



Umoja At A Glance

Understanding The Impact of Umoja Campus Programs' Culturally Responsive Education Model

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“In traditional African society, education was a collective, communal function. Children were the responsibility of everyone in the family and the larger community. No child was allowed to fail; the group’s welfare depended on each person succeeding. This way of learning and teaching remains a model for how we must uplift the African child in modern times.”

- Asa G. Hilliard III, SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind, 1997

History and Reach

Umoja, a Kiswahili word meaning unity, was founded nearly two decades ago by California Community College counselors and instructors. They witnessed the disparities in academic success for African American students and decided to form a coalition of support resources. Under the umbrella of Umoja, they combined models and tools to create the 18 Umoja practices built on the foundations of liberatory education and ancestral knowledge, rituals, and practices akin to those of the African diaspora.

The Umoja model has developed into a college success campus program, faculty/staff training, and student development programs serving 73 California Community Colleges, colleges in Washington State, the California State University system, the University of California system, a Historically Black Graduate Institution, and one high school pilot district. Umoja has grown enrollment by 25% annually for three consecutive years, serving over 15,000 scholars in 2023-24, and aims to serve 100,000 students by 2030.

In 2023, the California State Legislature commissioned an evaluation of the Umoja Campus Programs executed by the Umoja Community Education Foundation (UCEF) on California Community College campuses. Education Insights at Sacramento State University completed the evaluation as an external evaluator. The full 146-page report can be [viewed here](#). Building on previous research conducted by The RP Group ([Umoja Evaluation Phases I and II](#)), the report provides clear evidence that Umoja Campus Programs’ considerable impact on increasing matriculation for Umoja scholars compared to their non-Umoja peers.

Looking Forward

Umoja’s transformative impact on Black and other students’ success is evident in academic and psychological outcomes presented on the following page.. Umoja Campus Programs create lasting change in students’ educational journeys by fostering a sense of belonging, enhancing self-efficacy, and increasing persistence. Our results underscore the importance of sustained investment in Umoja’s model, professional development, and institutional support. As Umoja grows, its commitment to culturally responsive education will remain powerful in closing equity gaps and empowering future generations of scholars to come.



Academic Outcomes

Umoja Campus Programs has impacted academic outcomes significantly, as noted in Figures 1 and 2. Students who participated in Umoja outperformed their non-Umoja peers on various metrics, including course completion rates, persistence rates, and degree completion and transfer rates within three years. Umoja scholars achieved a first-year course success rate 1.2 times higher than their non-Umoja peers and persisted in the following term 1.5 times more often.

Umoja’s success in the classroom points to the impact of its transformational model, which engages both student services professionals and instructional faculty and has curricular and co-curricular components.

Psychological Outcomes

Self-efficacy and self-concept are key to academic success, particularly for Black and other students facing systemic barriers. Self-efficacy, defined as someone’s belief in their ability to succeed – drives motivation and persistence. At the same time, self-concept shapes a student’s identity, belonging, confidence, and sense of vision for themselves.

At Umoja, we define self-concept as influenced by representation, cultural rituals, connection ancestral lineage and societal narratives, and affirming educational conditions generated through the Umoja practices. We define self-efficacy as a culturally grounded belief in one’s ability to achieve, sustain motivation, and persist toward academic and personal goals. It is shaped by communal support, ancestral connection, positive representation, and the deliberate, affirming education practices at the core of Umoja.

As presented in Figure 3 the recent evaluation uncovered the significant impact on the self-concept and self-efficacy of Umoja scholars. A survey assessment designed to gather information about scholars’ experiences before and after participating in the Umoja program was used. UCEF pioneered a student self-concept assessment designed specifically for culturally relevant pedagogy, discovering, on a scale of 0-100, a 22 percentage-point increase in self-concept.



Figure 1: Umoja students' 3-year success rates in comparison to non-participating peers

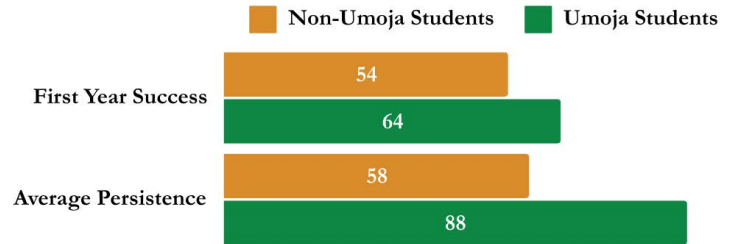


Figure 2: Umoja student first-year course success and average persistence from the prior term in comparison to their peers

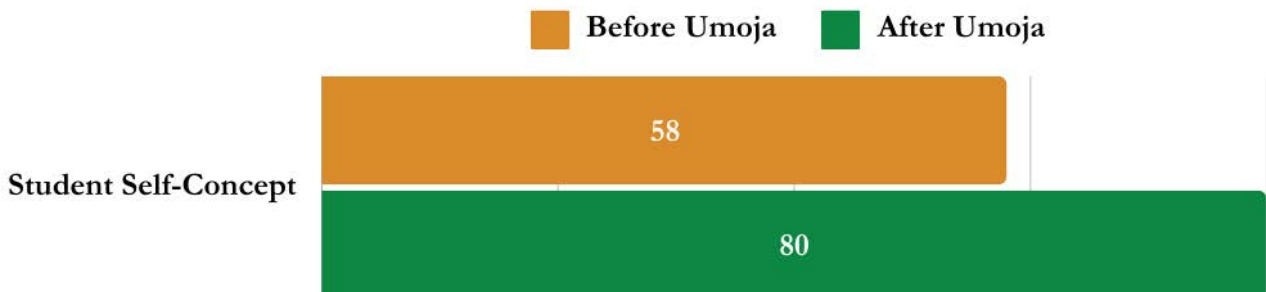


Figure 3: Perceived student self-concept before and after joining Umoja (N=546) T(548)=19.62, P<0.001, 95% CI OF THE DIFFERENCE [19.74, 24.13].

Umoja’s model counteracts the negative impacts of the historical disenfranchisement of Black and other students by integrating culturally responsive teaching, mentorship, and community support to strengthen students’ self-concept and self-efficacy. The evaluation shows that Umoja significantly boosts students’ psychological well-being, enhancing academic self-efficacy, expanding self-concept, and fostering resilience, belonging, and achievement.