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The Experience of Interaction With and Reporting to the Dean of Students Office Among African American Law Students at a Private, Midwestern University

Nikeya Sharp
Advisor: Savio D. Franco, Ph.D.

Abstract
The Dean of Students Office is a primary advocate for students and provides services that support students in achieving academic and personal success. Ideally, these resources would be utilized by all students, but there are populations of students who tend to take advantage of these services less frequently. Within those populations are African American Law students. This research study explores the interaction with and reporting among African American Law students and the Dean of Students Office.

Research Question
What is the experience of interaction with and reporting to the Dean of Students office among African American Law students at a Private, Midwestern University?

Indicative Student Response
“Law school is a stressful, closed environment. The type of services that Dean of Students Office provides would be nothing short of beneficial to the law school student body.”

Methodology
This survey-based study included a 19-item anonymous online instrument taken by eight African American Law students. After reviewing the responses, themes were developed in relation to the interaction or lack thereof, with the Dean of Students Office. Based on the themes, interpretations were made on this interaction being explored.

Select Reference

Findings
71.4% Do not know how to make contact with the Dean of Students Office
28.6% Have experienced a Dean of Students concern and reported it
14.3% Feel a connection or supported on campus

Key Theme: Need for Enhanced Mental Healthcare Support in the Legal Profession
Williams (2000) identifies the discrimination and stigma in mental health in regards to the African American community.
None of the students who participated in this study had utilized the Counseling Center.
“Law school is an inherently stressful experience, so having someone to help guide students through the unique stressors associated with this program would be great. It would also help to destigmatize mental healthcare in the legal profession in general by normalizing those services.”

Conclusion and Recommendation
There seems to be a lack of knowledge of Dean of Students Office Services and how to make contact among the African American Law students. Providing direct outreach could increase interactions.

To better support this population, the Dean of Students Office could enhance case management services located within the Law School so that students will be more inclined to report concerns of crisis as well as feel more supported.