outreach to high school and current college students
- Additional Umoja courses particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
- Additional counseling (e.g., standardized guidance on majors and career options)
- Larger dedicated “Village” space
- More instructional and counseling faculty, staff, and administrators of color
Key Takeaway

Starting next week, what is one thing you will do differently (or more often) to better engage Black students?
Visit [www.umojacommunity.org](http://www.umojacommunity.org) to register.
Thank You!

Darla M. Cooper EdD, RP Group Executive Director
dcooper@rpgroup.org

Katrina King, Umoja Regional Coordinator, Bay Area
kking@umojacommunity.org

Rogéair D. Purnell, PhD, RP Group Senior Researcher
rpurnell@rpgroup.org

Alyssa Nguyen, MA, RP Group Director of Research and Evaluation
anguyen@rpgroup.org