# LUMINA STUDY OF FEMALE STUDENT SUCCESS

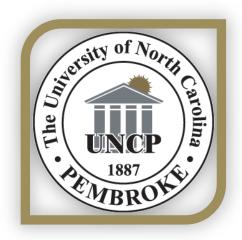# The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

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# Executive Summary

Nationally, men are less likely to attend and graduate from college than are women. This is particularly true for minority groups. This gender imbalance in college success rates holds true at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP). However at UNCP, unlike at other universities, minority men tend to outperform Euro-American men in terms of retention and graduation rates. Funded by a grant from the Lumina Foundation to the minority-serving institutions within the University of North Carolina system, a study was conducted in the fall of 2012 to investigate what factors may lead male students to be successful in their educational pathways at UNCP as well as what factors may hinder that success. Because there were funds remaining after the completion of that study and because questions arose during that study of how male student success compares to female student success, particularly among various races/ethnicities, a follow-up study was conducted in the spring of 2013.

African-American, American-Indian, and Euro-American female students at UNCP were asked via e-mail to volunteer to participate in the study by either linking to an online survey or by indicating in a return e-mail a preference for a focus group day and time. Three focus groups were designated for each of the three race categories. (The three racial groups were selected based upon their large numbers within the UNCP student body. Female students account for approximately 63% of UNCP's student body; of these, around 89% belong to these three racial groups.) At final count, complete (or mostly complete) surveys were obtained from 228 women and 82 women participated in focus groups. Thus, a total of 310 women participated in the study of 3302 who were sent invitations to participate resulting in a 9.39% response rate. The same set of questions was presented to students whether they chose to participate via the survey or within a focus group.

When asked to define student success, women in this study included a variety of elements in their definitions. Those elements of success included in definitions by more than 10% of respondents were: having and achieving goals (28%), being prepared for a career or finding a job (27%), graduating (20%), self-fulfillment or pride (17%), doing well in one's courses (15%), and developing personal characteristics such as adaptability, confidence, determination, integrity, perseverance, maturity, focus, motivation, or a positive attitude (14%). Euro-American women were more likely than were minority women to emphasize "doing well in one's courses" in their definitions of success whereas African-American women were more likely than Euro-American or American Indian women to emphasize "developing personal characteristics."

The women in this study indicated that the things that had most helped them be successful while attending UNCP were faculty (33% of respondents mentioned this factor), personal characteristics (such as determination, drive/motivation, and hard work; 30%), campus resources and services (such as tutoring and supplemental instruction; 22%), family (20%), and friends (12%). It was very common for participants to mention more than one single factor that had helped them be successful. There were few differences across racial groups; however, Euro-American women were less likely than were minority women to mention campus involvement. Fewer than one-fifth of respondents thought that the factors that had helped them be successful students were unique to their race or gender. American Indian (27%) women were most likely to answer "yes" to this question followed by African American (13%) and Euro-American (12%) women. Several minority women indicated that race or gender was related to their success as students because they felt compelled to counter stereotypes and prove that they could "make it." Minority women also spoke of being successful due to past experiences in overcoming adversity; that is, their struggles as minorities--and particularly as minority women—have helped them develop determination and persistence. American Indian (Lumbee) women were also likely to mention the heritage of their racial group or the history of UNCP. Affirmative responses by Euro-American women to this question were mainly followed by comments related to white or class privilege.

In terms of obstacles to success, the most frequently given response (by 16% of the sample) indicated that these women had not encountered any obstacles or challenges that had limited their success at UNCP. In second place were factors related to faculty/teaching (13%) followed by finances (11%), family (especially juggling the responsibilities of being a student with those of being a mother and, sometimes, an employee as well; 10%), and personal problems (9%) such as physical illness, homesickness, loneliness, discouragement, stress, or as one student put it, "just life in general." There were more noticeable differences among racial/ethnic groups in the responses to the question about obstacles than in responses to the question on what has helped them be successful at UNCP. "No obstacles or challenges" was much more frequently given as a response by minority women than by Euro-American women and Euro-American women were more likely than minority women to indicate that commuting distance was a problem. American Indian women were more likely than either African American or Euro-American women to say that work had limited their success. The only response category that appeared in the top responses for all three racial/ethnic groups was "faculty/teaching." As with factors that aid student success, few students (about 5% of those who responded) thought that factors which may have limited their success were unique to their race or gender. Of those that did, more than half were American Indian students who indicated that their success had been limited by prejudice, lack of respect for women, or expectations of women (e.g., mothers, rather than fathers, being expected to stay home when children are sick).

Online survey participants were given the opportunity to rate factors (from -5 to +5) which research in higher education has indicated are related to student retention and graduation.

Negative ratings indicated that factors had hindered success for these students personally while positive ratings indicated that factors had aided in their success. Some factors were more likely to receive a positive rating than others. In this group of women, personal goals were perceived to be the biggest contributor to their success, followed by commitment (to UNCP and/or education in general), family support, and curriculum/faculty/advising. In terms of rank ordering factors according to their role in aiding student success, very few differences were observed among racial groups. Women who attended focus groups gave qualitative responses to this question. For example, they felt that students who were not striving to attain personal goals while in college had little reason to be there and were less likely than those who did have such goals to be successful in school. Commitment was most often discussed in relation to education in general (rather than at UNCP in particular), especially higher education. Students had a variety of reasons for being committed to education but they agreed that commitment to getting an education contributes to overcoming obstacles and being successful in pursuing a degree. As one woman put it, "Education is the key to life." Families were said to be important in a number of ways such as financial, emotional, or motivational support. In the area of curriculum/faculty/advising, study participants commented on the importance of classes in which faculty used a variety of teaching methods as well as faculty who are engaged with their students and passionate about their subject matter. Students also stressed the importance of knowledgeable, personable, and supportive advisors.

Participants were asked what sort of activities or strategies they were aware of at UNCP that were intended to promote students success (whether they had used them or not). Over 50 different activities and strategies were mentioned by participants. Tutoring was far and away the most frequently mentioned activity/strategy (52%) followed by Supplemental Instruction (25%), the Writing Center (25%), Career Services (15%), the Counseling/Testing Center (11%), the Library (10%), and the Center for Academic Excellence (10%). Very little variation from this rank order was seen across racial/ethnic groups.

Almost half (44%) of the responses supplied by this group of women referred to resources provided by UNCP for student academic support as the thing that UNCP does best in supporting student success. The most frequently mentioned resources were tutoring and supplemental instruction. Over a quarter of respondents (27%) indicated that hiring good faculty was one of the things that UNCP does best. In third and fourth place (in terms of frequency of responses for the sample overall) were non-academic services (e.g., computer labs, Career Services, Counseling Center, Bookstore, Disability Support Services; 11%) and opportunities for campus involvement (e.g., organizations, activities, events; 10%). Unlike for several other questions in the study, there were some notable differences among racial groups here. For example, American Indian (35%) and Euro-American (33%) women were twice as likely to mention "faculty" as something that UNCP does best than were African American women.

The last question asked of both focus group and online survey participants was "What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success?" Around half of the participants mentioned a specific service, program, or resource that they would like to see changed. This category of response was particularly likely to be given by African American women (42%) compared with American Indian (25%) and Euro-American women (26%). Two frequently requested changes in this area were improvements to the tutoring program and more services for commuter, distance, and night students. For example, women felt that the GPA requirement for tutors should be higher, especially for subjects in which they were tutoring. A commuter lounge, extended hours for services such as offered in the counseling and writing centers, and more online support (e.g., career services, opportunities for involvement) were common themes. The second most popular response to this question was that nothing needed changing (19%). African American (20%) and Euro-American (21%) women were slightly more likely to give this response than were American Indian women (16%). It is worth noting that only American Indian women (16%) mentioned cultural aspects of the campus as something that needs changing. Predominantly, their comments focused on the history of the school and the benefits of educating students about that history and the Lumbee people.

## Background

In October of 2009, the Lumina Foundation for Education announced grants totaling almost $4.5 million to support models of success among minority-serving institutions (MSIs).  A half million of that funding went to The University of North Carolina General Administration to increase the retention and graduation rates for students of color, especially male students of color, at all six MSIs within the University of North Carolina system.  Of these six, UNCP is the only historically Native American-serving institution.

The goal of the Lumina Foundation for Education is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by 2025.  Lumina pursues this goal in three ways:  by identifying and supporting effective practice, through public policy advocacy, and by using communications and convening power to build public will for change (www.luminafoundation.org).

## Context

### Nationally

In the United States, women outnumber men nearly 3 to 2 in the college population.[1]  Women are also more likely than are men to complete college.  As of 2010, 36% of women ages 25 to 29 held a bachelor's degree or better versus only 28% of men in the same age group.[2]  Minority men are particularly outnumbered.  African American women earn two-thirds of the degrees awarded to African American students and American Indian women earn 60% of the degree earned within their racial group.[3]

At a more local level, there are gender and racial disparities in college success within the University of North Carolina system as evidenced by the most recently available data.  Whereas for women, the first-to-second year retention, first-to-third year retention, four-year graduation, and six-year graduation rates are 83.7%, 75.5%, 44.1%, and 62.8% respectively, for men, these rates are 81.2%, 70.9%, 32.1%, and 56.7% (according to most recent numbers available at http://www.northcarolina.edu/ira/ir/analytics/retgrper.htm.  Table 1 displays rates for three racial groups of students:  American Indian, African American, and Euro-American.

**Table 1.  Retention & graduation rates for 3 racial groups within the University of North Carolina system**

|  | American Indian | African American | Euro-American |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st to 2nd year retention (2011 first-time full-time cohort) | 72.3% | 78.2% | 84.4% |
| 1st to 3rd year retention (2010 first-time full-time cohort) | 59.9% | 67.1% | 75.8% |
| 4-year graduation (2008 first-time full-time cohort) | 22.0% | 24.9% | 43.9% |
| 6-year graduation (2006 first-time full-time cohort) | 41.1% | 48.4% | 64.8% |

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[1] de Vise, D.  (2010, Oct. 10).  *College completion rate among men stalls.*  Washington Post.

[2] U.S. Census Bureau.

[3] College Board. (2010).  *The educational crisis facing young men of color.*

## At UNCP

The three largest groups of students at UNCP, in terms of race, are Euro-American, African American, and American Indian.   An analysis of first-time, full-time freshman cohorts within these groups indicates that American Indian males, African American males, and Euro-American males lag behind their female counterparts in rate of retention from first to third year, rate of graduating within four years, and rate of graduating within six years.  A notable exception to this trend is in the area of first-to-second year retention where the rate for African American males in the most recent trackable cohort was higher than the rate for any other group except African American females.  Table 2 presents rates for American Indian, African American, and Euro-American men and women within specific cohorts.

**Table 2.  Retention & graduation rates for 3 racial groups at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke**

|  | American Indian | | African American | | Euro-American | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Men | Women | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| 1st to 2nd year retention (2011 first-time full-time cohort) | 58.9% | 67.2% | 67.3% | 76.8% | 57.3% | 65.2% |
| 2nd to 3rd year retention (2010 first-time full-time cohort) | 45.3% | 56.8% | 43.7% | 57.2% | 44.8% | 47.3% |
| 4-year graduation (2008 first-time full-time cohort) | 12.2% | 17.9% | 6.6% | 19.4% | 6.5% | 18.4% |
| 6-year graduation (2006 first-time full-time cohort) | 34.7% | 37.6% | 26.7% | 43.1% | 31.4% | 36.7% |

## Methodology

Participants in this study were female students, age 18 and over, whose race was indicated (in the university's database) as American Indian, African American, or Euro-American.  (The three racial groups were selected based upon their large numbers within the UNCP student body.  Female students account for approximately 63% of UNCP's study body; of these, around 89% belong to these three racial groups.)

Participants were recruited in by way of e-mail invitations.  E-mail addresses for all female American Indian, African American, and Euro-American students at UNCP were obtained from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.  In the e-mail invitations, students were told about the purpose of and protocol for the study; they were also given information about when and where focus groups would be meeting.  They were asked to volunteer to participate in the study by either linking to an online survey or by indicating in a return e-mail a preference for a focus group day and time.  Three focus groups were designated for American Indian women; three for African American women; and three for Euro-American women.

Nine focus group sessions were available on a variety of days and times between January 31, 2013 and February 18, 2013.  Incentives were provided to participants in the form of meals (lunch or dinner, depending upon session times) and gift cards.  Each individual participant received a $25 gift card.  Each student signed, upon receipt of a gift card, a sheet of paper (for auditing purposes) indicating that the card was not actually a gift but rather was given in exchange for the student's time and participation in the study.

It was explained to students at the beginning of each focus group session that their attendance would be taken as consent to participate.  They also were informed that they were free to leave at any time and could refrain from answering any questions with which they felt uncomfortable.  Responses within focus groups were recorded by use of letters assigned to participants and no names were recorded; students were assured that their responses would be confidential.  Each focus group session lasted approximately 75 minutes; at the end of each, students received their gift cards and an information sheet which included contact information for the primary investigator, the focus group facilitator, the study coordinator, and the chair of UNCP's Institutional Review Board (IRB).  The focus group script and questions are included in Appendix A.

Students who chose to complete the online survey rather than attend a focus group received the same set of questions as was asked of focus group attendees.  The survey was active and available for completion from mid-January, 2013 until the end of February, 2013. The survey questions are included in Appendix B.  Women who completed the online survey were

entered into a random drawing for one of forty-four $25 gift cards. A gift card winner could pick her card up at an on-campus location or indicate (by responding to the e-mail announcing that she was a winner) that she would prefer to have the card mailed to her. Each of these participants also signed a paper (mailed, if necessary) indicating that she completed the survey in exchange for a gift card.

IRB approval was obtained for all aspects of the study.

# Results

## Participants

The goal was to obtain between 8 and 10 participants for each of 9 focus groups (between 72 and 90 total). At final count, 82 women participated in focus groups. On average, each focus group had nine participants (with a range of three to thirteen).   By race, 30 women participated in an African American-only focus group; 20 in an American Indian-only focus group; and 32 in a Euro-American-only focus group.  Complete (or mostly complete) surveys were obtained from 228 individuals (94 African American women; 60 American Indian women; and 74 Euro-American women). Thus, a total of 310 women participated in the study of 3302 who were sent invitations to participate resulting in a 9.39% response rate.

Table 3 (on the next page) provides additional detail on the breakdown among participants in terms of race as well as how this breakdown compares to that of all women in these racial categories in the UNCP student body as a whole.

Note that, because focus group participants were identified in responses by letter only and no demographic information was collected in those sessions, race for focus group participants was determined through focus group designation--that is, whether women signed up to participate in an American Indian-only, African-American-only, or Euro-American-only focus group.

**Table 3.  Number and percentages of study participants**

| | American Indian | African American | Euro-American | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **# focus group participants** | 20 | 30 | 32 | 82 |
| **% focus group participants*** | 24% | 37% | 39% | 100% |
| **# online survey participants** | 60 | 94 | 74 | 44 |
| **% online survey participants** | 26% | 41% | 32% | 100% |
| **# all participants** | 80 | 124 | 106 | 100 |
| **% all participants** | 26% | 41% | 34% | 100% |
| **# women, UNCP student body**** | 704 | 1241 | 1549 | 3494 |
| **% women, UNCP student body** | 20% | 36% | 44% | 100% |

*Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

**Three major racial categories only, Fall 2012

## Responses

Responses from focus groups and the online survey are presented below organized by question. For each question, number of responses is indicated when appropriate along with some indication of overall frequency and comparison among women of different racial groups. Total number of responses may exceed the number of participants as multiple responses were possible per question. Comparisons among groups are made utilizing percentages within groups; in other words, to answer a question about which group of women gave a particular response (or category of response) most frequently, percentage within the group is used for comparison rather than the absolute number of women.

> **At UNCP, we define student success as graduating students who are prepared for rewarding careers, postgraduate education, leadership roles, and fulfilling lives. How do you personally define student success?**

There were 255 total responses to this question and students defined success in a variety of ways. The most frequently included elements in their definitions (mentioned by more than 10% of respondents) were:

- Having & achieving goals, 28%
- Being prepared for a career or finding a job, 27%
- Graduating, 20%
- Self-fulfillment/pride, 17%
- Doing well in one's courses, 15%
- Developing personal characteristics (e.g., adaptability, confidence, determination, integrity, positive attitude, perseverance, maturity, focus, motivation), 14%

Here are a few examples of the various student success definitions given by study participants:

o "I define student success on a personal level as reaching the goals I have made for myself. I lay out my expected grades and growth during each semester and then decide if I have achieved what I set out to do."

o "I define success as being able to achieve beyond what others can imagine and being able to do well or very well in everything."

o "Student success is in the eye of the beholder; if you are working hard toward your personal goals in order to better yourself, then you are succeeding."

o "Student success can be defined as reaching your goals, finding out who you are as a person, graduating and entering into your career with the right knowledge."

o "I define student success as fulfilling my educational goals, having a rewarding career, and providing a better life for my children."

o "I define success as fulfilling your dreams and goals in life in ways that continue to make you happy."

o "I define student success as attending every class, doing all homework assignments, participating in classroom discussions, helping other students when and where you can, striving for the grade (4.0), so that you are prepared for graduation and your career that follows after."

o "I define student success as working hard to maintain academic goals such as good grades and taking time to give back to the school and community.  Giving back is what I love to [do] and it's important that we as individuals do so."

o "Student success is not just about obtaining a degree, but coming away from each course having actually learned the material and not just memorized it to pass a test or satisfy an assignment."

o "I personally define success as the ability (or learned ability) to adapt to changing situations."

o  "In my own words, student success is when a student has graduated with the confidence that they will succeed at any task given to them in their intended field."

o "I think part of student success is a determination to continue one's own education. Successful students are life-long learners who continue to take classes, [develop professionally], etc., in order to further enhance their knowledge, skills, abilities, and career."

o "To me, student success is being able to put forth your best effort in all that you do. Whether your teachers, peers, or superiors define it as success, you know and believe it to be success because you tried."

o  "Success is not about money (although that can be a wonderful perk!); it is more about completion of tasks and goals, reaching milestones and participating in meaningful work, all while being a person of integrity and character."

Some comparisons of racial/ethnic groups are provided in Table 4.  Most notably, Euro-American women were more likely than minority women to emphasize "doing well in one's courses" in their definitions of success whereas African-American women were more likely than Euro- or American Indian women to emphasize "developing personal characteristics.

**Table 4.  Elements of success definitions**

|  | American Indian | African American | Euro-American |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Having & achieving goals** | **23%** | **32%** | **26%** |
| **Being prepared for a career or finding a job** | 28% | 27% | 26% |
| **Graduating** | **25%** | **18%** | **18%** |
| **Self-fulfillment/pride** | **13%** | **18%** | **18%** |
| **Doing well in one's courses** | **8%** | **11%** | **23%** |
| **Developing personal characteristics** | 7% | 22% | 9% |
| **Learning** | **7%** | **8%** | **8%** |
| **Ability to apply one's knowledge** | 6% | 4% | 11% |

**What has helped you be successful at UNCP?**

There were 267 total responses to this question; more than 10% of women gave responses in the following categories:

- Faculty, 33%
- Personal characteristics, 30%
- Campus resources & services, 22%
- Family, 20%
- Friends, 12%

Faculty were cited frequently as factors in student success.  Participants used adjectives such as the following to describe the faculty at UNCP:  helpful, caring, supportive, encouraging, inspiring, friendly, accessible, understanding, and patient.  The importance and value of our faculty are illustrated in the following quotes:

- "In the short period of time [I have been at UNCP], the professors…have shown a tremendous amount of support.  They have made my classes interesting as well as fun.  They let you know the importance of reading, learning and getting assignments on time without all the stress that I was concerned about prior to enrollment."
- "The involvement and compassion of my professors has aided me in becoming a successful student at UNCP.  Knowing that there are people who are invested in me and care about my future drives me to push harder to meet my fullest potential.

Furthermore, there is a wonderful reassurance in knowing that if I need help or have questions my professors' doors are always open and that they genuinely care about me."

- "…not everyone who attends the university does so with purpose, but for those of us who seek to better our lives for whatever…reason, the professor/instructor is our link to the university and that educational relationship is crucial to our success."

- "[UNCP has] some of the greatest instructors in North Carolina!"

Numerous personal characteristics were mentioned by students as contributing to their academic success. By far, the most frequently mentioned were determination, drive/motivation, and hard work. Although motivation was a common theme, the origins of students' drive were varied and included the degrees for which they are striving, future careers, the hope of not struggling like parents or grandparents had done, and wanting a better life for themselves and their children. Several women cited campus resources or services in general as contributing to their success. For those who named a specific resource or service, the most frequently mentioned was tutoring followed by supplemental instruction.

It should be noted that it was quite common for a participant to mention numerous things that had helped her be a successful student. This tendency to realize that success is most often due to more than one factor is expressed well in the following quote from a young African American woman:

> I attribute my success to having a loving and supportive family; a small group of good, loyal, and honest friends; good instructors and faculty that actually get to know you and genuinely care about you; and my own drive and passion to become successful and make something of myself.

Table 5 below lists the top six categories, for each racial/ethnic group, of responses to the question "What has helped you be successful at UNCP?" The percentage of participants responding in these categories and the ranking of the categories were similar across groups. However, Euro-American women were less likely than were minority women to mention campus involvement.

**Table 5. Top responses by race/ethnicity to the question "What has helped you be successful at UNCP?"**

| American Indian | African American | Euro-American |
|---|---|---|
| Faculty (38%) | Faculty (28%) tied with Personal characteristics (28%) | Faculty (34%) |
| Personal characteristics (32%) | Campus resources & services (23%) | Personal characteristics (30%) |
| Campus resources & services (28%) | Family (19%) | Family (20%) |

| Family (20%) | Friends (12%) | Campus resources & services (15%) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Campus involvement (11%) | Campus involvement (10%) | Friends (14%) |

### 🔱 Do you think that any of the factors that have helped you be a successful student at UNCP are unique to your race or gender?

Fewer than one-fifth of respondents answered this question affirmatively.  American Indian (27%) women were most likely to answer "yes" to this question, followed by African American (13%) and Euro-American (12%) women.  Several minority women indicated that race or gender was related to their success as students because they felt compelled to counter stereotypes and prove that they could "make it."  Stereotypically, they said, women and minorities are expected to fail in college.  An African American women stated, "We're doing something that is not expected of young Black women.  We're in college; most people expect us to be pregnant."  One American Indian woman said she knew early in life that she did not want to be just one more statistic within her race, dropping out of high school or becoming an unwed teenage mother working in a factory.  Another stated, "Gender pushes me.  I'm interested in going into the business world that is dominated by males.  I want to prove that women can have a career and family."  Minority women also spoke of being successful due to past experiences in overcoming adversity; that is, their struggles as minorities--and particularly as minority women—have helped them develop determination and persistence.  To quote one young African American woman:  "I think that being a minority, I have learned to overcome certain things that other ethnicities would not have understood in life.  Being a female adds to understanding the world from a different view point."

American Indian (Lumbee) women were also likely to mention the heritage of their racial group or the history of UNCP.  Some indicated that the Lumbee culture encourages working hard and achieving one's dreams.   Others stated that UNCP began as a school for American Indians and that there were specific programs, scholarships, and organizations at UNCP intended to promote (or influential in promoting) academic success among American Indian students (e.g., FATE, scholarships, Native American sororities).

Affirmative responses by Euro-American women to this question were mainly followed by comments related to white or class privilege.  For example, one women said, "I feel as a pretty, white American woman I have had more/better chances of opportunities offered to me.  I must express that I do not mean this as a negative, but I do happen to feel this way when I notice that I am, in reality, offered opportunities of success on an almost daily basis."

**🦋 Please describe any obstacles or challenges that have potentially limited your success at UNCP.**

Two-hundred fifty-three responses were given to this question.  The most frequently given response (by 16% of the sample) indicated that these women had not encountered any obstacles or challenges that had limited their success at UNCP.  In second place were factors related to faculty/teaching (13%) followed by finances (11%), family (10%), and personal problems (9%) such as physical illness, homesickness, loneliness, discouragement, stress, or as one student put it, "just life in general."

Responses to other questions in this study indicate that, in general, students feel that most faculty care deeply about their success.  However, a few faculty have served as obstacles or challenges to student success due to negative attitudes, lack of helpfulness, or slow responsiveness (to e-mails or in terms of grading assignments).  Negative attitudes mentioned by students included rudeness, discourteousness, belittlement, impatience, lack of respect, meanness, or not caring whether students "get it" or not.  The fact that these faculty are definitely in the minority but that their negative impact can have serious consequences is perfectly captured in the following response to this question via the online survey:

> "The thing that has been THE most difficult has been one faculty member in particular.  Had that individual been my only contact with someone at UNCP, I would NOT have attended.  Also, had there not been the faculty members that have been positive influences, I would not have stayed.  That has been the single most challenging issue in this journey: one person!"

Financial struggles are not uncommon among students.  Women described the strain of having to work and go to school (and often care for a family as well).  Sometimes tough decisions had to be made about cutting back on work in order to devote more time to school or taking fewer classes in order to earn a sufficient salary.  The following quote describes this type of choice:  "Costs have continued to rise for tuition, fees, and books, and that means that I cannot always take the number of classes I would like in order to move through the program quickly."  And costs go beyond those associated directly with education; having enough money for gas and groceries is a stressor with which some students must cope.

The number one challenge associated with family for women in this study was juggling the responsibilities of being a student with those of being a mother (and, often as noted above, those of being an employee as well).  The following quotes illustrate the struggles with which these women are faced:

- "I wouldn't necessarily say that [family] has limited me but has required me to put in extra hours while others may be sleeping.  As a full-time student, wife and mother, there are times when I would like to be focused on reading assignments way before they are due but my children and mommy duties come first."

- "Another challenge that I faced was my daughter…struggling in her school work in second grade and she wouldn't let anyone else help her but me.  That caused me to not spend as much time with my school work [as] I needed."
- "The only challenges I have faced as a student have been the fact that I work full-time and have two school-age children that are very active in sports.  Sometimes I feel that I have to decide what is more important…my studies or their childhood memories."

There were more noticeable differences among racial/ethnic groups in the responses to the question  about obstacles than in responses to the question on what has helped them be successful at UNCP.  "No obstacles or challenges" was much more frequently given as a response by minority women than by Euro-American women and Euro-American women were more likely than minority women to indicate that commuting distance was a problem. American Indian women were more likely than either African American or Euro-American women to say that work had limited their success.  The only response category that appeared in the top responses for all three racial/ethnic groups was "faculty/teaching."  Table 6 illustrates other differences among racial/ethnic groups.

**Table 6.  Top responses by race/ethnicity to the question "Please describe any obstacles or challenges that have potentially limited your success at UNCP."**

| American Indian | African American | Euro-American |
|---|---|---|
| No obstacles or challenges (23%) | No obstacles or challenges (16%) | Faculty/teaching (18%) tied with Finances (18%) |
| Finances (15%) tied with Family (15%) | Faculty/teaching (13%) | Commuting distance (11%) |
| Work (12%) | Personal problems (12%) | Personal problems (9%) |
| Faculty/teaching (8%) tied with Balancing difficulties (8%) | Poor time management (10%) tied with Family (10%) | Balancing difficulties (8%) |

🛡 **Do you think that any of the factors that have limited your success at UNCP are unique to your race or gender?**

As with factors that aid student success, few students (about 5% of those who responded) thought that factors which may have limited their success were unique to their race or gender.  Of those that did, more than half were American Indian students who indicated that their success had been limited by prejudice, lack of respect for women, or expectations of women (e.g., mothers, rather than fathers, being expected to stay home when children are sick).  One African-American woman opined that finances are more likely to limit the

success of minorities because "minorities are on the lower socioeconomic status." On the other hand, one Euro-American women indicated that, in her opinion, minorities are advantaged because of the grants and scholarships for which they are eligible while she is "…a middle-aged white women [who owes] $50,000 in loans."

- **Research in higher education has identified a few things that seem to be related to student retention and graduation.**
    - o **Focus group version: Let me mention a few of these and see if you have any comments about their relationship to your success.**
    - o **Online survey version: Listed below are a few of these. For each one, indicate how much that factor has influenced your success as a student by dragging the "slider" to the right. 0 indicates no influence; negative numbers indicate that that factor hindered your success and positive numbers indicate that it helped you be more successful. For example, if you feel as though you did not get adequate preparation in high school for college, you would indicate that by placing the slider under a negative number with greater under-preparation indicated by the higher numbers. On the other hand, if you feel your high school prepared you for college, you would move the slider to one of the positive numbers with better preparedness indicated by the higher numbers. You will have an opportunity in the next question to provide comments.**

This is the only question in the study that had a distinctly different presentation in the focus groups versus the online survey. Focus group responses were all open-ended comments; online participants had the opportunity to provide both quantitative and qualitative responses. As indicated in the question above, students could indicate that a factor hindered their likelihood of retention and graduation success by selecting a negative number, that a factor had no influence on their success by selecting zero, or aided their success by selecting a positive number. The range of possible responses was -5 to +5. Quantitative and qualitative results are discussed separately below.

*Quantitative results*

Table 7 presents results related to ratings of retention factors by online participants (N=228). In addition to the mean and mode for each factor, percentages are given for students who thought that a factor hindered their retention and graduation success (% hindered), had no influence on their success (% neutral), or aided their success (% aided). Percentages are rounded to the closest whole number and will not add up to 100% due to rounding and the small number of omitted responses for each factor (that is, a few student chose not to respond at all to some of the factors).

**Table 7.  Results related to ratings of retention factors by online participants.**

| Factor | Mean | Mode | % hindered | % neutral | % aided |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High school preparation | 1.99 | 5 | 15% | 8% | 69% |
| Finances | 0.45 | 0 | 32% | 16% | 43% |
| Family support | 3.77 | 5 | 5% | 2% | 87% |
| Feeling connected to campus and other students/ campus involvement | 1.27 | 0 | 18% | 21% | 56% |
| Course curriculum/ faculty teaching methods /advising | 2.78 | 3 | 6% | 8% | 82% |
| Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general | 3.72 | 5 | 2% | 5% | 89% |
| Personal goals | 4.46 | 5 | 1% | 0% | 94% |
| Seeing your culture reflected on campus & in courses | 1.37 | 0 | 11% | 30% | 51% |

Participants were more likely to indicate that these factors aided in their success than hindered it.  More than 50% of respondents chose a number greater than zero for each factor except "finances."  Clearly, however, there were some factors that were more likely to receive a positive rating than others.  In this group of women, personal goals were perceived to be the biggest contributor to their success, followed by commitment (to UNCP and/or education in general), family support, and curriculum/faculty/advising. In terms of rank ordering factors according to their role in aiding student success, very few differences were observed among racial/ethnic groups.

*Qualitative results*

Women in this study felt that students who were not striving to attain personal goals while in college had little reason to be there and were less likely than those who did have such goals to be successful in school.  Commitment was most often discussed in relation to education in general (rather than at UNCP in particular), especially higher education.  Students had a variety of reasons for being committed to education (e.g., to serve as a role model for their children, because they were the first in their families to go to college, because they observed the commitment of instructors, to prepare for the commitment needed for a career) but they agreed that commitment to getting an education contributes to overcoming obstacles and being successful in pursuing a degree.  As one woman put it, "Education is the key to life." Families were said to be important in a number of ways.  Some families provided money relieving financial stress; others relieved students' stress or got them through rough times by

providing emotional support.  Families also were important motivating forces, although in a variety of ways as illustrated by the following student comments:

- "It pushes me harder to do better than my family members have done."
- "Everyone has a college degree in my family so that makes me strive to get mine."
- "Their financial support motivates me to do well so their efforts are not wasted."
- "I want to make my family proud of me.  Their verbal reinforcement helps keep me motivated."
- "[Family support] makes failure not an option."

In the area of curriculum/faculty/advising, study participants commented on the importance of classes in which faculty used a variety of teaching methods as well as faculty who are engaged with their students and passionate about their subject matter.  Students also stressed the importance of knowledgeable, personable, and supportive advisors.

### What sort of activities and strategies are you aware of here at UNCP that are intended to promote student success?

This question was not intended to determine which resources at UNCP students used, but rather those they were simply aware of, whether they had used them or not.  Over 50 different activities and strategies were mentioned by participants.  Tutoring was far and away the most frequently mentioned activity/strategy (52%) followed by Supplemental Instruction (25%), the Writing Center (25%), Career Services (15%), the Counseling/Testing Center (11%), the Library (10%), and the Center for Academic Excellence (10%).   Very little variation from this rank order was seen across racial/ethnic groups as illustrated in Table 8.

**Table 8.  Top ranked student success-related activities/strategies at UNCP by group.**

|   | African American | American Indian | Euro-American |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Tutoring (55%) | Tutoring (50%) | Tutoring (50%) |
| 2 | Supplemental Instruction (21%) | Supplemental Instruction (28%) | Writing Center (32%) |
| 3 | Writing Center (18%) | Writing Center (18%) | Supplemental Instruction (28%) |
| 4 | Career Services (15%) | Library (10%) | Career Services (22%) |
| 5 | Center for Academic Excellence (12%) | Center for Academic Excellence (8%) & Faculty (8%) | Counseling/Testing Center (15%) |

### What are the things that UNCP does best in supporting student success?

Of all responses provided to this question (N=180), almost half (44%) referred to resources provided by UNCP for student academic support.  As in the previous section, the most frequently mentioned resources were tutoring and supplemental instruction.  Over a quarter of respondents (27%) indicated that hiring good faculty was one of the things that UNCP

does best.  Faculty were described as helpful, supportive, available, fair, approachable, friendly, and caring.  One young woman used the descriptor "amazing" and another, "awesome."  Several women indicated that faculty go "above and beyond" or "out of their way" to help students succeed.   In third and fourth place (in terms of frequency of responses for the sample overall) were non-academic services (e.g., computer labs, Career Services, Counseling Center, Bookstore, Disability Support Services; 11%) and opportunities for campus involvement (e.g., organizations, activities, events; 10%).  Unlike for several other questions in the study, there were some notable differences among racial/ethnic groups here.  For example, American Indian (35%) and Euro-American (33%) women were twice as likely to mention "faculty" as something that UNCP does best than were African American women.  Table 9 highlights some other differences among groups.

**Table 9.  Percent responses to the question "What does UNCP do best in supporting student success?" by race/ethnicity**

| Factor | African American | American Indian | Euro-American |
|---|---|---|---|
| Faculty | 15% | 35% | 33% |
| Academic support resources | 44% | 51% | 40% |
| Non-academic services | 6% | 16% | 10% |
| Opportunities for campus involvement | 15% | 8% | 7% |
| Size of university/classes | 8% | 4% | 15% |
| Communication | 5% | 14% | 7% |

**What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success?**

The last question asked of both focus group and online survey participants was "What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success?"  Around half of the participants mentioned a specific service, program, or resource that they would like to see changed.  This category of response was particularly likely to be given by African American women (42%) compared with American Indian (25%) and Euro-American women (26%).  Two frequently requested changes in this area were improvements to the tutoring program and more services for commuter, distance, and night students.  For example, women felt that the GPA requirement for tutors should be higher, especially for subjects in which they were tutoring.  A commuter lounge, extended hours for services such as offered in the counseling and writing centers, and more online support (e.g., career services, opportunities for involvement) were common themes.

The second most popular response to this question was that nothing needed changing (19%).  African American (20%) and Euro-American (21%) women were slightly more likely to give this response than were American Indian women (16%).  Additional differences among racial/ethnic groups can be seen in Table 10.  It is worth noting that only American Indian women (16%) mentioned cultural aspects of the campus as something that needs changing.  Predominantly, their comments focused on the history of the school and the

benefits of educating students about that history and the Lumbee people.  One woman of Lumbee heritage requested that UNCP

> "[h]elp educate all students on the history of the school; maybe [then] they would/could have pride in it, too.  I'm sad when others make fun of Pembroke and the area.  I have pride 'cause I know about the struggles and how hard the people have worked to have what they have.  When I hear students of other races put it down, I just wonder why they didn't pick a different school.  Instead, their words stifle the ability for us to feel free to show our pride for what our heritage and ancestors [have] left in hopes that the future would be brighter with more possibilities."

**Table 10.  Percent responses to the question "What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP?" by race/ethnicity**

| Factor | African American | American Indian | Euro-American |
|---|---|---|---|
| Services/programs/resources | 42% | 25% | 26% |
| Nothing | 20% | 16% | 21% |
| Courses/scheduling | 12% | 18% | 12% |
| Communication | 12% | 14% | 1% |
| Finances | 12% | 4% | 5% |
| Culture | 0% | 16% | 0% |

**Comparison of results from the Fall 2012 study of male student success and the**

**Spring 2013 study of female student success**

### Definitions of success

The importance of setting and achieving goals was the number one element included in definitions of success by both men and women, in roughly the same proportions. Almost a third of both male and female respondents included this element in their personal definitions of success. Also common in both men's and women's definitions were comments related to academics (doing well in one's courses or graduating) and self-fulfillment.

### Success-aiding factors

Men and women were also similar in their responses regarding factors that have helped them be successful as students at UNCP. Both groups had among their most frequent responses personal characteristics, university personnel (mainly faculty), family, and friends. Women, but not men, also frequently indicated that campus resources and services (such as tutoring and supplemental instruction) were important to their success. An interesting commonality between African American men and women was that both groups gave responses indicating that their success was aided by motivation to disprove or counter stereotypes depicting them as non-intellectual and unable to be successful in college. Although African American men indicated that, in their culture, women are more encouraged to attend and succeed in college than are men, this theme did not emerge in comments from women in this study.

### Obstacles to success

The most frequent response from women when asked about obstacles or challenges was that they had not encountered any obstacles or challenges that had limited their success at UNCP. This response was especially likely to be given by minority women but was not given by men of any racial category. Both men and women mentioned finances and faculty as potential obstacles as well as personal issues. However, in the case of women, the personal issues were problems such as physical illness, homesickness, loneliness, discouragement, and stress whereas for men, they were characteristics such as laziness, procrastination, poor time management, irresponsibility, immaturity, and lack of motivation. A major area emphasized by men but not women was the challenge of class and major availability. Women, but not men, emphasized the difficulty of juggling the demands of school and a family. Few students of either gender thought that potential hindrances to their success were related to race or gender. Of those who did, however, the most frequent responses were given by American Indian women and Euro-American men. American Indian women indicated that their success had been potentially limited by prejudice, lack of respect for women, or expectations of women; Euro-American men emphasized perceived

inequalities with women and minorities being at an advantage in terms of receiving financial aid.

### Factors related to retention and graduation

Both men and women emphasized personal goals, family support, and curriculum/faculty/advising as important to their own academic success.  The factor of "commitment to education in general or UNCP in particular" was very important to several men but did not generate a great many responses overall from male participants.  However, commitment was the second most highly rated factor (in a list of eight) by women.

### Awareness of UNCP activities/strategies to promote student success

Remarkable similarity was seen among men and women in terms of the activities and strategies of which they were aware at UNCP that are specifically intended to promote student success.  Frequently mentioned by both men and women were tutoring, supplemental instruction, the Writing Center, Career Services, and the Center for Academic Excellence.  Over 10% of women, but not men, included the Counseling/Testing Center and the Library.

### What UNCP does best in promoting student success

Both male and female participants felt that supplying good academic resources such as tutoring and supplemental instruction, and hiring good people, especially faculty, are things that UNCP does best in promoting student success.  Men (especially African American and Euro-American men) were more likely to mention small classes and a good faculty/student ratio than were women and women were more likely than men to comment on non-academic services (e.g., computer labs, bookstore, DSS) and opportunities for campus involvement (e.g., organizations, activities, events).

### What students wish they could change about UNCP

Women (especially African American women) were more likely than were men to mention a specific service, program, or resource that they would like to see changed at UNCP to better support student success. Two frequently requested changes in this area were improvements to the tutoring program and more services for commuter, distance, and night students. Women were also more likely than were men to say that nothing needs changing.  Men's responses had greater variability and the only change mentioned by more than 10% of male respondents overall was greater class availability (more classes offered more often).  There was also more variability across racial groups for men than for women.  The only prominent difference among women was that only American Indian women mentioned cultural aspects of the campus as needing change but this wasn't the top response even for this group. Among men, all three racial groups had different number one responses.  The top response for Euro-American men was greater campus safety; for American Indian men, it was higher student standards.  Only African American men indicated a desire for greater school spirit and it was the most frequently mentioned item for the group.

Appendix A:  Focus Group Script & Questions

**Lumina Study of Female Student Success
at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke**

"Hello and welcome to today's focus group.  [Introduce facilitator/assistant.]  At UNCP, we believe it is crucial to hear what students have to say about their educational experiences.  Our discussion today will center around what you feel are the factors that lead students to be successful in their educational pathways and factors that may hinder that success. We are particularly interested in what our African American and Native American students have to say because historically, they stay at UNCP past the freshmen year at a higher rate than do Euro-American students."

"Before we begin our discussion, however, let me provide some details about how the focus group will work and see if you have any questions.  Your participation in today's focus group is completely voluntary.  Your attendance here today implies your consent to participate; however, you may end participation, at any time and for any reason, without penalty.  You may also choose to withhold comment if there are topics addressed with which you are uncomfortable. There are no anticipated costs or risks associated with your participation and, in my experience, most student focus group participants appreciate the opportunity to have their "voice heard" and enjoy the discussion that takes place.  An additional benefit to you is the receipt of a UNCP bookstore card as our way of saying "thank you" for participating.  Before you leave today, you will receive that gift card and an information sheet containing my e-mail address and phone number in case you have any questions after our session ends. Also included on that sheet is contact information for the chairperson of UNCP's Institutional Review Board, a committee that works to protect the rights and welfare of research volunteers."

"In a good focus group, participants not only answer questions posed by the facilitators but also talk among themselves.  Keep in mind that this is your group and you should feel free to bring up and/or discuss anything on your mind.   We ask that you not share anything that is said in today's session with anyone outside of this room.  The facilitator and note taker(s) will also make sure that your participation is confidential.  Focus group attendees will not be identified in any report or publication about this study and no identifying information (other than gender and race) will be collected. On the table in front of each of you is a placard on which is a letter.  The note taker(s) for today's session will be summarizing statements made by members of the focus group; however, we will be using the letters to identify you in these notes and you do not need to reveal your names."

"Does anyone have questions at this time?

"Let's get started.  As a reminder, our general theme today relates to factors that contribute to a successful educational experience at UNCP."

- At UNCP, we define student success as graduating students who are prepared for rewarding careers, postgraduate education, leadership roles, and fulfilling lives.  But how do you personally define success?
- What has helped you be successful at UNCP?
- Do you think that any of these factors are unique to your race or gender?
- Are there any obstacles or challenges that have limited your success at UNCP?  That is, are there factors that might lead students to leave the university or to struggle while here?
- Do you think that any of these factors are unique to your race or gender?
- Other research has identified a few things that seem to be related to student retention and graduation.  Let me mention a few of these and see if you have any comments about their relationship to your success:
    - High school preparation
    - Finances
    - Family support
    - Feeling connected to the campus and other students/campus involvement
    - Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising
    - Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general
    - Personal goals
    - Seeing your culture reflected on campus and in courses
- What sort of activities and strategies are you aware of here at UNCP that are intended to promote student success?
- What are the things that UNCP does best in supporting student success?
- What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success?

[Make sure to allow enough time for students to think and then respond.  For all questions, be aware of time and gently bring students back on task if their discussion becomes tangential reminding them of the limited time allotted for their session. Follow up on topics as clarification or elaboration is needed. Time allotted per focus group = 75 minutes; make sure to end promptly after 75 minutes or before; thank students profusely for their time and thoughtful input.  Give each student a bookstore card and an information sheet.]

Appendix B:  Online Survey

## Lumina Study of Female Student Success
## at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

**Introduction:**  At UNCP, we believe it is crucial to hear what students have to say about their educational experiences.  This survey is intended to find out what you feel are the factors that lead students to be successful in their educational pathways at UNCP and factors that may hinder that success.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary.  You may choose to answer all of the questions or only some of the questions; any information you provide will be beneficial.  Your responses will be confidential and we encourage you to be as candid as possible in your replies.

**Questions:**

1.  At UNCP, we define student success as graduating students who are prepared for rewarding careers, postgraduate education, leadership roles, and fulfilling lives.  How do you personally define student success? [Textbox]

2.  What has helped you be successful at UNCP? [Textbox]

3.  Do you think that any of the factors that have helped you be a successful student at UNCP are unique to your race or gender? [YES, NO; if Yes, please explain---branched from Yes.]

4.  Please describe below any obstacles or challenges that have potentially limited your success at UNCP. [Textbox]

5.  Do you think that any of the factors that have limited your success at UNCP are unique to your race or gender? [YES, NO; if Yes, please explain—branched from Yes.]

6.  Research in higher education has identified a few things that seem to be related to student retention and graduation.  Listed below are a few of these.  For each one, indicate how much that factor has influenced your success as a student by dragging the "slider" to the right.  0 indicates no influence; negative numbers indicate that that factor hindered your success and positive numbers indicate that it helped you be more successful.  For example, if you feel as though you did not get adequate preparation in high school for college, you would indicate that by placing the slider under a negative number with greater under-preparation indicated by the higher numbers.  On the other hand, if you feel your high school prepared you for college,

you would move the slider to one of the positive numbers with better preparedness indicated by the higher numbers.  You will have an opportunity in the next question to provide comments.

   a.   High school preparation
   b.   Finances
   c.   Family support
   d.   Feeling connected to the campus and other students/campus involvement
   e.   Course curriculum/faculty teaching methods/advising
   f.   Being committed to UNCP and/or education in general
   g.   Personal goals
   h.   Seeing your culture reflected on campus and in courses

7. Do you have any comments related to the items listed above and how they have aided, or hindered, your success as a student?  If so, write those comments in the text box below. [Textbox]

8. What sort of activities and strategies are you aware of here at UNCP that are intended to promote student success? [Textbox]

9. What are the things that UNCP does best in supporting student success? [Textbox]

10. What are some things you wish you could change at UNCP, to better support student success? [Textbox]

**Thank you message:**  Thank you for taking the time to provide information related to student success at UNCP.  If have any questions or comments related to this survey, please don't hesitate to contact the Primary Investigator, Dr. Beverly R. King, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness at UNCP.  Her e-mail address is beverly.king@uncp.edu.