

# Counseling with Intention: Ensuring African American/Black Students Thrive



American

r Tipping Point Study



UGH THE GATE<sup>SM</sup>

**Dr. Darla M. Cooper**  
**The RP Group**

Equitable Counseling Regional  
Convening  
March 14, 2025

# Agenda

- Research Overview and Overall Results
- Counseling Results
  - Phase 1: Quantitative Analysis
  - Phase 2: Focus Groups and Interviews
  - Phase 3: Survey
    - What Students Said Was Their Tipping Point
- Recommendations and Discussion

# About The RP Group

**Mission:** The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group) is a leader that supports equitable outcomes for minoritized and marginalized students through race-conscious, equity-minded research, planning, and professional development. We uplift student voices and empower researchers and planners to improve institutional effectiveness by dismantling systemic barriers and injustices.

**Services:** Research, evaluation, planning, professional development, and technical assistance—designed and conducted by CCC practitioners

**Organization:** 501(c)3 with roots as membership organization

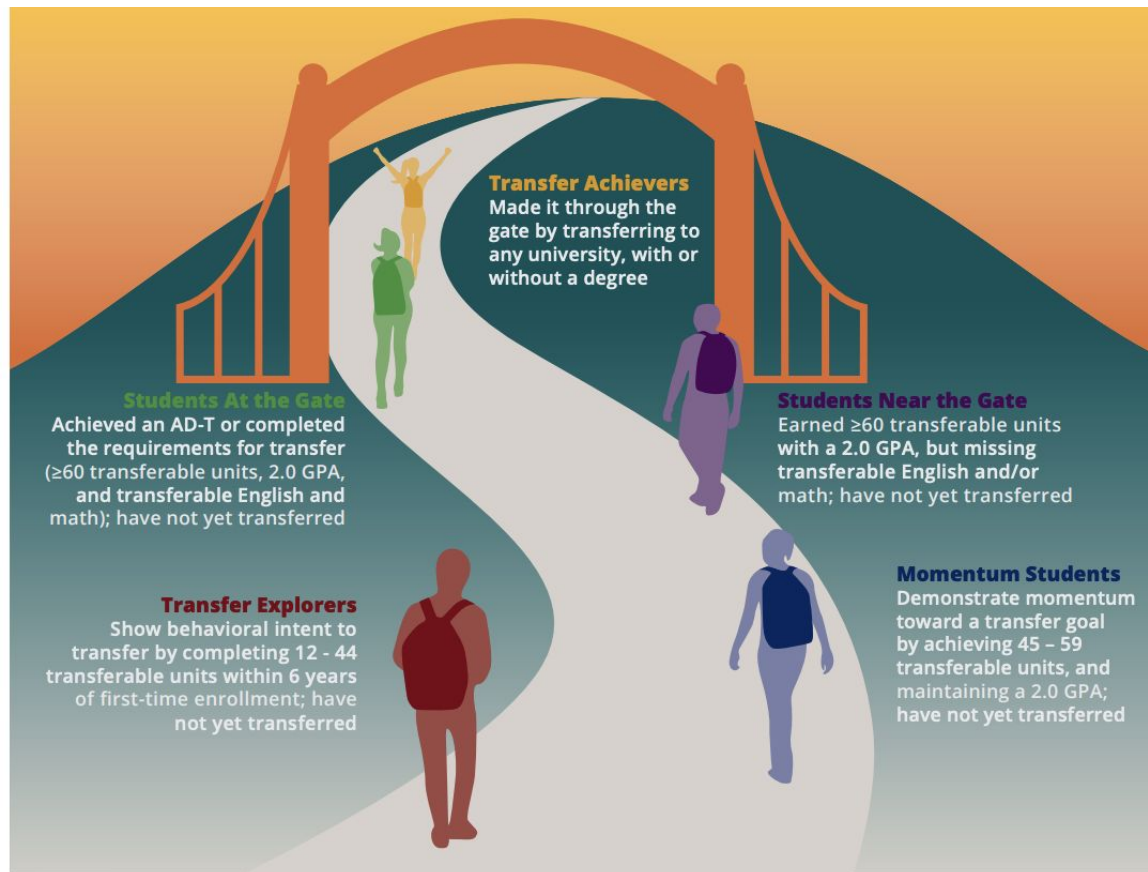


# *Research Overview and Overall Results*

# Through the Gate

Mapped California's transfer landscape, identifying a continuum of milestones for the student transfer journey and quantifying how many students were "near" or "at" the transfer gate

When compared to White students, African American/Black students are **2.04 times more likely to transfer** than remain near the gate. The problem is that they are less likely to make it "near the transfer gate."



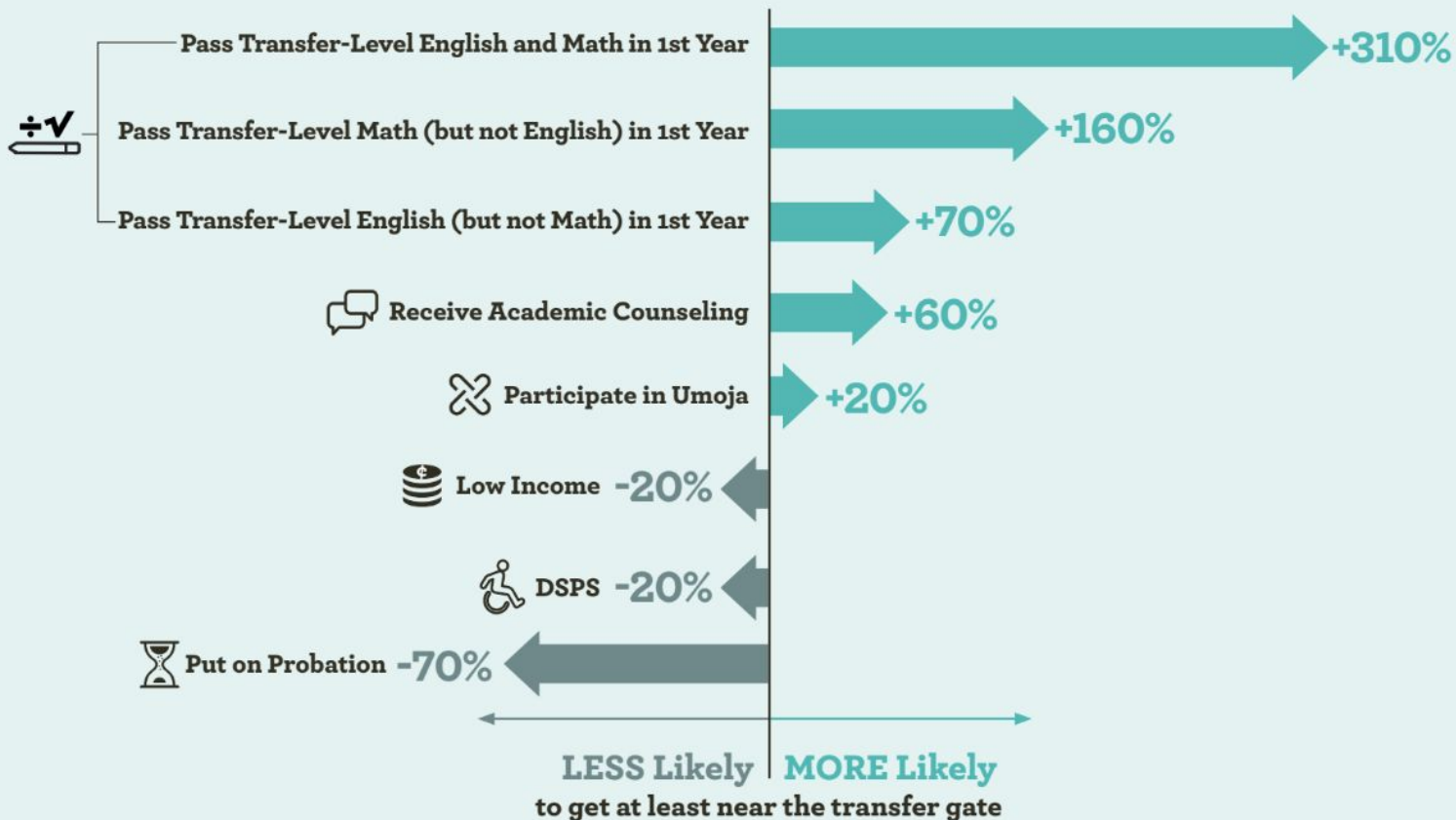
# GUIDING QUESTION S

- What factors contribute to students' likelihood of reaching the tipping point?
- Which programs and practices are associated with greater persistence to and through the tipping point, and ultimately, the transfer gate?

# METHODS

- **Phase 1:** Exploring student course-taking patterns
- **Phase 2:** Interviews and focus groups with college practitioners and transfer-intending students at colleges having higher success with transfer among African American students
- **Phase 3:** A survey of African American/Black students across the CCC

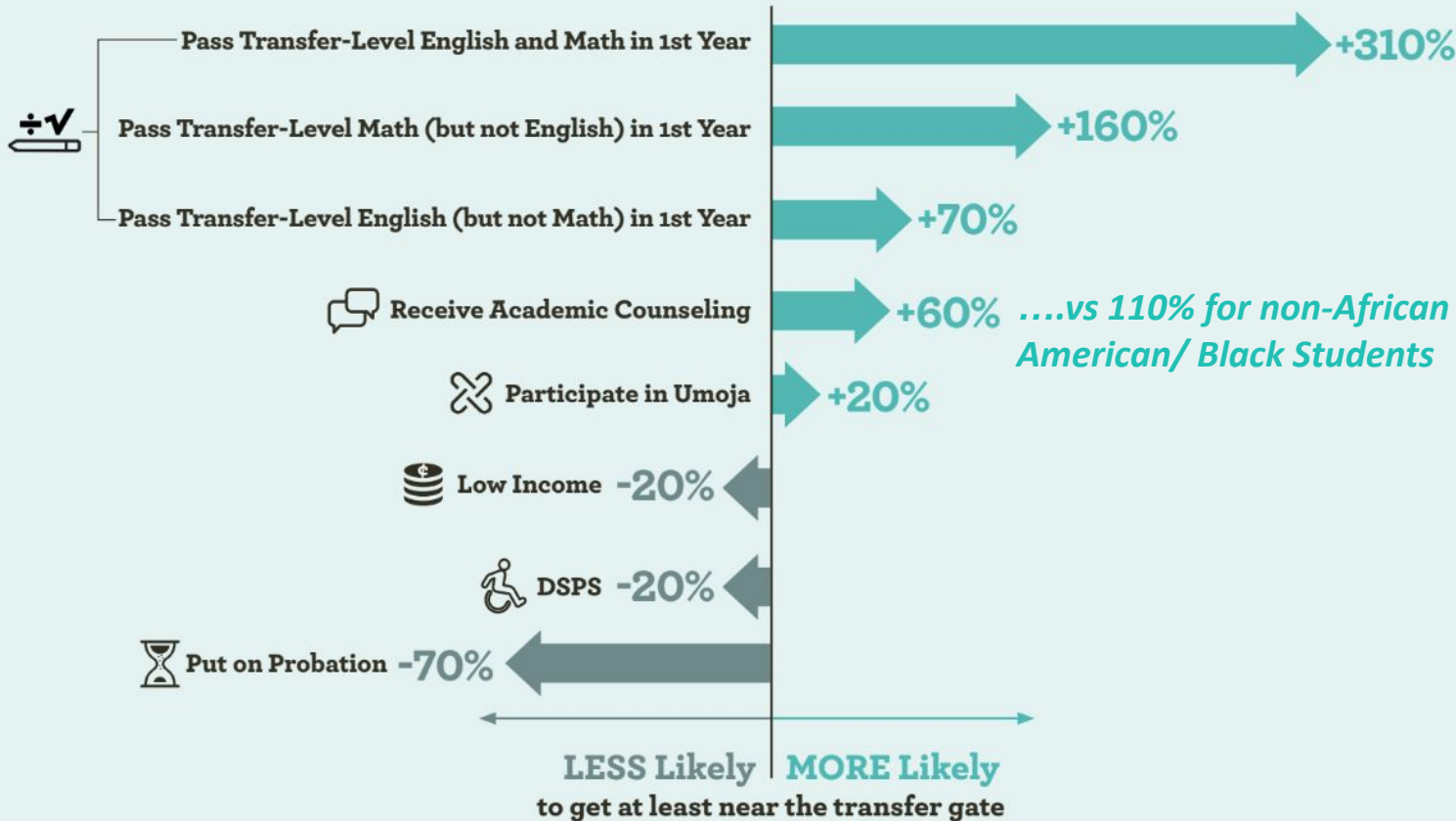
# Overall Results





# *Counseling Results*

# Phase 1 Results: Academic Counseling



## Phase 2 Results: Academic Counseling

- Students avoided general and Transfer Center counseling
- They did not feel heard, seen, valued, or respected
- They did not see themselves reflected in counseling space
- Not having the time it takes to build trust when not able to see the same counselor over time
- Lack of African American/Black counseling faculty and staff
- More likely to indicate benefiting more from academic counseling support from special population programs such as EOPS or Umoja

# Why Counseling Matters: Student Perspective

“

For Black and African American students, they are starting at a different point than most students would be – and so it would be more difficult for Black students to gain something because their relationship with their counselor is starting at a different point. The student has to become more comfortable with a person digging into their life, and that can feel a little bit intrusive. And for a Black student, that can be possibly a little triggering. Having to open up to a stranger and divulge certain things about themselves can be a little bit off-putting for a Black student versus another student who has possibly been conditioned by society to believe that they are a bit safer in society and they have a place in society and that they are valued.

”

# Why Counseling Matters: Student Perspective

“

I don't think [the Transfer Center is] geared to who I am and what I'm looking for. It's not that I'm trying to go to school with a bunch of Black folks—that's not what I'm trying to do. It's just that the representation they have for the schools (in the Transfer Center) is not really clicking with me. It's literally in the same building as the resources that I'm currently using and I'm finding myself like, 'Nah, that's not for me.'

”

“

A lot of times, we'll check a lot of who we are at the door before we go into these spaces because of the disconnect between us and the people we're meeting with.

”

# Why Counseling Matters: Practitioner Perspective

“

For a student who might be going into a counseling appointment with preconceived notions of this person not really caring about them based on their race, it can be a little bit difficult. My first thought was that trust has to be built with a Black student versus trust already being there [with a non-Black student]. It's a little bit less effective for Black students because more time needs to be taken... just comfortability and conditioning of Black students, I think is probably why [counseling is] not as effective for them as other students.

”



# Why Counseling Matters: Practitioner Perspective

“

All it takes is just one bad experience. Speaking for myself, when I went to school, it was very discouraging getting the runaround, people just kind of treating you like you don't belong. Like you're not supposed to be here. The microaggressions...[our college has] come a long way since I've been here as far as acknowledging Black students' needs. There are a lot of stories I hear from my mentees that are heartbreaking. They just don't feel comfortable. They don't have the space to have conversations about these issues. So, they're just kind of stuck and they have to perform under uncomfortable situations.

”

## Phase 3 Results: Academic Counseling

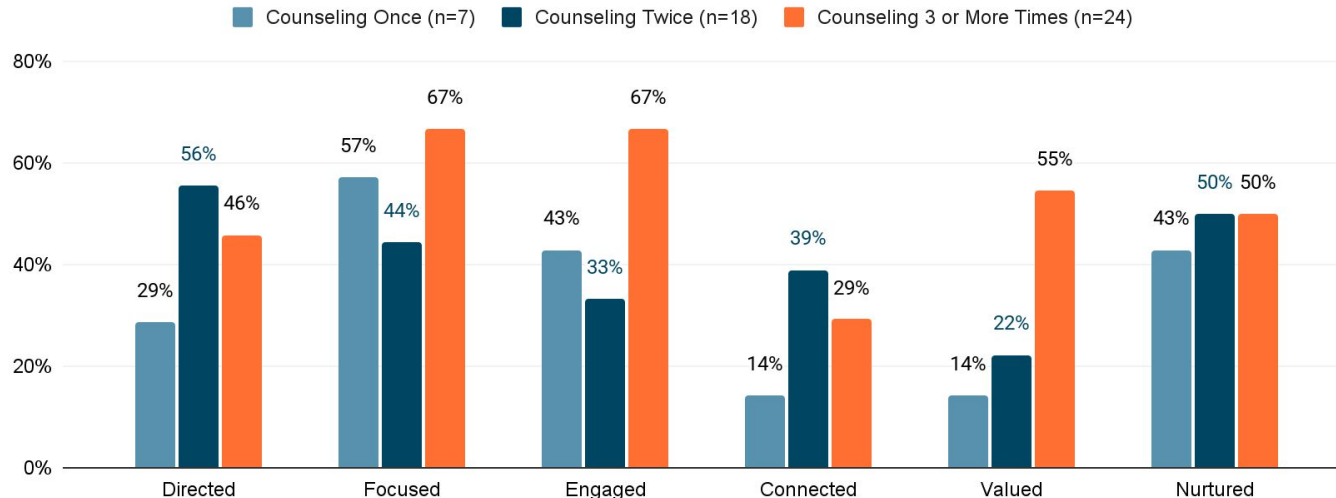
- Two-thirds of African American/Black survey respondents said they would prefer to see an African American/Black counselor, but only half saw an African American/Black counselor.
- 42% of students who successfully transferred met with an African American/Black counselor compared to 33% among students who left without transferring.



# Phase 3 Results: Academic Counseling

The more frequently African American/Black students received academic counseling, the more likely they were to identify with each of the six student success factors, notably the degree to which they were focused.

Points scored



# What Do Students Say Is Their Tipping Point?

**BUT FIRST:**

*What do you think they were?*

# What Do Students Say Is Their Tipping Point?

- (1) When they felt **supported** and **empowered** in their journey (24% overall)
- (2) When they had a **clear, navigable path** laid out for them (12% overall)
- (3) When they reached certain **academic milestones**, namely maintaining a high GPA and doing well in their courses—especially math (11% overall)

# Authentic Support and Empowerment

Importance of counseling where they felt supported in a way that is personal, not performative or transactional.



# Personalized Support and Guidance from Counselors

“

*Having a counselor that I feel knows me and my situation and can offer advice and guidance.*

”

“

*(I need to) meet with an academic counselor who could speak to not just my school life but consider my personal lifestyle as a Black mother in school.*

”



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# Personalized Support and Guidance from Counselors



*My **counselor** is a well-educated African American woman who has aided me in my **confidence build-up** towards my educational goals. Her support is beyond minimal, and she always makes sure that I feel welcome and that my needs are taken care of properly.*



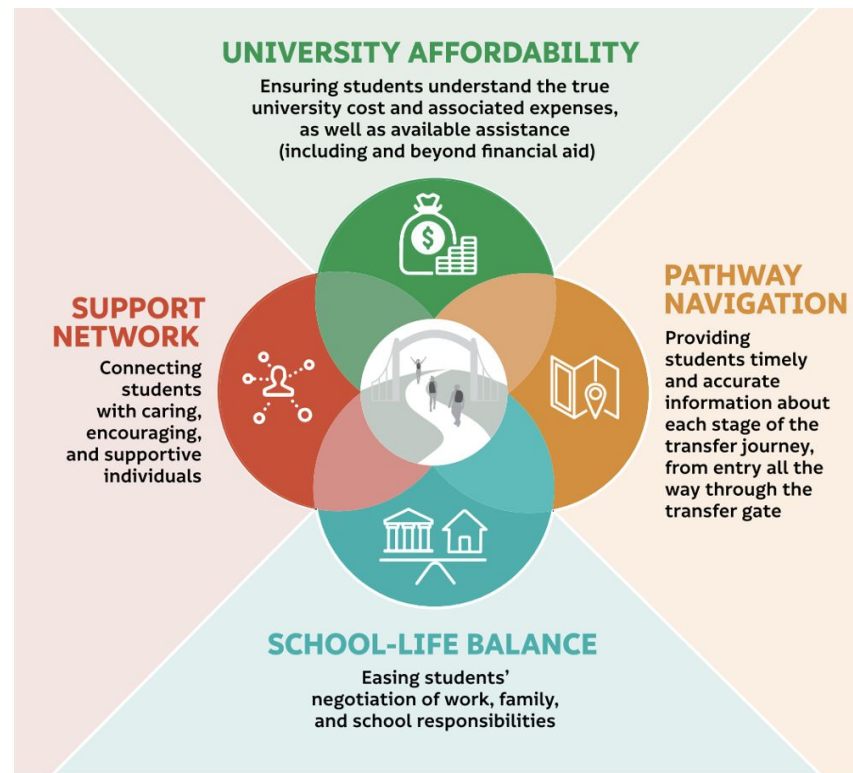
*I feel confident I will be successful in any possible goals to transfer because **I have a great counselor and she is consistent**. Having this kind of support is very helpful.*



# Clear Pathway Navigation

Having a clear, well-mapped-out path to transfer was critical in boosting students' confidence in the likelihood of being successful.

Some students who, due to not having a complete understanding of their transfer path, did not realize that they were able to transfer until they were near the end of their journey.



Source: *Students Speak Their Truth about Transfer: What They Need to Get Through the Gate*

# Counselors' Role in Helping Students with Pathway Navigation

“  
*When I received from my counselor a **clearly outlined path** listing colleges that best fit me financially and that had a strong leadership team that would support me emotionally through my journey.*  
”

“  
*The person that helped me most during my transfer journey was **my counselor at Umoja**, as she created a **step-by-step process on the courses I needed to transfer**. This helped as I knew I wanted to transfer within two years, and making sure I took all my courses within each quarter to ensure I would not delay my transfer process was key.*  
”



# Counselors' Role in Helping Students with Pathway Navigation

“

*I actually had no idea it was time for me to transfer until I met with an Umoja counselor. He told me that with the classes I was enrolled in for the current semester, I had completed all the requirements and could begin applying to university. It was past the application date but I applied anyway with some help, and got in!*

”

“

*When I met with an academic counselor and was informed I had nearly enough credits to complete my AA and transfer. It was a surprise as it felt I was aimlessly taking GE.*

”



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## **So What's The Tipping Point?**

There is no singular “Tipping Point,” for African American/Black students upon which they switch from being less to more likely to transfer.

There are many milestones and experiences along the way that intersect with one another to cumulatively impact their ultimate success.

# Recommendations: Academic Counseling

- Increasing African American/Black representation among all levels of staff, most notably instructors and counselors/advisors.
- Providing counselors/advisors with professional development focused on reducing microaggressions and bias, culturally relevant and sustaining counseling, and trauma-informed practices.
- Moving from transactional to relational counseling where students are able to build trust with counselors they see over time.
- Leveraging promising practices from Umoja, EOPS, and other Black student support programs to create a greater sense of community among African American/Black students across the campus.

# Discussion

- What do these findings about Black students' experiences with counseling bring up for you?
- What might be contributing to the differences between Black and other students in their counseling experiences?
- What can your Counseling department do?
- What can individual counselors do?

# THANK YOU!

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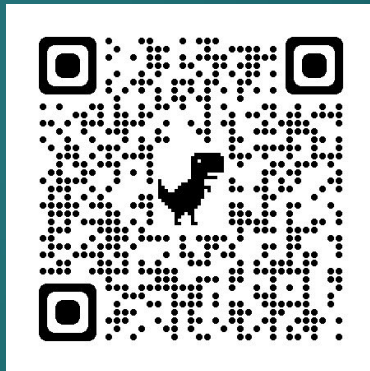
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Please let us know your thoughts



*THANK  
YOU!*