

# Thriving at the Intersections: Supporting Black Men with Bipolar Disorder in Higher Education

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We ask you to join us in creating a culture that reflects...

**Access and Inclusion**

and

**Civility and Respect**

...this week and in all aspects of our organization.

# African American Male Theory (Six Tenets)

- (1) The individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectories of African-American boys' and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach.
- (2) There is something unique about being male and of African descent.

# African American Male Theory

- (4) African-American boys and men are resilient and resistant.
- (6) The focus and purpose of study and programs concerning African-American boys and men should be the pursuit of social justice.

# Critical Race Theory

- Race is a social construct with widespread effects
- Values experiential knowledge
- Interdisciplinary

# Disability Critical Race Theory (Seven Tenets)

- (1) DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.
- (3) DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms.

# Disability Critical Race Theory

- (4) DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.
- (5) DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens

# Retention & Inclusion

- Classroom Experience
- Extracurricular Activities
- Peer Relationships

# Classroom Experience

- Students in the study:
  - Did not feel comfortable in the classroom
  - Lacked participation in class
  - Did not feel socially integrated

# Extracurricular Activities

- Students in the study:
  - Had mixed results
  - Some enjoyed being involved
  - But most did not

# Peer Relationships

- Students in this study:
  - Majority found it difficult to make friends

# Institutional Support

- Early Intervention
- Crisis Response and Medical Leave
- Accommodations

# Early Intervention

- Syllabi statements
- Check-in tools
- Workshops for faculty/staff and students

# Crisis response and medical leave

- One-stop shop and workflow
- Faculty and staff preparedness
- Restructuring medical leave

# Accommodations

- Documentation guidelines
- Provisional accommodations
- A collaborative partnership between accommodations offices and faculty/staff

## Case Study #1

When a severe depressive episode leaves his body aching and renders him unable to get out of bed, Marcus misses several consecutive weeks of class. Rather than receiving a supportive check-in, he is given an automatic deduction on his attendance score and met with a quiet implication that he simply chose not to show up. For a Black man doing everything possible to keep from falling apart in public, this rigid response treats his deep suffering as mere apathy. Examine this scenario to question how a lack of faculty training causes educators to misinterpret an unseen medical battle as a character flaw or behavioral failure.

What specific structural changes, such as validating syllabus clauses or brief peer-led workshops, are required to stop an institution from quietly eroding a student's belonging before silence hardens into despair?

## Case Study #2

Devon, a Black male undergraduate student living with bipolar disorder, approaches his university's Disability Services office seeking academic adjustments, only to be met with a rigid bureaucratic structure that demands extensive medical documentation before any support is granted. As Devon attempts to secure the necessary paperwork while managing his mood cycles, the demands of the fast-paced 15-week semester outpace him, leading him to fail courses and risk losing his financial aid. Because the institution treats accommodations with suspicion rather than assuming good faith and refuses to grant a provisional bridge of support while he navigates an uneven medical system, Devon is left to prove his worthiness while his academic belonging is quietly eroded.

Examine this scenario to question how institutional gatekeeping in disability services turns equalizing resources into inaccessible privileges. How must universities restructure their accommodation frameworks, such as implementing immediate provisional status and automatic renewals, to build a culture of access that trusts and empowers vulnerable students from day one?

# Session Evaluation

[tiny.cc/8zu1101](https://tiny.cc/8zu1101)

Thank you for attending!

Your feedback helps shape future programming.

