A STUDY OF WHY A SELECT GROUP OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS PERSISTED TO BACCALAUREATE ATTAINMENT

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by

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ABSTRACT

Based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, this dissertation presents the findings of original research into the factors that influenced the baccalaureate degree attainment of a group of African American Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) students. Several members of this group of participants were surveyed and interviewed to determine why they, unlike many other traditional-aged African American students at predominantly white colleges and universities, persisted to baccalaureate degree attainment. The survey and interview questions used in this study were constructed using factors that Tinto (1993) and other researchers identified as influencing persistence. The research results indicated that these participants attributed their enrollment and persistence to degree attainment primarily to the encouragement and support of their parents. The influence provided by faculty as parental surrogates was a secondary source of encouragement. The results of this study support the prior research regarding the important role parents and faculty play in academic engagement and degree attainment but draw into question the benefits of peer interaction and institutional behaviors on baccalaureate degree attainment for these African American students.

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW

Introduction

"The bedrock of America's competitiveness is a well-educated and skilled workforce" (Bush, 2006). Regrettably, even though the demand for a more highly-educated work force is increasing, college and university persistence rates have remained relatively unchanged, at roughly 45%, for more than a century. Furthermore, "there are notable variations in persistence rates when the ethnicity of the student is introduced" (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarrella, & Hagedorn, 1999, p. 134). Almost all minority group graduation rates lagging behind those of white students (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). In particular, "African Americans are 20% less likely to complete college within a six-year period" (Cabrera, et al., 1999, p. 135).

If higher education is to meet the emerging technological needs of the nation and the world, persistence and educational attainment rates across all racial groups must improve. In addition, as U.S. society becomes increasingly more diverse (Davis, et al., 2004), the higher education of greater numbers of minority students is essential to the nation's economic and social future (Balz & Esten, 1998). For these reasons, factors affecting minority enrollment and persistence to graduation must be identified and addressed, especially for African American students.

There is a significant gap between African American and white post-secondary enrollment patterns. According to the College Board (Baum & Ma, 2007), from the late 1990s to 2005 the gap between the immediate college enrollment rates of African American and white high school graduates has increased from about eight to twelve

percentage points. “In 2005, 71 percent of white high school graduates (those who had graduated within the past 12 months) were enrolled in college. In contrast, 59 percent of black high school graduates…went directly to college” (Baum, & Ma, 2007, p. 31). Thus, despite increasing high school graduation rates, African American students continue to be disadvantaged in the college enrollment process.

The educational persistence figures follow a similar trend. Although approximately 50 percent of traditional-age college freshmen persist to graduation (Resch & Hall, 2002), a 2001-2002 study conducted by the American Council on Education revealed that the rates of graduation vary by race. Almost sixty percent of white students graduate within six years of enrolling in college, but the graduation rate for African Americans is less than forty percent (Smith, 2004). In 2007, the College Board affirmed that this graduation gap still exists; “white… students are more likely to earn degrees than black…students” (Baum & Ma, 2007, p. 29). To close this gap, the U.S. Department of Education suggests that institutions of higher education need to more thoroughly examine the factors that affect persistence and accept the responsibility for ensuring that the students they admit actually persist to graduation (2006).

After a discussion of the conceptual framework for this study, this chapter will introduce the relevant literature on the factors that affect college student persistence that is more extensively reviewed in Chapter 2, followed by the purpose of this study, and the research questions. It will conclude with an introduction to the plan of research that will be more fully developed in Chapter 3.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's Model of Student Departure

Because the rates of degree attainment have long remained unchanged, student departure has been studied "for more than seventy years" (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004, p. v). It continues to be an active topic of research; "indeed, one could argue that student departure has been the central focus of higher education research" (Tierney, 1992, p. 604). Over the years, various theoretical approaches, such as organizational, psychological, economic, and societal theories have been used to frame this research (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000).

More than three decades ago Tinto (1975, 1993) also began to study student departure. Until his research, "the vast majority of retention research involved correlation studies with no grounding of findings in a conceptual… framework" (Halpin, 1990, p. 23). Tinto's research culminated in an interactionalist theory of student departure, meaning that persisting to degree attainment or departing higher education "is a complicated interplay among many factors" (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005, p. 108) that are continually in interaction with one another (Tinto, 1993). According to Braxton and Hirschy (2005, p. 109):

> Tinto regards student departure as a longitudinal process during which the individual student ascribes meaning to his or her interactions with the formal and informal dimensions of a given college or university. Such interactions transpire between the individual student and the academic and social systems of a college or university.

The model "focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on the events which occur within the institution following entry and /or which immediately precede entrance to it" (Tinto, 1993, p. 112). It recognizes that pre-college characteristics, such as family and

community background (e.g., socioeconomic status, parental education), individual attributes (e.g. race, age, gender), educational experiences and achievements (high school GPA, awards), and commitments to educational goals directly influence a student's academic and social integration into the institution. Institutional experiences that increase academic and social integration lead to greater levels of institutional commitment and commitment to college completion; the higher the level of these two commitments, the greater the student's probability of persisting to graduation. Thus, academic and social integration enhance student persistence and a lack of congruence between the student and the academic and social systems causes departure. Students who voluntarily leave school before completing their degree do so because of a failure to integrate socially and intellectually into the life of the institution (Leppel, 2001). It is this integration model that will form the conceptual framework for this study.

To add a level of complexity to the model, Tinto (1993) suggests that throughout their educational journey, students re-evaluate their commitments to leave or to stay. Each stage of the journey presents different challenges and experiences that may influence a student's ultimate decision to leave or to stay.

According to Tinto (1993), academic integration is largely determined by the student's academic performance and intellectual development. Academic performance and intellectual development are affected by pre-college and within-college learning experiences, including interaction with faculty and staff in and outside of the classroom. Social integration, on the other hand, primarily is a function of peer group interaction (Milem & Berger, 1997). It is affected by formal and informal peer relations in the classroom and in other institutional (extracurricular) settings (Tinto, 1993).

Criticism of Tinto's Model

Over the years there has been criticism of Tinto's (1993) theoretical model. Researchers have suggested that "the Tinto model does not include all the variables needed to understand student departure behavior" (Braxton, 2000, p. 62). Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda, (1993) agree that the predictive validity of Tinto's model has been proven with respect to the effects of some pre-college factors (e.g., parental education and high-school preparation), but they assert that there exists a major gap in Tinto's (1993) theory and the related research with respect to the role of:

> external factors in shaping perceptions, commitments, and preferences. This topic is particularly relevant from both a policy analysis and an institutional perspective, given the different social and institutional programs aimed at stimulating enrollment and preventing attrition by addressing variables other than institutional ones (that is, ability to pay, and parental support) (p. 124).

Braxton, et al., (2000) agree that a model that is more inclusive of additional theoretical concepts can lead to a greater understanding of student departure decisions.

Other criticisms of the model also have been raised. The constructs of academic and social integration are pivotal to Tinto's interactionalist theory, yet through empirical research, Braxton, et al., (2004) found only modest support for the construct of academic integration and the construct of social integration remained unexplained. As a result, they too have suggested that Tinto's theory is in need of revision.

Tinto's model, which is rooted in the work of two well recognized social theorists, has been criticized at the foundational level by Tierney (1992). Tierney suggests that using anthropological terms to describe individual behavior, such as voluntary departure, is problematic; "from an anthropological standpoint to emphasize the 'individual' at the expense of the 'group' or the 'culture' is backwards" (p. 610). He

also asserts that if social integration into an institution is regarded as a 'rite of passage,' or a ritual, Tinto's model misinterprets the anthropological notions of ritual. According to Tierney (1992), rituals are used to acculturate the young into their own society, whereas social integration for racial minorities attending predominantly white institutions often is a cross-cultural experience.

Furthermore, because an interactionalist retention theory:

> adheres to some of the basic premises of the acculturation/assimilation framework, such as separation and incorporation, several researchers have challenged the way these processes have been conceptualized in relation to explaining minority student retention in college. In particular, the assumption that minority students must separate from their cultural realities and take the responsibility to become incorporated into the colleges' academic and social fabric…to succeed (with little or no concern)…to the notion that minority students are often able to operate in multiple contexts (Braxton, 2000, p. 129).

Although the critics suggest a need for revision of Tinto's theory (Braxton, et al., 2004), at this time, none suggest completely abandoning it. Braxton and Hirschy (2005, pp. 108-109) assert that this is because the critics agree that:

> theory…gives meaning to putatively isolated factors or groups of factors because it offers an understanding of the connections among such factors… [When examining factors that relate to student persistence, Tinto's theory is used] as a framework for understanding the connections among the factors deemed as empirically reliable.

Indeed, Tinto's (1993) student departure model is the "most sophisticated and widely accepted model in use" (Tierney, 1992, p. 615), and with more than 775 citations, it enjoys "paradigmatic stature… Paradigmatic status connotes the considerable consensus among scholars of college student departure concerning the potential validity of Tinto's theory. Consensus [is assumed] because scholars extensively test and cite Tinto's theory" (Braxton, et al., 2004, p. 7). Moreover, when examining persistence of minority students,

"the research on minority college students is relatively young" (Braxton, 2000, p. 130). As a result, the validity of Tinto's theory has not been tested "to account for student departure across different racial or ethnic groups… [and this] remains an open question for scholars to pursue" (Braxton, et al., 2004, p.18).

Thus, notwithstanding the criticism of Tinto's model (1993), because it continues to be widely used by educational scholars, it was selected over other conceptual models to provide a framework for this researcher to gain greater understanding of the factors that affect degree attainment for African American students. For this study, however, factors external to Tinto's model, such as institutional type (Balz & Esten, 1998), student involvement (Milem & Berger, 1997), and financial aid (Hu & St. John, 2001) have been included for consideration, creating a modified Tinto model. Overall, this study will contribute original data which may help to address student departure for African American students.

Factors Affecting Persistence to Graduation

Despite the passage of time, there has been a persistent gap in the college enrollment and graduation rates of African American students when compared to white students (Baum & Ma, 2007). Several factors contribute to this gap, including socioeconomic and family factors, academic preparation and performance, social integration, and institutional behaviors such as faculty contact, classroom experiences, institutional culture, type, and control, and financial aid.

Socioeconomic Status and Family Factors

Socioeconomic status has an impact on African American students in a number of ways. Bennett and Xie (2003) found that lower levels of education often equate to lower

socioeconomic status. In turn, African American students from lower socioeconomic families are more likely to attend lower quality elementary and high schools. These schools often do not have the same educational resources available to students as do the higher quality schools that many white students attend. This inequity leads to lower rates of college enrollment for racial and ethnic minority students. In addition, student poverty is important to consider when examining academic achievement. Students with the lowest level of achievement, as measured by standardized tests, are more often enrolled in high-poverty schools, and African American students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools than are white students (Garibaldi, 1997). Lower levels of academic achievement also affect college enrollment.

Perna and Titus (2005) agree that African American students are disadvantaged in the college enrollment process. They found, however, that parental involvement, not just parental education, is positively related to college enrollment and may offer some hope for increasing college enrollment. On the other hand, Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2004) have demonstrated that parental involvement is more likely to increase with higher levels of parental education and in general, low income families have lower levels of parental education.

In a study of first-generation college students, a classification into which many African American students fall, Balz and Esten (1998) reported that parents with lower levels of education often do not see the value of higher education. In addition, they "do not understand the postsecondary process or are unaware of the availability of financial assistance. Thus, they may be intimidated by their children's efforts to enter these

unknown institutions" (p. 335). This contributes to lower levels of African American enrollment in higher education.

These studies indicate that socioeconomic status is a complex factor that is very important to educational attainment. In general, socioeconomic status is related to one's educational level. It follows that the quality of schools that children attend is related to parental education. School quality is related to students' level of academic preparation and the level of educational support, counseling and mentoring, including educational expectations and aspirations, offered to students. As a result, low-income students may not be adequately prepared for higher education and are likely to have lower educational goals.

Academic Factors

According to Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, academic integration is in part determined by academic performance and the level of the students' intellectual development. Academic performance and intellectual development are influenced by academic preparation and achievement prior to entering college. If the level of academic preparation and performance is low at the time African American students enroll in college, it is not surprising that persistence to graduation lags behind that of white students.

In researching nursing education in California, Seago and Spetz (2005) suggest that high school preparation is important to degree attainment. Their findings show that community college programs with high percentages of African American students draw from areas where high school preparation is poor. As a result, these students have greater difficulty with the curriculum and do not perform well on tests. They also noted that

programs with high percentages of African American students have a higher attrition rate, which is attributed to poor high school preparation.

While studying the importance of financial aid for minority students, Hu and St. John (2001) also found that college grades and other college experiences largely explain the disparity in persistence rates among racial and ethnic groups. Thus, it appears that academic and institutional experiences feed off of each other and are necessary to degree attainment.

Social Factors

Tinto (1993) theorizes that social integration, particularly in the first year, is positively related to persistence and to graduation. Unfortunately, in predominantly white institutions "students of color may find it especially difficult to find and become a member of a supportive community within the college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 74). Expanding on Tinto's work, Milem and Berger (1997) reported that involvement with peers in extracurricular activities aids social integration and serves as a predictor for first-year success; the first hurdle of student persistence to degree attainment.

Thomas (2000) studied social integration as a function of social networks, as opposed to individual social ties, and found that broader social networks are better for student integration. Gardner (2005) reported similar findings in a study of minority nursing students. She found that low numbers of minority students limit social networks and can become a barrier to education for some students. Without a peer group, many students do not persist because of feelings of isolation.

When examining social interaction for African Americans students specifically, Watson, Terrell, and Wright (2002) found that in general, all African American students

were susceptible to feelings of isolation, but particularly first-generation African American students. These studies indicate that sufficient numbers of African American students, a 'critical mass,' in the classroom and on campus are important to persistence. Critical mass is the point at which institutions exceed token numbers of African American students within its student body to create significant opportunities for personal interaction (Townsend, 1994).

Institutional Behaviors

As stated, central to Tinto's (1993) theory is the proposition that student persistence is influenced by the interaction of certain pre-college entry characteristics with the academic and social systems of the institution. Institutional behaviors, however, influence both the formal and informal academic and social systems and thus, student integration. For this reason, Lang (1992) states that the lack of a comprehensive commitment to institutional behaviors that create hospitable and supportive environments and allow African American students to interact in a meaningful way within these systems is responsible for lower graduation rates at many post-secondary institutions. The research of Watson, et al., (2002) supports this supposition. They found that to persist to graduation, African American students must connect with the institution and to do so they first must feel that the institution is non-discriminatory.

Tinto (1993) agrees that institutional behavior is necessary to student retention. His research indicates that student persistence stems from institutional attachment, essentially the loyalty or individual commitment to the college or university the student attends. Thus, institutions that are inclusive of all students, and that place "an emphasis upon the construction of supportive social and educational communities that actively

involve students in learning" (Tinto, 2005) increase student loyalty and engender greater attachment and commitment to the institution, which in turn increase persistence. As a result, to increase persistence, institutions must commit to behaviors that focus on the social and emotional well-being of racial and ethnic minority students by being attentive to their institutional experiences and making those experiences meaningful. Such a commitment includes a number of components, including the actions of faculty.

Research on student-faculty interaction supports the notion that student success is related to establishing a relationship with faculty. Pascarrella and Terenzini (2005) noted a particularly strong relationship between student-faculty interaction and "every academic attainment outcome" (p. 417), including degree attainment. Watson, et al., (2002) affirmed that faculty members provide a necessary support system for African American students as well, particularly for African American students on predominantly white campuses.

Classroom experiences beyond interaction with faculty are also critical to success. Tinto (1997) found that persistence is positively associated with the increased effort in learning that results from academic and social experiences in the classroom. Student "engagement in the community of the classroom becomes a gateway for subsequent student involvement in the larger academic and social communities of the college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 132); students who are able to socially integrate into the intellectual life of the college are more likely to graduate. Classroom experiences with peers are a key part of social integration for African American students. Thus, because the classroom experience helps students make sense of their collegiate experience (Watson, et al., 2002), faculty members must promote classroom environments which allow African

American students to connect with their peers as individuals and with the university as a whole (Davis, et al., 2004).

Educational attainment for some African American students often depends on academic support and success programs. Institutional support programs, however, must effectively integrate and not further separate minority students from the mainstream institution (Tinto, 2005). With respect to these support programs, Balz and Esten (1998) reported that "*TRIO* programs help [students] to overcome the social and cultural barriers to higher education" (p. 334). Although *TRIO* programs increase persistence to graduation for first-generation, low-income students, students generally require five years to graduate. The time, however, varies by institutional type and control; degree attainment rates for African American students at private four-year institutions exceeded those at public four-year institutions. This research suggests that the institutional support for African American students enrolled in private institutions is superior to that of public institutions. This may, in part, be due to institutional size.

Students who are enrolled in smaller institutions have a greater opportunity for faculty contact and to be more involved in campus activities. As a result, they are more likely to integrate into the social and academic systems of the institution and persist to graduation (Watson, et al., 2002). In general, public institutions tend to be larger than private institutions, and at present, the majority of African American students are enrolled in public institutions (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). This may negatively affect African American persistence.

As early as 1981, Thomas found that financial aid is strongly related to four-year graduation rates. When compared with all other variables examined, only college grades

and high school rank were more strongly related than financial aid. Thomas concluded that African American students' ability to succeed academically is largely dependent on financial aid being available to them.

A decade later, in a cohort study of African American college students, Robinson (1990) showed that students from two-parent households with greater economic resources persisted at a higher rate, suggesting a critical need for financial aid to provide the resources that the family cannot. More recent studies also indicate that for all students, financial aid is important to educational persistence (Hu & St. John, 2001).Seemingly, the availability of adequate financial aid significantly influences African American persistence to graduation.

Financial aid for African American students in itself, however, is not enough; the form of the aid is also a consideration. Research shows that student persistence is positively related to non-repayable grants, merit-based scholarship aid, gifts, and work-study funds (College Board, 2004b), whereas loan aid has a negative impact on African American students. The impact is particularly strong for low-income, first-generation African American students (Somers, et al., 2004). Unfortunately, over time, grant aid to students has decreased and loan aid has increased (Paulsen & St. John, 2002).

Compounding the problem for African American students with financial need is the increase in the cost of higher education. On the whole, from 1983 to 2003, the price of college outpaced median income for families with college-aged children (College Board, 2004b). These large increases in tuition have caused the number of black students who have dropped out before graduation to double in the decade from 1982-1992 (Lang, 1992). As the cost of post-secondary education has continued to increase, costs have

become a growing barrier for African American students who are more likely to come from low-income families (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2005).

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to learn why some African American students persist to degree attainment while many others do not. The literature demonstrates that multiple factors influence student persistence in general, and particularly from the freshman to the sophomore year, the time-frame when "the largest proportion of institutional leaving occurs" (Tinto, 1993, p. 14). However, "major gaps in the persistence literature exist on student retention past the first year in college" (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005, p. 129), and there is a paucity of studies of African American students who have persisted to graduation, particularly at predominantly white institutions, where, as a result of legislative and programmatic initiatives, most African American students are now enrolled. In fact, as African American enrollment in predominantly white institutions has increased, enrollments at Historically Black institutions have "dropped drastically. At present, they enroll [only] 16% of African Americans at the undergraduate level" (Palmer & Gasman, 2008, p. 52).

Furthermore, the research that has been conducted on African American students who have persisted to degree attainment at predominantly white institutions is missing the answer to why these students persisted despite experiencing adverse feelings such as alienation or isolation (Watson, et al., 2002). This suggests a gap in the literature that this study will attempt to fill.

This study examined the background and pre-college characteristics (e.g., parental education, high school resources, and academic preparation) and collegiate experiences

(e.g., classroom and social experiences) of selected African American college graduates who participated in one of two 2007 Council of Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) Summer Institutes. These annual summer institutes are pre-law school enrichment programs hosted by CLEO-selected, American Bar Association accredited law schools.

CLEO is a non-profit project of the American Bar Association Fund for Justice and Education that is committed to diversifying the legal profession by expanding legal education opportunities for minority, low-income, and disadvantaged groups. As such, CLEO programs include students from all minority groups, as well as low-income and disadvantaged white students (CLEO, 2007).

Understanding the experiences of African American students who persisted to graduation is necessary information so that institutional policies and practices may be developed to increase degree attainment for other African American students. This understanding may also contribute to a re-examination of policies or programs that consume resources but offer little help. Overall, this knowledge may be used to help close the persistence to graduation gap between African American and white students.

Research Questions

To add to the understanding of the factors that influence African American persistence to degree attainment this research addressed the following questions:

1. Considering the pre-college characteristics and the institutional experiences of the participants, which characteristics and experiences best describe these African American students who have persisted to baccalaureate attainment at predominantly white colleges and universities within six years of high school graduation?

2. Given their minority status within their undergraduate institutions, why did these African American students persist to graduation?

Research Design

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure guided the data collection and analysis of this research. Thus, a survey instrument, based on a modified Tinto model (1993), was used to gather information from the participants related to their pre-college characteristics (e.g., parental levels of education, and academic achievement in high school) and institutional experiences (e.g., academic experiences, social relationships, student-faculty relationships and financial aid) to derive a quantitative portrait of the characteristics and experiences of the African American participants in this study. The survey questions were then grouped into categories: support for educational attainment (pre-college), support for educational attainment (while in college), social engagement, academic engagement, institutional behaviors, and general demographic information for the purpose of data analysis. Data analysis of these groups was conducted using the statistical Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 2007, version 16.0).

After the survey was administered, individual interviews were conducted to learn why these participants persisted to degree attainment and to gain a greater understanding of the meaning they gave to their college experiences. The interview questions were constructed by incorporating the same factors used in the survey instrument: support for educational attainment, social engagement, academic engagement, and institutional behaviors. Interview responses pertaining to major, GPA, degree granting institution, time to completion, and transfer status were verified through record review.

Interviews are frequently used to collect data in case-study research. A case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003, pp. 13-14). Case study is "an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed…Case studies…are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data" Tellis, 1997, ¶1). The case-study is a commonly used method of qualitative research and the more "the question seeks to explore 'how' or 'why' events occur, the more the case study [is] relevant" (Yin, 1997, p. 233). Thus, case study research provides a means to explore and gain an understanding of complex and sensitive social or human problems (Trochim, 2006) such as educational persistence for African American students.

Creswell (2002) further describes a case study as an in-depth exploration of a single unit; an individual, a group, an event, or process—a bounded system—and recommends the use of case-study methodology if the purpose is deep understanding of that bounded system. Being bounded "means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (p. 485). Accordingly, boundaries, or limitations, may be created around the participants under study.

As stated, Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure guided the data collection and analysis of this research. Because this "theoretical model [was] tested on traditional students, only first time freshmen…" (Cabrera, et al., 1993, p. 129), this study used a similar boundary; the data used for analysis were collected from traditional students, meaning that they enrolled in college at the completion of high school. In addition, three other boundaries were imposed: first, because the purpose of this study was to explore

persistence of African American students, all of the participants were African American; next, all of the participants completed college within six years of enrollment, a standard timeframe by which graduation rates are measured (Smith, 2004); and finally, all of the participants attained their baccalaureate degree at predominantly white private or public colleges or universities, where most African American students are currently enrolled (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

To better understand the complex phenomenon of African American persistence to degree attainment, after each interview, the data were reviewed, coded, and categorized to identify important patterns and themes (Creswell, 2002). When clarification of the data was necessary, follow-up interviews were scheduled. Participants were also asked to check their responses and quotations.

Pattern-matching logic was used for the case study analysis. Pattern matching logic "compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one" (Yin, 1997, p. 251). In this study, the empirical patterns were compared to the factors that were identified in the literature as influencing persistence. Since multiple participants were interviewed, cross-case comparisons were possible. Such comparisons strengthen the findings about the issues under study (Yin, 1997). Finally, using a holistic approach (Patton, 2002), the interview data were integrated with the survey data and compared with the variables identified in the literature to shed as much light as possible on the phenomenon.

It was the purpose of this qualitative study to learn more about the factors and experiences that influenced the persistence of a group of African American CLEO students and why they, unlike many others, persisted to degree attainment. Understanding why they persisted to degree completion might suggest interventions or policy changes

that would increase baccalaureate attainment for other African American students. The findings in this study also might identify the need for future research for other racial or ethnic populations.

Definitions

To avoid confusion surrounding the meaning of the key words used in this study, the following definitions are provided:

Academic integration: Involves structural and normative dimensions. "Structural integration involves the meeting of explicit standards [values or principles] of the college or university, whereas normative integration pertains to an individual's identification with the normative structure of the academic system… [it] takes the form of congruency between the individual's intellectual development and the intellectual environment of the college or university" (Braxton, 2000, pp. 2-3).

Modified Tinto model: Tinto's (1993) model of student departure includes student entry characteristics, such as individual attributes (e.g., race, gender, ability), precollege experiences (e.g., grade point average, academic and social success) and family backgrounds (e.g., socioeconomic status and values), in addition to educational goals and institutional commitment. These factors influence the student's ability to integrate into the social and academic systems of the college. *A modified Tinto model* includes these student entry characteristics and commitments as well as other factors such as, institutional size and type, student involvement and networking, active learning, and financial aid. These additional measures also act to shape the student perceptions, commitments, and preferences that ultimately influence student social integration (Braxton, et al., 2000). Using a modified Tinto model addresses the concerns of Braxton,

et al., (2000), Cabrera, et al., (1993), and other critics by being more inclusive of the various external measures that the research has identified as affecting students' collegiate experiences.

Persistence: "Refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion" (Berger & Lyon, 2005 p. 7). As used in an abundance of the literature reviewed (e.g., Tinto, 1993), the term persistence is commonly used to describe student enrollment at the same institution in the fall semester subsequent to the fall semester in which the student first enrolled in college (usually first-year to second-year persistence). First to second-year persistence is important because it is the point at which students are at the greatest risk of leaving college (Tinto, 1993). In this study, the term *persistence, retention, persistence to graduation, or persistence to degree attainment* will be used interchangeably to refer to the process that ends with completion of a first baccalaureate degree within six years after commencing a program of post-secondary education at either a two or a four year college or university. Persistence to degree attainment requires that individuals make the transition to college and become integrated into the ongoing social and intellectual life of the college (Tinto, 1993).

Social integration involves the degree of congruency between the student and the social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1993). Integration occurs at the level of the institution and at the level of a subculture of an institution. "Integration reflects the student's perception of his or her congruence with the attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms of the social communities of a college or university" (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005, p.109).

Limitations

This study is narrow in scope. The participants in this study were not randomly selected. All of the participants in this study were pre-law, CLEO students. As stated, CLEO participants self-select to apply to the CLEO program and then are competitively selected over other applicants based on their history of academic success, as measured by college grade point average and personal statement. Furthermore, the fact that the researcher served as one of the institute directors may raise questions about the trustworthiness of the participants' responses.

In addition, because this is a qualitative study the findings are not generalizable to the larger population of African American college students (Yin, 2003) they are merely suggestive of what might be found with other similar groups. The findings, however, may be used to expand theory (Yin, 2003) by supporting or refuting the applicability of the factors in the modified Tinto (1993) model as applied to this group of African American participants.

Finally, this study is based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure. As stated, the validity of this theory has not been tested across different racial groups (Braxton, et al., 2004). Using this theory to guide the study and frame the questions may have masked important findings that another theory may have revealed.

Significance of the Study

It is essential to this nation that institutions of higher education increase the number of African American students who persist to college graduation. There are limited studies of African American graduates that take a holistic approach to the factors that influence persistence to graduation. This study will provide a greater understanding

of African American collegiate experiences and will contribute distinctive data to the literature on African American persistence to degree attainment.

Summary

There has been little improvement in the persistence to graduation rate for all students over the last century. While an undeniable need exists to increase the graduation rates for all students in higher education, the need is more pronounced for African American students.

The studies that address the factors affecting persistence ultimately tend to focus on the effects of a single factor, and for the most part, tend to show why white students do not persist from their freshman to their sophomore year of college. In general, the persistence research underscores the multiple challenges that may confront many African American students and cause them to voluntarily leave higher education at this critical juncture. Few studies consider the factors that influence African American persistence beyond the first year and even fewer studies focus on African American students who have persisted to degree attainment.

This study will contribute to the growing body of student persistence literature in general, and to the relative void of literature that addresses the factors that have encouraged and supported African American students in achieving degree attainment despite the challenges that may have arisen because of their minority status. The results of this study will have important implications for educational policies and practices, and may indicate the need for study of other racial and ethnic groups.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains a comprehensive review of the literature that is germane to the study of this group of African American pre-law students, all of whom have persisted to degree attainment at predominantly white colleges and universities. The literature under review will examine the legislative and legal foundations that influenced African American student enrollment in today's colleges and universities, the theory of student persistence that will serve as the conceptual framework for this study, and the empirical research on the issues that influence the persistence of African American students.

Introduction

> If you are an African American 25 years of age or older, you are more likely to be *without* a high school diploma than you are to *have* a college degree. Conversely, if you are white and in the same age group, you are nearly *three* times as likely to have a college degree than you are to be without a high school diploma (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2005, p. 1).

Achieving higher post-secondary graduation rates for African American and other non-Asian American minority students is an educational challenge and a societal concern for this nation. It is a concern that will increase as the United States transitions from an era of manufacturing to an era of high technology in a global economy, and particularly as minorities continue to make up a greater portion of the nation's total population (e.g., Balz & Esten, 1998; Castle, 1993); by 2015, it is projected that one-third of the population will be non-white (Davis, et al., 2004). Such a transition requires a more

educated work force "to solve the problems envisioned for the 21st century, problems that will be created by high technology and post-industrialization" (Lang, 1992, p. 521).

Despite the fact that the proportion of 18 to 24 year-olds enrolled in college has grown by more than one-third from 1980 to 1994 (Kane & Rouse, 1999):

> persistence rates have remained remarkably stable at roughly 45% as far back as 1885, [and] there are notable variations when the ethnicity of the student is introduced. Compared to White students, African Americans are 20% less likely to complete college within a six-year period (Cabrera, et al., 1999, pp. 134-135).

Student retention and persistence to degree attainment is an unrelenting problem in higher education, especially for many racial and ethnic minority students.

As a consequence of the high rates of student loss, even though the demand for more highly educated workers is increasing, since the mid-1990s there have been "shortfalls in the number of scientists, technicians, and other skilled labor market participants" (Castle, 1993, p. 24). To compound this problem, the focus on social justice and advancing democratic values such as equality and equal economic opportunity that occurred from 1945 to1980 appears to have shifted to a focus on advancing individual economic values, "perhaps in part as a reaction against the gains made by members of racial minorities…" (Fowler, 2004, p. 120). This change in focus has adversely impacted the early educational gains made by African Americans, causing them to stagnate (Renner & Moore, 2004).

Accepting that a more educated populace is necessary to solve the more complex issues of this century, there is no doubt that persistence and educational attainment rates must improve if post-secondary education is to meet the needs of our nation and our

world (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). The country can no longer afford low college graduation rates (Carey, 2004). Thus, as US society becomes increasingly more diverse, the education of greater numbers of minority students will play a critical part in its economic and social future (Balz & Esten, 1998). Accordingly, greater minority enrollment and persistence to post-secondary graduation is imperative.

> Until many more…underrepresented minority students…are very successful educationally, it will be virtually impossible to integrate our society's institutions completely, especially at leadership levels. Without such progress, the United States also will continue to be unable to draw on the full range of talents in our population during an era when the value of an educated citizenry has never been greater (The College Board, 1999, p. 2).

There is an abundance of literature on minority access and enrollment in higher education; there is less on the factors that influence minority persistence to degree attainment. As noted by Castle (1993), however, because of factors such as "language, culture, historical orientation to particular institutions, and degree of acceptance into, and satisfaction with, the university community" (p. 27) different racial and ethnic groups respond differently to the same institutional environment; all minorities are not the same educationally. Thus, the focus of this review will be limited to a single minority group. Because African Americans have historically comprised the dominant minority population in US society (Garibaldi, 1997) this literature review will focus on African American baccalaureate degree attainment.

The literature may be viewed as two intertwined themes of research. The earlier literature primarily examined the variables affecting African American access or enrollment in higher education, which continues to be a major focus of research, followed by more recent literature which examines the variables affecting persistence to

graduation. To address the current challenges facing persistence for African American students, this review will examine literature primarily published after 1990.

The initial research on enrollment and persistence generally is quantitative in nature. More recently, however, qualitative studies have emerged, perhaps because of the social and human nature of the problem or perhaps to begin to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of African American students with the hope of shedding new light on this unrelenting problem.

In addition, most students who leave college do so during their first year (Tinto, 1993). Thus, most of the studies under review focus on the variables that affect freshman to sophomore attainment. There is little research that examines how those same variables influence long-term student persistence.

Finally, much of the literature under review recognizes two legislative milestones for African American students in higher education: the Higher Education Act of 1965, which was designed to foster college enrollment, and the Higher Education Amendments of 1968, which were designed to foster academic retention. Essentially, it was during this time period that significant numbers of African American students began to enroll in predominantly white institutions of higher education, the setting for most of the research. According to Lang (1992), "by 1978, 7 [out of] 10…Black college students were enrolled in predominantly White institutions—a drastic change from the previous decade" (p. 515). Thus, it is appropriate to begin the literature review with a brief history of this legislation to provide perspective or context for the issues surrounding African American post-secondary degree attainment.

Higher Education Legislative Milestones

Higher Education Act of 1965

The civil rights movements of the 1950's and 1960's were instrumental to African Americans enrolling in predominantly white institutions of higher education (Thomas, Farrow & Martinez, 1998; Renner & Moore, 2004). The ideology of the time was "…that no motivated student should be denied access" (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004, p. 68). Recognizing, however, that access to higher education required more than just open admissions, in 1965, as part of the national war on poverty, Congress enacted the first Higher Education Act (PL 89-329) to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education. One part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (the Act), was the Educational Opportunity Grant Program, the precursor of the Pell Grant. The program was designed to remove the financial barriers to higher education for low-income students by making available "at least 75% of an eligible student's cost of attending college" (National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2004, ¶3). To further decrease the cost of education, other need-based grants were created (Hannah, 1996).

The intent of Congress was to make higher education available to all students with the desire and ability to succeed, not just to those students who could afford to pay. The Act opened the schoolhouse doors to "millions of low-income students [who] completed high school with exceptional academic qualifications [but lacked the financial resources to] participate in the dream of higher education" (National Association for College Admissions Counseling, 2004, ¶1).

Higher Education Amendments of 1968

Realizing, perhaps, that academic success required more than just access, three years after the passage of the Act, the Higher Education Amendments (HEA) of 1968 were enacted to further expand access and increase the academic success of poor but academically talented students. The HEA created a *TRIO* of programs, one of which was the Student Support Services program. Originally introduced as the Special Services for Disadvantaged Students program, this collegiate-level academic support program was renamed Student Support Services in 1970. Along with Upward Bound and Talent Search, pre-college preparatory and transition programs intended to support and sustain minority and lower socioeconomic students while in college, Student Support Services was the last of the original three *TRIO* programs (Thomas, et al., 1998). TRIO was later expanded to include three additional student programs, in 1972, 1986, and most recently in 1990 (McElroy & Armesto, 1998).

TRIO was designed to ensure equal educational opportunity, regardless of race, ethnic background or economic ability, and to increase the college retention and graduation rates of all program-eligible students by helping them overcome the social and cultural barriers to higher education (McElroy & Armesto, 1998; Balz & Esten, 1998). As mandated by Congress, program eligibility is determined based on socioeconomic status; two-thirds of the participants are low-income (family incomes less than $24,000 per year), first-generation college students (Balz & Esten, 1998).

Since the program began, more than 1,200 colleges and universities have opted to participate in the student support program (Balz & Esten, 1998). The impact that this legislation had on the higher education of African American students cannot be denied;

unfortunately, “by the mid-1970s the enrollment of Black students had reached its historical peak” (Lang, 1992, p. 515).

The Education Gap

Despite the passage of the civil rights and higher education legislation, there has been a persistent gap in college enrollment between African American and white high school graduates (College Board, 2005). There also is a disproportionate gap in college graduation rates; when compared to white students, a smaller portion of African American students who enroll in college persist to graduation (Smith, 2004).

Perna and Titus (2005) found that in 1999, even though comparable percentages of African American and white high school sophomores expected to finish college, the college enrollment rates for African American students lagged behind those of whites. Only 39 percent of African American high school graduates as compared to 45 percent of white students were enrolled in college. Furthermore, even though the high school graduation rate for African Americans has been increasing, by race, the national graduation rate for the class of 2003 was 78 percent for white students while only 55 percent for African American students (Greene & Winters, 2006). From the outset, this significantly lower number of high school graduates has contributed to the gap between the number of African American and white college enrollees.

Since 2000, the College Board (2005) estimates that the gap between African American and white four-year college enrollments immediately after graduation has averaged ten percentage points. The gap is reported to have been as small as five percentage points in the 1970’s and as large as 21 percentage points in 1985. Thus, African American students continue to be disadvantaged in the college enrollment

process, despite increasing high school graduation rates and research findings that indicate that "blacks are more likely [than are white students] to attend college *net* of socioeconomic background and academic characteristics" (Bennett & Xie, 2003, p. 567).

The persistence figures follow a similar trend. Approximately 50 percent of traditional-age college freshmen persist to graduation (Resch & Hall, 2002), however, a 2001-2002 study conducted by the American Council on Education reveals that the rates vary by race; "59% of white students graduate within six years of enrolling in college, whereas the graduation rate [is] 38% for African Americans" (Smith, 2004).

A number of different factors affect persistence to graduation. In addition, persistence is longitudinal in nature with each of the college years possibly having its own set of challenges. Thus, the factors that affect the freshman transition to college may give way to others as students transition from youth to adult status (Tinto, 1988). Some of these factors are multifaceted and interconnected.

As a result of the lagging African American enrollment trend, and flat or decreasing graduation rates (e.g., Garibaldi, 1997; Renner & Moore, 2004), both enrollment and student persistence continue to be studied to identify the factors that contribute to this educational gap. Furthermore, in light of the 2003 Supreme Court decisions in the University of Michigan undergraduate and law school admissions cases (Gratz v. Bollinger, 2003; Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003), in which the court basically required this gap to be closed within twenty-five years, it is anticipated that research in these areas will continue or perhaps intensify in the next several years.

The Michigan Cases

In Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306 (2003), the Supreme Court decided that diversity is a compelling state interest and may be used as a factor in college admissions. The Court recognized that "effective participation by members of all racial and ethnic groups in the life of our Nation is essential if the dream of one Nation, indivisible, is to be realized" (*Grutter*, 2003, p. 332). Thus, *Grutter* has resolved the unsettled legal status and seemingly inconsistent court decisions between Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 438 U. S. 265 (1978), where the Supreme Court held that the goal of achieving a diverse student body was sufficiently compelling to justify consideration of race in admissions decisions and Hopwood v. Texas, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir., 1996), where, despite the precedent of *Bakke*, the lower Court of Appeals held that it was not. Regrettably:

> the Supreme Court's… ruling [in *Grutter*] focused on admissions, and said little or nothing about the many other areas – such as financial aid…where colleges often take race into account…[and] many colleges were already under pressure to review the legality of race-exclusive scholarship, fellowship and academic-enrichment programs before the Michigan rulings came down (Schmidt, 2003, ¶44, 45).

While the Michigan decisions have temporarily resolved the inconsistency and the uncertainty surrounding the use of race on the admissions side of the educational access equation, this same decision has spawned controversy and legal challenges to African American-targeted scholarship and fellowship programs, causing several colleges and universities to abandon or significantly alter their programs (Schmidt, 2004). Abandoning these programs is problematic because ever since the enactment of the Act and the HEA, "minority scholarships have been the backbone of many [college and university] affirmative action programs" (Sullens, 1991, ¶1). Affirmative action programs were

designed to counter previous discrimination against African Americans and increase access to and success in higher education.

The Michigan cases are noteworthy because of this potentially adverse impact on African American enrollment and persistence. Without financial support, increasing numbers of less advantaged African American students may face even greater challenges in college enrollment and persistence to graduation. Thus, if after *Grutter* race may be considered in the admissions process but not utilized to help African American students financially enroll and persist, an unintended consequence of the decision is that it may further widen the educational gap.

The Research Factors

The research related to African American persistence to degree attainment focuses on two critical periods, the high school years, when students decide to pursue post-secondary education (enrollment in college), and the years of college attendance (persistence to degree attainment). Because the initial decision not to pursue higher education significantly contributes to the overall lower numbers of degrees attained by African Americans, the earlier research focused on enrollment in higher education and examined the factors that affect a student's decision to pursue education beyond high school. These pre-enrollment factors include family influence, primarily parental education (e.g., Balz & Esten, 1998; Lang, 1992) and socioeconomic status (e.g., Bennett & Xie, 2003), both which are related to high school resources (e.g., Smith, 2004) and academic preparation for college (e.g., Lang, 1992). The research also examined institutional barriers to enrollment such as commitment to diversity (e.g., Gardner, 2005) and financial aid (e.g., College Board, 2004b; Lang, 1992).

Once enrolled in post-secondary education, the research on student persistence mirrors much of the research on student enrollment. Many of the same factors affect both enrollment and persistence to degree attainment: family influence (e.g., Balz & Esten, 1998; Perna & Titus, 2005) and socioeconomic status (e.g., Bennett & Xie, 2003); academic preparation (e.g., Smith, 2004) and student performance (e.g., Tinto, 1993); and institutional behaviors, such as commitment to diversity (e.g., Lang, 1992; Gardner, 2005) and financial aid (e.g., Lang, 1992; College Board, 2004b). In addition, social factors, including the racial composition of the student body and whether or not a critical mass of African American students exists at the institution (e.g., Gardner, 2005) and social integration into the institution (e.g., Tinto, 1993; Thomas, 2000) are also examined.

Participation in collegiate athletics also is a variable for many African American students, often inducing enrollment. Aside from those students who do not persist academically because of athletic commitments, others choose to leave voluntarily because of the significant economic opportunities available to them through athletics. Athletics is a confounding variable and will not be discussed in this literature review.

The Influence of Specific Factors on African American Student Enrollment and Baccalaureate Attainment

Socioeconomic Status and Related Family Factors

As early as 1975, Tinto noted that students bring with them to college a range of background characteristics and goal commitments. Of the characteristics that are shown to be related to persistence:

> the more important pertain to the characteristics of his family, the characteristics of the individual himself, his educational experiences prior to college entry, and his expectations concerning future educational

> attainments… Put in general terms, the family's socioeconomic status appears to be inversely related to dropout. Specifically, children from lower status families exhibit higher rates of dropout than do children of higher status families even when intelligence has been taken into account…To summarize these findings, it appears that college persisters are more likely to come from families whose parents are more educated (pp. 99-100).

Similarly, Bennett and Xie (2003) attribute the lag in enrollment to lower levels of socioeconomic status. Lower socioeconomic status often is synonymous with lower levels of parental education and ultimately with the lower quality of the primary and secondary school education that many African American students receive. These researchers concluded that economically disadvantaged African American students do not have the same pre-college experiences or educational resources as do white students. This socioeconomic disparity is the root of the "*total* black-white gap in college attendance" (p. 579).

Although Perna and Titus (2005) agree that lower socioeconomic African American students are disadvantaged in the college enrollment process, they have shown that regardless of the level of individual and high school resources, parental involvement, as a form of social capital, is positively related to college enrollment. Pascarrella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004), define social capital as:

> a form of capital that resides in the relationships among individuals that facilitate transactions and the transmission of different resources…Individuals with highly educated parents may have a distinct advantage…in understanding the culture of higher education and its role in individual development and socioeconomic attainment (p. 252).

Perna and Titus (2005) concluded that regardless of socioeconomic status or educational level, college preparation programs that effectively involve parents offer a promising

approach to addressing the continued under-representation of African Americans in higher education. Seemingly, parents underpin educational aspirations.

Data from The College Board support this conclusion. In a 2001 survey of college preparatory programs, the Board found that almost three quarters of pre-college programs targeting African American students involve parents. Parental involvement, however, is more likely to increase with higher levels of parental education. In a study that contrasted first-generation college students (often used as a proxy for African American status because of the increased legal scrutiny of minority scholarship and fellowship programs), with continuing-generation college students, Somers, et al., (2004) demonstrated that enrollment and persistence in college for continuing-generation students was "rooted in the educational attainment of parents" (p. 421). They concluded that the educational values and expectations of parents create and reinforce student expectations, and students with aspirations of degree completion are more likely to persist to graduation. They found that students with higher aspirations are less likely to become discouraged by the small setbacks that are routine in the educational process, and are more likely to persist.

Analogously, Horn and Berger (2004) report that when comparing two student cohorts, one that enrolled in college between 1989-90 and the other in 1995-96, African American students in the latter group were more persistent in maintaining their enrollment toward degree attainment. The percentage of students whose parents graduated from college in the latter group was also higher, again suggesting an association between the level of parental education and persistence to graduation.

The research of Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2003) also supports these findings. Based on their studies at Berea College, where roughly 50 percent of students

do not persist despite full tuition awards, they found a statistically significant and powerful relationship between family income and student performance. This study indicates that tuition alone is not the answer to persistence; a student's background and family environment are also important. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds not only generally attend lower quality primary and secondary schools, but they receive less educational instruction at home and are less likely to have parents who stress the importance of a college degree. More importantly, these parents often do not provide their children with the necessary encouragement to stay in school when academic and social problems arise.

Balz and Esten (1998) noted that socioeconomic status plays a role both in enrollment and persistence; alone it is not significantly related. Relying on National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data of first-generation college students, their research indicated that students whose parents had lower levels of education persisted at lower rates than students whose parents had attended or completed college. Parents without higher education often do not understand the process and may be intimidated by their children's efforts to pursue a college education. They also are "less likely to see the value of higher education…Each of these factors represent represents a barrier to educational attainment and success" (p. 335).

It appears that socioeconomic status has multiple components that are inextricably intertwined. Socioeconomic status involves more than just one's level of income. Income is generally related to two of the more obvious components, parental education and the quality of schools children attend. In turn, parental education is related to the level of financial resources available to their children and to the level of support and aspirations

offered to them. Primary and secondary school quality often is related to the level of student academic preparation, educational expectations, and the counseling and mentoring that students receive, specifically regarding higher education.

Academic Factors

According to Tinto's (1993) student departure model, which has "served as sort of the archetype against which other models are compared and contrasted" (Barefoot, 2004, p. 11) the departure process has at its core the concepts of academic and social integration into the institution. The degree to which these concepts influence students, however, may vary by institution (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration, in part, is determined by the student's academic performance and the student's level of intellectual development, both of which are influenced by students' academic preparation and achievement.

As reported by Garibaldi (1997), student poverty is an important variable to consider when examining academic achievement. Students with the lowest level of achievement, as measured by standardized tests, were more often enrolled in high-poverty schools, and African American students are more likely to attend high-poverty schools than are white students. High-poverty schools are further hampered by large class sizes and lower levels of resources (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Considering the challenges facing the many low-income African American students enrolled in these high-poverty schools, if academic achievement is low at the time of postsecondary enrollment, it is not surprising that academic integration is problematic and that persistence to graduation lags behind that of better prepared white students.

In researching nursing education in California, Seago and Spetz (2005) suggest that this is true. They noted that although minorities constitute the majority of the state

population, only four percent of California nurses are African American; 82 percent are white. Their findings show that community college programs with high percentages of African American students draw from areas where high school preparation is poor and as a result, students have greater difficulty with the curriculum and do not perform well on tests. They also noted that programs with high percentages of African American students have a higher attrition rate, which is attributed to poor high school preparation.

In addition to poor academic preparation, many first-generation college students often are not adequately prepared to navigate "through the academic cultural minefields of higher education" (Smith, 2004, p. 48), for example, many minority students may not know how to appropriately engage in classroom discussions. Although tutoring, remedial courses, freshman seminars and the like are helpful, the author suggests that the use of mentors and networks are necessary to help minority students identify the norms, values and expectations, and the "hidden curriculum" of higher education. Such programs may help to fill the breach created by under-educated parents and low quality schools.

While studying the importance of financial aid for minority students, Hu and St. John (2001) found that the availability of aid alone does not explain the disparity in persistence among racial groups. A significant gap in college grades exists across racial lines and the authors suggest that enhancing academic achievement could level the inequality in persistence rates. As a whole, financial aid, college grades, and positive academic experiences are necessary to academic persistence.

During the first year of college, academic integration is important to persistence. Research has shown that without academic integration, students may begin to disengage in the sophomore year. Based on the results of a survey of almost 1,100 second semester

sophomores, Graunke and Woosley (2005) concluded that after the first year, positive academic experiences and student attitudes, particularly the selection of an academic major, and encouraging faculty interactions, increased the chances of sophomore success at their institution.

Leppel (2001) also found that after controlling for certain external variables such as age, socioeconomic status, student employment, race, as well as academic and social integration, college persistence varied most depending on the choice of major:

> Differences in persistence rates were explained by differences in the relative magnitudes of a goal-commitment effect, a subject-interest effect, a social-forces effect, and a self-image effect…The results show that students with undecided majors have both low academic performance and low persistence rates (p. 340).

According to Leppel (2001), students who are leaning toward a certain profession after college may put more emphasis on the job-related benefits of college and thus, their increased persistence rates may be explained by greater goal commitment.

Social Factors

The research conducted by Tinto (1993), shows that social integration, particularly in the first year, is positively related to persistence to graduation, and non-integrative experiences, such as alienation and loneliness, are positively related to withdrawal. Expanding on the work of Tinto, and further validating the importance of social integration, Milem and Berger (1997), reported that involvement with peers in extracurricular activities helps social integration into college and serves as a predictor for first-year success; the first hurdle of student persistence.

Using Tinto's model of student departure as his theoretical underpinning, Thomas (2000) examined social integration from a social network perspective. His research was designed to determine how subgroup membership (membership in various student groups, such as the ski club or student newspaper) affects social integration. Thomas collected data from first-time students at a co-ed, four-year institution with almost 1200 students. Almost all (98%) of the freshmen surveyed resided on campus. Survey data were collected from 322 students at two points in time, during freshman orientation and at the end of the first year. The variables in the model included: race, gender, SAT score, freshman GPA, social integration (personal relationships with peers, satisfaction, and resultant growth), academic integration measures (such as satisfaction with the academic experience), institutional commitment (such as confidence in choice of college), educational commitment factors, persistence intention and behavior (likely to return and continued enrollment), and network measures (more than one group of friends).

From his findings Thomas concluded that "peers are the single most potent source of influence on the lives of college students" (p. 591). Student acquaintances foster a sense of belonging and are a good thing; however, broader social networks, the "sets of acquaintances and friendships that define one's relations with others" (p. 595), further enhance student integration. Consequently, students who have a greater number of social relationships outside of their immediate peer group, and who associate with other students with greater numbers of social relationships outside of their immediate peer group, "perform better academically and are more likely to persist" (p. 609), because of the connection between social and academic integration.

Although Thomas' sample was largely white, potentially limiting the applicability of the results to minority students, Gardner (2005), reported analogous findings in a study of minority nursing students. She found that low numbers of fellow minority students (members belonging to the same minority group), can become a barrier to education; students did not persist because of feelings of loneliness and isolation. Once programs were instituted to create family and student support networks for minority students within their groups, and between groups, to learn about each other's cultures and to build a sense of connection and peer support, student retention across all minority groups increased markedly.

If the lack of social networks limits social integration and results in lower levels of persistence, and if predominantly white institutions are committed to African American persistence, they must consider the necessity of admitting a 'critical mass' of African American students. As noted earlier, critical mass is the point at which institutions exceed token numbers of African American students within its student body to create significant opportunities for personal interaction (Townsend, 1994). It also relieves individual students from the responsibility of having to represent the 'minority viewpoint' on particular issues (Davis, et al., 2004). A critical mass insures that minority students do not feel alienated or isolated, or as if they are the spokesperson for their race (The College Board, 2006).

A phenomenological study of eleven African American students in a predominantly white university supports these findings. Although all of the students had completed their graduation requirements at the time of the interview, they voiced feelings of isolation, difference, lack of connection and invisibility throughout their college

experience. At other times, however, they experienced hyper-visibility, when, as individuals, they were expected to be representative of all African Americans (Davis, et al., 2004). These negative feelings can make self-esteem difficult and have an adverse effect on academic performance and achievement which makes connecting with others even more difficult. Watson, et al., (2002) found that these results were not limited to students who were poorly prepared academically. African American students who had achieved academic success were "not immune to the effects of isolation, alienation, and cultural dissonance" (p. 90). This is particularly true of first-generation students who are "*breaking*, not continuing a family tradition" (Somers, et al., 2004, p. 421).

Institutional Behaviors

Integration into the institution is dependent upon the extent to which the individual student has successful or personally rewarding interactions within the academic system and social systems in which he or she is enrolled. Thus, the experiences that students have with these systems may foster persistence or lead to their departure from the institution. Institutional behaviors influence both the formal and informal components of these systems.

Tinto (2005) suggests that because student persistence stems from the commitments that institutions make to students, commitments must be made that extend beyond serving only institutional interests. These are commitments that focus on the education and general welfare, the educational experiences, of students rather than merely on their enrollment. Persistence increases when educational experiences are inclusive of all students. Educational experiences, however, are influenced not only by academic performance and social experiences but by a host of institutional behaviors and

commitments, some of which include critical mass, faculty interactions, classroom experiences, institutional type, and financial aid.

The lack of a comprehensive commitment to African American students on the part of institutions of higher education contributes to their lower graduation rates (Lang, 1992). To increase enrollment and persistence, institutions must be attentive to their students' institutional experiences. According to Lang (1992), to improve the experiences of African American students, institutions must make a commitment to "accommodate the diversity of skills, cultural backgrounds, adeptness, and historical legacies that minorities bring to school with them" (p. 521), yet traditionally, they do not.

One experience that has been identified as being essential to ensuring a student's successful matriculation is the ability to establish a relationship with faculty. Faculty interactions and classroom experiences are a key part of the cultural dissonance that students may experience. Pascarrella and Terenzini (2005) have found that "student contact with faculty members outside of the classroom appears consistently to promote student persistence, educational aspirations, and degree completion" (p. 417). This is due to the socialization to the values and attitudes of the academy that occurs as a result of such relationships, and the increased attachment or loyalty to the institution that results from positive interactions with faculty as well as peers.

Watson, et al., (2002) affirmed that faculty members provide a necessary support system for African American students, particularly for those on predominantly white campuses. In fact, student-faculty relationships may "prove to be even more critical …in their educational experiences" (p. 79) than for white students. Informal student-faculty

relationships, however, represent only part of the academic experience. The experience is influenced by pedagogy as well.

Academic systems are comprised of classrooms, faculty, and staff, and the recurring interactions between students and the classrooms and people who concern themselves almost entirely with the formal education of students (Tinto, 1993). Because the classroom is the center of the educational process on the college campus, classroom encounters are fundamental to the student educational experience and are instrumental in promoting academic and social integration (Tinto, 1997). To determine the classroom influence on student persistence, Tinto conducted a longitudinal study of students enrolled at Seattle Central Community College.

The results demonstrated that active participation in group-learning allowed students to develop a small supportive peer group that helped them to integrate into the social community of the institution, while at the same time engaging them in the academic life of the school. In addition, the students "persisted to the following spring and fall quarters at a significantly higher rate than did similar students in the regular classes…[differences] were greater still when transfer to four-year institutions was included in [the] measure of persistence" (Tinto, 1997, p. 607).

Tinto's (1997) work shows that what happens inside the classroom is important. Students who are able to socially integrate into the intellectual life of the college, inside and outside of the classroom, as opposed to just outside of the classroom, are more likely to graduate. Persistence is positively associated with an increased effort in learning that results from academic and social learning experiences in the classroom. He concluded

that "involvement matters…the greater students' involvement…in the life of the college the greater the likelihood that they will persist" (p. 600).

Thus, faculty members should promote a classroom environment that allows and encourages African American students to connect with their peers as individuals and to engage with the various segments of the university as a whole (Davis, et al., 2004). The classroom helps to set "the tone for how students make sense of their collegiate experience" (Watson, et al., 2002, p. 79). If African American students are not actively engaged in the learning process as unique individuals with distinct viewpoints, but instead are viewed as merely being reflective of the "black point of view" (p. 78), this racial generalization and bias can cause them to feel alienated and isolated, negatively affecting their academic performance and decreasing the likelihood that they will persist.

According to Braxton, et al., (2000), active learning must be defined broadly. It includes more than cooperative learning and group work. It includes engaging students in discussion, debate, role playing, and in the questions faculty pose in the classroom and on examinations. In general, active learning "involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (p. 571).

These researchers suggest that active learning encourages a sense of congruence and affiliation between the student and the academic system of the institution in which the student is enrolled, the result of which influences *academic* integration. Academic integration in turn influences student persistence. The purpose of their study, however, was to estimate the influence of active learning on *social* integration, institutional commitment, and departure decisions.

Using student departure theory, Braxton, et al., (2000) conducted a longitudinal study comprised of 718 first-year students at a highly selective, private research extensive university. The researchers tested the theoretical framework that social integration is necessary to prevent student departure and is comprised of "peer group interaction and interactions with faculty" (p. 576). Based on the findings of their research, Braxton, et al., (2000) also concluded that the classroom experiences are important:

> faculty classroom behaviors play a role in the student departure process. Three of the four indices of active learning (class discussions, higher order thinking activities, and knowledge-level exams) wield a statistically significant influence on one or more of the central constructs of this study's theoretical perspective: social integration…institutional commitment, and student's intent to return. Only… group work fails to influence any of these constructs (p. 581).

Institutional commitment to African American student retention requires that specific attention be paid to the educational attainment of African American students. Educational attainment often depends on the nature of the academic support or success programs that are created. At the same time, institutions must attend to the need for the social and emotional well-being of minority students if they are to socially and academically integrate into the institution. Institutional commitment involves creating a campus climate that recognizes and values the individual contributions of African American students (Watson, et al., 2002). Differences in culture, values, and social skills can prove fatal to the successful integration of minority students. Thus, support programs must effectively integrate and not further separate minority students from the mainstream institution (Tinto, 2005). Ultimately, however, to be successful, African American students must first connect with the institution and to do so they must feel that the institution is nondiscriminatory (Watson, et al., 2002).

Research shows that the structures, values, and pervasive attitudes that exist in higher education, particularly in predominantly white institutions, are barriers to success for black students and to institutional change (e.g., Seago & Spetz, 2005). Lang (1992) states, however, that addressing this problem is a challenge because, in general, "what is needed to provide a genuinely hospitable, conducive, and supportive environment for minority students is not provided for majority students" (p. 519). Environments, however, may vary with institutional type.

Institutional support for African American students is often necessary for academic success. Support, however, may vary with the type and size of the institution. Balz and Esten (1998) reported that students who were enrolled in public four-year institutions graduated at higher rates than students enrolled in public two-year institutions: 34.1 percent receiving bachelor's degrees as opposed to 18.4 percent receiving associate degrees. Ultimately, however, at 55.1 percent, the graduation rate for students enrolled in private four-year institutions was the highest. Comparative data for two-year private institutions were not reported.

When degree attainment of this same group was examined by race, first-generation black students graduated at higher rates than first-generation whites. Comparative data reflects that 33.6 percent of whites obtain a bachelor's degree within five years as compared to 37.3 percent of blacks at public four-year institutions. Black students in private institutions graduated at an even higher rate than whites: 60.2 percent as compared to 54.9 percent, suggesting that the institutional support for African American students enrolled in private institutions is superior to that of public institutions.

Institutional size is also a factor to be considered. Students who are enrolled in smaller institutions often have greater faculty contact and are often more involved in campus activities. As a result, they are more likely to persist to graduation (Watson, et al., 2002). Regardless of institutional size, students must achieve a balance in their lives and not allow campus activities to engulf them, taking their focus off of academics.

Similarly, financial need must not allow work to dominate students' time to the detriment of their studies. Unfortunately, however, while the College Board data support that a variety of other factors contribute to the variation in postsecondary enrollment rates, "the evidence does…clearly indicate that finances create barriers" (Baum, S. & Payea, K., 2004, p. 6) to education, and as a result, low-income students are often forced to work to the detriment of their academic performance. Thus, the availability of financial aid is crucial to persistence.

As early as 1981, Thomas found that when examining the impact of college-level controls, such as racial composition, public/private status, and financial aid on four-year graduation rates, student financial aid is strongly related. When compared with all other variables examined, financial aid had the third highest correlation to graduation. Only college grades and high school rank placed higher. Thomas concluded that African American students' ability to succeed academically is largely dependent on financial aid.

The following year, Tinto (1982) also recognized that financial aid was important to both enrollment and persistence in higher education. He too found that financial aid not only influences the decision to enroll, but often shapes the student's choice of institutions. And unfortunately, financial aid, or the lack of aid, may induce students "to enter institutions that may increase or decrease the likelihood of their dropping out of

college" (p. 689). Overall, however, based on decades of research, Tinto (1993) asserts that financial considerations "tend to be of secondary importance to… most students" (p. 88); "*for most students*... financial aid is but one of a wider number of events that shape persistence" (p. 68).

Almost a decade later, in a cohort study of 386 African American college students enrolled at an HBCU, Robinson (1990) showed that a higher percentage of students who decided to leave prior to degree attainment, after their third year, were from single parent, low-income, female-headed households. Students from two-parent households with greater economic resources persisted at a higher rate, suggesting a critical need for financial aid to provide the resources that the family cannot. Robinson concluded that the availability of adequate financial aid significantly influences African American persistence to graduation.

Lang (1992) also recognized the critical dependence that many African American students have on financial aid. She noted that the decrease in federal financial aid, specifically grant programs, and the rapid increase in tuition costs were having an adverse effect on access to higher education for African American students.

Some of the most extensive research on financial aid has been conducted by the College Board; it has tracked trends in financial aid from all sources since the early 1980s. The abundance of the Board's research shows that persistence is positively related to grant aid, merit-based scholarship aid, and work-study funds—financial aid that does not require repayment (College Board, 2004b). Unfortunately, since 1980, as a result of changing government priorities, there has been a shift away from the federal commitment to need-based grant aid to student loans, and presently, more than "one-half of the funds

on which students rely to supplement family resources are in the form of loans" (College Board, 2006, p. 2).

To underscore the grant versus loan problem, the College Board reported that in 1980-1981, 55 percent of all financial aid to students was grant aid and 43 percent was in the form of loans. By 2000-2001, the percentages reversed and worsened; grant aid decreased to 41 percent and loans increased to 58 percent of financial aid (College Board, 2004a). Furthermore, although the overall amount of financial assistance to students increased by 139 percent from 1993 to 2003, federal grant aid increased 47 percent while federal loans increased by 427 percent (College Board, 2004b).

In addition, the basis for grant aid has changed. More grant aid is awarded on the basis of merit as opposed to financial need. Finally, the proportion of institutional grant aid being awarded to the lowest-income students is declining while the proportion being awarded to the highest-income students is increasing (College Board, 2004a).

Compounding the problem for African American students with financial need is the increase in the cost of higher education. An examination of the survey data of two-year and four-year institutions reveals that throughout the 1970s there was little real growth in college costs. Prices, however, began to grow rapidly in the early 1980s and have continued on an upward trend ever since. By the end of the ten-year period ending in 2004, average tuition and fees rose 26 percent at two-year public colleges, 36 percent at private four-year colleges, and 51 percent at public four-year colleges, in constant 2004 dollars (College Board, 2004a).

Although tuition and fees increased most rapidly in both the public and private sectors in the early 1980s, and again in the public sector in the early 1990s, from 2002-03

to 2004-05 public four-year college costs increased an additional 20 percent. Public two-year colleges also experienced their greatest increase during that time. Furthering the injury to students, statistics show that 73 percent of fulltime students and 80 percent of students overall are being educated in public institutions (College Board, 2004a).

On the whole, from 1983 to 2003, the "price of college has outpaced median income for families likely to have college-aged children" (College Board, 2004b, p. 5). These increases in tuition have caused the numbers of black students who drop out before graduation to double in the decade from 1982-1992 (Lang, 1992).

The full impact of the increase in cost can be seen in a 1998 study conducted by Nellie Mae, the largest U.S. nonprofit provider of private and federal education loan funds. The study shows that 69% of African-American students who enrolled in college, as opposed to 43% of white students, did not complete their education because of high student loan debt (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 1999). As the cost of postsecondary education continues to increase, "the costs of attending college are a growing barrier for… minority students, who are far more likely to come from low-income families than their white peers" (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2005, p. 5).

In response to this trend, Paulsen and St. John (2002), characterized the last two decades of the twentieth century as a period of "high tuition [and] high aid, but with an emphasis on loans rather than grants" (p. 189). Grounded in rational choice theory, a theory that states that individuals engage in a cost-benefit analysis when making choices, these researchers used a financial nexus model to determine how this change in tuition and financing affects college choice and persistence to bachelor's degree completion across four socioeconomic groups (low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and upper income).

The reason for choosing the financial nexus model, a choice-persistence model, is because it "has established linkages between the two primary aspects of student enrollment behavior—college choice and persistence— that have been traditionally viewed as two distinct sets of behavior and research" (p. 193). The model includes the influences that student background, perceptions or expectations about college costs (the financial reasons students have for choosing a particular institution), college experiences (including measures of academic performance), educational aspirations, and finances (market-based measures of prices and subsidies) have on student persistence; all are factors which influence decision-making. Thus, the model allowed the researchers to look "across the sequence of student choices, focusing on how factors that affected earlier choices (i.e. the college choice) could also influence subsequent choice (i.e. the persistence decision)" (p. 193).

Because the purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between socioeconomic status and students' responses to college cost, 15 background variables, several of which are related to social class differences, were included in the model. Those variables included gender, ethnicity, mother's education, high-school completion status, age, marital status, employment, dependency, college cost choice (including tuition, financial aid, living expenses and work status), and college experience (including institution type, living status, enrollment status, year in college, and grades).

Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that lower and lower-middle income students are particularly sensitive to tuition increases; each $1,000 increase reduces "their probability of persisting by 16% and 19%, respectively" (p. 229). Thus, the "new financial conditions in education (change from grant aid to loan aid), have had

differential effects across social classes [and] tend to reduce the likelihood of persistence in college" (pp. 228-229) for low and lower-middle income students. This study revealed that loans and grants had a direct negative effect on the persistence of lower and lower-middle income students, indicating that the form of financial aid (e.g., grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study), not merely its availability, is important.

Based on their findings, Paulsen and St. John (2002) concluded that the nexus between choice and persistence depends upon whether students' *perceptions and expectations* of the availability of aid (as compared to the cost of tuition at the time of college choice) align with the aid and tuition that they actually *experience* at the time of a subsequent persistence decision (re-enrollment). If the perceptions and experiences align, students will re-enroll, if perceptions and experiences do not align, students will leave. Specifically, if students receive aid yet still have unmet financial need (perhaps due to increasing tuition and fees), some, depending on socioeconomic status, will be less likely to persist.

In 2002, Resch and Hall confirmed that the form of student financial aid matters. These researchers examined data of more than 20,000 Georgia technical college students who were enrolled in two separate cohorts, one in 1992 and one in 1997, and found that after the institution of the HOPE grant in 1993, students who received the grant as opposed to traditional need-based financial aid, persisted and graduated at a lower rate. (To retain the HOPE grant, students had to make satisfactory progress toward earning a diploma or certificate). The students in the 1992 cohort were more likely to persist to graduation than were the students enrolled in the 1997 cohort. In fact, attrition rates

increased six percent after the institution of the HOPE grant. Overall, graduation rates were ten percent higher before the HOPE grant. Both rates were statistically significant.

Dynarski (2003) has also studied the effect of financial aid on increasing a person's educational and degree attainment. She conducted an empirical analysis of the impact of the elimination of the Social Security Student Benefit Program (SSSBP) on college enrollment and degree attainment. The SSSBP was enacted in 1965, and provided educational benefits (monetary benefits) to the children of deceased, disabled, or retired Social Security beneficiaries. At its peak, in 1977, approximately 700,000 students were enrolled in college. In 1981, Congress voted to eliminate the program, causing "the largest and sharpest change in grant aid for college students that has ever occurred in the United States" (p. 279).

Drawing on data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), Dynarski (2003) compared college attendance of SSSBP eligible high school seniors who graduated in 1979, 1980, and 1981 ("before cohort"), with those who graduated in 1982 and 1983 ("after cohort"), students who were sophomores and juniors when the SSSBP was abandoned. The variables in the data include: family income, ethnicity, parental education, family size, age, gender, whether college attendance and completion occurred before age 23, and whether or not the family was a single-parent household. The data show that for both cohorts, five percent of all of the children had a father die before the age of 18, a key to eligibility for the SSSBP.

The results of her study showed that 56 percent of eligible students in the "before cohort" attended college using SSSBP benefits as compared to 50 percent of students with living fathers. In the "after cohort" only 35 percent of students without fathers

attended college as compared to almost 48 percent of students with living fathers. Thus, the elimination of grant aid (the SSSBP), "reduced college attendance probabilities by more than a third" (p. 279) for students without fathers. In general, "children with deceased fathers grew up in relatively low-income families" (p. 281).

Dynarski (2003) demonstrated that for students in the "before cohort," those with "deceased fathers were more likely to attend college than their classmates…for the ["after cohort"] the pattern is reversed" (p. 282). Furthermore, the receipt of grant aid induced about 22 percent of college qualified students, who would otherwise not have enrolled to do so, and it "likely induced others who would have completed just a few years of college to instead finish their degree" (p. 285). Based on her findings, Dynarski concluded that grant aid eligibility is consistent with increasing both college entry and persistence.

Until the recent research of Dowd and Coury (2006), little was known about the effect of loans on persistence to the second year or on associate degree attainment in the community college sector. Using the National Center for Education Statistics' Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS 90/94) data set, the researchers examined the influence of tuition and financial aid (including grants, loans, and work-study) on the persistence of community college students. Defining persistence as re-enrolling in the fall of the second year, the researchers found that there is a "negative association of loans with persistence rates" (p. 47).

The sample selected for analysis consisted of 1,010,543 students who began their education in 694 California community colleges and had persisted to the second year at their specific community college. In the sample, "41% of the students persisted to enroll in the fall of the second year and 20% earned an associate's degree in five years" (p. 40).

The predictor variables selected were conceptualized as components of the first year experience and included: financial status, financial aid package, parental status, and work hours.

These researchers used a statistical model which integrated rational choice theory with student departure theory, because "psychological factors [which] are recognized but not explicitly measured" (p. 41), influence rational decision-making. Their analysis identified differences in the characteristics of students who take loans. They found that before making a decision to withdraw, students will make a risk-benefit analysis, balancing the cost of education and its potential financial benefit, with their dissatisfaction with the risks associated with loan default. Based on their findings Dowd and Coury concluded that while grants provide no significant effect, student loans have a "negative effect on persistence and no effect on degree attainment" (p. 33). These results support their proposition that:

> all else [being] equal, students who take loans will arrive at a more negative assessment of the net benefits of a community college education than their peers. As students assess their aptitude for college work and the prospects for a financial return to their educational investment, those who have loans will more quickly become dissatisfied with their college investment decision and withdraw (p. 53).

From the research thus far, it seems that the shift in financial aid from grants to loans over that last several years has made a difference in students' choice of institution as well as in their ability to enroll and to persist to degree attainment. In another study, DesJardins, Ahlburg, and McCall (2002), specifically explored how the type, amount, and timing of financial aid affect student departure decisions. The conceptual framework for their study was student departure theory (Tinto, 1993). The research indicates that

scholarships have a psychosocial effect on students and that "the provision of a scholarship (which includes all forms of merit-based aid) may signal commitment from the institution, which in turn increases a student's commitment to the institution….Researchers…have shown student commitment to be strongly related to persistence" (p. 661).

To examine how a change in financial aid affects student departure, DesJardins, et al., (2002) used a discreet-time hazard model. Hazard models forecast college stop-out and permit the inclusion of factors that vary over time (like financial aid), thereby providing information about the subsidy response of students over their academic careers (DesJardins, et al., 2002). The model included institutional data that was collected from 3,975 University of Minnesota, at Minneapolis, freshmen. Data were collected each term for seven years. The data pertaining to the students included several variables: race, gender, age, disability, high-school rank and ACT score, residency, major college, GPA, athletic status, and transfer credits.

These researchers ran model simulations under three different financial aid scenarios: no financial aid, converting loans to scholarships, and frontloading scholarships into the first two years—when students are more likely to leave (Braxton, et al., 2000). The results of these simulations were compared to the "average" financial aid package of the university which included loans, grants, and scholarship offers made by the institution.

Based on the simulations, DesJardins, et al., (2002) concluded that a package containing any type of financial aid reduces stopout relative to a package that contains no financial aid offer. Beyond that "the effects of the offer of financial aid vary temporally

and by type of aid… In every year, scholarships had the largest impact on retention" (p. 669).

Overall, these researchers identified a critical relationship between financial assistance and educational persistence (e.g., Hu & St. John, 2001; Resch & Hall, 2002; Seago & Spetz, 2005); other factors such as parental education, socioeconomic status, institutional type, and racial composition of the student body, had a significantly lower correlation to graduation.

The mere availability of financial aid for African American students is not enough; the form of the aid is also a consideration. The abundance of financial aid research shows that student persistence is positively related to non-repayable financial aid such as grants, merit-based scholarships, gift and work-study funds (College Board, 2004b), particularly for lower-income students.

Since 1980, however, as a result of changing government priorities, "if not as a result of the breakdown in the old consensus about equal opportunity" (St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005, p. 545), there has been a shift away from the federal commitment to need-based, non-repayable grants. In a six-year longitudinal study beginning in 1995-96, Reynolds and Weagley (2003) report that loan aid became more prevalent and is negatively related to persistence. During this same time, tuition rates have increased significantly. The impact of loan aid has been particularly difficult for low-income first-generation African American students because, in general, they are more averse to student loans than their white peers. Therefore, aid packages with high amounts of loans do not encourage African American students to participate in higher education (Somers, et al., 2004).

Summary

Degree attainment is regarded as the path to higher socioeconomic status and mobility for all Americans, yet surprisingly, as we entered the 21st Century approximately only one-half of all college students are expected to be successful in their educational journey; a number that has sadly remained unchanged for many decades. Even worse, the rates of enrollment in higher education and persistence to graduation for African American students continue to lag behind those of white Americans. With steadily increasing numbers of non-white Americans, this persisting educational gap is harmful to the nation's economic development and to societal advancement.

From the literature it appears that there is not necessarily a single factor that explains this educational gap. Although much of the literature generally supports Tinto's (1993) assertion that academic and social integration and institutional commitment and fit affect persistence, the research also demonstrates that persistence is influenced not only by pre-college characteristics and institutional experiences but by other factors external to Tinto's (1993) model. Persistence to degree attainment is not the result of any one factor but is rather a complex mix of pre-college factors and within-college factors over time.

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure was used to frame this study of degree attainment of a group of pre-law, African American college graduates from a variety of predominantly white private and public colleges and universities, to learn more about their pre-college characteristics and within college experiences and why they persisted despite challenges and potentially inhospitable educational environments. This research addresses existing gaps in the literature. From the findings, policy and programmatic suggestions that increase African American persistence and degree attainment will be

made. The research design and methodology used in this study is more fully discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

"America is a diverse country, racially, economically, and ethnically, [a]nd our institutions of higher education should reflect our diversity" (Bush, 2003). Thus, as minorities continue to make up a greater portion of the United States' total population (e.g., Castle, 1993; Balz & Esten, 1998) increased minority enrollment in higher education and degree attainment is imperative. The education of greater numbers of minority students will be a key dimension of the economic and social future of the United States (Balz & Esten, 1998). Considering the low percentage of African American students who attain baccalaureate degrees, it was the purpose of this study to learn more about the pre-college characteristics and educational experiences of a group of African American CLEO students who persisted to degree attainment and why they did so.

To learn about their pre-college characteristics and institutional experiences, the researcher first surveyed the participants. Several participants then took part in focused individual interviews. Both the survey items and interview questions were constructed using factors included in a modified Tinto (1993) model of student departure. The survey results were compared with the interview responses to triangulate the data.

This chapter will describe the research methods used to obtain a quantitative portrait of the participants and to learn why they persisted to baccalaureate degree attainment. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the research design. This discussion will be followed by identification of the interview sites, a description of the participant selection and the ethical considerations surrounding the use of live

participants, survey instrumentation and interview protocol, and an explanation of how the data were collected. The final section will discuss how the data were analyzed.

Research Design

Simply put, a research design is merely the researcher's plan of how he or she is going to proceed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). A research plan is "an action plan for getting from *here to there,* where *here* may be defined as a set of questions to be answered and *there* is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions" (Yin, 1997, p. 236).

The case study is a research approach that investigates single and multiple cases, or events, within their real-life context (Yin, 1997). When a single unit is under investigation, the case study is defined as a holistic case study. Holistic case studies attempt "to understand the whole picture of the social context under study" (Janesick, 2004, p. 7). This case study is holistic in that it sought to understand the many factors that influenced persistence to baccalaureate degree attainment for this group of participants.

Because the basic definition of case studies includes reliance on multiple sources of evidence, case studies may be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence (Yin, 1997). "When multiple methods are used, the methods interact with each other and inform the research process as a whole" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.20). Accordingly, to open the way for synergistic effects, this case study made use of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection (Kohlbacher, 2005) to understand how and why these participants persisted to graduation. The quantitative data enumerated the outcomes of the grouped factors. The qualitative data gave the factors meaning (Yin, 1997).

In addition to collecting survey and interview data, participant records were fully reviewed in advance of their arrival at the summer institute, to gain an academic sense of the cohort, and then once again after the individual interviews. The record review following the interviews was participant specific and limited to the students who met the identified boundaries. The purpose of the review was to authenticate age, race, participant major, GPA, degree granting institution, time to completion, and whether or not the participant had transferred institutions.

Using these methods conforms to the commonly accepted research dimensions for qualitative studies established by Patton (2002). Those dimensions include multiple methods of data collection, as well as a holistic approach to data analysis, and then a rich descriptive, narrative discussion of themes and implications. In addition, using both methods of data collection mirrors the quantitative and qualitative literature underlying this study.

To engage the participants in thinking about their degree attainment and to generally learn more about them, they were asked to provide information related to their pre-college demographics and profile characteristics (e.g., parental levels of education, and academic achievement in high school and college) and institutional experiences (e.g., social relationships, faculty interaction and financial aid) using a survey instrument that was based on a modified Tinto model. As defined, a modified Tinto model (1993) means that the survey questions were constructed using the factors that Tinto and other educational researchers identified as influencing persistence. Surveys were administered at two independent sites. Beyond providing a quantitative description of the participants,

the survey data were collected to triangulate the interview findings; the interview questions and survey instrument were constructed using the same groups of factors.

According to Yin (1997), triangulation is the use of converging lines of evidence of multiple sources of evidence to corroborate the findings of the research and to enhance their validity; "the more the emulation [of the findings], the greater the confidence in the results" (p. 230). Convergence requires that the same questions be asked of the different sources of evidence (Yin, 1997). Although triangulation implies the use of three separate sources, according to Kohlbacher (2006), in social research triangulation is not literally interpreted but is employed to describe the use of multiple methods and measures of empirical phenomena.

Following the collection of survey data, interviews were scheduled at one site for those participants who wished to tell their story. After the interviews were conducted, individual reports were written. The use of multiple interviews permitted cross-case analysis, or comparisons of the cases, strengthening the analytic, as opposed to statistical, generalization of this study. Yin (1997) defines analytic generalization as "using single or multiple cases to illustrate, represent or generalize to a theory" (p. 239). It is important to note, however, that:

> case study is the pursuit of the uniqueness of individual cases more than their commonality…Sameness or commonality…is the basic building block of quantitative data analysis. What is unique to an individual usually shows up there as error variance. In case study, uniqueness of an individual that recurs consistently is not error variance but the basic building block of understanding (Stake, 2004, p. 200).

Thus, unique responses to the interview questions were neither unanticipated nor undesired. All responses were helpful in understanding why this group of participants persisted to graduation.

Data Collection Sites

Survey data were collected in summer 2007, at the University of Missouri, School of Law, Columbia, MO., and the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, Pittsburgh, PA. The individual interviews were conducted only at the University of Missouri. These institutions were chosen for data collection because they were selected by the Council of Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) to host the 2007 annual summer institutes. Both institutions are doctoral/research-extensive universities as described by the Carnegie Foundation. Considering, however, that the students were selected from a national applicant pool and were randomly assigned to the host institutions for the summer institutes, these institutional characteristics are not relevant.

CLEO summer institutes provide academic support, placement assistance, and counseling to pre-law students. Founded in 1968, CLEO is a non-profit project of the American Bar Association Fund for Justice and Education. CLEO is committed to diversifying the legal profession by expanding legal education opportunities for minority, low-income and disadvantaged groups. In 1998, Congress passed the Higher Education Amendments Act, creating the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program. CLEO currently receives funds from the U.S. Department of Education.

Since its inception, more than 7,500 students have participated in the various CLEO pre-law and law school academic support programs, have successfully completed law school, have passed the bar exam, and have joined the legal profession. CLEO

alumni may be found in every area of the legal profession—private law firms and corporations, law schools, federal and state judiciaries, and legislatures in jurisdictions across the United States. CLEO has played a major role in helping to provide a voice to under-represented groups (CLEO, 2007).

Participant Selection

The participants in this study represented a purposeful sample. Purposeful sampling selects information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1990); participants are specifically selected to facilitate an expansion of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). All of the participants in this study were CLEO students. According to established program guidelines, CLEO students are minority, low-income, or disadvantaged college graduates from across the United States. Thus, this group was selected for data collection because it was anticipated that many of the participants would have met the established four boundaries of the study; traditional-aged African American students, meaning that age-wise they were not older than age 19 when they entered college, who had completed a bachelor's degree at an predominantly white college or university within six years.

Each site hosted approximately forty CLEO students. There were as many different private and public colleges and universities represented in this study as there were participants. The participants' undergraduate majors and grade point averages also varied.

To reward voluntary participation in this study, two students at each location were randomly selected to receive a $25.00 gift card for their completion of the survey. All students who participated in the interview process received law school T-shirts for their effort.

Human Subjects

The Declaration of Helsinki states that:

> Every...research project involving human subjects should be preceded by careful assessment of predictable risks in comparison with the foreseeable benefits to the subjects or to others…The right of the research subject to safeguard his or her integrity must always be respected. Every precaution should be taken to respect the privacy of the subject and to minimize the impact of the study on the subject's physical and mental integrity and on the personality of the subject (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 87).

This qualitative study involved human participants. As such, it was submitted to the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of the University of Missouri, Columbia, MO., and the University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA., for ethical review prior to data collection to ensure that the participants suffered no harm as a result of this study and for permission to access and use the data for this research. Permission was obtained from both institutions. As a courtesy, permission to survey and interview the CLEO students also was obtained from the Council on Legal Education Opportunity. Proof of IRB and CLEO approval appears in Appendix C.

Although permission to conduct this research was granted by CLEO and the IRBs at both institutions, it also was necessary to obtain the informed consent of the individual participants. Informed consent is defined as "the right of the subjects to decide anonymously whether they will be involved in the research endeavor" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 98).

Shortly after the participants arrived at each university, they were informed verbally and by letter about the purpose of the research and they were invited to participate in the written survey. Participants at the University of Missouri were also made aware of the individual interview process. All participants were informed that the

research was part of a doctoral study and was separate and apart from the CLEO Institute. Participants were told at the outset that all participation was voluntary and that there was no obligation to participate and no penalty if they chose not to participate. At the University of Missouri, subjects were given the option of participating in either one or both parts of the data collection processes. Most importantly, participants were instructed that responses would be treated confidentially and not associated with any individual in any way.

All participants were informed that even if they had agreed to participate, they could choose to opt out at the beginning of the research process or to end their participation at any time during the research process, with no penalty. Finally, the participants were informed that blank or incomplete forms would be considered as non-consent and not included in the study. The surveys were administered by paid student-workers who were not affiliated with the CLEO summer institutes or the subjects.

All efforts were made to ensure the anonymity of the participants. No identifying information appeared on the survey forms and interview notes were identified by number rather than by name. The identification key for the interviews is stored separately from the data. Electronic files will be retained for three years after the conclusion of this study. None of the data will be shared with other researchers. All data will be retained in a locked cabinet. The Letter of Informed Consent appears in Appendix D.

Survey Instrumentation and Interview Protocol

Using Tinto's (1993) model of student departure as the framework, this researcher constructed the survey instrument and the interview questions using the relevant literature on student persistence that was reviewed in Chapter 2 (e.g., support for educational

attainment, social engagement, academic engagement, and institutional behaviors). The survey questions were drafted by the researcher and then reviewed and critiqued by two of the experts on the researcher's dissertation committee. The questions were then reconstructed by the researcher and resubmitted to the same two experts for final approval.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was comprised of two distinct parts. A five-point Likert scale was used to collect information on the pre-college and within-college factors that were identified in the literature as factors that influence persistence to graduation. Likert scales consist of three or more rank-ordered categories along a continuum, and are typically used to assess subjects' perceptions, opinions or beliefs. To increase reliability, typically scales of five to eleven categories are used. Although Likert categories may appear to represent equal intervals, "the relative intensity of [the] category labels is ambiguous" (Busch, 1993, p. 734). Single response questions that pertained to pre-college demographic and profile characteristics were included at the end of the survey.

Operationalization of the Survey Instrument

Tinto's (1993) model of student departure suggests that most students who leave school before completing their degree do so voluntarily because of a failure to integrate into the academic and social life of the institution. As the research points out, Tinto and others have identified several pre-college characteristics and collegiate experiences that influence academic and social integration (e.g., Tinto, 1975, 1993; Lang, 1992; Cabrera, et al., 1993; Balz & Esten, 1998; Bennett & Xie, 2003; Smith, 2004; College Board,

2004; Gardner, 2005). In the next section the researcher will briefly discuss these factors; these factors were considered in the survey instrument.

Socioeconomic Status and Family Factors

Students bring with them a broad range of background characteristics, many of which have been shown to be related to persistence (Tinto, 1993). Parental levels of education and support for higher education are important to persistence to degree attainment because parents create and strengthen the expectations and aspirations of their children. Parents with higher levels of education tend to set higher expectations (Somers, et al., 2004). Higher levels of education are generally related to higher socioeconomic status (Bennett & Xie, 2003). On-going parental support throughout the college process is also necessary to persistence and parents with higher levels of education are more likely to lend support and stress the importance of degree attainment (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). This need for on-going support is particularly true for African American students (Somers, et al., 2004).

Academic Engagement

Academic preparation in primary and secondary school is necessary to intellectual development and academic achievement. Low academic performance at the time of college enrollment often leads to difficulty integrating into the academic fabric of the university (Garibaldi, 1997). Without academic integration, students begin to disengage (Graunke & Woosley, 2005).

Social Engagement

Involvement with peers aids social integration, and social integration, particularly in the first year, is important to degree attainment. However, in predominantly white

institutions "students of color may find it especially difficult to find and become a member of a supportive community within the college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 74). Without a peer group, African American students, particularly first-generation African American students, may experience feelings of isolation or alienation which may become a barrier to educational persistence (Watson, et al., 2002).

Institutional Behaviors

Institutions of higher education that are committed to helping students persist are those which create educational experiences that are inclusive of all students. Institutional commitment is defined broadly and includes among other factors, formal and informal academic and social experiences and support, (Tinto, 1993), in and out-of- the classroom experiences, financial aid, and admitting a critical mass of students (Gardner, 2005). A critical mass of African American students is particularly important in preventing the isolation and alienation (Davis, et al., 2004) which can result in student departure.

Research shows that student persistence at the end of the freshman year is related to establishing a relationship with faculty both in and out of the classroom (Pascarrella & Terenzini, 2005). This student-faculty relationship provides a *necessary* support system for African American students and may prove even more critical in their educational experiences than for white students (Watson, et al., 2002).

Classroom experiences matter. Active participation in classroom-learning facilitates student integration into the social and academic life of the school which in turn influences student persistence (Tinto, 1997). Tinto also found that active participation was related to increased student transfer rates from two to four-year institutions. Because it is increasingly common for minority students to begin their education at two-year

institutions, positive classroom experiences are fundamental to improving persistence to baccalaureate attainment.

To be successful, African American students must connect with the institution. To form a connection, minority students must feel that the institution is hospitable, supportive, and nondiscriminatory (Watson, et al., 2002). Supportive environments, however, often do not exist even for majority students (Lang, 1992; Seago & Spetz, 2005). The graduation rate for African American students at smaller, private institutions is higher than for larger, public institutions suggesting that these institutions provide environments in which students have greater institutional support and opportunities for more extensive social relationships. Unfortunately, because of cost, African American students are more often enrolled in larger, public institutions (College Board, 2004a).

The increasing cost of higher education is often a barrier for African American students (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2005). Thus, financial aid is critical to success. The form of the aid, however, also must be considered. When engaging in a cost-benefit analysis, lower socioeconomic students, who do not necessarily recognize the future value of higher education, are less inclined to assume high debt loads and frequently do not persist (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Because African American students are often low-income, first-generation college students, in general, they are more risk-averse to high loan amounts than are their white peers (Somers, et al., 2004).

Persistence to Graduation

Over time, despite the increased college enrollment of African American students, the persistence rate, as determined by the percentage of students who attain baccalaureate degrees has remained relatively unchanged (Kane & Rouse, 1999; Cabrera, et al., 1999).

As indicated in Chapter 2, perhaps there exists a group of factors, rather than a single factor, that allows some African American students to overcome the challenges to degree attainment and influences them to persist. Unfortunately, there is little research that considers this question. There is even less research that examines African American students' perceptions of their educational experiences and reasons for why they persisted to graduation. This study will attempt to build on the previous literature by addressing these gaps in the literature and describe the variables that influence persistence for this group of African American students.

Interview Protocol

The qualitative piece of this study involved interpretive data methods (Stake, 2004), meaning that the researcher "seeks representations of personal experience, the complexity of problems, and situational constraints" (p. 200). Each participant was asked a limited and uniform set of open-ended questions. Although these qualitative questions were open-ended, the focus was on the collegiate experience with an emphasis on meaning rather than cause and effect (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The interview questions that were used appear in Appendix B. These questions also were drafted by the researcher, were reviewed and critiqued by the same two experts who reviewed the survey instrument, and then rewritten and resubmitted to them for their final approval. The interview questions were designed to shed light on the larger research question of why some African American students persist to degree attainment and others do not. While the interview questions focused on the same groups of factors as did the survey instrument: support for educational attainment, social engagement, academic engagement, and institutional behaviors, through focused interviews the researcher

probed the participants to describe their collegiate experiences at predominantly white colleges and universities to learn the details of those experiences and to understand how they made sense of their collegiate experiences and why they persisted to degree attainment.

Data Collection

The participants in this study were made aware of the research at the outset of the 2007 CLEO Institutes. At the University of Missouri School of Law, the survey was administered by an undergraduate, student-worker during the second week of the institute at the close of the school day. At the University of Pittsburgh, School of Law, the survey was administered by a different student-worker during the fifth week of the institute, also at the close of the school day. Both surveys were administered in a single sitting and took the participants no longer than 30 minutes to complete. At the completion of the Missouri administration, the student-worker informed the participants of the opportunity to participate in the interview process.

Because the survey was administered by student-workers with no understanding of the research, it was administered to all willing participants without regard to the four identified boundaries. Similarly, at the completion of the Missouri survey, all participants were afforded the opportunity to tell their story through individual interviews. As a result, all of the participants who volunteered to be interviewed were scheduled for an interview by the student-worker. Interview data were collected from participants regardless of race, age at which they entered college, type of institution attended, or time required to complete their degrees.

A total of 76 CLEO students were enrolled at two independent locations. Survey data were collected from 53, or 70%, of all CLEO students, 39 students at the University of Missouri and 14 students at the University of Pittsburgh, and were converted into a database, SPSS version 16.0 (2007). The data were examined and the responses of the participants who met the four boundaries of the study were identified and separated from the larger dataset. Fifteen participants met the established boundaries. Thus, a subset of data from these 15 participants was created and the results were aggregated into the four identified categories for final analysis.

At the University of Missouri, 13 CLEO students volunteered to be interviewed, to tell their story. All were interviewed during the fourth week of the institute, outside of class time. Interviews averaged one and one-half hours. All 13 subjects requested that their interview not be audio taped. Thus, based on the subjects' preferences, their responses were hand-recorded by the researcher.

Nine of the 13 interviewees were African American. The interview notes of these nine participants were examined to identify which participants met the identified four boundaries; five participants met them. The notes from these five were read and reread and individual reports were written. Second interviews of two of the participants were conducted during week five for clarification of themes that emerged from the original notes. Quotes from all participants were checked by the participants for correctness. From these reports, emerging themes were identified to form the basis for addressing the research questions.

Before setting aside the interviews of the remaining four African American participants, the interviews were reviewed for unique responses to the research questions.

It is worth noting that none of the substantive qualitative responses of these four participants were significantly different from the responses of the participants who met the established four boundaries. None-the less, the quantitative and qualitative data analyzed in Chapter 4 described the pre-college demographic and profile characteristics and college experiences of those participants who were traditional-aged African American students when they entered college, and who subsequently completed their baccalaureate degrees at predominantly white public and private colleges and universities within six years after matriculating at their post-secondary institutions.

Analysis of the Data

"Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study" (Tellis, 1997, ¶49). In this study the researcher investigated two questions:

1. Considering the pre-college characteristics and the institutional experiences of the participants, which characteristics and experiences best describe these African American students who have persisted to baccalaureate attainment at predominantly white colleges and universities within six years of high school graduation?
2. Given their minority status within their undergraduate institutions, why did these African American students persist to graduation?

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure guided the data collection and analysis. Because Tinto's "theoretical model [was] tested on traditional students, only first time freshmen" (Cabrera, et al., 1993, p. 129), this case study used the same boundary; all of the participants interviewed were traditional students, meaning that they enrolled in college at the completion of high school. In addition, three other boundaries were

imposed: all of the participants were African American; all of the participants completed college within six years of enrollment; and all of the participants attained their baccalaureate degree at predominantly white private or public colleges or universities.

Demographics and Profile Characteristics

The survey instrument used in this study was based upon a modified Tinto model (1993) that included the factors identified in the research literature. Using SPSS (2007, version 16.0) to aid the quantitative analysis, the researcher generated descriptive statistics from the Likert-type and demographic data that was collected and inputted into that database. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations and numbers and percentages provide summaries of the characteristics and experiences that describe these African American students who have persisted to baccalaureate. The survey results presented a quantitative response to the first research question.

Interview Data

The purpose of the interview component of this study was to turn to the students to ask how, given their minority status in predominantly white institutions, they coped with feelings such as isolation, invisibility, or hyper-visibility and persisted to baccalaureate attainment. The individual interviews yielded rich descriptions of the subjects' collegiate experiences enabling the researcher to more fully address the second research question.

The open-ended questions that were necessary to answer the overarching research question appear in Appendix B. The responses to these questions guided the qualitative analysis. These data were analyzed inductively. The inductive approach to qualitative data analysis allows research findings to emerge from repeated, dominant, or significant

themes in the data without the restraints that structured hypothesis testing may impose (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Thomas, 2003; Creswell, 2002). After each interview, the reports were read and reread, looking for recurring words, phrases, or themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions of their college experiences. Coding categories were then developed from the recurring themes that emerged. These categories were then used to sort, total, and rank-order the data to understand how these participants made sense of their college experiences to be able to persist to graduation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

According to Thomas (2003), the desired outcome of the inductive process is to create between three and eight summary categories that capture the most important themes considering the purpose of the research:

Table 1: The coding process in inductive analysis

Initial read through text data	Identify specific segments of information	Label the segments of information to create categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating most important categories
Many pages of text →	Many segments of text →	30-40 categories →	15-20 categories →	3-8 categories

Note: Adapted from Creswell, 2002, Figure 9.4, p. 266

Then, using a modified Tinto (1993) model as the framework, pattern-matching logic was used for the analysis of these categories. Pattern matching logic is "one of the most desirable modes of analysis, [it] compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one" (Yin, 1997, p. 251). Because this study was qualitative in nature, the empirical patterns that emerged were compared to the factors that were identified in the modified Tinto model (1993) as influencing persistence to either support or refute those findings.

Multiple interviews allowed for cross-case comparisons, strengthening the findings about the question under study (Yin, 1997).

Summary

As minorities continue to make up a greater portion of the United States' total population (e.g., Castle, 1993; Balz & Esten, 1998) the education of greater numbers of minority students will be a key dimension of the economic and social future of the United States (Balz & Esten, 1998). The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methods used to find answers to the research questions that might contribute to increasing the persistence of greater numbers of African American college students.

Using a modified Tinto (1993) model as a framework for the research, quantitative and qualitative data were collected by surveying and interviewing a group of African American CLEO participants. Then pattern-matching logic was used to compare an empirically-based pattern with a predicted pattern to learn more about the pre-college characteristics and educational experiences of a group of African American CLEO students who persisted to baccalaureate degree attainment and how they did so.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the pre-college characteristics and institutional experiences of traditional-age African American students who persisted to baccalaureate degree attainment at predominantly white colleges and universities within six years of enrolling, to better understand how and why they, unlike the majority of African American students, were successful in completing their degrees. This knowledge may be useful in helping close the persistence-to-graduation gap between African American and white students.

This chapter will first provide descriptive statistics of the pre-college characteristics and institutional experiences of the survey participants, and then will allow the reader to hear the voices of several participants as they described their collegiate experiences through individual interviews. Finally, the chapter will discuss the results of the analysis and conclude with a summary of the results.

Pre-College Characteristics and Institutional Experiences

This section identifies the survey categories that were used for analysis in this study. The categories were created by grouping individual survey questions that spoke to the factors identified in the literature as influencing degree attainment. As stated, the individual factors were defined using a modified Tinto (1993) model. The survey categories were: support for educational attainment (pre-college), support for educational attainment (in college), social engagement, academic engagement, institutional behaviors, and general demographic information. For purposes of analysis, only four categories

were utilized; support for educational attainment, pre-college and within college, were compressed into a single category. Means and standard deviations and numbers and percentages were computed to quantify the responses. The survey appears in its entirety in Appendix A.

Descriptive Statistics

The data for this study were obtained by surveying students enrolled in the 2007 CLEO Summer Institutes. A total of 76 CLEO students were enrolled at two independent locations. Of these 76 students, 37 students at one location and 16 students at the other voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey. Thus, results were obtained from 53, or 70%, of all CLEO participants. All survey responses were included in the original dataset (N = 53). These data were converted into an SPSS database (2007).

From the initial data set, a subset was ultimately created for the purpose of this analysis. This subset was comprised of participants whose responses met the four identified boundaries: all were African American, all entered college at the completion of high school, and all graduated from predominantly white college and universities within six years of enrolling. To create this subset, race/ethnicity was chosen as the initial identifier. After identifying only those participants who were African American, the remaining four boundaries were addressed.

Race/Ethnicity

Based upon self-reported data, participants initially were assigned to one of five racial/ethnic groups: African American (29 participants or 54.7 % of the sample), Hispanic (12 participants or 22.6% of the sample), Asian (six participants or 11.3% of the

sample), Caucasian (three participants or 5.6% of the sample), and other (three participants or 5.6% of the sample).

Age, Years to Completion, and Institutional Type

Of the 29 African American participants who chose to participate in this study, 28 participants (96.5%) entered college at the completion of high school (by the age of 19); 26 participants (89.6%) completed college within six years; and 19 participants (65.5%) attained their degrees at predominantly white public and private colleges and universities. Considering only those participants who met all four boundaries resulted in the working subset of 15 (51.7%) of the initial 29 African American participants (n=15).

Demographic Information

The demographic section of the survey collected information about gender, race, socio-economic status and parental education, emotional and financial support for higher education, work patterns while in college, institutional information, inter-institutional transfer history, and debt load. In addition, this section captured information related to the participants' academic preparation for college, and performance in high school and college; these findings, however, will be addressed in the academic engagement section.

Although the demographic questions appeared at the end of the survey, presenting the participants' responses to these questions at the outset is preferable. It is a means to describe the participants' background and profile characteristics, and to address the first research question.

Research Question One

The first question asked, *Considering the pre-college characteristics and institutional experiences of the participants, which characteristics and institutional*

experiences best described these African American students who persisted to baccalaureate attainment at predominantly white colleges and universities within six years of high school graduation?

The 15 African American participants were essentially equally distributed by gender, eight were male (53.3%) and seven were female (46.7%). All graduated from high school between 17 and 19 years of age: six participants (40%) were 17 years old, eight participants (53.3%) were 18 years old, and one participant (6.7%) was 19 years old. Two participants celebrated birthdays after high school graduation and before entering college. As a result, 10 participants (66.7%) entered college at 18 years of age.

As indicated, all of the participants graduated from predominantly white public and private colleges and universities; eight or 53.3% of the participants graduated from public institutions and seven or 46.7 % of the participants graduated from private institutions. Of the 13 participants who responded to this question, seven participants (53.8%) attended institutions that enrolled more than 10,000 students, including three participants (23.1%) who attended institutions larger than 20,000 students. Six participants (46.2%) attended institutions that enrolled fewer than 10,000 students, including two participants (15.4%) who attended institutions smaller than 1,000 students.

Four of the participants (26.7%) transferred institutions at some time during their college years. One participant transferred from a community college to a four-year institution; and three other participants transferred from one four-year institution to a different four-year institution.

When examining time to graduation, all participants completed college within a period of three to five years after enrolling. One participant (6.7%) graduated in three

years, three participants (21.7%) graduated in 3.5 years, and nine participants (60%) graduated within four years. One participant graduated in four and one-half years and one other in five years; both participants were transfer students between four-year institutions. The remaining participant who transferred between four-year institutions graduated in four years. The only participant to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution reported graduating in 3.5 years, but it is not certain if this represents both of these educational experiences or just the four-year college experience.

Upon entering college, two participants (13.3%) lived at home and commuted to college; one initially attended a community college. The remaining 13 participants (86.7%) lived on campus during their first year, as seemingly did the community college student after transferring to a four-year institution. Even though these participants lived away from home, 12 participants (80%) talked to their parents with regularity; five participants (33.3%) spoke to their parents daily, seven (46.7%) spoke to their parents every few days, and one participant (6.7%) spoke to parents weekly. Only two participants (13.4%) spoke to their parents less than weekly. Similarly, 10 participants (66.6%) spoke to a support person (grandparent, foster parent, minister, etc.) at least weekly and only four participants (26.7 %) spoke to a support person less than weekly.

With respect to parental education and socio-economic status, 14 mothers (93.3%) and 13 fathers (86.7%) completed high school and eight of each (53.3%) completed college. Four participants (26.7%) considered themselves to be low-income students, which was defined by CLEO as earning less than 150% of the Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines, with parental income less than $40,000. Eight

participants (53.3%) were dependent on their families for financial support while in college, two of whom were from low-income families.

All participants (100%) worked while in college; 14 participants (93.3%) began working in their first year, including seven (46.7%) who worked only on campus. The hours worked varied widely, with a minimum of five hours per week to a maximum of 40 hours worked per week. The mean hours worked was 21.21 hours per week (S.D. = 11.33), however, the majority of participants, eight (57.1%), worked 20 hours per week or less. One of the participants who worked 40 hours per week and both of the participants who worked 25 hours per week contributed to the support of their families as opposed to being dependent on them for support. Of these three participants, only one, who worked 25 hours per week, self-identified as both low-income and economically disadvantaged, which was defined by CLEO as being independent of one's parents with an income that is less than 185% of the HHS poverty guidelines. The other two participants failed to identify in either category. Overall, twelve participants (80%) indicated that working was financially necessary to their ability to complete their education.

A summary of the demographics reveals that all of the participants under analysis entered college following high school graduation, most at 18 years of age. All of the participants who moved away from home resided on campus their first year. The great majority talked with their parents on a frequent basis. All of the participants had at least one parent who completed high school and 10 of the 15 participants had at least one parent with a college degree. Six participants had two parents with college degrees, including two of the four participants who identified their family as being low-income.

All participants worked while in college with all but one beginning in the freshman year; half of these freshman workers were employed on campus. The majority of participants worked fewer than 20 hours per week but more than three quarters of the participants indicated that working was necessary to completing college. The predominantly white colleges and universities from which they graduated, in five years or less, were essentially evenly split between public and private institutions that varied drastically in size, from fewer than 1,000 students to more than 20,000 students.

Support for Educational Attainment (pre-college and while in college)

The purpose of this category was to identify the individuals who encouraged or influenced the survey participants to pursue higher education and then once enrolled in their respective institutions, influenced the participants to complete their degree program. The survey participants also were asked to indicate the importance of the role these individuals played.

Parental encouragement was identified as being of great importance to the educational attainment of the survey participants. Twelve participants (80%) strongly agreed that their parents played an important role in encouraging them to attend college. High school teachers were second to parents in encouraging college enrollment. Eight participants (53.3%) strongly agreed and four participants (26.7%) agreed that their teachers played an important role in their college decision-making.

With respect to completing college, parents also were important to degree completion. One participant agreed (6.7%) and 11 participants (73.3%) strongly agreed that their parents played an important role in encouraging them to complete college. Friends followed parents in encouraging degree completion. Five participants (33.3%)

agreed and seven participants (46.7%) strongly agreed that their friends provided important encouragement. Educators ranked third; however, the focus shifted from high school teachers to college professors. While five participants (33.3%) agreed and two participants (13.3%) strongly agreed that high school teachers played an important role in encouraging college completion, five participants (33.3%) agreed and six participants (40%) strongly agreed that college faculty played an important role in encouraging them to complete college.

Many different individuals played a role in encouraging individual participants to attend and complete their college education. For this group as a whole, however, parental support for education was the most significant source of encouragement.

Academic Engagement

This category was designed to identify whether or not the survey participants were engaged in the academic life of their institutions, as measured by class attendance, participation in class discussions and projects, and out-of-class academic interactions with classmates and faculty. This category also attempted to gauge whether or not the participants felt that they were academically prepared for college.

Eleven participants (73.3%) attended public high schools and four (26.7%) participants attended private high schools; nationally, only nine percent of African American students attend private as opposed to public schools (NCES, 2002). In addition, all of the participants' high schools offered Advanced Placement (AP) courses and 13 participants (86.7%) were enrolled in AP courses. According to statistics published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) in 1999-2000, roughly when these participants were entering high school, 47% of private schools offered AP courses and

60% of public schools offered AP courses. By 2002-03, when these participants were graduating high school, approximately 67% of public high schools offered AP courses (NCES, 2007). As a group, the high school GPAs ranged from 2.68 to 4.34 with an average of 3.63 (S.D. = 0.48). Fourteen participants (93.3%) had a GPA of 3.0 or higher (one reported a GPA of 97%), and 11 (73.3%) of the 15 GPAs were above 3.5 (including the GPA of 97%).

When examining within-college academic activity, the responses were remarkably consistent, with only slightly different distributions of the category of the response; 13 participants (86.7%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they attended most of their classes, participated in classroom discussions and activities, participated in out-of-class projects and assignments with classmates, and attended optional academic activities such as speakers, concerts, films, and similar activities. In addition, 10 participants (66.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they participated in out-of-class academic discussions or activities with professors and five participants (33.3%) responded that they worked as a research assistant for a faculty member. Of the group, nine participants (60%) declared a major in their freshman year, five participants (33.3%) declared a major in their second year, and one (6.7%) declared a major in the third year. Overall, nine participants (60%) agreed or strongly agreed that they found their institutions to be academically supportive of them.

Despite the relatively high average high school GPA, 3.63 (S.D. = 0.48), and high level of within-college academic participation of this group, college GPAs were lower, ranging from 2.80 to 3.87 with an average of 3.15 (S.D. = 0.33). Only eight participants (53.3%) graduated with a college GPA above 3.0 and only two of the eight (13.3%)

graduated with a GPA above a 3.5. As a group, six participants (40%) agreed or strongly agreed that their high school classes prepared them for college; seven participants (46.7%) were neutral on the issue and three participants (20%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. With respect to college academics, 14 participants (93.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their college classroom experiences were academically challenging, and six of the 12 participants for whom academic support or TRIO programs were applicable agreed that these programs were necessary to their academic development; four others were neutral on the issue and two disagreed.

The results in this section indicated that as a group, these participants were academically engaged at their respective institutions. The findings also indicated that regardless of their high school preparation or GPA, this group found college to be academically challenging.

Social Engagement

This group of questions was designed to identify whether or not the survey participants were engaged in the social life of their institutions. Social engagement was measured by participation in student organizations and clubs and the importance given to interactions with friends, classmates, and faculty outside of the classroom. Thirteen participants (86.7%) were active members of clubs and organizations at their institutions. The number of clubs and organizations in which they participated ranged from two to 25, with an average of 5.47 (S.D. = 6.2). Eleven of the 13 socially active participants (84.6%) were members of eight or fewer clubs and organizations; one participant was active in 12 clubs or organizations, and one participant was active in 25 clubs or organizations. All 13

participants held leadership positions in the clubs or organizations to which they belonged.

Approximately half of the participants (53.3%) also were involved in club, intramural, or recreational sports at their colleges or universities. Seven participants (46.7%) belonged to a social sorority or fraternity. In addition to participation in organized social activities, 13 participants (86.7%) were active with college friends and classmates outside of organized clubs, organizations, and sororities/fraternities. Two participants did not participate in these social activities, yet both considered that social activities were important to completing college.

Finally, nine participants (60%) participated in out-of-class social activities with their professors. While four (26.7%) agreed that social interaction with faculty was important to completing college, seven participants (46.7%) were neutral on the issue and three (20%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that such interaction was important.

Overall, 12 participants (80%) indicated that social activities and interactions with friends and classmates were important to completing college. The results in this section are supportive of the results in the preceding section. Social engagement with peers played an important role in persisting to degree attainment for the majority of the survey participants.

Institutional Behaviors

This category was designed to assess factors that the literature identifies as influencing student comfort or 'fit' within their institution. One factor was whether or not the participants felt that their institutions were racially and ethnically diverse, as measured by the composition of the student body, the faculty, and the staff. A second

factor was whether or not participants received sufficient financial aid information and guidance; and the final factor was designed to identify the type of aid the participants received. Racial and ethnic diversity and financial aid are factors that help to create a supportive community and are necessary to attracting and retaining African American students.

In response to the survey questions that addressed racial and ethnic diversity, only four participants (26.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that their universities enrolled a racially and ethnically diverse group of students, two participants (13.3%) were neutral on the issue, and nine participants (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similar responses were recorded when the participants were asked whether their universities employed a racially and ethnically diverse group of faculty members. Again, four participants (26.7%) agreed or strongly agreed, three participants (20%) were neutral on the issue, and eight participants (53.3%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their universities employed a racially and ethnically diverse group of faculty members. Finally, when asked about the diversity of the administrative staff at their institutions, six participants (40.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that their universities employed a racially and ethnically diverse group of administrative staff members, two (13.3%) were neutral on the issue, and seven (46.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

With respect to financial aid, 10 participants (66.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were provided sufficient information and guidance on financial aid. Four participants (26.7%) were neutral and one (6.7%) strongly disagreed. The type of financial aid that was available to the participants varied between institutions. Only loans were uniformly available at all institutions. When examining the type of aid participants

received, loans were most common. Fourteen of the 15 participants (93.3%) helped to finance their education using student loans; the one participant without student loans received only a merit scholarship. Work-study and need-based scholarships were the next most commonly received source of aid, with nine of the participants (60%) receiving funds from these sources. Finally, eight participants (53.5%) received merit scholarships, six participants (40%) received Pell grants, four participants (26.7%) received diversity scholarships, and three participants (20%) non-repayable grants, to help finance their education. Six of the 14 participants (40%) who received loans also received Pell Grants and work-study aid. Three of the six participants (50%) self-identified as being low-income.

At graduation, 11 participants (73.3%), two of whom were low-income participants who received loans, Pell grants, and work-study funds, estimated their debt load to be more than $10,000. Three participants (20%), one of whom was low-income and received loans, Pell grants, and work-study, estimated their debt load to be greater than $20,000.

The findings in this section indicated that most of the participants did not consider their institutions to be racially or ethnically diverse with respect to the number of students, faculty, or staff. When asked about financial aid, most of the participants believed that their institutions provided adequate information and guidance. Loans were uniformly the most available and utilized form of financial aid for this group of participants.

Considering these four groups of factors, the overall analysis of the descriptive statistics revealed that for the participants in this study, parental support, social engagement with peers, and academic achievement in-the-classroom and out-of-the-

classroom in high school and in college were important to degree attainment, regardless of gender, socio-economic status, institutional type or diversity, or the type of financial aid received. Demographic summaries appear in Appendices E and F.

Research Question Two

The second research question underlying this study was, *Given their minority status within their undergraduate institutions, why did these African American students persist to graduation?* As outlined in Chapter 3, the participants were asked six open-ended interview questions (constructed using the same factors used in the survey categories), to answer this overarching research question. To put the participants at ease before asking them to respond, the researcher again explained that participation was voluntary (that there was no connection between the CLEO program and participating in the study), that all information was confidential, that they need not answer any question that was uncomfortable for them to answer, and that they could end the interview at any time. As a segue to the interview questions, participants were asked to confirm their racial identity, age upon entering college, the number of years to degree attainment, and the type of institution attended. The interview questions that appear at Appendix B and that underlie this second research question are:

a. What were the situations that helped you to complete your degree?

b. Were there things that your college or university did to help you make your initial transition to college easier and to make you feel comfortable about your choice of institutions?

c. Were there social and academic activities or programs at your college or university that helped you finish your college education?

d. What were some situations that made you want to stop attending college?

e. If those experiences caused you to consider leaving college, what caused you to change your mind?

f. What were some things your institution could have done to make you feel more comfortable about your choice of institutions and to motivate you to attain your degree?

Thirteen participants were interviewed, nine of whom self-identified as African American. After setting aside the interviews of the non-African American participants, interview responses were more closely screened to identify which responses met the remaining boundaries. Four additional interviews were eliminated; one African American participant attended an HBCU and three others required more than six years to complete a bachelor's degree. Ultimately, the responses of five participants were used for qualitative analysis. All five participants also took part in the survey.

The participants whose interviews were used for analysis included one female and four males. All but one male participant grew up in major urban areas and graduated from institutions in their home states. The male participant from a more rural area attended an elite university out of his home state, but within 500 miles of home. Two of the participants graduated from public institutions: one large "flagship" state university with more than 20,000 undergraduates, and one small, regional state university with approximately 6,000 undergraduates. Three participants graduated from private institutions: one religiously-affiliated university with approximately 8,500 undergraduates; one elite, private university with approximately 6,500 undergraduates; and one independent, liberal arts and sciences college with fewer than 1,000 students. This last participant originally attended a large "flagship" state university as an out-of-state resident but transferred when he could no longer afford tuition. All but one participant were first-generation college students.

When asked to respond to the first question, *what were some of the situations that helped you complete your degree*, the participants were encouraged to define 'situations' broadly, to include anything or anyone who might have helped them persist to graduation. Although some participants identified institutional sources of support, such as church membership or collegiate programs, such as TRIO programs, people, particularly parents, were identified by all participants as being the most important influence in their degree attainment. In the words of one participant, "my parents supported all facets of my education starting in high school. Also, my football coach, teachers, my church, [pause] my parents supported me in all ways." Another participant responded with a more descriptive but similar list:

> My football coach insisted on a good GPA because of inter-conference competition. We had a minimum 3.0 to play. I think he set the bar high, but it was good because I had a goal of going to law school and I had to do more than get by. There was a family friend that helped with a scholarship when I couldn't afford out of state tuition after my mother lost her job. Also, my independent-study professor encouraged me to schedule certain classes and took me to conferences. My high school was private and assumed that we would go to college and when I got there [to college], I had friends that I wanted to stay with. But my mother was the key factor, she was adamant about me finishing.

Yet another participant stated that:

> Mentors, the faculty and administration, and those that I met through work-study were the greatest help. They alerted me to resources and programs that were available, and encouraged me. There were programs like the McNair Scholars that groomed me for higher education [beyond the baccalaureate] and to make the most of myself. While I am thankful for the programs I had at my disposal, I would have finished anyway because of my parents, my upbringing, and their attitude toward college. I had to go [to college] and do well. Because of them, I wanted more.

For one participant, the loss of both parents, while in college, played a major role in persisting to graduation, "my parents encouraged me to go to college and when they

died, I knew that I had to continue. I had to make them proud." While this participant was normally very talkative and confidant in his day-to-day interactions, when talking about his parents he was obviously uncomfortable and somewhat hesitant. He seemed to want to talk about his parents but had difficulty doing so; talking about his parents seemed to cause him pain. The researcher sensed that he had not yet fully accepted their loss. Making his parents proud was his echoing refrain. This same student also credited professors, "my professors kept pushing me to excel, to continue beyond my BA."

The death of a parent was a driving force for yet another participant, but in a very different way:

> My dad died when I was in fifth grade. We struggled [financially] and in my senior year of high school we were evicted. We had no real place to live. I was motivated to live away from my family and to do well. They were not supportive. I had to do well. I had no home.

When prodded further about how and why she decided that college was the answer to a poor home situation, the participant replied:

> I was pushed and motivated to pursue college by a teacher at my high school. I did not have her as an instructor, but for some odd reason she took a particular liking to my sister and I [sic]. She took us under her wing and broke down the entire college application process for us. When my mother failed or refused to take us on college visits she stepped up and used her resources to take us to in-state and out-of-state visits. She offered us a place to stay in her home and taught us to open our very first bank accounts. Once we were exposed to colleges and the college living arrangements, and realized we would be away from our current family situation, we jumped at the opportunity to pursue a college education.

Interestingly, after talking about the loss of their parents, both participants immediately and insistently declared that they were internally motivated to complete their

degrees. Both participants had the same response, “I had to prove myself.” Although, all five participants acknowledged that they were goal-driven to finish college, the other three participants specifically expressed having an external goal, a goal to attend law school. These three also recognized and expressed the thought that to be competitive for law school admission they “had to do more than just pass.”

The participants were then asked if there were things that their college or university did to help make the initial transition to college easier and to make them feel comfortable about their choice of institutions. Four participants attended summer orientation programs involving student advisors or ambassadors in conjunction with faculty and staff, and one student described a one credit, fall semester program open only to first-year students. All participants described programs that were designed to make the transition to college easier for them socially and academically, such as personal connections with other students, and course advising and registration, academic support, and professors to seek out.

Three participants described their summer programs as making them “feel connected” in various ways to the greater campus community, and two of the three participants described programs that fostered connections specifically to other African American students. One participant who attended a summer orientation program downplayed its value. He related that “TRIO programs…and dual enrollment [with a local college] while in high school helped make me ready [for college],” more so than summer orientation.

When asked whether there were social and academic activities or programs at their college or university that helped them to finish their college education, three

participants acknowledged that social and academic programs were available but only one of the three conveyed the perception that they were of any real value:

After the first year, student organizations allowed me to become more organized and responsible. They cultivated an environment of studying, of learning. My school also provided special pre-law classes and internships with law firms.

Two participants responded to the question with ambivalence. They stated that, "student organizations helped but they didn't make a difference" or "my fraternity was helpful but was not key, not really." One participant stated that, "there were no organizations or programs for African Americans, but my coach and independent-study professor really helped me" and the other said that "there were no specific programs by the school but African American organizations [fraternities and sororities] encouraged graduation."

Based on the literature it was anticipated that given their minority status within their predominantly white colleges and universities, these participants may have had experiences that caused them to consider leaving college. Thus, after discussing the various situations that influenced or contributed to their success, their degree attainment, the participants were asked if there were situations or experiences that made them want to stop attending college, and if so, what caused them to change their mind. Again, based on the literature, the responses were not the responses that the researcher anticipated.

One of the more garrulous participants stated that nothing that he experienced throughout his college years caused him to want to stop attending college. His response was brief, straight forward and to the point, "nothing, ever." The participant who was

evicted the year before entering college, and then essentially ended up homeless, stated that while in college there were "no bad situations. I had a place to live."

With real emotion in his voice, yet another very self-assured participant stated that:

> one low grade on a mid-term shook me, it really shook me and made me feel really down, it made me wonder about myself, but never made me want to quit. I talked to my advisor and went to tutoring. I always felt that my parents and support organizations on campus were there to support me.

While campus experiences may have had little or no impact on persistence for most of these participants, life experiences did. As indicated earlier, as a result of a tragic accident, one participant suffered the loss of both parents while in college. This horrific loss caused the participant to seriously consider leaving school. He credits the aggressive and personal intervention of the Dean of Students with convincing him to continue his education. Then again, his steadfast desire "to make [his] parents proud" also compelled him to persist. For the other participant who lost a father, having been evicted and essentially homeless was so unpleasant that regardless of campus experiences, simply having a place to live was a good thing.

The last participant actually withdrew for one year. He felt duty-bound to do so when his mother (a single parent), lost her employment and suffered serious financial problems. He felt compelled to help her relocate from their home to a smaller place to live, and to help support her. One year later, with the assistance of a family friend who was on the board of the college to which he transferred, he obtained a full-scholarship

and was able to return to a smaller, more affordable school closer to home to complete his degree. After he returned to school, he continued working to help support his mother.

Even when prompted, none of the participants related racially-based experiences that may have caused them to consider leaving college. The participant who said that "nothing, ever" made him want to leave college, however, also stated that "friends did not find that the school was racially friendly." When asked what he meant, he stated that:

> This had a lot to do with individual students' experiences in some of their classes and dealing with the university outside of the classroom. Some of my classmates felt that some of the professors created a hostile learning environment in the classroom, towards them as students of color. It was usually individual professors, scattered throughout the many departments at the university. Also, some of my classmates and friends had issues when wanting to put on certain events with their fraternity, sorority, or ethnic student group. For them, the process of hosting an event on campus seemed a little more difficult than for our white counterparts. One of the most interesting examples is that just a couple of years prior to my entering the university, the school made it a point to recruit more black, non-athlete students. The year I entered the institution, 4.5% of the student body was black; 4% were athletes, 0.5% were black non-athletes.

In addition, he stated that school programs made a difference to students:

> Political science, where I was, was friendly. Professors there were just genuinely nice people, more accustomed to dealing with people and students with various political, social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. They were more acutely aware of wanting to be sure they created and fostered a non-hostile learning environment, regardless of your background of political views. The B-school was not, especially for students of color. In my state, many professors in the business school still had that "good old boys" mentality as it related to business and its many facets. The make-up of the students in the business school also spoke to this because many of the students came from old money (oil, cattle, etc.), and new money (service industry, attorneys, business executives). Their world view was shaped by what the business environment of the state has been. In the words of some of my classmates, in the B-school "different equals less than."

He affirmed though that he had no bad experiences:

> I put myself out there. [Meaning that] people sometime have a tendency to close themselves off to those around them if they feel that the environment is unwelcoming or there are not enough people that look like them. I am not that kind of person. My personality was as such that I knew I could develop quality relationships and have mentors that were administrators, professors, and staff who did not necessarily look like me. So, I made it a point to find those people on campus that were known to be friendly and advocates of students. I refused to be denied the opportunity to make the most and get a lot from my undergraduate experience. I got involved in multiple areas of campus, not just those dealing with students of color, such as the Residence Hall Association, Residence Life, Intramural Sports, Political Science Department, etc.

Another participant who stated that there were no bad experiences also remarked that college was "my first time with white students, where they were the predominant group." Rather than feeling isolated, however, this participant viewed her minority status as a learning experience. "I learned to embrace being African American. It taught me to appreciate myself and my race. I learned that race mattered. I learned who I was." When asked to explain this more fully, the participant's response was:

> I learned that race mattered by observing and comparing how portions of the SGA[student government] budget were allocated between predominantly white social groups and African American social groups. Also by noticing that race was a scary topic of discussion for the university administration. Instead of confronting racial disparities on the surface, the school somewhat hid from them and chose not to address them at all. At that point I realized that it was something about the color of someone's skin that dictated how the school would address or treat an issue. I learned to appreciate myself and my race. As compared to my high school, my college only had an enrollment of approximately 13% African Americans during my attendance. This was a major difference coming from a 97% African American enrollment at my high school. So because there were not many of us, we were forced to depend on each other, as outlets, and that's when I realized how much of a resource we were to each other. Through those experiences, I learned to embrace the true meaning of being an African American, instead of the small and stereotypical depiction of African Americans I was surrounded by in my neighborhoods and schools. Although there were not many of us on campus, we had a voice and the voice proved powerful for issues that we were passionate about. I was a part of

> a culture that fought for equality for many years and the history of my culture induced me to learn more about myself and my race. Knowledge is power and the more I learned, the less defeated I felt about being in my own skin. As a college student without much financial or emotional support, I had to attack issues alone and learned to figure out solutions to problems without many resources. I experienced most of these issues in college and it was the foundation that I went back to in order to solve real life situations after college. Therefore, my struggles in college taught me how to be independent and it gave me a thought process of how to confront and address other struggles.

Finally, the participants were asked to identify things that their institutions could have done to make them feel more comfortable about their choice of institutions and to motivate them to attain their degree. One participant, who was recruited by his college through a younger sibling who participated in a high school international baccalaureate program, stated, almost angrily, that the school "should engage in broader recruitment of all public school students, not just a hand-picked few, like my sister." Another felt that the institution could have "reached out more to African American students. There were no specific programs offered by the school for students of color." The third participant, who attended a private, predominantly white high school, stated that:

> A more diverse faculty, more faces of color might have made me more comfortable, but I was not uncomfortable. This was that first time I had an African American peer group. I never had African American friends before. [As an after-thought, he added] Also, better counseling services."

A fourth participant reiterated that "TRIO was essential, nothing else was necessary." The final participant said that there was "not much else the school could have done. I sought out people and they were open to me at all times. I demanded more from my education and got it."

Analysis of the individual interviews revealed that for the participants in this study, parental support and influence, including the strong desire to make deceased but encouraging parents proud, was the prevailing motivation or factor for these participants to persist to degree attainment. To escape the poverty that accompanied the lack of parental education and support seemed to drive another participant. Internal drive or goal attainment was the next most articulated reason. Social interaction with peers and academic programs were helpful but not essential to most participants. Only one participant expressed any benefit from social programs, and that benefit seemed to be academic in nature – "They cultivated an environment of studying, of learning" – and one participant articulated an academic benefit from TRIO programs.

In terms of persistence, minority status on a predominantly white campus was not a negative influence for any of these participants. While almost all students voiced that institutional support, such as diversity of faculty and students, counseling, and outreach to students of color could have been better, the lack of support did not negatively impact their persistence. For the participants who addressed the issue in depth, their minority status was growth enhancing. It taught them to greater appreciate themselves and their race; "we were forced to depend on each other, as outlets, and that's when I realized how much of a resource we were to each other," and how to interact with others across racial lines; "I got involved in multiple areas of campus, not just those dealing with students of color."

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results of this study. The use of descriptive statistics addressed the first research question and provided the reader with a

portrait of the pre-college background and profile characteristics and institutional experiences of the larger group of African American CLEO participants surveyed in this study. Then, through personal interviews, the reader heard directly from five African American participants to learn more about their institutional experiences and why they persisted to degree attainment, addressing the second research question. These results will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Introduction

This qualitative study used survey data and individual interviews of African American CLEO students who graduated from predominantly white colleges and universities to learn what experiences and factors influenced their persistence to baccalaureate degree attainment. This final chapter will discuss the results presented in Chapter 4. The first section will present a summary of this study. This section will be followed by a discussion of the responses to the research questions that this study set out to answer and will make meaning of those answers in relation to the theoretical framework and relevant literature. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the study's limitations followed by the implications for future research, policy, and practice.

Summary of the Study

As minorities continue to make up a greater portion of the United States' total population, increased minority enrollment in higher education and degree attainment is essential to the economic and social future of the United States (Balz & Esten, 1998), yet there remains a significant gap between the educational persistence of African American and white college students. According to the College Board (Baum & Ma, 2007), African American students are less likely to earn baccalaureate degrees than are white students; while almost sixty percent of white students graduate within six years of enrolling in college, the graduation rate for African Americans is less than forty percent (Smith, 2004). The U.S. Department of Education (2006) is calling for institutions of higher education to bear the responsibility for ensuring that the students they admit persist to

graduation. Thus, to increase graduation rates, colleges and universities must re-examine existing programs in light of the factors that affect student persistence. Institutions can no longer afford to expend resources on programs that do not produce results.

Tinto (1993) theorizes that certain pre-college characteristics and institutional experiences influence persistence to graduation. Unfortunately, when considering these factors in the context of African American persistence, the validity of these factors has not been tested (Braxton, et al., 2004). Consequently, as discussed in Chapter 3, the purpose of this study was to learn from the participants why they were successful in persisting to degree attainment at predominantly white institutions while many other African American students were not. These data were collected through both a survey instrument and individual interviews.

Discussion of Results

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure served as the conceptual framework for this study. This theory "focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on the events which occur within the institution following entry and /or which immediately preceded entrance to it" (p. 112). Tinto (1993) asserts that these pre-college characteristics and institutional experiences influence student academic and social integration into the institution. Academic and social integration lead to greater levels of institutional commitment and commitment to college completion and the higher a student's level of these two commitments, the greater the probability of persisting to graduation. Students who voluntarily leave school before completing their degree do so because they are unable to integrate academically and socially into the life of the institution.

Tinto's critics suggest that his model does not include the factors external to the institution, such as non-institutional support networks, work, and financial ability that also influence student departure. They advocate for the inclusion of additional factors external to the institution, to more fully understand student departure. Accordingly, for this study, the researcher used a modified Tinto (1993) model, one that considered additional external factors to learn which factors were important to degree attainment for these African American participants. Personal interviews, however, created an opportunity for the participants to introduce still other factors that were not included. This section discusses the answers to the research questions and how they relate to the theory and literature.

Question 1: Pre-college Characteristics and Institutional Experiences

The first research question was, "Considering the pre-college characteristics and the institutional experiences of the participants, which characteristics and experiences best describe these African American students who have persisted to baccalaureate attainment at predominantly white colleges and universities within six years of high school graduation? A survey was conducted to answer this question.

As stated, Tinto (1993) theorizes that persistence is influenced by several pre-college characteristics. Thus, when considering factors such as socioeconomic status, parental education, and high school preparation, a review of the research by Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2003), Somers, et al., (2004), and Horn and Berger (2004) suggests that college enrollment and persistence is rooted in the educational attainment of parents, and parents with higher levels of education are more likely to stress the importance of college and provide their children with the necessary support when they suffer small

setbacks. Furthermore, Perna and Titus (2005) found that parental involvement is positively related to college enrollment, even for students with lower socioeconomic status who attend poorly resourced secondary schools. Parental involvement, however, is likely to increase with higher levels of parental education (College Board, 2001), and higher levels of education are generally related to higher socioeconomic status (Bennett & Xie, 2003). Similarly, with respect to high school preparation, Seago and Spetz (2005) found that students with poor high school preparation have difficulty with the college curriculum, perform poorly on tests, and experience higher attrition rates than do those students with higher levels of high school preparation. Low quality schools and poor high school preparation are associated with limited education and lower socioeconomic status (Bennett & Xie, 2003).

Considering these pre-college characteristics with respect to this group of participants, the results of the survey indicate that all but two participants had two parents with at least a high school education and one or both of the parents of more than half of the participants had college degrees. Only four participants self-identified as being low-income, two of whom had two parents with college degrees and for the others, one or both parents completed high school. In addition, four participants attended private high schools, and all participants attended high schools with a level of resources that was high enough to support Advanced Placement (AP) courses. In fact, all but two participants completed at least one AP course while in high school. Upon entering college, most participants had high school GPAs well above a 3.0, or its equivalent. Finally, the survey results indicated that almost all participants reported that parents were important in encouraging them to attend and complete college.

Overall, the survey results indicate that as a group, these participants had fairly well-educated and involved parents, the majority of whom were not considered to be low income. All participants attended high schools with a level of resources that allowed them to offer AP courses. Almost all participants enrolled in AP courses. These findings are supportive of the literature which by and large describes the circular nature of the relationship between parental education (Horn & Berger, 2004; Somers, et al., 2004), socioeconomic status (Bennett & Xie, 2003), and academic preparation for college. Although the results support the literature that suggests that higher levels of parental education are related to higher levels of encouragement and support for college enrollment and educational persistence (College Board, 2001), based on the level of parental education reported by the participants, the results do not suggest that their parents themselves required a baccalaureate degree to be able to offer encouragement and support to their children.

According to Tinto (1993), academic integration is determined in part by students' pre-college academic preparation and by their intellectual development within college. Hu and St. John (2001) agree that grades matter. Their research shows that students who experienced academic successes and achieved higher college grades were more likely to persist. Leppel (2001) indicated that students with undecided majors demonstrate lower academic performance and lower persistence rates than students who had committed to a major or educational goal.

When asked about their academic development and college performance, almost all of the participants reported high levels of class attendance and participation in in-class and out-of-class projects and assignments, and having attended optional out-of-class academic activities such as speakers, concerts, or films. On the whole, the participants' college GPAs were lower than their high school GPAs, with the cumulative average GPA dropping from a 3.63 to 3.15 on a 4.0 grade scale. Despite the decrease in the mean college GPA, the GPA for this group was above average. The survey also revealed that nine of the 15 participants decided on majors in their first year of college, five in their second year, and only one in the third year of college. This suggests a commitment to goal attainment and perhaps aspirations for graduate education.

Considering the participants' high school preparation, their high school and college GPAs, and their early selection of a college major, the results from the survey are supportive of the relevant literature. That literature suggests that: there is an underlying relationship between socioeconomic status and pre-college preparation which influences intellectual growth and academic success in college (Seago & Spetz, 2005); that academic success, as measured by grades, influences persistence; and that having a major is related to goal attainment which also influences persistence.

With respect to social engagement with peers, Tinto (1993) posits that social integration, especially in the first year of college, is positively related to persistence. Based on the work of Tinto, Thomas (2000) concluded that peers are "the single, most potent source of influence in the lives of college students" (p. 591), and that broader social networks enhance social integration. Gardener (2005) and Watson et al., (2004) found that social networks are especially necessary for African American students to

prevent feelings of alienation and isolation. While social integration is related to activities outside of the classroom, Braxton, et al., (2000) found that social integration also includes in-classroom interaction with peers and with individual faculty.

The survey results indicated that peer relationships and social networks were important to these participants. All but two participants were active members of two or more clubs or organizations, and/or sororities/fraternities, and/or intramural sports at their institutions, and all participants assumed leadership positions in the organizations to which they belonged. Even the two participants who did not belong to clubs or organizations reported that they considered social activities to be important to completing college. In addition to being actively involved in social activities outside of the classroom, these participants reported being actively involved in academic activities both in and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, they felt that their institutions were academically supportive of them and that the encouragement of faculty members was important to the completion of their degree.

The results of the survey clearly support the literature that suggests that peer and faculty relationships thwart feelings of alienation and isolation and foster connections to the institution (e.g., Gardener 2005; Watson et al., 2004). Assuming that institutional connections promote academic engagement and persistence to degree attainment, institutions should encourage pedagogy that brings African American students and faculty together in academic activities in and out of the classroom.

Tinto (1993) theorizes that student interactions within the institution are critical to persistence. For this reason, colleges and universities should focus on behaviors that improve the institutional experiences of students. Some of these behaviors include

admitting a critical mass of racial and ethnic minority students, providing opportunities for student-faculty interactions, encouraging active classroom experiences, addressing financial aid issues, and understanding that educational experiences may vary depending upon institutional type and size and therefore require individualized institutional programs.

The literature maintains that a critical mass of African American students creates significant opportunities for personal interaction (Townsend, 1994) and insures that racial and ethnic minority students do not feel alienated or isolated, or as if they are the spokesperson for their race (The College Board, 2006), thus enhancing their educational experience. In addition, Pascarrella and Terenzini (2005) found that "contact with faculty members outside of the classroom appears consistently to promote student persistence, educational aspirations, and degree completion" (p. 417). This is because of the socialization to the values and attitudes of the academy that occurs as a result of such relationships and the increased attachment or loyalty to the institution that results from positive interactions with faculty and peers. Watson, et al., (2002) affirmed that faculty members provide a necessary support system for African American students, particularly for those on predominantly white campuses, and that students who are enrolled in smaller institutions often have greater faculty contact and are often more involved in campus activities. As a result, they are more likely to persist to graduation. Classroom experiences are fundamental to students' institutional experiences and are instrumental in promoting academic and social integration. Classroom experiences that are inclusive of all students increase persistence (Tinto, 1997).

With respect to critical mass, the survey results reveal that very few of the participants felt that their predominantly white colleges or universities enrolled a racially or ethnically diverse group of students (or faculty). For this group of participants, however, even though lower numbers of African American students may have affected social networking with other African Americans, the lack of diversity did not limit their participation in clubs and organizations, nor did it produce feelings of alienation and isolation sufficient to cause their departure. In general, this result neither supports nor refutes the literature.

In terms of classroom experiences and faculty interactions, almost all participants reported attending most of their classes and participating in classroom discussions and activities. All but one participant found their classroom experiences to be challenging; this one participant also reported low levels of classroom attendance and participation. As stated, most participants, including the one participant with low attendance, agreed that their institutions were academically supportive of them. These findings are supportive of the research which asserts that what happens in the classroom matters (Braxton, et al., 2000); and that classrooms that are inclusive of all students increase persistence (Tinto, 1997).

When examining the influence of student-faculty relationships, all but one participant reported interacting with faculty on an academic basis outside of the classroom, including two participants from public institutions with enrollments of more than 20,000 students. The only participant who did not interact with faculty on an academic basis outside of class, but who was otherwise engaged in academic activities in and out-of-class, attended a public institution with more than 20,000 students. Nine

participants, four of whom attended public institutions, reported that they also interacted with faculty on a *social* basis outside of the classroom. Seven of those nine participants attended colleges with fewer than 15,000 students, two attended institutions with fewer than 5,000 students (one public and one private).

Previous research indicated that students at smaller, private institutions have greater opportunities for faculty contact and are often more involved in campus activities than are students at larger, public institutions (Watson, et al., 2002). For this group of participants, as reported earlier, institutional size and type appeared to make no difference with respect to either individual faculty contact or social activity. The results for this group of participants are not supportive of the prior research.

It is important to note that participants were asked about faculty interaction in two separate sections of the survey, in the educational attainment and the social engagement sections. With respect to *social* interaction with faculty, only four of the nine participants who reported social interaction with faculty felt that it was important to their persistence. While this response may seem to be inconsistent with the earlier reported response, that the involvement of individual faculty was important to degree attainment, it is not. The participants made an appropriate distinction between academic and social interaction with faculty.

For these participants, *academic* interaction with faculty was important to their persistence, *social* interaction was not. This supports the research that asserts that student-faculty interaction promotes educational aspirations (Pascarrella & Terenzini, 2005) and thus, persistence. In view of these results, it appears that even though student-faculty interaction may occur in *informal* environments, the student-faculty relationship

should remain more *formal,* or academic, in nature; the social distance, or role distinction, between faculty member and student should be maintained.

Finally, considering financial aid, Tinto (1993) asserts that although financial considerations are important to persistence, "financial aid is but one of a wider number of events that shape persistence" (p. 68). Other researchers, such as Lang (1992), Paulsen and St. John (2002), the College Board (2004a; 2004b) and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (2005), however, report that the increasing cost of tuition coupled with the shift from need-based aid to merit scholarships and loans have created barriers to higher education for minority students who come from low-income families.

All participants reported receiving some form of financial aid. Loan aid, which all but one participant received, was the most commonly received form of financial aid. Work-study and need-based funds were the next most common sources of aid. Most students received aid from three or more sources. Despite receiving loans and working, eleven participants incurred more than $10,000 of student debt, including three of the four low-income participants, and three other participants incurred more than $20,000 of debt. Considering that essentially all of these participants received loan aid and that the majority incurred relatively high levels of student debt, the result for this group of participants does not support the findings of the previous research that indicates loan aid is negatively related to persistence (Reynolds & Weagley, 2003). This finding supports Tinto's (1993) assertion that financial considerations are but one of a host of factors that influence persistence.

With the few noted exceptions, the results of the survey generally lend support to the findings of the literature. Furthermore, for this group of African American students,

the results by and large are supportive of a modified Tinto (1993) model. The pre-college entry characteristics of these participants, specifically parental involvement and academic preparation, were important to the persistence of these participants. In addition, ongoing parental support and social and academic experiences, such as student-faculty interaction and inclusive classroom experiences reportedly exerted a positive influence on their degree attainment. This suggests that programs that foster parental involvement and faculty-student interaction would increase persistence to degree attainment for African American students.

Question 2: Persistence to Degree Attainment

Beyond describing the participants' perceptions, the researcher conducted individual interviews to better understand the institutional experiences of the participants and to address the second research question. The second overarching research question was, "Given their minority status within their undergraduate institutions, why did these African American students persist to graduation?" To learn the answer, six questions were asked of each participant. To triangulate these data, the questions were designed to overlap the survey categories.

When asked to discuss the situations that helped them complete their degrees, all but one participant affirmed that parents were essential to degree attainment. Whether explicitly or covertly, parents communicated to these participants an educational aspiration and the mind-set that higher education is essential; education is the means to social mobility, to "become more." In addition, parents cultivated the internal drive or motivation to persist toward the goal of degree attainment regardless of challenges. What is striking about this result is that for this group, only one participant had college-

educated parents. Thus, while this finding is supportive of the literature that found that parental involvement is important to enrolling and persisting in higher education (Perna & Titus, 2005), it is not necessarily supportive of the implication that parents need higher levels of education, such as a baccalaureate degree, to encourage and motivate their children toward degree attainment. This interview finding is consistent with the survey finding that parents are important to degree attainment.

Similar to the results of the survey, the interviews revealed that the involvement of faculty, to include coaches, board members, and other administrators, made an important difference for these participants. Through their words, the participants conveyed an impression that educators exercised a surrogate parental influence, picking up where parents left off in encouraging them to persist. Seemingly, acting *in loco parentis*, educators were a strong source of reinforcement and support for these participants, often reaching out to them in a time of need; "when my mother failed or refused to take us on college visits [a teacher] stepped up and used her resources to take us... She offered us a place to stay in her home and taught us to open our very first bank accounts." In addition, for the participant who lost both parents while in college and another whose mother lost her job and their family home, the actions of educators were significant to, if not responsible for, their degree attainment. This finding, that faculty (defined broadly), are important to the continued educational persistence of many minority students is supportive of the literature.

On the other hand, the participants stated that the encouragement of friends was "helpful," but not really necessary to degree attainment. Only one participant even found student organizations to be of any value; although it was the academic rather than the

social nature of those organizations that was significant to him. Perhaps the value of friends was less important in the interviews when compared to the survey because the participants had to verbalize *how* friends were important to their degree attainment. This required participants to respond on a more thoughtful level. Although friends may have helped discourage isolation and foster a sense of connection and commitment to the institution—"I had friends that I wanted to stay with"— friends are neither prepared, nor in the position to assume a parental role and provide the necessary words and sense of support and encouragement for college enrollment and goal attainment that resonated so strongly with these participants. As one student reported, "we were [a resource] to each other… [but] as a college student without much financial or emotional support, I had to attack issues alone."

From their words, the participants conveyed the impression that parental encouragement occurred over the course of their lives, beginning long before college entry. Thus, while peer support may have helped make their institutional experiences more fun, it was not essential to their degree attainment; the motivation and aspiration of attaining a degree was already firmly established within them. This finding is contrary to the previous literature that states that peers are "the single, most potent source of influence in the lives of college students" (Thomas, 2000, p. 591). It also is incongruent with the survey results.

Clearly, for these participants, parents were the most potent source of influence for degree attainment. Internal motivation or goal realization was the next most important source of influence for this group. As discussed, however, parents were instrumental in developing this internal motivation. Unconcealed, positive parental encouragement to

pursue higher education was present for all but one participant. That one participant, however, seemed to be motivated by the lack of emotional and financial support and the poverty that she experienced, but unmistakably, she would not have attended college without the quasi-parental encouragement and support (including financial support) of a high school teacher.

For this group of African American participants, the results of the interviews generally support a modified Tinto (1993) model with regard to pre-college characteristics, specifically parental involvement and academic performance, but not necessarily with regard to social engagement and institutional experiences. Friends, critical mass, and financial aid seemed to have had little or no influence on the overall persistence to degree attainment for this group. In support of Tinto's critics, the evidence supports the assertion that factors external to the institution, 'life events' such as the death of a parent or parental insolvency, influence persistence and also must be included in any student departure model. When considering these external events, it is noteworthy that for these participants faculty/institutional interaction prevented student departure; someone in the institution stepped-up to act in a quasi-parental role and provide the needed support and guidance to allow these students to persist. These interviews reinforce the finding that ongoing parental encouragement and faculty interaction could increase persistence to degree attainment for African American students.

Limitations

Given this group of African American participants, the undeniable result of the qualitative aspect of this study reveals that parental support and encouragement before and during college were essential to baccalaureate degree attainment. There are, however,

important limitations to consider. First, this study was very narrow in scope. Although the participants in this study attended and graduated from a variety of predominantly white colleges and universities from across the nation, as individuals they were not randomly selected. All of the participants in this study were pre-law, CLEO students. As stated, CLEO participants self-select to apply to the CLEO program and then are competitively selected over other applicants based on their history of academic success, as measured by college grade point average and personal statement. In addition, these students attended private high schools, as well as high schools that offered AP courses, at a rate that is greater than the national average, suggesting better preparation for college.

Next, because this is a qualitative study the findings are not generalizable to the larger population of all African American college students; the findings are merely suggestive of what might be found with other similar groups. Qualitative findings are generalizable only to theory (Yin, 1997).

Finally, this study is based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure. As stated, the validity of this theory has not been tested across different racial groups (Braxton, et al., 2004). Thus, using this theory to guide the study and frame the questions may have masked important findings that using another theory, perhaps one that was grounded in psychology or economics, may have revealed.

Implications for Future Research

This study contributes to the growing body of persistence literature in general, and to the relatively recent literature on African American persistence to degree attainment. The results of this study suggest that parents were the key to degree attainment for this group of participants. This finding raises a number of questions. While

it is useful to understand the important role that parents played in degree attainment for this group of African American participants, it is equally important to know whether this finding is generalizable to African American students as a group. It is also important to understand why some African American students who do not have the active support and involvement of their parents also persist to degree attainment.

Furthermore, during the interviews several students related that educators provided a great deal of support, although when compared to their parents, this role was downplayed. It is important to learn in greater detail the value of the contribution could educators make, perhaps acting *in loco parentis*, in influencing persistence for African American students, especially for students who do not have actively involved parents.

A number of boundaries were imposed in this study. It is important to decide whether student age and institutional type influence African American persistence and whether a six-year time to completion is the appropriate measure for degree attainment for less traditional African American students.

Finally, considering the projected increase in the number of all minorities in the nation's population (Davis, et al., 2004), it is important to learn if parental influence is equally important to the degree attainment of other minority groups. Likewise, the issues of whether student age and institutional type influence persistence and whether a six-year time to completion is the appropriate measure for degree attainment for other minority groups also must be addressed.

Implications for Policy and Institutional Practice

This study was designed to assist institutional policy makers in reassessing existing practices to increase degree attainment for African American students. The

overarching policy question of this study was, "Given their minority status within their institutions, why did these African American students persist to graduation?" While this study was not designed to establish causation, it suggests that parental involvement had a considerable and positive influence in persistence to degree attainment for these African American participants. In addition, there is an indication that faculty (broadly defined) may be able to provide 'quasi-parental' support at the institutional level (both high school and college) for some African American students.

While institutions of higher education cannot be all things to all people, more than ever, the pressure is on colleges and universities to take responsibility for the academic success of their students, particularly for their racial and ethnic minority students, and to take action to close the graduation gap between white students and racial and ethnic minorities (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2006). Thus, this mandate challenges, and perhaps even requires that educational institutions reassess current programs and practices.

The findings of this study coupled with governmental pressure on colleges and universities to close the educational gap between African American and white students raise fundamental policy questions concerning the role of colleges and universities. Policy makers must decide whether institutions of higher education are prepared to take on a more comprehensive *in loco parentis* role with respect to students, specifically African American students. A more comprehensive role goes beyond the university's role in regulating student behavior. If colleges and universities choose to expand this role, it must be determined to what extent they will act "not as authorities but rather as preparers, protectors, and passers-on of [their] vision of a learning community's ideals" (Fant, 2008). Institutions must define the scope of the responsibility they will assume.

Alternatively, institutions might decide whether they should instead seek to influence the existing family dynamics of their African American students and if so, how, and when? If either decision is made, it must be decided if all African American students will be treated equally. If some students are to be treated differently than others, it must be determined how these students will be identified, what the consequences of unequal treatment may be, and how these consequences will be addressed.

The social and practical implications of these decisions are considerable, but they are not new. Since the passage of the first civil rights and higher education legislation nearly a half-century ago, institutions have been trying to eliminate the education gap between African American and white students. Under the *Grutter* (2003) decision, the window of opportunity to do so may be slowly closing. More research on the factors that influence the persistence of African American students is desperately needed, but in the meantime, institutions must bolster institutional programs that are helping to increase persistence rates for African American students and replace failing programs with experiences that foster academic engagement and success. Programs that include parental involvement and faculty interaction may be the place to begin.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

A Survey of Baccalaureate Degree Attainment

This survey is designed to examine factors that contributed to your baccalaureate degree attainment. Please read each statement carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree. You may also indicate if the statement is not applicable (NA). Your responses are very important to this research and **confidentiality is assured**. Thank you for participating.

Support for Educational Attainment (Pre-College)

Please circle your response.

1. My parent(s) played an important role in encouraging me to attend college.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable

2. My high school teacher(s) played an important role in encouraging me to attend college.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable

3. My guidance counselor(s) played an important role in encouraging me to attend college.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Not Applicable

4. If applicable, identify other individuals who played an important mentoring role in encouraging you to attend college. Check all that apply:

_____ a grandparent _____ an employer

_____ a foster parent _____ a minister

_____ a guardian _____ a coach

Other _____

Support for Educational Attainment (While in College)

5. My parent(s) played an important role in encouraging me to complete college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

6. My high school teacher(s) played an important role in encouraging me to complete college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

7. My high school guidance counselor(s) played an important role in encouraging me to complete college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

8. Faculty member(s) at my college played an important role in encouraging me to complete college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

9. My college advisor played an important role in encouraging me to complete college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

10. My friend(s) played an important role in encouraging me to complete college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

11. My college fraternity/sorority played an important role in encouraging me to complete college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

12. If applicable, identify other individuals who played an important mentoring role in encouraging you to complete college. Check all that apply:

_____ a grandparent _____ an employer

_____ a foster parent _____ a minister

_____ a guardian _____ a coach

Other _____

Social Engagement

13. Were you an active member of clubs and organizations at your college(s)/ universit(ies)? _____Yes _____No

14. Please estimate, on the line below, how many college clubs and organizations you participated in while a college student.

_____

15. Did you hold any leadership positions in any of the clubs or organizations to which you belonged? _____Yes _____No

16. Did you participate in athletic activities (club, intramural, or "rec" sports) at your college or university? _____Yes _____No

17. Were you a member of a social sorority or fraternity? _____Yes _____No

18. Were you socially active with college friends and classmates outside of organized activities (clubs, organizations, sororities/fraternities, etc)? ____Yes ____No

19. Overall, social activities and interactions with friends and classmates were important to my completing college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

20a. Did you participate in out-of-class social activities with any of your professors? ____Yes _____No

20b. Social interaction with my professors was important to my completing college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

Academic Engagement

21. My high school classes prepared me for college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

22. Academic support or TRIO programs were necessary to my academic development.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

23. I found my college classroom experiences to be challenging.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

24. Overall, I attended most of my college classes:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

25. I participated in classroom discussions and activities.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

26. I participated in out-of-class academic projects/assignments with my classmates.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

27. I participated in out-of-class academic discussions/activities with my professor(s).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

28. I attended optional academic activities while in college (speakers, concerts, films, etc.).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

29. I worked as a research assistant for a faculty member while in college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

30. Overall, I found my college/university to be academically supportive.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

Institutional Behaviors

31. My college/university enrolled a racially and ethnically diverse group of students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

32. My college/university employed a racially and ethnically diverse group of faculty members.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

33. My college/university employed a racially and ethnically diverse group of administrative staff members.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

34. My college/university provided me with sufficient information and guidance on financial aid.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

35. The following type(s) of financial aid were available at my college/university. Check all that apply:

_____Merit scholarship _____Need-based scholarship _____ Pell Grant _____Loans

_____Diversity-based scholarship _____Non-repayable grant _____Work Study

36. Which of the following forms of financial aid did you receive? Check all that apply:

_____Merit scholarship _____Need-based scholarship _____ Pell Grant _____Loans

_____Diversity-based scholarship _____Non-repayable grant _____ Work Study

Demographic Information

1. Gender: Female ____ Male _____

2. Race/ethnicity: _____

3. Did you live at home and thus, commute during college? _____Yes _____No

4. If you moved away, did you live on campus during your first year? ____Yes ____No

5. If you moved away, how often did you go home during the school year?

Weekly _____ Every few weeks_____ Monthly _____ Breaks _____

Other _____

6. How often did you talk to your parent(s) during the school year?

More than once/day _____ Daily_____ Every few days_____

Weekly _____Every two weeks_____ Monthly _____

Other _____

7. How often did you talk to one of the other supportive people that you identified on page one?

More than once/day _____ Daily_____ Every few days_____

Weekly _____Every two weeks_____ Monthly _____

Other _____

For questions 8 and 9 please use the table below:

Low-income or Economically, or Otherwise Disadvantaged: A student may be determined to be low-income only if he/she earned less than 150% of the HHS poverty guidelines AND his/her parents earned less than $40,000. An independent student may be determined to be economically disadvantaged if his/her income is less than 185% of the HHS poverty guidelines.

LOW-INCOME AND ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED TABLE		
Size of Family Unit	**150% of HHS Poverty Guidelines**	**185% of HHS Poverty Guidelines**
One	$14,700	$18,130
Two	$19,800	$24,420
Three	$24,900	$30,710
Four	$30,000	$37,000
Five	$35,100	$43,290
Six	$40,200	$49,580

Source: CLEO

8. Using the table above, would you be considered to be a low income student?

Yes___ No ___

9. Using the table above, would you be considered to be economically disadvantaged?

Yes___ No___

10. Were you dependent on your family for financial support while in college?

Yes___ No___

11. Did you work during college? _____Yes _____No

12a. If you worked during college, were you employed on-campus or off-campus during your first year? ____On-campus _____Off-campus

12b. If you worked during college, were you employed on-campus or off-campus after your first year? ____On-campus _____Off-campus

13. If you worked during college, how many hours/week did you work? _____

14. While in college did you contribute to the financial support your family?

___Yes ___No

15. Overall, working was necessary to my completing college.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

16. Please circle your estimated student debt:

Less than $1,000 $ 1,000-5,000 $5,000-10,000

$10,000-15,000 $15,000-20,000 > $20,000

17. What was your age when you graduated high school? _____

18. What was your age when you began college? _____

19. How many years did it take for you to complete college? _____

20. Did your mother complete high school? Yes ____ No ____

21. Did your mother complete college? Yes ____ No _____

22. Did your father complete high school? Yes ____ No _____

23. Did your father complete college? Yes ____ No _____

24. What type of high school(s) did you attend? Public____ Private____

25. Did your high school offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses? _____Yes _____No

26. Did you take any AP courses? _____Yes _____No

27. What was your **high school** GPA? _____

28. From which type of college/university did you graduate? Public ____ Private _____

29a. If you attended a distinctive type(s) of college /university, did you graduate from it?

_____Yes _____No

29b. If so, from which type of institution did you graduate?

Historically Black College or University _____ Tribal College _____

Women's College _____

30. How large was the enrollment at the college/university from which you graduated? Please circle your response:

Less than 1,000 1,000-5,000 5,000-10,000 10,000-15,000

15,000-20,000 > 20,000

31. What was your **college** GPA? _____

32. At what point in your college years did you declare a major?
_____

33a. Did you transfer institutions at any time while earning your baccalaureate degree?

Yes _____ No_____

33b. If yes, how many times did you transfer institutions? _____

Please indicate how many times you transferred from:

a two-year institution to a four-year institution _____ or from

a four-year institution to a different four-year institution _____

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your time and effort is deeply appreciated.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

a. What were the situations that helped you to complete your degree?

b. Were there things that your college or university did to help you make your initial transition to college easier and to make you feel comfortable about your choice of institutions?

c. Were there social and academic activities or programs at your college or university that helped you finish your college education?

d. What were some situations that made you want to stop attending college?

e. If those experiences caused you to consider leaving college, what caused you to change your mind?

f. What were some things your institution could have done to make you feel more comfortable about your choice of institutions and to motivate you to attain your degree?

Appendix C

Member Schools
Boston College
Brigham Young University
University of California-Davis
Catholic University of America
Chicago-Kent
University of Colorado
DePaul University
University of the District of Columbia
Duke University
Fordham University
Golden Gate University
Hofstra University
University of Houston
Howard University
University of Idaho
John Marshall Law School
Marquette University Law School
McGeorge School of Law
Mercer University
University of Miami
University of Mississippi
Northeastern University
Northern Illinois University
University of Notre Dame
Nova Southeastern University
Ohio State University
Pace University
University of Pittsburgh
Quinnipiac University
Roger Williams University
South Texas College of Law
Southern Methodist University
Stetson University
Suffolk University
Texas Wesleyan University
Thomas Jefferson School of Law
Thomas M. Cooley Law School
Touro College
Vermont Law School
Western State University
Whittier Law School
William Mitchell College of Law
Yeshiva University

Supporting Institutions
University of Akron
Albany Law School
Arizona State University
University of Arkansas-Little Rock
Case Western Reserve University
University of Chicago
City University of New York
Columbia University
Cornell University
Drake University
Duquesne University
Hamline University
Harvard Law School
University of Iowa
University of Louisville
University of Missouri-Columbia
Loyola University-New Orleans
University of Maryland
University of Michigan
New England School of Law
New York Law School
New York University
Samford University
University of Southern California
Southern Illinois University
State University of New York at Buffalo
Temple University
University of Tennessee
Wake Forest University
Washington & Lee

Sustaining Institutions
University of Alabama
American University
Appalachian School of Law
Ave Maria School of Law
University of Baltimore
Baylor University
California Western School of Law
Chapman University
University of Denver
Emory University
University of Florida
Florida Coastal School of Law
Franklin Pierce Law Center
Georgia State University
University of Illinois
Indiana University-Indianapolis
University of Kansas
Lewis and Clark
Loyola Law School-Los Angeles
Loyola University-Chicago
University of Maine
University of Nevada
University of New Mexico
North Carolina Central University
Northern Kentucky University
Northwestern University
Oklahoma City University
University of Oregon
Pennsylvania State University
Rutgers University-Camden
Rutgers School of Law-Newark
Saint John's University
Saint Mary's University
University of San Diego
Santa Clara University
University of South Carolina
Southern University Law Center
Syracuse University
Texas Southern University
Tulane University
University of Tulsa
University of Utah
Vanderbilt University
University of Virginia
Washburn University
Washington University
Western New England
Widener University
Willamette University

CLEO

Promoting Excellence in Legal Education through the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program

May 7, 2007

Dear CLEO Participants,

CLEO is happy to cooperate with Assistant Dean Donna L. Pavlick at the University of Missouri-Columbia, School of Law on the enclosed survey. The leadership of CLEO has endorsed this project and encourages you to respond to the survey.

The results of this survey will be presented to CLEO, and also will be used in upcoming publications about increasing student persistence to baccalaureate degree attainment. Increasing baccalaureate degree attainment for minority and low-income students is important to increasing law school enrollment and ultimately, to increasing the diversity of the legal profession. This project contributes to that objective.

Please take a few minutes to complete the survey. Responses from every CLEO participant sampled are important to the study. Your response will make a contribution to future CLEO students.

Sincerely,

Rod Terry

Roderick Terry, Esq.
Associate Director - CLEO

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From: Harrington, Marcia Denise [harringtond@missouri.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, May 16, 2007 4:16 PM
To: Pavlick, Donna L.; Rosser, Vicki J.
Subject: Campus IRB Application Approval Notice

Your project entitled *Degree Attainment: An Examination of the Factors that Lead to Academic Success for African American Students* (IRB Number 1089917) was approved by the Campus IRB and will expire on May 16, 2008.

Go to
https://irb.missouri.edu/eirb/letters.php?proj_num=1089917&reviewkey=63189&letter_id=15 for more information regarding your continued IRB approval.

Thank you,

Campus Institutional Review Board

From: irb+@pitt.edu [mailto:irb+@pitt.edu]
Sent: Monday, June 25, 2007 7:33 AM
To: Pavlick, Donna L.
Subject: IRB Notification: Your research study has received exempt approval

University of Pittsburgh

Institutional Review Board

3500 Fifth Avenue
Ground Level
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 383-1480
(412) 383-1508 (fax)
http://www.irb.pitt.edu

Memorandum

TO:	DONNA PAVLICK
FROM:	SUE BEERS PHD, Vice Chair
DATE:	6/25/2007
IRB#:	PRO07050258
SUBJECT:	Degree Attainment: An Examination of the Factors that Lead to Academic Success for African American Students

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The above-referenced project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided, this project meets all the necessary criteria for an exemption, and is hereby designated as "exempt" under section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)tests.

Please note the following information:

- If any modifications are made to this project, please contact the IRB Office to ensure it continues to meet the exempt category.
- Upon completion of your project, be sure to finalize the project by submitting a termination request.

Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.

Appendix D

Letter of Informed Consent

May 16, 2007

Dear Pitt CLEO student:

You are invited to participate in a dissertation research project. This research project will examine the factors that contribute to African American student baccalaureate degree attainment.

This study will consist of a short survey. It is anticipated that the survey will take 20 minutes of your time.

I hope you will take the time to participate in this study as your input is vital in helping colleges and universities understand how to improve persistence to graduation. Other than the time that it will take to complete the questionnaire there are no physical risks or discomforts associated with being in this research study, but some of the questions may cause you to feel uncomfortable.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to answer all of the survey questions or skip some of the questions. You may choose to end your participation at any time. Two of the survey participants will be randomly chosen to receive a $25.00 gift card.

Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential and in no way will be associated with your name. A number on the form will be used to keep track of respondents. The primary investigator is the only person that has the list of participants selected for the study and that list will be kept confidential. Once data collection has been completed it will be retained in a locked space for a period of three years. After three years all data will be destroyed. The results of the study will not individually identify any participant.

If you have questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Donna L. Pavlick, Primary Investigator, at 573-884-2949, pavlickd@missouri.edu or Dr. Vicki J. Rosser, Dissertation Advisor, at 573-884-1806, rosserv@missouri.edu. This study was approved by University of Missouri-Columbia's Institutional Review Board and the University of Pittsburgh's Institutional Review Board. Any questions or concerns about human subject participation may be directed to the University of Missouri-Columbia's Campus Institutional Review Board, at 573-882-9585, umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

Please make every effort to complete and return the questionnaire. Your completion of the questionnaire indicates your willingness to participate. If you do not wish to participate in this study, please return the blank survey form to me.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project.

Sincerely yours,

Donna L. Pavlick
Primary Investigator

May 16, 2007

Dear Missouri CLEO student:

You are invited to participate in a dissertation research project. This research project will examine the factors that contribute to African American student baccalaureate degree attainment.

This study will consist of two parts, a short survey and a personal interview. It is anticipated that the survey will take 20 minutes of your time. It is anticipated that the interview will take no more than one hour. A second interview may be conducted if after reviewing the initial responses, the researcher needs to ask any follow-up questions to clarify the information provided. It is anticipated that follow-up interviews will take no more than 30 minutes. Interview responses may be tape-recorded or transcribed at the participant's request. Participants may participate in either or both parts (survey and interview) of the research project.

I hope you will take the time to participate in this study as your input is vital in helping colleges and universities understand how to improve persistence to graduation. Other than the time that it will take to complete the questionnaire and/or the personal interview there are no physical risks or discomforts associated with being in this research study, but some of the questions may cause you to feel uncomfortable.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to answer all of the survey and/or interview questions or skip some of the questions. You may choose to end your participation at any time. Two of the survey participants will be randomly chosen to receive a $25.00 gift card. All of the interview participants will receive an MU Law T-Shirt.

Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential and in no way will be associated with your name. A number on the form will be used to keep track of respondents. The primary investigator is the only person that has the list of participants selected for the study and that list will be kept confidential. Once data collection has been completed it will be retained in a locked space for a period of three years. After three years all data will be destroyed. The results of the study will not individually identify any participant.

If you have questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Donna L. Pavlick, Primary Investigator, at 573-884-2949, pavlickd@missouri.edu or Dr. Vicki J. Rosser, Dissertation Advisor, at 573-884-1806, rosserv@missouri.edu. This study was approved by University of Missouri-Columbia's Institutional Review Board. Any questions or concerns about human subject participation may be directed to the University of Missouri-Columbia's Campus Institutional Review Board, at 573-882-9585, umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

Please make every effort to complete and return the questionnaire. Your completion of the questionnaire indicates your willingness to participate. If you do not wish to participate in this study, please return the blank survey form to me.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project.

Sincerely yours,

Donna L. Pavlick
Primary Investigator

Appendix E: Participant Data

Demographic Profile of 2007 CLEO Survey Participants (N = 15)			
Gender	7 = female	8 = male	
High school type	11 = public	4 = private	
AP courses offered	All schools		
AP courses taken	13 = yes	2 = no	
High school GPA	2.68 = min	3.63 = mean	4.34 = max
Age entry college	4 = 17 years	10 = 18 years	1 = 19 years
College type	8 = public	7 = private	
College size (# students)	6 < 10,000 (2 < 1,000)	7 > 10,000 (3 > 20,000)	
Residence (1st year)	13 = on campus	2 = commute	
Employment (in college)	All; 14 employed in first year		
Hours worked (in college)	5 hr/week = min	21 hr/wk = mean	40 hr/wk = max
Debt at graduation	11 > $10,000	3 > $20,000	
Years to completion	1 = 3 years	3 = 3.5 years	9 = 4 years 2 = 4-5 years
College GPA	2.80 = min	3.15 = mean	3.87 = max
Institutional transfers	1 = 2 yr. to 4 yr.	3 = 4 yr. to 4 yr.	

Appendix F: Parent Data

Demographic Profile of Parents
2007 CLEO Survey Participants

High school completion	14 = mothers	13 = fathers
College completion	8 = mothers	8 = fathers
Socioeconomic status	4 = low income (income < $40,000)	

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VITA

Donna L. Pavlick is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She received her Bachelor's of Science degree in Physical Therapy from the University of Pittsburgh in 1974, a Masters of Arts in Psychology with an emphasis in Guidance and Counseling from the University of Northern Colorado in 1979, a Juris Doctor from the University of Pittsburgh in 1985, and a Masters of Law in Dispute Resolution from the University of Missouri in 2000.

In 1990, Donna began her career in Higher Education, first as an adjunct instructor of physical therapy at the University of Missouri (MU) and then as the Academic Clinical Coordinator of Education and instructor for physical therapy assistants at Linn State Technical College. In 2000 she returned to MU to become the Assistant Dean for Admissions and Student Services at the School of Law, where she remained until 2008. While at MU Donna collaborated with the College of Arts and Sciences Honor's College, teaching a pre-law explorations course and conducting pre-law programming for the Missouri Scholar's Academy. In conjunction with the Department of Residential Life she was a stakeholder in the Law and Society learning community and also taught a Freshman Interest Group (FIG) seminar. For her efforts on behalf of undergraduate education she received MU's Excellence in Education award in 2004.

Donna is now the Director of Academic Programs and Registrar at Vanderbilt University Law School in Nashville, Tennessee where her responsibilities include academic counseling, curricular programming, and registrar's duties. Donna's research interests include student persistence and higher education law and policy.