



Umoja Conference XVII Regional Student Assembly: Supporting Umoja Students as they Create their Futures

At this year's conference the community held the first regional student assemblies with the goals of uplifting and centering the students' voices in identifying and responding to areas of opportunities and challenges for Umoja scholars. This initial assembly, of 28 current and former high school and community college Umoja scholars, was focused on the question of how can our respective high schools, colleges, and universities support our acceleration of achieving our academic and life goals? This was time for us to meet and network with Umoja students and talk about experiences and what we want our future academic experiences to be.

During the small group discussions and community share outs, several themes emerged that reflected our current Umoja scholars' experiences.

- **Imposter Syndrome** - Students are struggling to feel confident in who they are. Students are not getting the mentorship or support on campus to feel confident in the academic and campus spaces.
- **Finding Community** - Umoja has become their trusted community where they can be their authentic self and find academic and community resources.
- **Intergenerational support and legacy building** - Family and community have a positive influence on student identifying and actualizing academic and career goals, expectations of excellence, and awareness of their ability to mentor others.

One of our biggest desires is to expand the reach of Umoja and make a deeper impact on the lifetime outcomes for Black and African American students. We want to do our absolute best to help students transform their lives as the leaders, thinkers, creators, and advancers of our collective future! This journey that we're on together, this journey to your best life starts here—in community, in Umoja. And while there is no telling as to where this journey will take us, one thing is for certain: we're still going. In fact, we need to go together, and we need to accelerate students' pathways to success.

Reflect on facilitators and students' voices about what was shared during the regional assemblies and consider your work and how you will continue to support, advocate, and uplift our Umoja students as they work to actualize their futures.

In Community

In service and community,
Umoja Annual Conference XVII Curriculum Committee
Trelisa R. Glazatov
De'Von Walker
Myia Williams

When you think about finishing college, what things come to mind?

Our Students...

Students are motivated by the stable life that awaits them after degree completion. The possession of a degree, for students, symbolizes the strength and determination that is required to live a life full of autonomy and comfort. Beyond the freedom to choose valuable work and have “lit” experiences, students are motivated by the power that, and respect graduates have. To students, having a degree could mean the difference between having the agency to implement changes, and being silenced in the workplace; the difference between going on an international trip to present at a conference, and scraping pennies to get your car repaired.

We must then consider...

Our students may need additional support in having a vision for their future and life after college. In some assembly rooms, there was not much conversation around life after college because students were more focused on the process of getting through college and the barriers they have gone through. More intentional programs or workshops that help students map out their post college plan can have an positive impact.

We must consider our role in preparing students for adulthood, so that their expectations are situated within the context of realities. We want for our students to freedom dream as wild as their hearts and imaginations allow. However, we do want them to know that most of us still scrape up for car repairs, on our way to the international conference. Those of us who have mastered the art of financial preparation have done so by tapping into skillsets and knowledge bases that are not typically suggested to striving college students. How can we as a community help our students to be better prepared for post graduate life than we were. Consider all of the things that “no one ever told you to expect about becoming an adult.” Somehow, we have to ground their expectations while simultaneously filling their dreams and providing resources to help them achieve their desires.

What is your idea of academic success? What is your idea of life success?

Our Students...

Student Personal Share – Dual Enrollment High School Student

“So I wanted to graduate early. I’m still a high school student, and I’m a community college student at the same time. So it’s basically cutting down time for where to come back. When I go for my Bachelor’s, I only have to do two years. And my dreams is to create tiny homes for the homeless students. And that does create a lot of time and effort. So I thought, well, if I wanted to achieve that, then I needed to cut down the time on my education but still achieve greater things.”

Student Personal Share – Non Traditional Student

“I’ve been in school a long time, I’m a non-traditional student, also, I try to leave school and always end up coming back. So the angle is to become a professor. But I believe that we’re always being and becoming at the same time. And I’m currently a teacher’s assistant for a professor who is teaching what I would love to teach in the future. So I’m already kind of doing what I want to do. So that’s why I say is the is the journey, you can always be what you want to become. Just keep on being it. And eventually you become”

Student Personal Share – Teaching to See Impact

“I like teaching. I would do this for free. And that was two to three years ago. Fast forward to today, I’m assessing on panels. And one of the students I helped write his college entrance paper to go to HBCU is on a panel here in this program, so it is good that you could see what you’re doing. Not just bless your life, but bless the life of somebody else. Now that young man I know his history. And I remember when he was talking about being a fireman. A lot of people tell him he couldn’t. He’s a semester away from graduating from an HBCU. So that’s why I do this is what is empowering to me is to see it to see what you do made and made manifest. Real life it’s not just something you read about this stuff that you see happen.”

In other assembly rooms, our students were generally unable to answer this question. One student shared a remarkable story about how their life transformed during the pandemic: earning 6 AAs, a real estate license, selling their first condo, and eliminating student debt. This story was affirmed and celebrated by the assembly facilitator and another Umoja Practitioner. No students, however, celebrated this scholars' accomplishments, not via chat or microphone. Choosing to believe in the Ethic of Love, I (the facilitator) felt the room and the students' silence came of as intimidated admiration, too stunned to celebrate, as they pondered "how this guy did so much while we all struggle to grasp our own ideas of success?"

We must then consider...

We must better instill the Afrocentric value of Nommo so that students feel empowered to generate and define their own ideas of success, and furthermore, so that students are proud of their ideas even as they learn of other people's pathways to success. What I am terming "intimidated admiration" is a phenomenon that can be witnessed in social media settings and beyond, whereas our current access to snippets of everyone's life has yielded hurtful cycles of comparison and loss of joy. With comparison being the thief of joy, we must consider how to develop our students to the point that they have a certainty of self and a firm belief in their own ideas for a successful and meaningful life.

Our students are driven by service and seeing the impact that they create. From helping students like them to more broad community problems like homelessness, our scholars embody the Umoja Practice of Gifting. How can we provide more opportunities for our students to create and support through service and collective efforts?

Why are you choosing college?

Our Students...

Umoja students want recognizable power. As stated by one of our student scholars, "...those letters they speak volume, it makes it makes them have to pay attention and recognize you because I have some letters behind my name, and [now] you respect me and [must] hear what I have to say." Beyond power, students want deeply to find themselves through their college experiences.

Student Person Share – UC Umoja Ambassador

"I can share my experience. I don't really know how to do my camera here. It's telling me it's doing an app. So I don't know. But for me, um, my mom's a professor. And a little bit about her story is she was in foster care. And one thing that she did take away from her parents throughout that experience was that education was the tool that was going to help her leave that kind of like generational trauma behind and use that to, like, perpetuate success and move our family kind of forward and grow. And my whole life. Literally since I was in preschool. The expectation was to go to college and succeed. And I could have a degree and underwater upside-down basket weaving. But as long as I had a paper with my name on it, that would entitle me to certain freedoms and liberties that could give me security as I transition to like adulthood and real life. So that's something that's been ingrained in me since birth. And I'm here, I'm transferred to UCI. I'm a current fourth year, so I'm almost there."

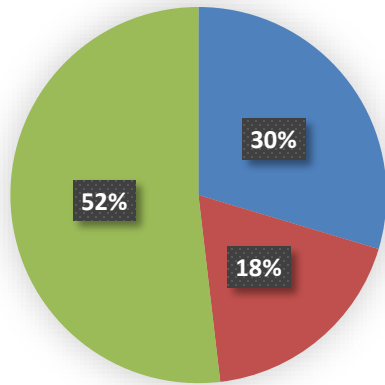
Student Personal Share – Not Good Enough for college

"Someone told me I wasn't college material. Well, I proved them wrong. I'm a nontraditional student I after I graduated high school in which an army was in barber for a long time now decided to go back to school. Run to the veteran program that was tested over say that 30 days into end and lady come into office and said, Mr. Bowman, you're not college material. Again, like I said, I'm nontraditional. So, I did they didn't do this when I was in high school. I was a, a husband and father at the time. And I'm not only gonna prove them wrong, but my I've been on the honor roll at every college I've been to. So that's how we do we, you know that it reminds me of what we have to do as a people. Or they've given us a narrative about who and what we should be or aspire to. So, they limit us or they put you in a box and you stay there."

We must then consider...

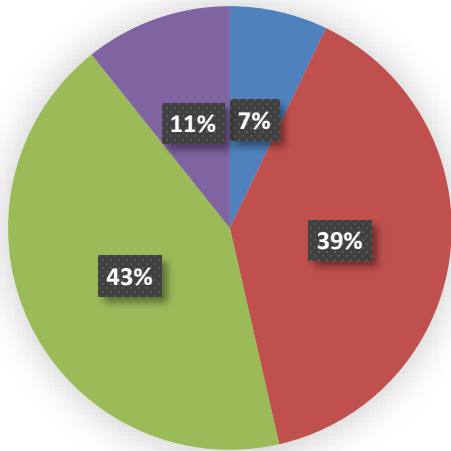
We must consider the evolution of self-identifiers and commit to encircling diversity in the self-actualizing choices that students make. We, then, must be careful not to allow our understandings African traditions and values interfere with the flowering of students who identify in ways that challenge binary thinking. Furthermore, we must listen to students *and believe them* if they express feeling marginalized within our culture and/or content.

What best describes your experience as a student attending college?



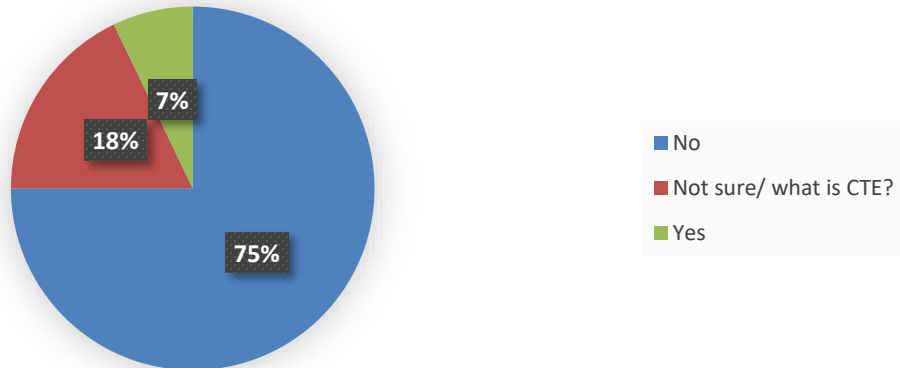
- I am returning to college after leaving college for more than a year
- I started college more than 2 years after completing high school/GED
- I will start/started community college right after high school

What is your main reason for going to college?

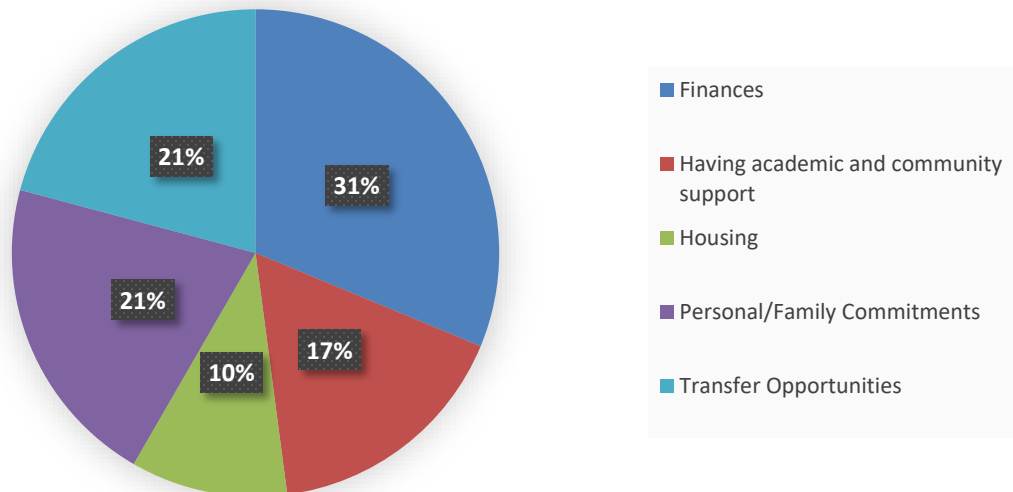


- Going to college for additional financial support
- Going to college was my idea for personal growth and development
- Going to college was my idea in order to get into a great career of my choice
- I was encouraged to go by family (parents/siblings/guardians)

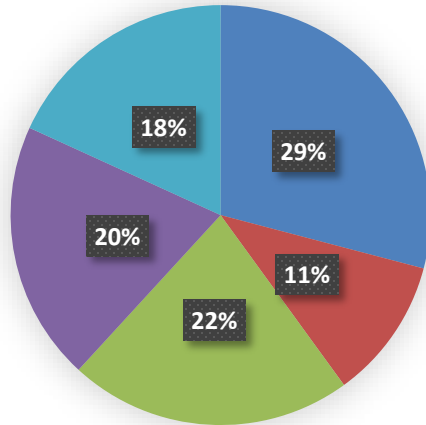
Are you enrolled in a Career Technical Education Program?



What will determine whether you finish your Associates Degree or Certificate?

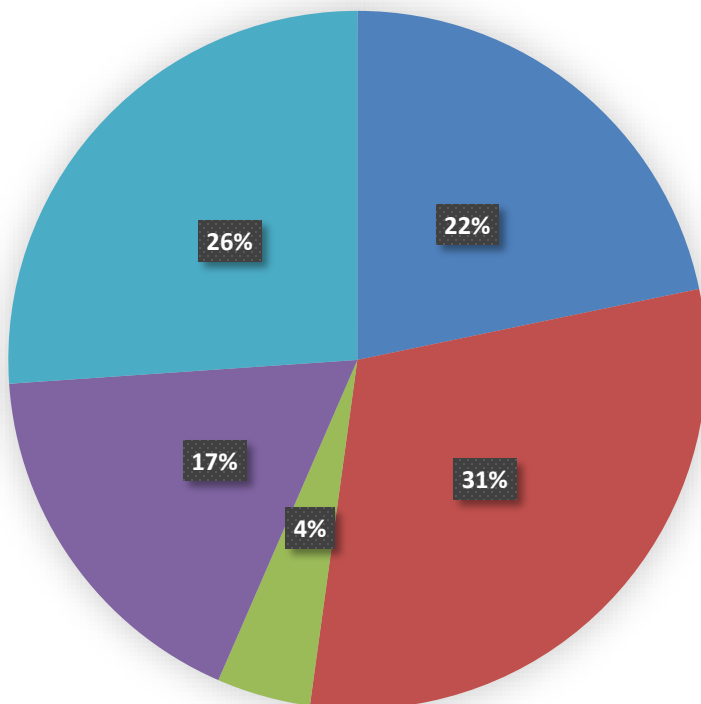


What are the most important areas that you consider when thinking about becoming career ready?



- Being financially stable
- Entrepreneurial opportunities
- Internships/Work experience opportunities
- Level of education that is needed for the profession
- Upward mobility within your profession

What is your preferred transfer pathway?



- I have no preference for where I transfer, as long as I continue my education
- I would like to transfer to a CSU Campus after completing community college
- I would like to transfer to a private university/college after completing community college
- I would like to transfer to a UC Campus after completing community college
- I would like to transfer to an Historically Black College or University (HBCU) after completing community college