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1-1-2015

## **"Across the United States African American Male Students and Latino Male Students are Facing Challenges with Academic Achievement"**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Dillihunt, Monica, "'Across the United States African American Male Students and Latino Male Students are Facing Challenges with Academic Achievement'" (2015). *Summer Community of Scholars (RCEU and HCR) Project Proposals*. 338.

<https://louis.uah.edu/rceu-proposals/338>

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## **2014 RCEU Research Proposal**

### **Faculty Research Mentor**

Dr. Monica Dillihunt  
Associate Professor  
College of Education  
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### **Desired Student:**

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### **Project Summary**

Across the United States, African American male students and Latino male students are facing challenges with academic achievement. There has been improvement in graduation rates for all male students over the past nine years, including these two cohorts. However, African American and Latino males' graduation rates and standardized test scores continue to be as they have been, consistently lower than those of their white peers. For example, for the 2009-2010 school year in Alabama graduation rates for males students were 69% for White males, 53% for African American males, and 58% for Latino males. Furthermore, although some states and districts have been able provide supports to secure a timely high school diploma for over three-quarters of White, non-Latino, males, only a little more than half of Black and Latino males were provided with the same supports. So there is still work to be done to close the achievement gap between these two cohorts and their peers. Given the potential impact that additional support can have on students' academic achievement, we would like to explore the role that faith-based organizational partnerships can play in addressing low success outcomes, and how these roles vary across denominations and educational stages. Ultimately, we hope that this research will provide valuable input, informing state and local school district officials about the roles that faith-based organizations can play in advocating for additional support for this population.

To that end, our research will focus on identifying churches, schools, and other interested organizations with whom we can partner to: determine what kind of services they can provide for students, develop curriculum, train teachers/mentors, track impact, assess areas for improvement, and create innovative solutions. We expect we might encounter challenges with accessing both school systems and faith-based organizations, reaching latino faith-based organizations, and

negotiating competing interests amongst community partners, municipal parties, and financial and political agendas. Nevertheless, we hope to navigate these challenges and in the long-term witness a decrease in high-school drop-out rates, an increase in college entrance/graduation, lower prison-rates, family formation, and lower unemployment. This opportunity for students and staff to cooperate with local community members toward a tangible, common goal could provide many further opportunities for study and creative work experiences, as the partnerships grow and expand.

### **Student Duties**

The student who serves as a research assistant for this project will be an integral part of developing and implementing this research. They will meet weekly with their mentor who will provide supervision as they work together to conduct a literary review, develop and implement a research design, support partner sites with implementation, collect and assess data on program impact, evaluate program effectiveness, and communicate research findings in writing. Learning to do these essential research tasks in a mentored environment will equip and empower the student to pursue further, independent research topics of personal interest. Furthermore, working on this project will provide opportunities for the student to deepen their understanding of factors driving academic achievement, engage meaningfully with community leaders, partner with others toward a common goal, think about affecting long-term change, and contribute toward real-world, local challenges with the potential for broader impact.

### **Mentor Supervision and Interaction**

The student will meet weekly at UAH with Dr. Monica Dillihunt to develop goals and discuss findings. During these meetings, the mentor will informally provide any training needed to achieve these goals including guidance in areas such as writing a literary review, research design, development of curriculum, evaluation processes, communicating with partner organizations, etc. The student will be expected to show initiative in seeking out needed help and make adequate progress in accordance with the agreed upon goals. Their unique skills, experiences, and interest will also be considered and opportunities to develop these through the project will be encouraged.