

Understanding the Experiences of Students of Color Transferring to a Private
Institution

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Doctorate of Philosophy

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UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS OF COLOR

TRANSFERRING TO A PRIVATE INSTITUTION

Presented by Venita M Mitchell

A candidate for the degree of

Doctorate of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

Completing a PhD and writing a dissertation takes a lot out of a researcher. The time and life it consumes is not only that of the researcher but that of the researcher's family. I am privileged and humbled to have a family who has supported this effort unselfishly. I could not have completed this journey without the support and encouragement of my husband and best friend, Matt. For many years Matt has carried the domestic load while I was in class or locked up in '*the New Hampshire room*' writing for hours. His patience and belief in my ability to complete this program allowed me to succeed. Bailey and Kalin, my two supportive kids, have grown up with a mom in the bleachers with a stack of research articles in her lap. Their patience and acceptance of a mom who spends a lot of time on homework has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. Time and time again their support inspired me.

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ABSTRACT

This case study used a revision of Tinto's theory of student departure and self-efficacy as frameworks, to explore the experiences of seven students of color who transferred to a small, private, and predominately White residential institution in the rural Midwest. All of the participants in this study faced challenges socially integrating into the campus community, but all participants displayed some degree of self-efficacy in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree. This study found that participants' commitment to the institution and persistence was positively impacted by their own ability to find common communities for socialization, their proactive social adjustment strategies, psychosocial engagement, and self-efficacy, but only among those identifying as traditional age and residential. Less support was found for the revised theory among non-traditional age commuters in the study who experienced less opportunity for social integration. Results of this study are valuable to higher education practitioners seeking to improve the experiences and/or recruitment and retention of transfer students of color. Small institutions which have historically served residential and predominately White students need to evaluate current programs, student organizations, campus environments, and social opportunities to determine if these services are meeting the needs of both non-traditional and traditional age transfer students of color.

CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS OF COLOR TRANSFERRING TO A SMALL PRIVATE INSTITUTION

Each fall hundreds and, depending on the institution, sometimes thousands of students arrive on college campuses across the country. Among the crowd of new arrivals on college campuses are an increasing number of transfer students (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Reports by the National Association for College Admission Counseling consistently indicate that approximately one-third of all college students are transfer students (Hoover, 2007; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2010). Significant numbers of these students arrive from 2-year institutions and many of these students are from racial and ethnic minority populations, specifically Black and Hispanic (Horn & Neville, 2006). Their experiences differ from those of traditional age (defined as age 18-25) first-time college students (Flaga, 2006; Kodama, 2002; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Woosley & Johnson, 2006) and recent research has shown that the transfer experience is worthy of further understanding. Taking the transfer students' differences one step further, researchers have found the transfer experience for racial and ethnic minority transfer students is different and perhaps even more challenging (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kodama, 2002).

A significant amount of research on transfer students has focused on transfer to large 4-year public and often research-based institutions (e.g., Berger & Malaney, 2003; Cejda & Kaylor, 2001; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson,

2006). These same studies did not separate the transfer experiences of students of color from those experiences of White transfer students. While there has been increasing research on racial and ethnic minority transfer students, limited research has focused on their transfer to small private institutions (Lee, 2001; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003; Wolf-Wendel Twombly, Morpew, & Sopcich, 2004). Some research has focused on transfer to elite public and private 4-year institutions, but not to private institutions beyond the elites (Cloud, 2010; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008).

In the United States there is a wide range of higher education institutional types and today's transfer students are moving among them. The transfer student population is growing on campuses around the country, with some institutions reporting transfers as the majority on their campus (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). Transfers are becoming a vital part of institutional populations as more and more institutions rely on these students to grow and sustain enrollments (Cejda & Kaylor, 1997). As transfer student enrollments grow, it is becoming increasingly more important for higher education administrators to understand this population.

For many students the community college, also referred to as a 2-year institution, provides access to a college education and economic hope for the future. This remains particularly true for students of color (Boswell, 2004; Wellman, 2002). Community colleges by design promote open access and enroll more low-income students than other types of educational institutions (Wellman, 2002). Wellman (2002) indicates that "the strong correlation between race,

academic preparation, and income also means that these institutions enroll the largest proportion of students of color, particularly African American and Hispanic students” (p. 4).

While community colleges have increased access to higher education for many students, there still remains a significant gap in persistence to graduation with a baccalaureate degree (Boswell, 2004). Research varies on reasons why, but lower high school graduation rates, lack of college readiness success in high schools, lower socioeconomic status, and lack of support for educational attainment all hinder college opportunities and success (Lee & Ransom, 2011). In the 2007-2008 academic year over a 67% White students achieved a Bachelor’s degree yet only 9% Black and 7.36% Hispanic students achieved the same (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010). A recent report on the educational experiences of male students of color released by The College Board shows the continued enrollment disparities in both two and four year institutions compared to that of White students (Lee & Ransom, 2011).

President Obama has announced a national goal of the United States having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. If this challenge is to be met by 2020, we must continue to increase the number of graduates from underrepresented populations (Lee & Ransom, 2011; Nichols, 2011). Perhaps a national agenda will stimulate progress which appears to have remained stagnate as the similar claims were made nine years ago. Wellman’s (2002) policy report specifically argued that “improving effectiveness of 2/4 [2-year to 4-year institution] transfer will be the key to national progress in closing the gap among

racial groups in degree attainment” (p. v). Given the large number of transfer students in the United States education system, Wellman also believes that private institutions play an important role in helping educate transfer students and should be included in state transfer student planning policies and data collection. Rendon, Jalamo, and Nora (2000) believe that increased research on race issues is necessary in order to understand the dynamics that impact persistence of different races.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I inquired about the experiences of students of color who transfer to a small, private, and not-for-profit residential institution, William Woods University. The specific purpose of the study was to understand and describe the experiences of transfer students of color who were successfully persisting at this specific small, 4- year, and predominately White institution. For the purpose of this study, transfer students were defined as students who attended a previous institution of higher education for at least one semester and were enrolled at William Woods University. Racial and ethnic minorities attending predominately White institutions can face additional challenges such as “racism, hostility, prejudice, discrimination, a ‘chilly’ climate, institutional bias, negative stereotypes, self-doubt, alienation, isolation, and cultural insensitivity (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003, p. 20). Understanding these challenges may help institutions find ways to improve these students’ persistence.

William Woods University is located in Fulton, Missouri. Fulton is a small, rural, Midwestern town with a population of just over 12,000 of which 81% is

White (City of Fulton, 2000). William Woods University is one of two private higher education institutions in Fulton. According to its website, William Woods is an independent institution that “distinguishes itself as a student-centered and professions-oriented university committed to the values of ethics, self-liberation, and lifelong education of students in the world community” (William Woods University, 2010a, ¶ 1).

The institution’s undergraduate enrollment on the residential Fulton campus is just over 900 students. The once all-female institution began admitting men in 1997 (William Woods University, 2010b); however, male enrollment growth has been slow and 75% of the total undergraduate population remains female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010-2011a). In addition, the institution is predominately White with 83% of the undergraduate population reported as White, non-Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010-2011a). The institution is a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and athletes are eligible to receive scholarships with athletic scholarships.

A revised version of Tinto’s (1993) theory on student departure will be used as a conceptual framework (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Self-efficacy, which is part of the revised theory, is also included as an additional lens. Participants in the study will have navigated the transition to a new institution and can provide insight as to their success thus far in college. Success in this study is defined as continued enrollment at their current institution. Rodgers and Summers (2008) specifically suggest that additional qualitative research on

African American students at predominately White institutions will “reveal variables and relationships that we had not initially considered to be part of the process” (p. 186). They suggest further inquiry about students’ motivation to attend the institution, their perceptions of the institution’s commitment to students, and their social and academic integration. Results of such inquiry can lead to a deeper understanding of the variables contributing to the retention of African American students at such institutions (Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

In this study, attention will be given to students’ institutional choice of transfer to William Woods University, their expectations of the institution, their investment in and opportunities for social integration, and the role of self-efficacy in their persistence. Students often choose to attend private institutions for their supportive and personal environments (National Association for Independent Colleges and Universities, 2006). The percentage of minority students enrolled at public 4-year institutions is proportionally similar to the number enrolled at private 4-year institutions at 29% and 30.4% respectively (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010). These numbers represented total enrollment in 2009 and did not distinguish between transfer and non-transfer students.

Private institutions can play a key role in the education of transfer students within the United States education system (Wellman, 2002). Bailey and Morset (2006) in their book *Defending the Community College Equity Agenda* indicate that they believe students’ race and ethnicity is often correlated with inequities on some level, which often do, but should not, limit their educational achievement. This study seeks to increase the understanding of the experiences of

transfer students of color who are successfully persisting at one private institution, William Woods University. Results can reveal information to help institutions evaluate recruitment and retention policies and programs that may improve the campus environments and institutional support for transfer students of color in pursuit of the 4-year degree.

Overview of the Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Several studies have highlighted the experiences and challenges of community college students as they transferred to 4-year institutions, particularly as they relate to and support Tinto's (1993) theory of departure (Cameron, 2005; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Not all persistence and departure studies using Tinto's framework support all of Tinto's findings (Braxton et al., 2004; Cameron, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tanaka, 2002; Tierney, 1992, 2000). Some argue (e.g. Tanaka, 2002; Tierney, 2000) that Tinto's work does not go far enough in exploring the impact of integration among students from diverse backgrounds. Braxton et al., (2004) believe there is little empirical support for the impact of academic integration on persistence and encourage further research on the impact of social integration with their modified theory. What many of these studies (e.g., Cameron, 2005; Flaga, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) do have in common is that they do not distinguish between the experiences of racial and ethnic minority and non-minority students. Research has shown that in some ways all transfer students experience feelings of marginalization (Kodama, 2002). This marginalization can be more significant

among women and some ethnic groups; however, additional research is needed if the problem is to be understood more completely (Kodama, 2002).

Persistence research has often assumed that the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students are similar to those of all students and, while some research gives Tinto (1993) credit for introducing the importance of inclusive environments, the consensus is that he has not gone far enough (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Rendon et al., 2000). Scholars are now suggesting that the experiences of underrepresented groups are not the same as those of the majority, and they further indicate there is a need for retention and persistence theories to focus specifically on the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students (Braxton et al., 2004; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008; Metz, 2004-2005; Torres, 2006; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). This study seeks to fill two gaps in the literature by first providing research specifically focused on transfer students of color and second providing research on these students' experiences at a small, private, and predominately White institution.

The revised version of Tinto's theory suggested by Braxton et al. (2004) allows for a closer look at the role of social integration and student persistence at often unstudied institutional type. This theory retains the empirically proven propositions involving social integration and introduces the second framework of self-efficacy. In addition, the revised theory is specifically intended for residential campuses.

Numerous researchers indicate that the nature and culture of the receiving institution may also impact the transition process of transfer students (Braxton et al., 2004; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Difficulty adjusting to larger classes, less interaction and direction from faculty, lack of knowledge regarding university services, and disappointing social experiences were common frustrations for students transferring to large research institutions (Cameron, 2005; Flaga, 2006; & Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Small private institutions typically promote smaller class sizes, low faculty to student ratios, and easy access to student engagement experiences (Cohen, 1998; Hurtado, 2003). Perhaps these environments can influence transfer student success differently, but their influence on the success of students of color remains to be seen as these populations continue to be quite small on many small private campuses.

The revised theory also allows for an in-depth look at social integration using several key concepts. Research has suggested that a variety of aspects of social integration can have an impact on those students whose backgrounds are not similar to those of students from the dominate culture which in my study is predominately White (Braxton et al., 2004; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Torres, 2006). Key concepts taken from the revision of Tinto's theory are used to frame the literature review and the study. These include: institutional commitment to the welfare of students; institutional integrity; communal potential; proactive social adjustment; psychosocial engagement; and to some extent, the ability to pay (Braxton et al., 2004). Building on a component of the psychosocial

engagement concept, self-efficacy is further expanded upon as an additional framework. Self-efficacy involves an individual's belief that they have the ability to create actions that impact particular outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is given additional consideration in this study because several studies in the literature review (e.g., Gore, Leuwerke, & Turley, 2005; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Torres, 2006) discuss the importance of self-efficacy for students of color.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide my research as I explore the unique experiences of transfer students of color:

- 1) How do the transfer student participants of color describe their experiences at William Woods University?
 - a) What influence do social opportunities and social enclaves at William Woods University have on participants' experiences? And, how important is the student's own investment in these experiences?
 - b) What are the participants' perceptions of the institution's commitment to the welfare of students?
- 2) How does a students' self-efficacy impact their experience and persistence?

Methodology

Using a theory proposed by Braxton et al. (2004) as a conceptual framework, I will conduct a qualitative case study in order to create an in depth understanding of the shared phenomenon of the transfer experience of students

of color at a particular institution. Case studies can reveal and help us understand the complexities of a particular social phenomenon (Merriam, 1988).

Experiential descriptions can allow the reader of the case study the opportunity to extend their understanding of the experience through vicarious experience (Stake, 2005). Seven students of color were interviewed regarding their decision to transfer, their experiences, their social engagement on campus, and self-efficacy. In addition, resources and information related to the institution's mission and processes related to these students were collected and analyzed for their contribution to their experiences. In addition to interviews, I observed transfer student admissions tours and student life orientations. These activities offered a perspective on the messages transfer students receive when considering and entering the institution. Also, I collected artifacts, such as, but not limited, orientation schedules and website information, as these items can contribute to our understanding of the participant's experiences and the institution they have chosen to attend.

Participants were transfer students of color who, at the time of being interviewed, were enrolled at William Woods University, a small, private, residential institution. Transfer students, for the purpose of this study, are defined as students who attended a previous institution of higher education for at least one semester and were then enrolled at William Woods University during the semester this research was conducted. Only domestic students were included in this study. Students were defined as students of color based on the responses they selected on their application for admission regarding ethnic heritage,

ethnicity, and race. The option to select two or more races was available to students and those doing so were eligible to participate in this study.

Significance of Study

This research explores the transfer experiences of students of color attending a small, 4-year private institution with a high residential population. Of the 7 participants in the study, 3 transferred from 4-year institutions and 4 transferred from a community college. All seven participants in this study identified as African American/Black. One participant, in addition to identifying as African American/Black, also identified as Hispanic and Native American. An investigation into students of color experiences at small institutions can potentially provide important information for improving their recruitment to and their persistence at receiving institutions.

According to Bowen (2006) “race remains the most deep-seated and intransigent barrier to opportunity” (p. 19). Racial and ethnic minority students still fall behind on all indicators of educational attainment and participation (Boswell, 2004; Network, 2003). Completing a bachelor’s degree brings undisputed rewards for graduates. Increased opportunities for employment, along with increased cultural and social capital, bring improved standards of living and health for those able to complete a degree (Braxton & Hirschy, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Therefore, this study focuses on students of color who are successfully matriculating toward degree completion. Research on this particular student population can help increase the understanding of what is contributing to their success. In addition, transfer students of color have the

potential to be an important part of enrollment strategies at both public and private institutions and, therefore, expanded research on successful transfer students can create a deeper understanding of their needs and what it takes for them to succeed (Cejda & Kaylor, 1997).

Summary

This chapter began with a brief discussion about transfer students, many of whom begin their college careers at 2-year institutions. This study sought to expand the research on transfer students of color, particular students transferring to a specific, private, predominately White institution, as little research is available on transfer to these types of institutions. A further purpose was to understand and describe these experiences through the use of a revised version of Tinto's theory on student departure (Braxton et al., 2004) and participants' self-efficacy in the experience. A brief overview of the literature, specific research questions, and a look at the case study method used in the study is also provided.

The next chapter is a review of the literature on transfer students of color. The review begins with a section on the unique characteristics of small institutions followed by two sections on the conceptual frameworks. The final sections of the literature review are organized around key themes in the conceptual frameworks; communal potential, (which includes a look at campus climate), commitment of the institution to student welfare, institutional integrity, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement (which includes self-efficacy), and ability to pay.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant amount of transfer research does not distinguish the experiences of ethnic and racial minority students as different from non-minority students; however, some studies have explored the challenges these students face particularly when transferring to predominately White institutions (e.g., Dowd et al., 2008; Lee, 2001). I use the terms students of color, racial and ethnic minority students, and underrepresented students interchangeably throughout this dissertation to reflect the original language or term used in the research being cited. This literature review, though focused on the transfer experiences of students of color, includes key literature on common challenges facing all transfer students, as these studies did include students of color in their research populations. Studies focusing on students of color show the unique challenges they face in addition to other typical transfer stress.

As discussed previously, retention research has often assumed the experiences of students of color are similar to those of White students. While Tinto (1993) did update his theory to include the importance of inclusive environments, this update has not always been considered in the research (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon et al., 2000). Tinto acknowledged that the individual characteristics students bring with them have an impact on persistence. He further indicated that students of color, whether new or transfer students, may find these transitions even more difficult on many campuses where there is not a critical mass of students from similar backgrounds. Racial and

ethnic minority students can find themselves overwhelmed with the whiteness they encounter when first arriving on a predominately White campus (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009).

This literature review begins with a section on institutional characteristics of a small colleges as there is little research available on student experiences at these institutions. The second part of the literature review covers the two conceptual frameworks that guide this study; Braxton et al. (2004) revision of Tinto's theory and self-efficacy. The section on conceptual frameworks opens with a brief look at Tinto's original theory, as this provides some background for the revision. This section also includes an explanation of the revision process as this contributes to the understanding of the revision and its usefulness as lens in this study. The final section reviews recent literature of transfer student of color and is organized according to the propositions found in the revision of Tinto's theory (Braxton et al., 2004).

Small and Private College Institutional Characteristics

There is little research available on transfer to small, private, not-for-profit, and particularly the non-elite institutions; however, these institutions can potentially enroll significant numbers of transfer students (National Association for Independent Colleges and Universities, 2006; Wellman, 2002). The private college's history in the United States dates back to the early nineteenth century when the growth of educational institutions boomed along with the population and the federal government limited state control over private institutions (Cohen, 1998). Small colleges, often with affiliations to religious denominations, were

chartered across the country. As each new community developed, town leaders felt a college gave them legitimacy. Many of these early small institutions closed due to financial failure, fires, and dissension among the leadership (Cohen, 1998). William Woods University is itself rich with the history of the time of its founding and managed to survive both a campus destroying fire and financial troubles after its original founding in 1870 (William Woods University, 2010c).

The small college environment may be prepared to meet the needs of racial and ethnic minority transfer students differently than larger institutions. Enrollments at small colleges are usually less than 3,000, which allows for small class sizes and low faculty-to-student ratios (Cohen, 1998; Hurtado, 2003). The small campus culture supports frequent faculty and staff interaction with students, which is often not the case at large public institutions (Cohen, 1998). Smaller institutions often appeal to students not interested in the “tumult associated with large, public institutions” (Cohen, 1998, p. 304). In addition, students attending private institutions have reported less racial conflict, good communication between ethnic groups, and more integrated curricula than students at public institutions (Hurtado, 1992).

Tinto (1993) speculated that the low student-faculty ratio of smaller colleges may help their degree completion effectiveness, but their small minority populations prevent them from providing as many subculture options for students. In addition, the challenge for smaller private institutions with small minority populations may be their inability to recruit or sustain minority student numbers (Tinto, 1993). Private institutions have consistently produced higher

degree completion rates than public institutions; however, when taking into account precollege characteristics such as, but not limited to, gender, socioeconomic status, and age, degree completion rates have varied (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This makes it difficult to attribute more successful degree completion rates solely to institutional characteristics, but lends support for the need to explore the experiences of students transferring to different institution types.

Conceptual Framework

This study uses a revision of Tinto's (1993) student departure theory as a lens for exploring the transfer experience of underrepresented students. Theory is often used in case study research to provide a framework for inquiry and data collection (Merriam, 1988). The revised model used in this study focuses on specific aspects of Tinto's original theory that received additional support from further research. After an extensive process of inductive reasoning by Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) and Braxton and Hirschy (2004), Braxton et al. (2004) produced a recommendation for a revision of Tinto's (1993) theory particularly as it applies to residential colleges. An understanding of Tinto's theory is helpful and is briefly outlined in the next section.

Tinto's Theory

Tinto's theory is based on the idea that student persistence or non-departure is similar to becoming a part of a community of any kind, and that students pass through various stages of integration into a community when they enter a new college (Nora, 2001-2002; Tinto, 1993). Within the theory, Tinto

does acknowledge that individual student characteristics such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, and age directly impact student persistence, along with their level of social and academic integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Essential to the theory is the idea that students either adapt to the new institution or they depart. Students leaving one institution for another must learn to navigate the new institution and develop new relationships. “The period of negotiation is commonly referred to as a transition period – a period of uncertainty in which students alter their routines and relationships and adapt to a new environment” (Cameron, 2005, p. 23). Institutions typically have distinct academic and social systems, which operate both formally and informally within them (Tinto, 1993). Tinto’s (1993) persistence theory claims that the academic and social integration of individual students into an institution’s community contributes to their persistence. Student success within the theory is defined as persistence or continued enrollment.

Tinto’s academic integration. Academic programs and activities typically include classroom learning and spending time with faculty both in and out of the classroom (Laanan, 2001; Metz, 2004-2005; Tinto, 1993). Academic experiences beyond the classroom, such as clubs, organizations and field experiences, which may or may not directly involve faculty, can contribute to both academic and social integration. This is not to say that grade performance is unimportant. Research has shown that grades do remain a significant predictor of student persistence (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); however, several studies (e.g., Braxton & Hirschy, 2004; Braxton et al., 2004; Cabrera, Stampen &

Hansen, 1990) did not find strong support for academic integration's impact on the student departure or intent to re-enroll decisions.

Tinto's social integration. Tinto believes social integration can play as significant a role in student persistence as academic integration; however, Braxton and Hirschy (2004) found that under some conditions, social integration plays more of a role than academic integration. Students need to feel like they belong in their new community whether they are first-year college students or transfer students. For social integration to occur, students must be able to align their attitudes, values, and norms with that of the institution (Tinto, 1993). For racial and ethnic minorities this can be a greater challenge (Gloria et al., 1999; Kodama, 2002; Torres, 2006). Social involvement can vary from extracurricular activities, such as clubs and organizations, to on-campus employment, but often centers around the daily lives of students outside of the formal academic arena (Tinto, 1993). For many students, positive social interactions are found in residence hall experiences and usually involve significant peer relationships (Woosley & Johnson, 2006).

Tinto (1997) believes that learning is directly tied to persistence and challenges institutions to further understand how student learning experiences impact students. He states his theory explains, not just describes, "how interactions among different individuals within the academic and social systems of the institution and the communities which comprise them lead individuals of different characteristics to withdraw from that institution prior to degree completion" (Tinto, 1993, p. 113).

Revising Tinto's Theory

According to Braxton et al. (2004), Tinto's theory holds "paradigmatic status as a framework for understanding college student departure" (p. 2) as it has been studied and cited in numerous research publications on student retention and departure for over 20 years. In the early stages of revising the theory, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) conducted research to test the consistency of 13 testable propositions of Tinto's original theory. This empirical support, they felt, was necessary if academic and/or social integration were to be proven influences in the departure decisions of students. This research revealed support for five of the 13 propositions that led to the revision of Tinto's model.

In order to appreciate the validity of the revised theory, it is important to understand the research and process that led to the revision. Propositions received a strong support ranking if at least 66% of three or more tests on that proposition resulted in statistically significant affirmation (Braxton et al., 1997). The propositions are listed below and are defined by the number from the original research.

1. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution.
9. The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution.
10. The initial level of institutional commitment affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of college graduation.

11. The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of college graduation.
13. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college. (Braxton et al., 2004, pp. 9-10)

The researchers found only moderate or weak support for the eight propositions not listed here that included, among other things, little support for academic integration as a significant part of student departure. Four of the propositions:--one, nine, ten, and thirteen--were found to be logically related and the researchers felt there was at least partial support for Tinto's (1993) original theory in these propositions. Further inquiry considered the propositions at both residential and commuter institutions.

Results gave partial support to Tinto's theory at residential colleges, but did not find support of the same five propositions at commuter or 2-year colleges (Braxton et al., 1997, Braxton et al., 2004). Additionally, because there was no data from liberal arts colleges, they were unable to find a way to test for significance at these institutions, leaving this open for further research. Also open for further inquiry is whether or not Tinto's theory explains student departure across racial or ethnic groups, as none of the 13 propositions were tested among samples of differing racial or ethnic minority groups (Braxton et al., 1997).

Based on strong empirical support for four of the propositions and their interrelatedness, results of several studies (e.g., Braxton & Hirschy, 2004; Braxton et al., 2004, Braxton et al., 1997) indicated that Tinto's theory was worth revising, particularly as it related to residential colleges and factors that impact social interaction. Using complex processes of inductive theory construction and conceptual factor analysis on previous empirical tests, Braxton and Hirschy (2004) developed five concepts that influence social integration: (a) commitment of the institution to student welfare, (b) communal potential, (c) institutional integrity, (d) proactive social adjustment, and (e) psychosocial engagement. These five concepts, developed from the original four propositions, are influenced by a student's institutional commitment. As social integration increases, student's institutional commitment increases, followed by persistence. The revised theory appears as Figure 1 (see Appendix A).

Braxton et al. (2004) found that each of these concepts contribute to a student's level of social integration. For example, "the greater the level of psychological energy a student invests in various social interaction at his or her college or university the greater the student's degree of social integration" (Braxton et al., 2004, p. 26). In earlier research, Murguia et al. (1991) suggested similar revisions of Tinto's theory of social integration based on the ethnicity of the participants in their study. These researchers found that the ethnicity of students played a key role in the social integration process of Hispanic and Native American participants. They suggested that research focus more closely on ethnic enclaves and the socialization occurring within them (Murguia et al., 1991).

Braxton et al. (2004) introduced a sixth concept: ability to pay into their revision of Tinto's theory. This was added based on the researchers' belief from a study by Cabrera et al. (1990) that ability to pay impacts a student's adjustment to and persistence in college.

Similar to Tinto (1993), Braxton et al., (2004) intended for their theory to be policy relevant and encouraged institutions to use their models to direct the institution's actions and policies with regard to student retention. The Braxton et al. research concluded with the recommendation that further research be conducted using their revised theory, particularly at residential and liberal arts institutions where the concepts above were found valid. Further research was advised for racial and ethnic minority students as well. In addition, the revised theory has yet to be tested on transfer students.

Self-Efficacy as an Additional Framework

Self-efficacy relates to an individual's belief that they have the ability and skills to engage in a course of action and affect a particular outcome (Bandura, 1986). Braxton et al. (2004) believe students' personal commitment to and psychological investment in an institution impacts their actions, social choices, and level of engagement. Students who are proactive and commit to social interactions with peers grow in their confidence. In addition, students who believe they can "find a compatible social community on campus experience a greater self-confidence and certainty in their social interactions" (Braxton et al., 2004). Self-efficacy is included in their revision of Tinto's theory as a part of psychosocial engagement.

Bandura's (1986, 1997) work on self-efficacy is cited frequently (e.g., Bean & Eaton, 2000; Bembenuddy, 2009; Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007; Solberg, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993) in research about self-efficacy and its impact on college success and persistence. Bandura (1997) indicated that people's beliefs in their own efficacy influences the decisions they make, the course of actions they pursue, how long they pursue them and the amount of effort they put into tasks, particularly when faced with obstacles and challenges. On the contrary, "the inability to exert influence over things that adversely affect one's life breeds apprehension, apathy or despair" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). When individuals are able to select and create environmental supports for what they want to become, they are able to impact the direction of their lives (Bandura, 1997).

More support for the importance of self-efficacy as a useful tool for understanding minority student persistence is found in the Gloria et al. (1999) study and in part of Rodgers and Summers (2008) revised look at Bean and Eaton's (2000) psychological model of student retention. Gloria et al. (1999) found in their earlier study on African American student persistence at a predominately White institution, that self-efficacy along with university comfort and social support were predictors of persistence.

Rodgers and Summers (2008) believe their revised model makes the model more applicable to African American students at predominately White institutions where African American students find it more difficult to find in-group support systems. In discussing self-efficacy, Rodgers and Summers believe self-efficacy is found in student motivational tendencies such as academic goals,

motivation, and values. In addition, they emphasize two of Bandura's (1986) five sources of self-efficacy--vicarious experiences and social persuasion--as particularly relevant to racial and ethnic minority students. Vicarious experiences as they relate to efficacy are dependent on student's identification with others and seeing their abilities and circumstances as similar to their own (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). The researchers believe this would be a challenge for African American students attending predominately White institutions.

Similarly, "social persuasion implies a social support system that believes in your efficacy on a task" (Rodgers & Summers, 2008, p. 177). Again the researchers believe that African American students "do not always perceive true social support from significant others, such as faculty" (p. 178) at predominately White institutions. The researchers recommend their theory be tested qualitatively with African American students in order to provide further understanding of students' motivation to attend college, their perceptions of the academic and social environments at their institutions, and their academic and social needs, along with how the institution can support those needs (Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

Self-efficacy was one of several useful lens used to consider Hispanic students' retention at two Hispanic-serving and one predominately White institution. Results showed that students who were able to learn to create cognitive maps on how to succeed were able to adjust and become successful (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Torres, 2006). The expectation cannot be that students

learn this on their own. Institutions need to see themselves as playing a role in assisting students in learning to create these cognitive maps (Torres, 2006).

Gore, Leuwerke, and Turley (2005) suggest self-efficacy is the link between student development theories such as Tinto's (1993) and social cognitive theory. Tinto's theory suggests that integration with faculty, staff, and campus life contributes to positive academic and social experiences. According to Gore et al., these same experiences contribute to positive self-efficacy beliefs and, vice versa, strong self-efficacy beliefs lead to "initiating interactions with faculty and staff and participating in campus life and would sustain such behavior in the face of periodic failure" (p. 241) .

Both the revision of Tinto's theory (Braxton et al., 2004) and self-efficacy provided lenses through which to consider the transfer experiences of students of color. This study seeks to understand why students transferring to William Woods University chose this particular institution, how these students perceive the institution's commitment to their welfare, and their experiences since arriving. Results will help William Woods, and potentially other institutions, determine if current recruitment and more specifically programs and retention strategies are effective in contributing to transfer students of color persistence. In addition, understanding these students' social expectations and experiences can potentially contribute to additional understanding regarding what types of supports and policies are needed to contribute to the success of transfer students of color.

Students of Color within the Revision of Tinto's Theory

This final section of the literature review examines the research on students of color and is organized according to the following propositions found in Braxton et al. (2004) revision of Tinto's theory: communal potential, commitment of the institution to student welfare, institutional integrity, proactive social adjustment, psychosocial engagement, and ability to pay. Within communal potential, I include a brief discussion of relevant campus racial climate literature at predominately White institutions as well.

Throughout the literature review, most research reviewed includes or is exclusively focused on transfer students; however, several studies relevant to students of color or the framework are included when I believed they contribute to the understanding of the revision of Tinto's theory (Braxton et al., 2004) and the phenomena of the transfer experiences of students of color. In addition, several relevant studies that address the challenges of first-year students of color are also included. This information is still useful to this study as the challenges transfer students confront can be similar to those of first-year students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006; 2009).

Communal Potential

According to Braxton and Hirschy (2004), communal potential "refers to the degree to which a student perceives that a subgroup of students exists within the college community with which that student could share similar values, beliefs and goals" (p.95). In the Braxton et al. (2004) revision of Tinto's theory, they believe that if students perceive there is potential for such communities, they are

more likely to become socially integrated in the campus. They specifically feel that this may be more likely at residential institutions where other research (e.g., Braxton & McClendon, 2001-2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) has indicated that residence halls can provide opportunities for community membership. This positive impact of on-campus residency is usually attributed to more opportunities for social and perhaps academic interactions along with increased extracurricular involvement on campus.

While residential living can improve the experiences of transfer students, one study did show that residential transfer students still reported less involvement and less satisfaction with social experiences than non-transfer students living in residence halls (Woosley & Johnson, 2006). This study directly compared the academic and social experiences of transfer and non-transfer students, most of whom were Caucasian. Results showed that even when opportunities for involvement are readily available to students in residence halls, transfer students still chose not to participate at the same level as non-transfer students (Woosley & Johnson, 2006). Reasons for this were speculative and further study was recommended.

Racial and ethnic minority students enrolled at predominately White residential institutions may perceive that there is no potential for cultural enclaves or cultural communities to which they identify (Braxton et al., 2004). These students may have challenges finding support groups and social networks, resulting in feelings of isolation and detachment from the institution's community. "Students of color generally are less likely than white students to see

themselves as being integrated within the mainstream of life in largely white colleges” (Tinto, 1993, p. 75). Research on racial and ethnic minority students at predominately White institutions supports this finding (e.g., Gloria et al., 1999; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Rodgers & Summers, 2008); however, there is also research suggesting these students can function in multiple contexts (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon et al., 2000).

Students of color often join groups on campus that give them a sense of belonging within the larger campus; however, they still remain connected to family during college. For Latino students, maintaining family relationships often is an important part of the support needed in the transition to college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For students in Hurtado and Carter (1997) study there was a need “to become interdependent with their families during college, rather than independent” (p. 339). This implies that students of color are constantly moving between the culture of home and the culture of the institution. As families are providing support from home, institutions need to provide support from the campus. “Navigating two landscapes, one of which is almost entirely different from home realities, requires both individual and institutional responsibilities” (Rendon et al., 2000, p. 137).

Institutional climate and processes within a community can impact perceptions students of color have about the campus community. Research has shown that normal challenges associated with succeeding in college are even more stressful for minority students at predominately White institutions (Swail et al., 2003). Institutions must be prepared to have role models and programs in

place designed to assist students in navigating college rituals they are unfamiliar with, mediate problems that develop between students' cultures and the dominant campus culture, and model behaviors that are a part of all cultures (Rendon et al., 2000). Typically, examples of this include programming and events designed to highlight cultural experiences of various groups of students such as Black History Month, Cinco de Mayo celebrations, and organizations such as Black and/or other cultural student associations (Rendon et al., 2000). A lack of diversity within the campus community of students, staff, faculty, and even curriculum can negatively impact academic success and social interactions for minority students (Swail et al., 2003). Unfortunately, at predominately White institutions, racial/ethnic minority students often believe that cultural diversity is not a priority at the institution (Hurtado, 1992).

Institutional interest in transfer student involvement is an important part of the educational experience for transfer students of color. Research has shown that noncognitive variables, such as motivation and student perceptions, played a significant role in college persistence decisions among students of color (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). African American and Asian American transfer students in one study showed more interest in meeting people from other cultures, working with faculty, and in joining campus organizations than other students (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Additional research also supports claims that the community and climate on a campus can have an impact on transfer student success for students of color. Students of color transferring from institutions with an emphasis in their culture to larger universities without

emphasis in their culture often experience feelings of isolation and feel no attachment to the new community (Lee, 2007). Fortunately for some transfer students of color, when they did transfer to institutions where someone took an interest in their specific needs, they felt very positive about the support they received from the new institution. The difference in the experiences makes clear the importance of supportive institutional environments for students of color (Lee, 2007).

Commitment of the Institution to Student Welfare

Commitment of the institution to student welfare refers to the institution's concern for the growth and development of its students (Braxton et al., 2004). The researchers propose that the more students believe the institution cares about them as individuals, the more likely they are to be socially integrated and persist at the institution. Empirical support exists for aspects of organizational behavior, fairness in the administration of policies, and communication at an institution impacting social integration (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Social integration can involve both interactions with peers as well as faculty (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Braxton et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993). Thus, students' beliefs that policies are enforced fairly can have a positive impact on their willingness to invest in relationships with peers and faculty at their institution (Berger & Braxton, 1998). According to Berger and Braxton (1998), students indicate that positive interactions with faculty regarding their intellectual and personal growth, along with interactions about their career choice, can impact their

commitment to persist. These positive faculty interactions are seen as another form of institutional commitment to the welfare of students.

Although Berger and Braxton (1998) only included first-year students in this particular study, additional findings within the study, have implications for students of color that are worthy of further consideration among transfer students. Race was the only entry characteristic (e.g., gender, income) within this study that had a direct effect on the dependent variable, which was the student's intent to return, and the effect was negative. White students were more likely to report involvement in decision making than nonwhite students and were more likely to relate to their peers, but were less likely to feel as if they related to faculty. The researchers speculated that nonwhite students may feel they have less say in decision making and have less opportunity for social integration (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Interestingly, nonwhite students appeared to be more willing to reach out to faculty for help. Further inquiry into the organizational attributes of institutions on the potential for social integration is suggested (Berger & Braxton, 1998).

The revision of Tinto's theory (Braxton et al., 2004) indicates that a student's commitment to the institution is strengthened by the student's belief in the institution's commitment to the welfare of students, which in turn strengthens social integration. Transfer students consistently indicate the need to receive more information and easier access to that information. These students often go unnoticed during the orientation and transition process (Britt & Hirt, 1999; Kodama, 2002). Some institutions are recognizing a need to cater to and

assist transfer students with the transition process; however, results of the success of these programs are mixed. Some transfer students report that orientation programs fall short of their expectations and needs (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Contrary to this finding, transfer students, minority included, who attended orientation programs with a strong academic advising emphasis credit orientation with improving their academic transition to the new institution (Mayhew, Vanderlinden, & Kim, 2010). Transfer students have reported learning more in orientation about academic expectations, time management, and study skills than their first-year counterparts, but give little credit to orientation for assisting with social integration (Mayhew et al., 2010). The researchers speculated that transfer students, particularly non-traditional age transfer students (defined as students over the age of 25), may be less interested in the social aspects of college. Other research (e.g., Flaga, 2006; Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) consistently supports the importance of institutions providing transfer students with access to both accurate information about the institution and specific individuals on campus that can assist in their successful transition. This can include, but is not limited to, such things as academic advising, student organization opportunities, and orientation about university processes. This type of information can lead to transfer students, including those of color, feeling more valued by the institution (Flaga, 2006).

Little research compares how institutional commitment varies by institutional type; however, community colleges that commit staff time and

resources specifically to minority student support services have produced more 2-year graduates and transfer students than other community colleges that only relied on current faculty and staff to support students or had no services at all (Jenkins, 2007). Put simply, when minority student support services were available, there was an increase in both minority student transfers to 4-year institutions and persistence rates (Jenkins, 2007)

Although there is limited research on transfers to small private institutions, a case study by Wolf-Wendel, Twombly, Morpew and Sopcich (2004) examined the unique transfer agreements between two large urban public community colleges and the highly selective all women's private institution, Smith College. Researchers found that while more White students took advantage of the agreement, there were still some Latino and African American students who utilized the agreement to transfer to Smith College. These women indicated that once they navigated the initial shock of arriving on such a quiet campus, which was completely different than their previous experiences, they did not find "it to be as problematic as they had initially thought it might be" (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2004, p. 223).

Results indicated that the care and attention these students were given by both their community college and Smith College contributed to their success. Many of the students had been encouraged by staff at their community college to consider Smith College. In addition, financial support was available in special scholarships and Smith paid for students to come for a special summer orientation that sometimes included taking a summer course (Wolf-Wendel et al.,

2004). Clearly, the institution committed resources to these students' social and academic integration resulting in many of the feeling supported and valued by the institution. However, the extent to which this institutional commitment can be attributed to institutional type is unknown.

It is worth noting that there is research indicating that programs such as this one can have good intentions but unintended consequences. Hart and Hubbard (2010) found, in a study of non-traditional women transferring to an all women's college, that while there was increased attention and even resources allocated to these students, this may not have been adequate for the unique needs of these women who were older than traditional age students and had different life experiences than traditional age students (e.g., they may have families to take care of in addition to school). In addition, when additional help is available, it often requires that students self-disclose their class background to access resources and programs (Hart & Hubbard, 2010). In relation to this study, research has shown a direct link to race and income, particularly within community college enrollment statistics (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2011; Wellman, 2002). For students of color, this may have both a positive and negative impact on their feelings about the institution's commitment to their welfare.

Institutional Integrity

Institutional integrity refers to the extent to which an institution is true to its mission (Braxton et al., 2004). It somewhat overlaps with institutional commitment to the welfare of students, as discussed in the previous section, in

that it does refer to the extent to which students believe that policies are fairly enforced (Berger & Braxton, 1998); however, institutional integrity also reveals itself when the “actions of a college university’s administrators, faculty and staff are compatible with the mission and goals proclaimed by a given college or institution” (Braxton et al., 2004, p. 24). Students arrive at college with an image of what to expect from the college (Hellend, Stallings, & Braxton, 2001/2002). This image comes from various types of information gathering such as talking to counselors and admissions staff. Students then use these images and expectations to evaluate their actual experiences (Tinto, 1993). For new students, student satisfaction with the institution can be a direct result of their expectations matching the perception of the social climate of an institution they developed from view books, catalogues, and meetings with staff prior to attending (Hartley & Morpew, 2008, Hellend et al., 2001/2002).

The importance of student expectations matching their experiences is reinforced by Braxton and McClendon, (2001/2002), who include the recommendation that recruitment practices by admissions offices accurately reflect the culture and characteristics of the institution to prospective students. In addition, programs that promote campus visits so potential students can see and experience the realities of campus can contribute to a student’s expectations matching their experiences once they enroll (Braxton & McClendon, 2001/2002). Meeting a student’s social expectations resulted in a higher social integration and an increased commitment to reenroll. No similar studies were found to indicate whether or not expectations of the institution has the same impact on transfer

students; however, Hellend et al. (2001/2002) compared expectations with experiences, and found that race may play a role in social integration and departure decisions. The researchers speculate that if students' social expectations are not met, they are less willing to invest energy into becoming socially integrated. Findings regarding race were preliminary and required further research on their validity.

Community college transfer students have reported higher satisfaction with the transfer experience than students transferring from one 4-year institution to another (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye 2007). This was attributed to community college transfer students expecting the experience at their new institution to be considerably different because advisors and staff had prepared students for a new culture (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). In essence, community college transfers had been forewarned about larger class sizes and different student populations at the public research university they were transferring to, so consequently their expectations were met. Yet, transfers moving from one 4-year institution to another reported more difficulties in the process. The researchers believe these students' expectations of the new institution were too similar to their previous experience and they arrived less prepared for a new environment (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007). Their perceptions of what to expect did not match the reality of their experience.

Proactive Social Adjustment

Proactive social adjustment is found in students who “adjust in a proactive manner to the demands and pressures of social integration in a college or

university environment” (Braxton et al., 2004, p. 24). These students realize that while attending an institution they need to learn the norms, values, and behaviors of the new community and respond in a positive way to new and perhaps stressful communities (Braxton et al., 2004). Numerous studies have provided support for the importance of students’ social integration on their potential persistence (e.g., Braxton, 2000; Braxton & Hirschy, 2004; Braxton et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993). Students’ social expectations of a particular college experience can also impact their persistence (Hellend et al., 2001/2002; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003).

Braxton et al. (2004) indicate that students who are willing to seek out social integration in a proactive manner will have higher levels of social integration and persistence. For some students of color, transfer stress involves transferring to institutions that are predominately White and where they feel like a number (Lee, 2001). Students of color can struggle finding faculty, staff, and students to connect with at predominantly White institutions. Feeling like a number at a large institution is not uncommon for transfer students. An additional obstacle for students of color is learning to manage their own culture with those of the campus and this is often dependent on the quality of interactions on campus (Lee, 2001). This is consistent with the challenges Tinto (1993) believes minority students face at predominately White institutions and the communal potential concept presented in Braxton et al.’s (2004) revised theory.

When students’ social expectations are met, students report being more satisfied with their social experience and showed increased institutional

commitment resulting in an increased commitment to reenroll (Hellend et al., 2001/2002). When students are dissatisfied with their social experiences, researchers found that students invested less psychological energy into initiating activities that resulted in less social integration (Hellend et al., 2001/2002). Similar research has shown that racial and ethnic minority students who are able to seek out social and academic opportunities or receive support for such are more likely to show higher levels of institutional commitment (Lee, 2001; Torres, 2006). Students of color attending large universities often search for smaller enclaves that create small communities for social interactions. Examples include fraternities and sororities, student organizations, athletics, and ethnic clubs that can provide opportunities for social interactions (Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Murguia et al., 1991; Sidanius, Levin & Van Laar, 2004). Unfortunately, transfer students of color may not be proactive in seeking help with involvement opportunities at a larger university, leaving them less engaged in the campus community (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Lee, 2001).

For persisting transfers at a large research institution, there are varying results on the importance of social integration and these students' ability and/or willingness to pursue social activities on campus (Townsend & Wilson, 2009). While some transfers, racial and ethnic minority included, report social integration as important, for some the expectation was mitigated by the decision to live off campus and the need for employment. Transfer students who chose to live off-campus have admitted that living off-campus directly limited their ability to engage in on-campus social events and meet new people. However, these same

students did actively seek out opportunities associated with academic organizations and activities related to their major (Townsend & Wilson, 2009). Researchers in this study acknowledge that the experiences and expectations of community college students transferring to smaller, teaching oriented, residential institutions may be significantly different than the experiences of participants in their study who were transferring to a large research, and mostly commuter, institution.

Psychosocial Engagement

Involvement and engagement in an active social life requires psychological energy and a personal investment in the process by individuals. Students who invest little psychological energy in the process of social integration are less likely to see themselves as a part of the college community (Braxton et al., 2004).

Braxton et al. (2004) include psychosocial engagement in their revised theory partly based on Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement which "refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). Among other things, involved students commit time and energy to studying, choose to join organizations, are active on campus, and seek out opportunities to interact with faculty and other students (Astin, 1984).

Self-efficacy, a part of the psychosocial engagement in the revision of Tinto's theory, relates to an individual's belief that they have the ability and skills to engage in a course of action and influence a particular outcome (Bandura, 1986; Braxton et al., 2004). Bean and Eaton (2000) indicate that as students

interact with their institutions, psychological processes occur that increase self-efficacy and persistence at the institution. “A student with a positive assessment of self-efficacy feels a sense of integration in the environment and returns to the environment to reinvest in his/her success in the academic and social milieu of the higher-education environment” (Bean & Eaton, 2000, p. 58). They further believe that the individual’s perception of the social environment is important and that individuals from different backgrounds would perceive the institution differently.

Proactive social adjustment and self-efficacy have been seen among successful Hispanic, Latino and Latina college students. These students indicated that although they had doubted their ability prior to attending college, all of them had learned to trust their ability to navigate and persist in college environments (Zell, 2010). By persisting in community college and, for some, transferring on to 4-year institutions, the students felt “confident they could accomplish their academic goals and depend on their resources and cognitive abilities” (Zell, 2010, p. 174).

In one of the few studies involving transfer students, a diverse population, and academic self-efficacy, Dennis, Calvillo, and Gonzalez (2008) found that academic self-efficacy contributed to transfer student success differently based on the diversity that exists in the transfer experience. For example, they found that for students labeled as “young achieving,” based on age and proven academic success, above average self-efficacy contributed to these students’ success and persistence. Participants were willing and able to commit psychological energy

into impacting their college experience. Of concern were students labeled “young low-achieving.” These students had decent self-efficacy scores, but were less prepared for college than other groups in the study and were less likely to be re-enrolled the next semester (Dennis et al., 2008). Many of these students were African American, Middle Eastern, and Latino. The researchers felt the younger low-achieving students were in need of additional support to improve study and academic skills, along with intellectual and social competencies.

Ability to Pay

Cabrera et al. (1990) believe that ability to pay impacts a student’s adjustment to and persistence in college, but found that ability to pay had no impact on academic performance or social integration. “The picture emerging from this analysis suggests that ability to pay is best understood as an external factor that directly affects decisions to persist, while it simultaneously moderates the effect of goal commitment and institutional commitment” (p. 330). Monetary aid alone does not account for student persistence; student commitment, support from others, along with academic and social concerns, all play a role in persistence (Cabrera et al., 1990).

Financial aid can be a challenge for transfer students, many of whom have come from community colleges where tuition costs are lower and there is often a better understanding of student financial need (Davies & Casey, 1999). Students faced with balancing financial stress and the responsibilities of being a student need access to adequate support, resources, and information (Cameron, 2005; Davies & Casey, 1999). Most financial aid processes and information are

designed for new students; however, transfer students often have different concerns and circumstances they bring to the process (Long, 2005). Too often institutions use the same “packaging strategies” (Kurz, Scannell, & Veeder, 2008, p. 28) for all students, which can limit allocations of university grants for transfer students. Navigating financial aid systems is a complex process and research shows that it is important for institutions to understand how their financial aid policies can negatively impact transfer students over native students (Dowd et al., 2008).

Summary

This literature review reveals new directions in research related to the success of transfer students of color. All transfer students face unique challenges when transferring to new institutions (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006, Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007); however, the value of self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, social integration, and supportive environments is magnified for students of color attempting to navigate the transition to campuses, which remain predominately White (Kodama, 2003; Tinto, 1993; Torres, 2006). Little is revealed in the current research about the experiences of students transferring to smaller institutions that have smaller populations of students of color to create communities within, but can often provide more opportunities for interaction with faculty, easy access to student engagement experiences, and supportive environments. As this population continues to grow, the need to understand the perceptions of their experiences and the environments they are entering is an important part of the persistence puzzle (Gloria et al., 1999). This study seeks to

contribute to our understanding of the experiences of students of color at a small private residential institution.

The next chapter explains the methodology for this study. Included in the chapter is a justification for the use of the qualitative case study, detailed information on the participants and the location, the interview structure and information on other data and artifacts to be analyzed. Specifics on data analysis are also provided along with research bias and information on the trustworthiness of the research.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHOD

I conducted a qualitative case study in order to create an in depth understanding of the experiences of racial and ethnic minority students transferring to William Woods University, which has a predominately White population. Creswell (2007) indicates that qualitative research is useful in understanding the settings in which participants navigate problems and issues. A qualitative methodology has been selected because I want to better understand the experiences and adaption strategies of this increasing, but yet still small, population of students attending a specific institution. By interviewing transfer students of color about their experiences at William Woods, I hoped to understand the experiences of these students at this small and predominately White private institution. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, and phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Interaction among people can be difficult to measure and qualitative research can capture the sensitivity and impact of issues such as race (Creswell, 2007).

I conducted a case study using a naturalistic approach to the research. According to Yin, (2003) “the distinctive need for a case study arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 2) and “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 13). This study attempts to understand the experiences of transfer students of color at a small private institution and how their own self-efficacy influences their persistence. A

revision of Tinto's theory (Braxton et al., 2004) and self-efficacy were used as frameworks from which to view and analysis the study.

In this study, students of color identified themselves as such when they completed the application for enrollment at the institution. The current application includes three questions on ethnic heritage, ethnicity, and race. In each question, applicants select from a list of options. In the ethnic heritage question, the option of "two or more races" is available. All three questions rely solely on the participant's decision to self-identify with one of the available options.

This chapter includes a description of the qualitative case study methods I used in the study. Included are sections on the location and institution, participant selection, the interview participants, interview structure, observations, artifacts, data analysis and trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

Before beginning the research, I requested permission from the Institutional Review Boards at the University of Missouri and William Woods University. At the request of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri, I asked the Registrar at William Woods University if she would agree to send the request to participate in the study to potential participants. This process is described below in the section on participants.

Location and Institution

The study was conducted at William Woods University, a small institution, located in a rural Midwest town. Fulton is centrally located between Kansas City

and Saint Louis just south of Interstate 70. The institution's mission is a professions' oriented university with a liberal arts foundation. The university website divides programs in to either *traditional undergraduate* or *graduate study* programs. The graduate study program includes some undergraduate degrees for working professionals and these programs are offered throughout the state and in northern Arkansas. Students enrolled in these programs were not included in this study as they attend classes separate from the traditional undergraduate program and many of these students never visit the Fulton campus.

The traditional undergraduate program has several unique majors; Equestrian Science, Equine Administration, Equine General Studies, and American Sign Language – English Interpreting, which attract students from all over the country. Seventy-five percent of the 846 full-time students in the traditional undergraduate program live on campus. William Woods University is predominately White with 82.7% of the undergraduate population reported as White. The Black or African American population is 4.8%, Hispanic students make up 1.1% of the population, and non-resident alien students are .1% of the population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010-2011a). These numbers include all undergraduates at William Woods because national reporting standards consolidate the two. According to statistics provided by the institutions institutional researcher , Dr. Erin Hansman, 90% of the traditional undergraduate program is Caucasian leaving 10% of the traditional

undergraduate population recorded as Non-Caucasian (personal communication, October 8, 2011).

According to Carnegie classifications, the institution has a high transfer-in rate compared with similar institutions (Carnegie Classifications, 2010). Within the last six months William Woods has committed staff resources to increasing the number of articulation agreements with 2- year institutions. According to the institutions transfer coordinator, William Woods has three active articulation agreements and has developed a strategy for exploring and developing additional agreements (T. Frankman, personal communication, October 18, 2011).

Information on articulations agreements is not available on the current William Woods website at this time; however, these resources will appear on the new website that will be launched in early 2012.

In addition to several unique majors, the institution offers a unique financial award called the LEAD Program (William Woods University, 2010d). Students accepting the reward receive a financial incentive (e.g. residential students receive \$5000 a year, commuters \$2500) to accumulate a particular amount of points for attending campus events. I mention the program not only for its financial implications, but its purpose. The LEAD program “is intended to encourage and acknowledge active student participant in university life beyond the classroom” (William Woods University, 2010d, ¶1). All the participants in this study were participating in this award. While many of the programs students attend in the program are classified as educational, cultural, and or intellectual students see the program as very social.

In addition to William Woods University, the town of Fulton is also the home of Westminster College another small private institution. Westminster reports an undergraduate enrollment of 1,167, 68.7% of this population is White, 7.5% are Black or African American population and their non-resident alien population is 14.6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010-2011b). There is social contact between students attending the two institutions at local pubs and many of the female sorority students from William Woods University participate actively in fraternity events on the Westminster College campus.

Interview Participants

Interview participants were chosen purposefully for their current knowledge of the transfer experience. Creswell (2007) indicates that in qualitative research it is essential that the participants have firsthand knowledge of the experience. Their experience will be similar in that they all share in the same type of transfer experience to the same small private institution. All transfer students who met the criteria of having self-identified into at least one of the non-White categories involving race and ethnicity on the application for enrollment, and had completed one full semester at William Woods University were invited to participate. The criteria included students who had identified with two or more races.

The Registrar's office of William Woods University agreed to generate a list of potential participants based on my criteria and e-mailed the invitation to participate in the study to potential participants. A list of the data on the potential participants was provided to me with no information that would allow

me to personally identify the participants. The listed included their ethnic group, part-time or full-time status, transfer hours earned, and entry date.

The registrar's office sent an e-mail (see Appendix B for a copy of this correspondence) to all nineteen domestic transfer students meeting the criteria for the study. This first communication explained the purpose of the study and invited them to participate. Individuals were told that the data would be used for a research project. In addition, participants were told that the information collected may be shared with members of the faculty and staff at the institution in an effort to improve the transfer experience on campus. To keep their identity confidential, a pseudonym would be used and this was also explained in the e-mail to potential participants. A follow up e-mail with the same information was sent to participants that had not responded several weeks later.

Once a student agreed to participate, I arrange a time for an interview. At the start of the meeting, I fully explain the study, reviewed the consent form and asked each participant to sign the consent form (see Appendix C). Each interview was held in a small conference room located in the university's library.

Interview Structure

Interviews followed guidelines for responsive interviewing as described by Rubin and Rubin (2005). According to Rubin and Rubin, use of responsive interviewing allows for a more in-depth understanding of what is studied. The flexibility of responsive interviewing creates opportunities for a relationship to form between the interviewer and the interviewee. Based on my research questions for this study and information from the literature review I developed a

list of questions in advance; however, the flexibility of this approach to interviewing allows for the depth and direction of the study to form as questions were answered and stories were told (see Appendix D for a copy of these questions). The intent is for the interview to feel informal to the interviewee in spite of some questions being determined in advance.

The interview protocol began with all participants reading and signing a consent form. In addition, I verbally explained the form and the purpose of the study and assured participants I wanted them to be honest with their responses even if this includes criticism of the institution and/or its processes. Participants were given a copy of the consent form to take with them as well. Interviews lasted between 70 and 90 minutes and occurred between March 2011 and April 2011. There were no follow up interviews; however, I did see several of the participants on campus at which time they volunteered updates on their status.

I conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants in a quiet conference room in the library on the William Woods University campus. Interviews were intentionally not held in my office. I intended to hold the interviews after work hours so I could appear less formal; however it was more convenient for several students to meet during the day. With the permission of the participants, interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by me. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview for accuracy. Two students returned the transcripts with either no changes or small editing changes.

Observations

Observational data can help increase understanding of a phenomenon by providing additional information about the site of the study (Yin, 2003).

Observations of the environmental setting and the behaviors in the setting can provide insight into the experiences of the participants (Merriam, 1988). I observed participants during the interview process and field notes were made about each interview immediately following the interview. Observations of the institution's processes and procedures also occurred on admission tours conducted for transfer students and at admission events where transfer students were present. In addition, observations took place during the January 2010 and August 2011 orientations. January orientations at this institution typically include mostly transfer students. These observations provide insight into experiences of transfer students of color to this institution. Observations were particularly attuned to the information and processes, or lack of information, included in the orientation that specifically impacted transfer students and/or students of color.

Physical Artifacts

Artifacts collected for the study included marketing and general information from William Woods University. This included such things as, orientation schedules from 2010 and 2011, admissions material, financial aid information, the student athlete handbook, and website information available for transfers. These data provided information about the messages transfer students

receive from the receiving institution. The review of material also revealed gaps in information and programs for transfer students of color.

Data Analysis

Information from interviews, observations, field notes, and artifacts were used in the data analysis. As a researcher, I find detailed field notes helpful when I conduct research. Therefore, I kept field notes and used the notes along with the transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts in my data analysis. I used memos and coding to analyze the interview data. I used a preliminary list of codes from the frameworks discussed in chapter two. Using theoretical propositions can be helpful in guiding the analysis of case study data (Yin, 2003). For this study, coding began with the following propositions found in Braxton et al. (2004) revision of Tinto's theory: institutional commitment to the welfare of students, institutional integrity, communal potential, psychosocial engagement, proactive social adjustment and self-efficacy.

Following guidelines of descriptive analysis, I used the significant statements of participants to determine if the codes within the data, aligned with or disputed the framework (Creswell, 2007). As I analyzed and interpreted the data, I was mindful of new themes that emerged. Creswell (2007) cautions qualitative researchers using pre-existing codes from a theoretical framework to be open to additional codes that may emerge from the data. Once the data were coded, I looked for additional codes that evolved from the individual experiences told by participants, which in some instances represented sub-categories of the

original codes. Codes that emerged outside of the framework are reported in the findings separately.

As a researcher, I used both memos and diagrams to document my analysis of the data as well as the personal thought processes I have followed in my analysis. Memos and diagrams were used in the analysis of artifacts and observations as well as participant interviews. Corbin and Strauss (2008) indicate that memos and diagrams are useful for helping researchers analyze data and track thought processes, particularly researchers working alone. I typically transcribed interviews soon after the interview and began the coding immediately. Coding and memo writing after each analytic session helped me capture each idea as I went through the process. Memos help researchers work with concepts rather than raw data and memos preserve analytic ideas as they develop (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I used coded data and memos to create diagrams of the codes and framework. I created my own system for tracking coded data and memos in Excel. Diagrams were drawn both by hand and using Word Illustrations.

Research Bias

I had some concerns that my position as Vice President and Dean of Student Life may inhibit students from being honest about negative experiences, in spite of assurances that they are free to be honest in their responses. To help elevated this concern I explained in detail the purpose of the study and reason for the study. When I met with participants prior to the interview beginning, I explained that their participation was part of a research project for my own

academic work at the University of Missouri and not specifically related to my position at the institution. In qualitative research, researchers and participants bring different cultures, experiences, and history to the project; therefore, it is impossible to be completely neutral (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). Because I could not completely separate myself from my position, I further explained to participants that it is through my position that I had developed an interest in the experiences of transfer students. I indicated that by committing to this research and listening to students who had lived the transfer experience, I hoped to use the results to improve the experiences of future transfer students. Participants seemed to appreciate this at the time and several commented at the end of the interview that they hoped their information helped make some changes. It seemed that participants perceived my role on campus to be a benefit in that I was in a position to implement change.

I also recognized that my own race limited my understanding of the participants' experiences. Although I was once a transfer student myself, I clearly did not share the same cultural experiences as the participants in this study. Using guidelines from Rubin and Rubin (2005), I attempted to build a relationship with the participant as the interview transpired. I respect that, in spite of my best efforts in developing this relationship, there was still a power imbalance between the participants and me. By listening carefully and following up with questions as the interview progressed, I believe I was able to discover what was important to the participant. Yin (2003) suggests that good listening in case study research “means receiving information through multiple modalities—

for example, making keen observations or sensing what might be going on—not just aural modality” (p. 60). Throughout the interviewing process I reflected in field notes on what I understood and experienced from the interviews.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves the researcher convincing the reader that their research has truth, applicability, consistency, neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To help establish this trust I utilized several different strategies. In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of the processes I used for collecting, documenting, and storing data. This documentation assists researchers in making their work convincing to the reader (Freeman et al., 2007).

I reviewed field notes, interviews, and memos for accuracy. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview for accuracy. Two participants returned the transcripts with no edits or small editing corrections. Two participants verbally indicated they had read the transcripts and had no changes they wanted to make to the content. Participant checks are a common way of finding out from participants if their story has been told accurately (Freeman et al., 2007).

To increase the dependability of the research, I used two peers to review narratives from my interviews and the analysis of the data. The director of multicultural affairs at William Woods’s institution and I reviewed and discussed narratives and analysis. At William Woods University the director of multicultural affairs has broad knowledge of students of color experiences on the campus which made her a useful as a peer auditor. In addition, analysis of the

data was shared with and discussed with a former transfer student of color who is now working at the institution. Since I was the only researcher on the project, processing the results with a knowledgeable source contributes to trustworthiness of the data. Peer auditors can provide a “confirmability” of the study by examining “the data, findings, interpretations and recommendations” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). Townsend and Wilson (2006) used a similar strategy in their transfer student study with admissions representatives.

Transferability is not necessarily a goal of qualitative research; however according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the researcher “can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (p.316). Thick descriptions are provided to allow the reader an opportunity to consider the concepts presented along with the data for use in considering their own possibilities.

To strengthen the credibility of the research I used triangulation of different forms of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I collected data from participant interviews, review of artifacts, and observations in order to create a more in-depth picture of experiences.

Limitations

My position at the institution may limit the data collection, although efforts mentioned above are intended to minimize the potential of this limitation. Only the perspectives of those agreeing to participate in the study are represented in this study. Those opting not to participate may have experiences not captured

that could contribute to the findings. The data obtained from the participants are limited to only what they are willing to share in the interview.

Summary

In this study I used a qualitative case study method to explore in-depth the transfer experiences of students of color at William Woods University. The study used codes found within the conceptual framework used to view the experiences of this small, but important population of students attending William Woods University. Specific details regarding the participants and the location of the study were included in order to allow the reader to better understand the uniqueness of each participant and the environment in which the study took place. Specifics of the organization of the analysis process and the analysis were also included. Finally the chapter concluded with limitations of the study.

In chapter four, I present the findings of the study. The chapter begins with a look at why participants choose to attend William Woods University and is followed by narratives of each participant. Following the narratives is a summary of the William Woods experience for all participants and a review of findings on social opportunities and social enclaves. The chapter concludes with a look at the findings related to the final question regarding self-efficacy.

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS

At William Woods University, transfer students of color remain a small part of the already small population of all students of color at the institution. This dissertation tells the story of seven students who made the decision to transfer to and, in most cases, persist at an institution where they were one of few. Their reflections offer insight about what it means to be a student of color at William Woods University and their stories provide opportunities for William Woods, and potentially other institutions, to improve programs and experiences for these students.

In this study, I used a revision of Tinto's (1993) theory of student persistence developed by Braxton et al. (2004) and part of Bandura's (1997) theory on self-efficacy as a lens for understanding and describing the experiences of students of color at a small and predominately White institution. More specifically, I wanted to understand the impact of both self-efficacy and social integration on participants' success and their perception of the institution's commitment to their success.

William Woods University is a small, private, not-for-profit, residential campus centrally located within the state of Missouri in the city of Fulton. The traditional undergraduate campus is host to just over 900 students and 85% of these students live on campus. In addition, 82.7% of the total undergraduate population identified as White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010-

2011). The institution’s mission is professions oriented and has several unique majors that draw students from all over the country.

Given the history of enrollment at the institution, I expected the participants would be mostly African American and/or Hispanic and in the range of 18-24 years of age, but the study was not limited to these racial or age groups. The actual applicant pool provided by the registrar’s office included eight African American students, two Asians, one American Indian and eight students who indicated two or more races. Six of seven students responding positively to the request to participate identified as African American students; one participant identified as African American but also identified with her family’s Hispanic and Native American heritage. These seven participants represented 36% of all eligible participants. Table 1 displays the race and ethnicity breakdown of potential participants.

Table 1:
Race and Ethnicity of Potential Participants

Race/Ethnicity	Eligible to Participate	Agreed to Participate
American Indian	1	0
Asian	2	0
Black/African American	8	6
Two or More Races	8	1

Five of the seven participants were traditional age and lived on campus for all or most of their William Woods experience. Two participants were non-

traditional age commuters. Three were student athletes and all three of these were the only participants from out of state. Three participants in the study transferred to the institution for specific majors. Table 2 provides a list of participants along with their gender, age (e.g., traditional or non-traditional), previous institution type, and reason for transfer. To protect the identity of participants, the names of the participants, others they mention, and locations on campus have been replaced with pseudonyms. Their stories are told in the following section.

Table 2:

Demographics and Details of Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Previous Institution Type	Reason for Transfer	Residential Status
Ayana	F	Traditional	2-year	Academic Major	Residential
Dana	F	Traditional	2-year	Athletics	Residential
Darryl	M	Traditional	4-year, 2-year	Athletics	Residential
Hayden	M	Traditional	4-year	Athletics	Commuter*
Jailah	F	Non-traditional	4-year	Academic Major	Commuter
La-Keysha	F	Non-traditional	4-year	Friend	Commuter
Taleisha	F	Traditional	2-year	Academic Major	Commuter

*Hayden was residential his first 2 years.

Why They Came

This section contains a look at why participants chose to attend William Woods University as this contributes to our understanding of their overall experiences. Six out of seven transfer students in this study were either recruited by coaches to play a particular sport or were drawn to the institution for a particular major. Participants who chose the institution for a particular major were all interested in one of the majors that are unique to William Woods University. Some participants specifically indicated that students of color who are not athletes or are not seeking one of the unique degrees offered by the institution would probably not consider William Woods University in their college searches. La-Keysha was the exception, as she chose William Woods University after visiting the campus with her boyfriend. He was recruited to play a sport and she discovered the school through him.

It does not appear that attending a small institution was a specific criterion of these students' college search. For example, Darryl chose William Woods University over a school in Miami because he thought he would get in less trouble here; this may have had more to do with the institution's location than size. Several times in the interview, Darryl and Hayden talked about William Woods University being in a town where there is not much to do as compared to big cities. The institution's proximity to participants' homes was mentioned more than the size of the institution. La-Keysha acknowledged that she specifically preferred the small class sizes at William Woods over those of large institutions. She was the only participant to specifically talk about small classes being worth

the cost of attendance, although several others did mention that they liked the small classes they had in their major. The athletes all said they were here because of their scholarships.

Regardless of the reason for transferring to William Woods University, it was clear that all of the participants understood that they would be coming to a predominately White institution. This is important because messages received from the institution can impact students' belief in the integrity of the institution (Hellend, Stallings, & Braxton, 2001/2002) and impact students' belief in their ability to find a common community (Braxton et al., 2004). All participants indicated that they were very aware that they were going to be attending a predominately White institution. This information was either obtained through campus visits, coaches, teammates and/or admissions representatives telling them this information before they arrived. Several mentioned being aware it would be predominately White, but were a little surprised that what diversity they found was basically Black and White. At a fall 2011 parent orientation for the parents of both freshmen and transfer students, a parent did ask about the percentage of minority students enrolled at the institution. She appeared surprised at the response of about eight percent, but did not ask any further questions.

As part of the research for this study, I observed campus tours as well as information sessions for students and parents during admissions events and orientation. During tours, diversity never came up in the conversation; students and families on tours did not ask about diversity, nor did tour guides mention it.

The fraternity and sorority process was talked about and encouraged by the tour guides who self-identified as White female members of a sorority. The Office of Admissions does employ several student tour guides who represent students of color and transfer students. On a tour I observed, there was a transfer student and the guide was very careful to speak about both the first-year and transfer experience at William Woods. Several times she pointed out experiences that might be relevant to one group rather than the other. I mention this as a positive in that she was making an effort to respect where each prospective student was in their college search process. Taleisha had indicated during her campus tour, that the guide was not making the connection that she would not be seeking the same type of experience as a traditional student.

The university website, which is considered a recruitment tool by the admissions staff, appears to give a fairly accurate representation of the student body with pictures portraying mostly White students. In reviewing the view book used by admissions, I could argue that it perhaps shows more diversity than actually exists; however, none of these students remembered seeing the view book or even using the website much when applying to the institution or navigating the admission process. The current website for William Woods does not have a specific link for transfer students. Under “application requirements” on the admission’s website there are four short paragraphs on transfer requirements. A new website being launched by January 2012 will have links and pages specifically designed for transfer students.

For the participants in this study, athletics and academics were the main reasons given for specifically choosing William Woods. They learned about both of these more through word of mouth and/or athletic recruitment processes. La-Keysha discovered the campus through a visit with her boyfriend who was visiting the campus as an athletic recruit. None of the participants were recruited by a general admissions representative, although Ayana does remember talking with the representative from her geographic area once she had applied to William Woods.

Narratives

In this section, I have created narratives of each participant, drawing on interview data, observations (e.g., campus tour), and physical artifacts (e.g., orientation schedule). Any references to specific majors by the participants have been changed to behavioral and social sciences. A collective summary of their reasons for transfer and overall experiences are included at the end of all the narratives. Following the narratives, the subsequent sections of this chapter address social opportunities, social enclaves, students' self-efficacy, and perceptions of institutional commitment to their success.

Hayden

Hayden is an African American student who transferred to William Woods University in the fall of 2008 from another small Midwestern institution. He grew up in an urban neighborhood in a large Midwestern city outside of Missouri. Hayden initially came to William Woods University on an athletic scholarship and lived on campus his first two

years. Outside of athletics, he was not involved in any other co-curricular activities but he was employed on-campus in the athletic department.

Hayden had two main reasons for attending William Woods University: “I wanted to play someplace closer to home so my parents could come see me.” And, “I got an athletic scholarship and that was important.” He first visited campus during the summer, which is typically very quiet as there are very few students around at that time.

I came in the summer because I was not sure what I was going to do yet.

When I came here it just worked out.... This school is just 5 1/2 hours from where I live and I just got a good vibe from the coach. So that was one of the reasons why I came. But there wasn't anybody that was here; it was empty when I came.

It would be difficult to get an accurate assessment of the campus climate from a summer visit. One of the campus tours I observed was during the summer and the tour guide tried to refer to things that would be going on if school were in session, but overall the campus was very quiet, leaving much to a visitor's imagination.

Hayden was not surprised by the limited diversity on the campus. For him, the immediate connection with teammates was more important. Hayden also believed in his ability to meet new people and adjust.

When I came, [for orientation] I met up with like four of my teammates...Coach was waiting on me....I remember I met Coach at the gym and he showed me around. I got my stuff moved in and then my

parents ate at the dining hall and they went back home. Then we all went to the gym and met up with my other teammates....I didn't really look around and see how diversity was....I didn't really look, I wasn't paying attention. (pause) It was not the number one thing on my mind. I have been places before when I am like the only African American Black person. That doesn't bother me too much.

Hayden he said he did not remember much about the orientation. He did recall attending a couple of LEAD events during orientation. William Woods's students participating in the LEAD program agree to attend a variety of intellectual, social, and cultural events on campus. The program is designed to promote student involvement and comes with a financial incentive. Outside of these events during orientation, Hayden indicated he mostly "hung out" with other players during this time.

I knew it would be a small town so I wasn't shocked. I drove around the city. But I didn't really have any expectations because I usually click with my teammates....I knew I wouldn't have trouble making friends. I can make friends. I never had a problem with that.

Hayden was open to being friends with anyone and he thought having friends from different races was easily done on this campus. Hayden said:

As long as people don't do anything to discriminate or disrespect me I get along with everyone I am in contact with. I never heard anybody say like 'Hayden is a this or that'. I get along with people. I don't have a problem

talking to people no matter if you White, Black, Blue, I have not had any problems with that or any of my classmates.

He dated outside of his race. He was one of only two participants to talk specifically about having close friends of a different race.

When he first arrived, Hayden was assigned another African American roommate who was also a teammate. "I related to him. We was like cool. That wasn't a problem." For Hayden, the campus climate was what he expected and he felt any issues he had were more related to his gender and perhaps age more than race. At his previous institution, male athletes all lived in one hall by themselves whereas at William Woods University, athletes did not have separate housing and residence halls are co-ed. Hayden was 20 years old when he arrived and was assigned to live in a university residential complex that housed mostly first-year students and the majority of the residents assigned to the hall were female.

That first year was like man, but second year I lived in Wilson [different residence hall with all upperclassman] and it was fine. I didn't have no problems last year or this year, but that it was ridiculous. There were times when like we were in the hallway just talking and people would be like, 'you are too loud.' It was like a weekend. Maybe like a Saturday night at like 9:00 and one of the community advisor's was like, 'you guys are being too loud.' At my old school we was all separated it wasn't like females living with us. It was just like us athletes in my hall. Coming from that and then coming here where just talking in your room is an issue I was like, wow!

In further discussion on his first year at William Woods he said:

Sometimes when it got towards the end of the year and the same stuff kept happening it got old, but I didn't get any racial vibe. A couple of my teammates were White and they were usually with us too. ...I was 20 going on 21 when I got here so like it was hard living with freshmen. I felt I was being treated like I was young. I did a year of prep school before I went to college.

Hayden recognized he was older than some of the students he was living around and brought college experiences with him to William Woods. He lived on campus two years before making the decision to move off campus for his final year.

Hayden was the only participant who did not talk much about the cost of attending school and the stress of paying for it. He had a partial but not full athletic scholarship for two years, some institutional aid, and a grant. He did not think he had a Pell Grant. He indicated he would have small loans to pay back when he finished.

For personal reasons, Hayden intentionally gave up his athletic scholarship during his second year but rejoined the team his third year on scholarship again. In May, he graduated from William Woods University with a bachelor's degree. When asked why he thought he had been successful here Hayden replied:

I think I just had a goal in mind. I didn't want to transfer again and get set back on my credits. I just wanted to graduate and get scholarships and help my parents by paying for college. I didn't want to drop out because I

knew if I dropped out it is hard for you to go back to college and finish. I just had a goal in mind that I needed to graduate.

This idea of graduation being a goal and not transferring again was a common response of all participants. Reflecting in March on what graduation would be like, Hayden said, “it can be like trumpets and joy and all types of celebration.”

Darryl

Darryl is an African American transfer from out of state, well over 1,000 miles from William Woods University. He originally attended a National College Athletic Association Division 1 institution on an athletic scholarship but did not make the grades to continue: “I messed up my grades; I didn’t know what I was doing. I didn’t realize you had to have good grades to [play sports].” He then took a year off of school before going to a community college on an athletic scholarship. Attending the community college and then transferring to William Woods University was an opportunity he had waited for after not doing well with the first opportunity. This impacted his decision on where to attend when he was given a second chance at being a student athlete. When asked why he chose William Woods University, he responded: “I was recruited. It was between this school and a school in Miami. I chose to come here because I knew I would get in trouble in Miami.”

His first semester in the residence halls, he was uncomfortable with interactions with other students:

People were different here. I could walk down or walk past somebody. I would try to say hey and they would just look down on the ground. I got

like the impression they thought I was a thug or something. People still do it sometimes.

Many of the people he referred to were other male athletes. For Darryl, it was strange that students would react this way to him in spite of them knowing he was an athlete too.

Similar to Hayden, Darryl found teammates to be an immediate and valuable connection to the campus.

I was around my teammate, another Black guy. That is kind of how I got to know it wasn't that bad here. Because I was around somebody who kind of acted like me and showed me the ropes and stuff like that. He had been here, and he was a transfer too.... It was easy to talk to him about stuff.

For Darryl, having an older teammate around to help him acclimate to the campus was helpful.

He shared how he felt when talking to other male athletes in his residence hall who were not teammates:

If I talked to them I can tell they are scared of me. They are too polite; you know how you are too polite because you don't want to say something wrong to them? When somebody acts like that, it is really hard to really be yourself around them because they don't understand you.

Making connections outside of teammates proved challenging and Darryl mentioned he struggled being himself. He talked about a particular time when he was really struggling, lonely, and considering leaving:

I am not going to lie, at the beginning of the school year I had a really bad time being here. I was really close to leaving and depressed and I have never been depressed before, but I was for a while. It is just lonely. It wasn't really school, but it was the fact that I was different than everybody else. Even the Black boys, they at least got to see their families and they weren't struggling with finances like I was.

For Darryl, living so far from family contributed to the stress of being a transfer student of color. He had not been able to afford to go home for many breaks and his family had never been able to come to see him perform as a collegiate athlete.

Darryl tells an emotional story of his family not being able to afford to attend senior night for his sport. This event was very hard for him because all the other players had their families there and were introduced before the game. The coach had suggested he ask a faculty member to participate in the event with him. "I asked Mrs. Taylor. She didn't know my family wasn't going to be there, but she always asked about my sport and stuff like that. She was always nice to me so I knew she would say yeah. She was the nicest lady that I know." After the event, Mrs. Taylor, a faculty member from his major, gave him several photos of the event, which really meant a lot to him. His appreciation of her participation that night was apparent in the emotion he showed during this part of the interview.

When asked about race and its impact on his transfer experience, Darryl really felt that his financial situation impacted him more than race, though he indicated his race in some ways impacts his socioeconomic status. He said, "I don't know if it is racial but for me financial." He was paying for school on his

own with his athletic scholarship, institutional aid, a Pell grant, and loans. For him being an athlete is like a job. He often found himself with no money for books or social things.

An ethnic person like me, financially we struggle because you have financial problems and you don't feel like people understand. Even a week ago I told a teacher I didn't have the book....And he was like 'that is not a good choice for this class.' Well I know, of course I know that, I just don't have any money. He was like you might want to rent it. And I am thinking I need money to do that. If I had the money I would do it. I was thinking to myself 'he just doesn't get it.'

This was something he felt people simply did not understand.

When asked why he thought he had been successful so far, Darryl's response was similar to other participants, "I really see it as I have nowhere else to go. You're a senior you don't want to transfer again. I will be back in the fall for one semester." He added that he believes African American men, specifically teammates, like him who have already graduated felt the same:

You don't have an option to leave again. They had the same mindset as me. Just get through it and go home. They just kept on going. They made the most of it. We make the most of what we can.

Darryl indicated he has transferred enough. Staying and completing his degree feels like his only option.

Dana

Dana is a female African American athlete living nearly 2,000 miles from home. Prior to transferring to William Woods University in the fall of 2010, she attended a large community college with a very diverse student population. In addition, she had gone to another university in her home state prior to attending the community college. After those experiences, she really wanted to finish college out of state.

I wanted to go to school out of state. That was my big thing. I didn't want to experience the same things....I met coach, he was from the only school out of state and I knew that was the school I wanted to go to. I came here for a visit. I liked everybody and everybody was really friendly.

Dana had made a deliberate decision to attend school out of state and valued the idea of making it on her own. Her only knowledge of the school came from the coach and she did not remember ever using the website as a source of information during her transfer process.

Dana was aware in advance that there was not a lot of racial diversity at the institution, but what surprised her was the difference in what she describes as geographic mindsets:

When I first arrived I already realized that there were not a lot of people like me. I am from [out of state]... I don't want to say we are more open minded, but in just having conversations with people I just realize they are a little bit different than me, you know? And I am kind of like a free spirited person and I just really didn't meet a lot of people like that. I don't

know. It was just hard to meet people that were like me, but initially I really liked people and they were friendly and nice.

Dana had been prepared for the minimal diversity, but was disappointed not to find more of what she refers to as open minded people. She had difficulty explaining what she meant, but felt students at William Woods were limited in their thinking.

Dana's teammates and other African American female athletes have become her main connection on campus.

If I were not an athlete I don't know what I would do on this campus and I always think about that. I am like if I didn't play a sport, I don't think I could be here. I think that is what keeps me attached. I do have those other players if I see them around school they introduce me to their friends. Like without them, I don't know what I would do if I just came here as a regular student.

She, like several other participants, wonders why African American students would come to William Woods University if they were not athletes.

In addition to her athletic participation, Dana had joined an academic club, but she felt her involvement had still been limited. She admitted not knowing many residents in her hall or others outside of sports. Like other athletes in this study, her roommate is also a teammate, but was not the same race as her. At the time of the interview, she had recently applied and been hired for a residence hall staff position for the fall. She felt this would be a good way to get more involved. "Next year I am going to be a community advisor. I am excited

about that. You know I need to get out and talk to new people and make myself talk to new people.”

Dana too sees her scholarship as a job. She is on a full athletic scholarship, participates in the LEAD program, receives a Pell Grant, and has no loans. Her family provides no additional financial support. She has a very emotionally supportive boyfriend back in her home state and feels his support is important, but finds it hard that her athletic schedule limits her opportunities to go home. She is also close to her siblings and considered leaving to be near them. When telling about only being able to go home for 6 days this year she said:

It was very, very hard. Many times I considered ‘should I go back home?’

And my boyfriend would say ‘no, you said you are going there, you know if you leave that will be your 3rd school.’ And I know that, so I am not leaving. His support, number one is everything, and my sister and my brother.

Dana plans to graduate from William Woods University next year. When asked how she had made it to where she is now, Dana said, “I just feel like I made the decision to come here so I need to go all the way with it. It was my decision. ... I need to finish.”

Jailah

Jailah started at William Woods University in 2008. She had completed one degree years ago and then attended a large, public, research institution in mid-Missouri before transferring to William Woods University for a specific degree not available anywhere else in the area. She identifies as African

American. Jaliah is a non-traditional student and speaks of being older than the majority of students on campus. Jaliah is the only participant who was working full time while attending classes.

Jaliah choose William Woods University for a specific degree she wanted to complete. Geographically, she was already living in the area and had been attending a large institution that was dropping the program. She lives and works in the Fulton community. Prior to the start of classes she did not give much thought to the campus climate:

I was excited about the program and I thought it was a very beautiful campus. I was looking for the African Americans, but overall it just was very beautiful. My mind was “I am here” you know there is this program that I am really, really interested in and I was just really excited to engage in that. I really didn’t give a lot of the thought to the campus outside of that.

Reflecting on the experience, Jaliah found it to be very isolating: “It is a very lonely college experience. Even in the community, being here it has been a very lonely experience.” She did not attend orientation because when she originally enrolled she was part time and did not receive any information about orientation, parking, etc.

In spite of attending for 3 years, she struggled finding other students willing to engage with her unless they shared her level of academic commitment:

As far as the students are concerned I haven’t had very many connections.

I tend to connect with those that are whole heartedly involved in what they

want to do. I can tell those students that are really passionate about learning and they want the study groups and they want to know what you know...And those are the ones I tend to connect more with. It's not that I don't have time to befriend somebody, I do. But there are those that have their social groups and cliques and they really don't care to socialize with me.

She believed that she bears some of the responsibility in reaching out to students and also believes that her working full time had a direct impact on her ability to engage more in the campus community outside of classes:

You have to make yourself available. And to me, I think I am here for a purpose and I am very goal oriented because time is of the essence....I am just exhausted because of how much I have on my plate. And I wish that I could just work four hours a day and you know have the other time to do things on campus outside of class.

Given the opportunity, Jaliah would like invest more in her major and take advantage of more out of the classroom experiences; however, her need to continue full time employment limits these opportunities.

She did acknowledge that she sometimes wonders if her race keeps some students from connecting with her. "I think sometimes I try to engage [with other students] and in the back of my mind the way that I perceive things, sometimes I tend to say well it's because of my race." She also wonders if it is her age. "I don't know if it's because I am the older student or if it is because it's a different race than what they have been exposed to." Without peer connections she typically

attended LEAD events by herself and tried to find events that either went with her major or were of interest to her personally. Given her work and class schedule this was a challenge.

Jaliah became emotional when she talked about attending a specific LEAD event celebrating Black History Month at William Woods University. The Director of Multicultural Affairs had hosted a speaker who was with Martin Luther King, Jr. on the balcony when he was assassinated. “He was very good. And I know it was just myself there as the only African American student and I mean I just wept. I loved the experience. I loved the experience so much.” At the same time she realized how important her culture was for her. “It just made me feel that there was a piece of me missing culturally here on campus.”

Jaliah valued the interactions she had with faculty in her major. She indicated:

I really love the fact that I can go to my teachers and they all always make time. I have always been able to go to their office and say this is where the rubber is not meeting the road. I am failing to understand. They have always given me their time and always tried to make a great effort to help me. I think that is probably why I connect more with my teachers. I think they all truly want to see me succeed and there has never been a time that I have felt brushed off or didn't get the help I was looking for. ... That has been really probably the best experience for me.

She mentioned that even though she struggled with the teaching style of one faculty member in her major, she still felt supported by this faculty member.

Jaliah was comfortable walking into faculty offices and valued talking to all of the faculty members in her major.

Jaliah graduated from William Woods University with her desired degree in May of 2011. A couple months earlier, in March, she indicated that she did not plan to participate in graduation: “I am not going to participate in my graduation ceremony this year. ... There are not many students that I feel like I could celebrate with.... I would be sitting in an auditorium full of strangers.” However, Jaliah did participate in graduation. I saw her after the ceremony and she said, “I just felt it was something I needed to do. I’m glad I did.” (Jailah, personal communication, May 7, 2011)

Taleisha

Taleisha refers to herself as Black or African American in the interview but also identifies with her mother’s Hispanic and Native American ethnicity. Her experience is similar to Jaliah’s, in that she is an older non-traditional student who commutes to campus. Taleisha, however, commutes from quite a distance. She organized her classes to limit herself to 3 days on campus and logs over 600 miles each week. She previously attended a community college and enrolled at William Woods University in the spring of 2010 in order to obtain a specific degree that was not offered any closer to where she lived. She plans to graduate during the 2011-2012 academic year. Several years prior to attending the community college, she had accumulated a significant amount of college credit at another institution, but had not graduated. She felt she had no other options for obtaining this specific bachelor’s degree to advance in her profession.

Taleisha visited the campus before attending classes, but did not participate in orientation because after reading the schedule she felt it was designed for traditional aged, new college students.

I visited the campus. I thought it is cute. It is out in the country....Yes it was cozy and cute. I didn't go to orientation. I am just bitter. It is a different experience here. This is a very traditional school. At the community college people were working they had kids, they owned houses. It was adults and here it is different. There is little diversity.

Taleisha missed the support she found from other working adults at the community college. Previously she had car pooled and studied with other working adults, but at William Woods she could not make these connections.

During her campus visit she felt she was treated like a traditional student. On her tour the student offered to show her the residence halls and took her by the fraternity and sorority houses. For her this was an indication that they really did not understand her as an individual. Referring to the student guide she said, "They are really sweet and all, but they showed me the fraternities and sororities houses and I was like oh crap. I had to say, 'I own my own house.'"

Taleisha was not happy with her experiences at William Woods University. She was disappointed in the academic program, finding it redundant to course work at the community college. Taleisha was committed to getting this degree even though she felt the academic work could be a waste of her time. Her disappointment in the major contributes to her lack of involvement even within the major: "I'm very disappointed in the major here.... I wanted to use William

Woods as a stepping stone, but it is more of the same stuff.... Sometimes I don't show up for class because I know the material." She was also unhappy with her interactions with other students: "I don't even know if I thought about the social environment honestly. I thought about the degree. That was my main focus. I don't think that really hit me until I actually started coming." Once she arrived she found she was the only person of color in most of her classes and students frequently made comments that surprised her, although she believed that much of what was said was more out of ignorance than malice. She offered an example:

It's been a pretty horrible experience really. Students will say things they don't mean to say, things and you are like wait what? Here is an example. One of the guys I was talking to, he was telling me he is in a fraternity and he was telling me about his brother. 'You know he isn't Black he isn't like my brother, just in my fraternity.' I was like thank you for clearing that up because I automatically think when you say brother you mean a Black student (kidding). He was like you know like, like a bro...I am like yeah I get it, I understand. I get a lot of those where I think are you kidding me really? No really, yeah, it is just a lot of naiveness and then another one was, 'I didn't really like Obama....oh sorry sorry.' And I think you know not every Black person voted for Obama. And they are like 'I don't mean to be racist.' I get that a lot. 'I am not trying to be racist,' which as soon as you get that you just sigh.

She went on to indicate some of it was the environment. "It is a small town; it is truly ignorance. I don't think that a lot of them come from a bad place or that

they are trying to be that way.” But she had little patience for it at this point in her life and thought: “... this is a moment for education, but then I get annoyed. I just want to get my degree. Why do I have to be the nice Black person that explains everything? Sometimes it is exhausting.” Participants seemed to place ignorance over racism when referring to comments made by Caucasian students that bothered them.

Due to her commute, which limited her time on campus, Taleisha was disappointed that she was forced to attend LEAD events that fit her schedule not necessarily her interests. When she was able to, she did attend and enjoy events offered by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. At one point she considered starting a new club on campus to support more diversity awareness on campus. When she did not see many of the traditional age students wanting to get involved in the leadership of the group, she decided not to invest her own time and energy in the pursuit.

Money is a stress for Taleisha and she takes on part-time work when she can fit it in her schedule. When asked how she pays for school she replied, “Loans, loans loans....So loans and some institutional aid, so that is it. I ain’t got 15 dollars back to live on so I have been working when I can.” With one semester remaining she was ready to move on. “At this point I am just ready to graduate. My experience overall, I didn’t enjoy it.”

Ayana

Ayana is an African American transfer student from a Missouri community. She transferred to William Woods University for the fall 2010

semester and lived on campus. Similar to the other non-athletes participating in this study, Ayana came to William Woods University for a specific major. However, she also wanted to go to school away from home, but not so far that she could not get home on weekends. “I did want to pursue a major in the social sciences. I was very interested in that and this was close to home. It’s also kind of a ‘getting away and focusing so I can get finished’ thing for me.” For Ayana, William Woods University was less than 120 miles from home and most weekends her boyfriend picked her up and took her home.

Ayana’s experience was a rough road of ups and downs. Socially, particularly the first semester, she was disappointed in numerous interactions with students and even faculty. When asked about the impact of race on her transfer experience, she said:

I have experienced a lot of riff raff to say the least that you just have to weed out. I have learned to take some with a grain of a salt, but I have gotten upset with a lot of things. You can see there are times people say things and I don’t think they noticed what they said or realized it is so offensive. I have experienced the N word several times on this campus....Where I am from it is a shameful word but we are taught it is going to happen. When people get drunk on this campus they have no ethics. You know they try to be funny ‘What’s up my nigger?’ It’s like that is not funny to me.

Ayana and Taleisha are the only participants to mention these types of hostile interactions. Taleisha attributed things more to ignorance than hatred. In her

residence hall, Ayana experienced both positive and negative interactions with peers. She was an active participant in orientation and connected with her roommate:

I got a little homesick almost the day I got here. Everybody dropped me off and left me. My roommate was very welcoming. She was warm and she was kind of here on her own too....We both were transferring in and we stuck together. We kind of hung together and were going to lunch and breakfast and the activities. Those activities were really good. I felt like they kept me busy.

Ayana's roommate joined a sorority shortly after orientation, however, and moved into the Greek organization's house.

Ayana enjoyed and appreciated the orientation events, but found the sorority recruitment process to be overwhelming. At William Woods University, fraternity and sorority recruitment runs simultaneously with orientation. Recruitment activities are actually listed in the orientation schedule. The process is supported and marketed by the Office of Student Life. In addition, during her orientation address each year, the president of the university encourages students to participate in recruitment events whether they decide to join or not. Ayana seriously considered the option and indicated:

I considered joining a sorority here and that [recruitment process] just washed it away for me, the entire process and the way that they were approaching joining a sorority. To me, there are too many people for you to decide that quickly. Where I am from and at other schools I am familiar

with, [recruitment] is a couple of months long. Here, we sat around and talked and I had a good time. It felt good to hang out with other people and relax. But then they were like you want to join? You are a new member now. I was like hold on, is that the way you do things because I don't want to be a part of that.

Ayana enjoyed participating in the process and meeting sorority women, but the pressure to make an immediate decision was too much for her and was different than the process she was familiar with at other schools. The recruitment process for historically Black sororities is very different and William Woods University does not have any of these organizations.

Ayana admitted she went home a lot on the weekends and she realized this had probably impacted her connections, particularly first semester. However, she found when she stayed on the weekends she had trouble connecting:

When I tried to stay for the weekend everybody cliqued up. People do that, it is part of school. They cliqued up and I just didn't fit to me. I just didn't find a group of people that I would connect with. You know you have the horse people and they hang out together and it's like you have the sororities.

By second semester, things were somewhat better for Ayana. She had friends in the hall and was active on campus:

My interactions with my residents are good. The girls are cool. We have movie night sometimes. If I cook they come down to eat. I made friends as far as like some athletes. My work study is good. I made friends there. I do

that in the information desk. Weekends when I am sitting in the office whoever is in the office with me we are buddies. The days we are ordering pizza together it is always good.

She talked about making deliberate efforts to meet more people by joining clubs and talking to other students in her residence hall.

Ayana was quickly dissatisfied with her major at William Woods University. Similar to Taleisha, she felt her degree program was repetitive of her community college experience. She also described an upsetting experience with a faculty member in her major that she felt was racially motivated. After giving a presentation, the faculty member had critiqued her body motions as something that African Americans liked to do, but was not appropriate in the presentation. Ayana felt the feedback did not need to involve the reference to her race. By second semester, Ayana had changed her major and was excited about a career in the new major. She joined a club related to her new major and was working closely with a faculty member and another student on research to be presented at a national conference. She valued the research experience she was gaining with this faculty member. In addition, Ayana had participated in a state academic competition as part of involvement in another club and was trying out other organizations as well.

Similar to other participants in this study, Ayana was paying for school herself and finances were a major concern. She worked on campus as part of federal work study. When asked how she paid for school she replied:

Nickels and dimes! I am on Pell, and loan, and LEAD. I have no family help. I don't really have parental support at all. I am on a dependency override. My great grandmother raised me and she passed away when I was 16 years old. From then on I was kind of on my own. Going from place to place chipping around and that is where I am now. It is not cheap. I have just been trying to find ways to have money. I asked the track coach is there any way I can join the team (Laughs). Everybody thinks I am an athlete already. He is kind of open to it surprisingly.

Like Dana, Ayana valued the support she received from her boyfriend back home.

Regarding his support she said:

He is able to say 'you need to do this. I am not coming to get you. I don't have time to run to Fulton every time you get upset so you need to be a big girl,' which is really good. He is proud of me. He calls me a perfectionist. 'You always have to try to do something bigger,' he says.

She did not have her own car and, among other support, relied on him for rides between school and home.

Ayana had thought about leaving, but when asked about it during the interview she said she planned to graduate from William Woods University:

Pride is keeping me here. That and my timeline....I have a lot of pride. I am very strong willed. If I leave, it will be because it is outside of my academic things or because of a specific thing. I don't want to be leaving because of social issue. I would not leave because I had been called the n word or slandered or talked about. I won't do it....That is who I am I can't do it.

She, like other participants, felt transferring again would extend her time to degree completion. Almost two months after the interview, I saw Ayana on campus and she indicated that she had decided to transfer. She had found a program at another institution in her new major that would allow her to simultaneously get her master's degree. The school was back in her home city and would be cheaper. She was excited about the new opportunity and felt it was the right choice for her long-term goals.

La-Keysha

La-Keysha is an African American transfer student from Missouri. She transferred to William Woods University in the fall of 2009 after taking online courses for a year at home. La-Keysha transferred to William Woods University with her boyfriend, who is not African American. She originally visited the campus with him when he was considering attending for an athletic scholarship. She indicated that having him here was nice because she and her family knew nothing about college, but pointed out that she has done her own thing while here: "So I came here based on him, but at the same time I didn't know anything about college and it kind of helped me. It would be different if I came here and didn't do anything. I have done my own thing." Her boyfriend had told her about the school, but she did a lot of research on her own to learn about the school and cost of attending. "It was very much about me doing my research and looking....I had never heard about it, but doing the research and picking up the phone and calling that also helped me decide if it was right for me." La-Keysha mentioned calling and e-mailing various offices on campus a lot while she was deciding

whether or not to attend William Woods and if she could afford it. She used the website some, but she relied on personal communication with different offices for the majority of her information.

For La-Keysha, it was also important that she attend a small school with small class sizes. Even with money as a significant worry for La-Keysha, she remained willing to incur debt for the experience:

Being in a smaller classroom is worth it to me over going somewhere where there are 200 students. I have a friend where she has 200 students in her classroom. Where here I sit in the front row of all my classes and there are 10-13 people in some of my classes. If I am gone then someone will say ‘La-Keysha is missing today, why weren’t you in class?’ I know that I have to pay a lot to go to school here, but I don’t want to be where they call your name that first day of classes and that is it. I can’t do that. I need the personal contact.

La-Keysha spoke at length about how important the small classes were to her. She really enjoyed knowing that faculty knew her and that she knew the students in her classes.

La-Keysha was particularly close to faculty in her major, “I have two professors that are going to support me. In thinking about coming back next year it makes me feel safer. Knowing those are people there that are going to help. It is that comfort zone that you need.” For her, the faculty connections were an important connection to the campus and her experiences at William Woods.

La-Keysha lived on campus in a university residence hall, but had met most of her friends through her involvement in two campus organizations related to her academic interests. At one point in the interview she talked about really enjoying meeting people 'like her' that did not drink and shared her same values. For her the connection to other students was tied to shared values, regardless of race and her closest connections were with students outside of her race:

I would say the only other African American student I know is James. I have talked to a couple of other African American girls a few times, but it is just once I am somewhere, I just go with it. They all do sports and they are constantly busy so I go where I can go and talk to who I can talk to.

La-Keysha's involvement in student organizations had provided the social opportunities that kept her at the institution.

For me, [social opportunity] weighs [as] an important factor in my decision to stay. You don't want to be alone. You don't want to go somewhere and not know anybody. Being in active academic clubs on campus it helps me see there are 20 other people I can talk to that have my back and are like my brothers and sisters....When you know you are 6 hours away from home and there is somebody else that is going to look out for you, it's good and that is how I see it.

At the time of the interview, La-Keysha had just been elected to serve as president of two very active student organizations on campus. She was proud of these opportunities, indicating she had not expected to become this active when she arrived over a year ago.

When asked about race in her experiences at William Woods University, her response was similar to Darryl in that she found socio-economic status to be a bigger issue.

I have been involved with all different races and all different people so it is easy. The only thing that has been hard has been the class difference, because I have a mother that didn't graduate high school or go to college. I just met my father last year. And I met him through MySpace. I am someone that has all these different things that are different from everybody else. When other people talk to you about their situations the things they complain about I don't see as important. You know, I am thinking 'I lived in a car for 6 months and you are complaining about your parents not sending you 100 dollars.'

She received no financial support from her family. La-Keysha had a constant worry about money. She told a story about trying to manage an additional off-campus job for a while before deciding it was having a negative impact on her academic experiences.

She had to make significant financial sacrifices to stay at William Woods University and worried each semester whether she would have the money she needed to return. She had several grants including the Pell Grant, LEAD (institutional aid), an outside scholarship, and loans. She had both an on-campus and an off-campus job. She spent a lot of time in the financial aid office asking questions and making sure she understood her loans. "Me and Mary [staff person

in financial aid office] have become best friends. I ask her ‘what does this mean?’ What little bit I have, I need to know what it goes to.”

The ability to continue to pay for her degree was a deciding factor in her return to William Woods University each semester. If she can afford to do so, she would like to graduate from William Woods University. Just keeping up with institution, state, and federal policies on loans and aid was a challenge for her as regulations are constantly changing. Recent political debates over state Missouri Access money and federal Pell Grants have left many students like La-Keysha guessing at their financial aid packages. “Hopefully I will be here next year. It depends on financial aid.... You would think they would know before the school year. Once school starts it is too late to budget.” La-Keysha did return in the fall of 2011 and is on track to graduate in spring 2012.

While there are some shared experiences among the participants, their experiences at William Woods had impacted each of them differently. Participants seemed to experience the climate differently. Through these narratives, the relevance of participants believing they could find common communities for social integration emerged as strong. Those participants unable to identify a community used words like “lonely” and “frustrating” to describe their experiences. I did not ask participants specifically about the cultural climate on campus; however, it was more common to hear negative racial experiences among those participants who struggled to find common communities. These participants were also less likely to invest the energy required for psychosocial

engagement within the community. Most participants mentioned proactive strategies they implemented themselves to improve their own experiences, such as, but not limited to: joining organizations, applying for campus jobs, seeking out faculty support, and reaching out to other students on their own.

The William Woods Experience

Themes from Braxton et al.'s (2004) revision of Tinto's theory emerged in the narratives as each participant's individual story was told. The narratives revealed all of the themes, although some resonated more clearly than others. Institutional integrity and to some extent ability to pay, were not as clearly present in the data as institutional commitment to the welfare of students, communal potential, proactive social adjustment, and psychosocial engagement. In addition, self-efficacy was ongoing in each participant's experiences. Individual experiences were unique; however, there were common elements among several of them. For example, it was clear that the participants who had significant and specific involvement on campus were more socially integrated, found more potential for communities, and were far more satisfied with the social, and to some extent the academic, experiences on campus.

Involvement with faculty mattered for many of these participants. In the upcoming section on institutional commitment to students, I discuss more thoroughly the impact of faculty involvement on students' perception that the institution is committed to the welfare of its students. Residential participants who were athletes or involved in clubs and organizations had a more positive overall experience on the campus. Commuter students found less opportunity for

communal potential and involvement, and thus invested less psychological energy in their experiences on campus.

The two non-traditional age commuters were not as satisfied with their overall experience as the other students. These participants, Taleisha and Jaliah, talked about feelings of loneliness and emptiness more often than the other participants and both were ready to be finished with the experience. Taleisha felt trapped by her decision and was ready to finish. In the end, Jaliah, although disappointed in the social interactions with students, really valued learning, obtaining the degree and the interaction with faculty.

Six of the participants mentioned the stress of paying for school. All participants took part in the LEAD program, which provides a financial reward to students who attend events on campus, and three of the participants paid for part of their college costs through athletic scholarships. Two students specifically mentioned socioeconomic situations playing a role in their social experiences and relationships with others. Darryl and La-Keysha struggled with finding money to remain at the institution and relating to students and faculty who do not understand what it means to attend college with fewer resources. Other participants mentioned loans, Pell Grants, and working to make ends meet. The original framework (Braxton et al., 2004) and other literature (e.g., Cabrera et al., 1990) indicates that ability to pay impacts persistence and both goal and institutional commitment. This appeared to impact at least six of the participants, but it was not a specific focus of this study.

A theme that emerged, that was not in the framework or covered in the literature review, was that of support outside of campus. Both Dana and Ayana had boyfriends who supported their educational goals. La-Keysha was attending William Woods with her boyfriend and appreciated his support because her family knows little about attending college. Although not included in her narrative, Taleisha had a supportive spouse who was also pursuing a college degree and shares some of the same experiences of loneliness at a different campus. Several mentioned that although their families could not support them financially, they did want them to graduate from college.

Social Opportunities, Social Enclaves, and Personal Investment

A sub question of this study considered the communal potential and social opportunities participants found at William Woods. Communal potential refers to the participants' perception of social opportunities and social enclaves available at William Woods. In addition, proactive social adjustment is seen in the participants' own willingness to invest in the experience. In analyzing the data, I found it made sense to break this question into two main sections. The first section, *Pathways to Community*, is organized around those elements that contributed to participants' opportunities for finding enclaves and opportunities for social engagement. The second section, *Barriers to Community*, contains those elements that prevented or stymied students' opportunities for engagement.

Pathways to Community

Athletics. From the narratives, it is clear that the athletic experience provides an immediate social and support group. However, several of these student athletes still experienced times of loneliness, indicating that merely being an athlete does not eliminate all social challenges. For African American students, the informal support they gained from peer athletes had a positive impact on their experiences. While none of the athletes had negative things to say about their coaches, they did not mention that the coaches or athletic staff had much of an impact on their experience. Both Darryl and Dana indicated that their coach was helpful, but had not really made a significant impact on their experiences.

Student Organizations and campus involvement. Involvement in student organizations provided small communities and opportunities for engagement for three of the participants. The student athletes often expressed that they did not have time to participate in other groups or organizations, but both Hayden and Darryl wished they had taken advantage of these types of opportunities. Dana, the only athlete to join an academic club, wished it met more often because she enjoyed the interaction. “It is my major and I just want to take advantage of the opportunity to be involved in something that has to do with my major other than just classes.” Hayden completed an internship on campus that was both convenient and contributed to his engagement. Darryl felt if he had college to experience again he would try to get more involved. “Once you are done

with college you are done with it.” He recognized he may have missed some opportunities by not investing more in other experiences.

Ayana recognized she needed and wanted more involvement so she invested her time in more groups in an effort to create more social interaction. When asked why she chose to join several different student organizations she responded:

I wanted to stop being a hermit crab just going to class and going in my room. I wanted to do more networking in school. I wanted to meet more people you know. Everybody on campus has their friends on campus I wanted some things I could relate to other people with outside of ‘do you want to do homework with me?’. It was a way of me reaching out and trying to make more friends basically.

Her actions are also an example of Ayana’s self-efficacy which is covered later in the chapter.

Dana also found time to join an organization and was planning to work in the residence halls the next year as a way to meet more people and become more involved. For La-Keysha, involvement in student organizations provided not only a social outlet but a safety net and a community that was important to her experience. She said:

There are 13 other people [referring to members of one of the organizations] that I see as a community where we can help each other. It is something we can all benefit from in the long run. I don’t play sports, these clubs are my sports this is what I have here. If I didn’t have those

organizations I would be bored. I would be sitting in my room just going to class and I would hate college all together. Not being involved can hurt in your social life. You are going to hate college. You won't meet people and you won't get to do those things that could be benefitting you.

She gave an example of a time when a prospective student once asked her why she joined a particular student organization and she said:

Joining this organization could be the thing that saves you while you are here. It sounds crazy now, but that group of people or the group in your sorority house if you choose that those are the people that bring you back down and help you enjoy learning.

For La-Keysha, student organizations were her family at William Woods University.

Neither commuter was very engaged on campus, although both enjoyed some interactions they experienced on campus, which indicates they were open to engagement. Jailah mentioned the value of the multicultural events she attended, but she simply did not have the time to participate in events on campus as often as she would have liked. I did see her participate in an "Open Mic" night competition on campus. She was a crowd pleaser, reciting a poem she had written herself. Taleisha thought about starting a new club on campus, but quickly realized that none of the other students were interested in helping with the leadership and organization of the group. She then decided it was not where she wanted to invest her energy. "I just didn't want to be the adult. I felt bad for a while but I just couldn't take that on. I have so much on my plate."

Forty percent of William Woods University's students are members of national fraternities and sororities; however, none of the participants in this study were members of fraternities or sororities and Ayana was the only participant that had considered the opportunity. In fact, Darryl could not imagine what the experience is like for the African American students who have joined fraternities. He described himself as having nothing in common with the fraternity men:

I mean I see a couple of Black people in those fraternities, but I couldn't do that because I don't relate with them like that. I mean a fraternity I would be in, would be all Black. There is nothing wrong with those guys. I mean I just don't relate with them. The things they like to have fun at is not as fun to me. Unless you are from the background it's going to be hard to make friends. Even if you want to be friends with them you just don't have anything in common with them.

Ayana also indicated she would have been more interested in a sorority that was historically Black. Taleisha mentioned that she noticed a few African American women had joined sororities and she wondered if that was a lonely experience for them.

Living on campus. The residential participants all had more connections and interactions on campus. This is consistent with literature (e.g., Braxton & McClendon, 2001-2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) and the emphasis on residential students in the Braxton et al., (2004) revision of Tinto's theory. It was interesting that none of the residential

students connected their residential status as contributing to their engagement. It may be because I did not specifically ask this question; however, several acknowledged that they really did not know many people in their residence hall. La-Keysha had found it hard to meet people in the residence halls. Her connections came through student organizations rather than residence halls. She said hall staff tried to host events, but no one attended. She believed it was just not a priority for residents. “Meeting people in the hall is hard because you are throwing all these people in the building with people that could probably care less if you are down the hall from them or not.” Dana lived in one of the largest halls on campus and indicated she really only talked to a couple of people in the building.

While students do not make direct connections in the halls, it is perhaps the convenience of living on campus that creates opportunities for engagement. For example, all three athletes in the study lived with a teammate and talk about hanging out with other teammates on campus. Ayana and La-Keysha mentioned enjoying cooking meals with friends in their residence hall kitchens.

Another college in town. Residential participants also mentioned meeting and/or socializing with African American students from Westminster College in town. Ayana mentioned that having students from Westminster at the clubs at night contributes to the fun. “It’s nice because it is not just us; there are Westminster College students too. Everybody just mixes together and it’s fun just hanging out. It’s an option to get up and go out and meet people.” Darryl

mentioned having several friends at Westminster who were African American. “It is people I can relate too,” he says in reference to enjoying hanging out with them.

Barriers to Community

Commuting and working off-campus. Jaliah and Taleisha both lived off campus and in Jaliah’s case worked full time. Commuting and working were significant barriers to campus involvement and interaction. Both acknowledged that these barriers and perhaps their age contributed to them not having the same experiences. Jaliah said:

I really don’t have opportunities to really talk to anyone. I think a lot of them would be open to that but I am just not there or available. I can’t sit in the lunch room, I don’t have the meal plan/ so I can’t just take my tray and go sit with somebody.

Jaliah and Taleisha also felt they had been open to more interaction and it just did not happen. Taleisha felt, “it would be nice if I felt like options were there if I wanted them. I have my social group at home. It doesn’t mean I don’t want to be friends with anyone here.” The campus climate, they believed, contributed to this. Both appreciated the experiences they had with the staff in the multicultural office on campus.

Uncomfortable and unfriendly environment. Hayden, Dana, La-Keysha, and, at times, Ayana found the campus to be friendly; however, for others this was a barrier. Darryl indicated:

I thought people would be more friendly but it was like they were scared of me... In the city White people and Hispanic [people], they are not scared to

look you in the face and talk to you. Some people here, not their fault; they are maybe just not from an environment where they are comfortable talking to other types of people.

For Taleisha, dealing with the traditional age students was exhausting. Although she excused their behavior as youth and even coming from a rural environment, she still did not feel it was a welcoming community for students like her. When a faculty member suggested the option of staying on campus one night a week, rather than driving home late at night, she indicated she would not “feel safe or comfortable staying on campus” overnight.

Many of the traditional age participants acknowledged that it was common to assume that if you were African American on this campus, you were probably attending the school because you were an athlete. Ayana, who is not an athlete, was disappointed in conversations she had more than once with students:

I get asked so much “what sport do you play?” All the time I will meet somebody and they are like what sport do you play? And I ask them ‘why do you ask that, because I am Black?’ And they say ‘no no no no I wasn’t asking because of that.’ I am like ‘no I don’t play a sport.’ Don’t do that. If you met Jane Doe, White student on campus you would not be asking her if she plays a sport. You wouldn’t. They don’t even ask if I play a sport but *what* sport do I play. They have already made the assumption I am an athlete.

This way of thinking is not limited to just White students on the campus. Dana indicated that as African American athletes, they made the same assumptions about other African American students.

Sometimes we even, I mean this is probably bad but, like if we see a Black girl we will say, 'Is she in a sport'? Or even the African American guys, we are like he has to be an athlete I mean like why else would you be here? Seriously that is what we say.... If they are not here for a sport then why are they here? It is kind of bad, but you shouldn't ask why a student is at school because it is school.

Darryl, Dana, and Hayden all indicated they did not know why you would choose to attend the school if you were not an athlete.

Several participants mentioned that most programs—like orientation, fraternity and sorority recruitment, and many LEAD events—were designed for a specific kind of student, often implying that was the traditional age and White student. It is likely that the orientation schedule supports this claim. In reviewing schedules for the past few years, there are numerous events that, while open to all students, appear to cater to traditional age and White students. Examples include fraternity and sorority recruitment occurring as a large part of the social aspect of orientation, and the campus life play, which is a theatrical look at college designed and produced by students and contains no references to diversity and, in 2010 and 2011, did not include any visible diversity among the actors. In addition, no transfer students or students of color have given either of the traditional opening day speeches presented by students.

For Jaliah and Taleisha, who were not able to find social communities, attending William Woods University was a lonely and disappointing experience, yet they remained enrolled. For Taleisha and Jailah, transferring to another school was not an option since the degrees they wanted were not available at institutions within their reach. For Ayana, when she found another opportunity that better met her academic goals, she left immediately. Had Taleisha and Jailah felt there were other options for them with their majors, they too may have considered leaving.

Even with the availability of smaller communities, students still recognized that the institution caters to or is focused on what they see as traditional White students and their needs. The fraternity and sorority system, along with many programs and social activities, are all more appealing to White traditional age students. Previous research has shown that “while predominantly white institutions do not intentionally create unresponsive and unfriendly campus environments; they were not created for students of color” (Pewewardy & Frey, 2002, p.89).

On a positive note, during observations of orientation and the opening of school during fall 2011, I observed there were a couple of students of color, who were hired as orientation peer mentors and community advisors in the residence halls. Both of these are visible student leadership positions on campus yet, this is still limited. It is clear that during orientation, transfer students of color would need to look hard to find evidence of the institution’s awareness of their arrival.

Jaliah refers to an “empty side” of her that came from her experiences outside of the classroom on campus. Regarding her thoughts about not attending the graduation ceremony, she said “it would feel like I am celebrating among strangers.” These types of feelings had a negative impact on some participants’ willingness to invest their time and energy in campus opportunities. Ayana, however, seemed to use involvement and investment in opportunities as a means to overcome negative experiences.

Age. Until fall of 2011, there were no special sessions offered specifically for non-traditional aged students at William Woods University. The orientation schedule and information sent to commuter students encouraged commuter participation, but the majority of sessions are clearly designed with traditional age students in mind. For example, an event called “the campus life play” is a series of skits about alcohol consumption, eating disorders, and life in the residence halls. Social events listed on the schedule included the fraternity and sorority recruitment process and late night events convenient for residential students.

In 2011, a special session for non-traditional age students was added to the orientation schedule. This session, a free breakfast hosted by the Office of Student Life, was held on the second day of orientation. Currently enrolled non-traditional aged students were invited to speak to new students about their experiences and offer advice on attending William Woods as a non-traditional student. I attended the breakfast along with two other staff members from the Student Life office. Three new students attended the session, along with one

returning non-traditional age student. The returning student spoke some about her experience but questions mostly focused on practical things such as, parking, the LEAD program, and specific questions about the major.

Unintended messages. Non-traditional aged participants often receive unintended messages of exclusion. Taleisha laughed telling a story about an invitation to Fall Family Weekend arriving to her home where she lives with her spouse being addressed: “*To the parents of Taleisha Jackson.*” In reviewing this document, I found that these invitations were actually addressed “*To the family of,*” but clearly the perception was *parents* to Taleisha. She described the social environment as “being a very traditional young school with the fraternities and sororities. Those are very important on campus.” She later added that the focus of the social environment is on “White, young, youth of America at this school.” The lack of opportunities to engage with students with the common experiences has a significant impact on her feelings “students are talking about their new cell phones. I am worried about adding a dishwasher so my house will sell.”

Socio-economic differences. Both Darryl and La-Keysha gave specific examples of being impacted by what they felt was their lower socio-economic status. Interactions with both students and faculty, who they felt did not understand their situation, created some feelings of alienation or a divide between themselves and others from a higher socio-economic status. La-Keysha shared:

Some people I have met have been the type of people that have money and want to rub it in people’s face. I don’t care if you have money, it doesn’t say

anything about who I am. That has been the only thing that has been hard for me.

La-Keysha felt that students with more resources just simply did not understand what it was like for those students who survived with limited resources.

Six of the participants mentioned the challenges of paying for school; however, La-Keysha and Darryl both specifically mentioned that their socio-economic status impacted their interactions with both students and faculty on campus in a negative way. Darryl was uncomfortable with a faculty response regarding his inability to purchase books and La-Keysha discussed frustrations with students who complained when their parents did not send them money or bragged about having money. She felt they had no idea what it was like for her to make ends meet financially.

The significant pathways to community for these students came from their residential status and enclaves such as student organizations and athletics. As indicated in Braxton et al. (2004), revision of Tinto's (1993) theory of student persistence students who engaged in proactive social adjustment strategies and demonstrated psychosocial engagement by adjusting to the norms of their surroundings, by seeking out specific club involvement and meeting new people, were more committed to the institution and were more likely to persist. However, this being said, for some (e.g. Taleisha, Jailah) there were less opportunities for proactive social adjustment or even psychosocial engagement, but they persisted anyway. It would seem that the barriers to community were

the source of frustration, dissatisfaction, and disengagement, but not necessarily departure.

The Role of Self-efficacy

Through their involvement, and even non-involvement decisions for some, participants displayed varying, yet strong degrees of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, again, is the belief that individuals have in their ability to engage in actions necessary to achieve their desired outcomes (Bandura, 1986). In this section, I talk about each student's self-efficacy. The data in this section are divided into three sections: a) participants' belief in their ability to find a compatible social community; b) participants' self-confidence and ownership in their experience, which often was revealed in examples of their psychosocial engagement and strategies they used for proactive social adjustment; and, c) participants' academic motivations and goals.

Belief in a Compatible Social Community

As indicated in the literature review, students who are proactive and commit to social interactions with peers grow in their confidence (Braxton & Hirschy, 2004; Braxton et al., 2004). In addition, students who believe they can “find a compatible social community on campus experience a greater self-confidence and certainty in their social interactions” (Braxton et al., 2004, p. 31). Evidence of this was found in the data from participants. For the athletes in this study, this was a given. Each knew the team would provide some support even before they came. Students who were able to find compatible social communities demonstrated higher levels of proactive social adjustment and psychosocial

engagement. The athletes, Hayden, Darryl and Dana, recognized the immediate and important role their team played in the experience. Darryl even mentioned the support of an upperclassman that showed him the ropes. Knowing there was a community waiting for them when they arrived increased their confidence in attending.

La-Keysha believed her involvement in student organizations provided her with new experiences and opportunities. “College, I never thought would be like this, I thought I would just go to class, but being involved has helped a whole lot.” As part of her club involvement, she had traveled to several competitions. “I had never been on a plane before I came here. I had never left the state before I came here. Those have all been experiences that have changed my life.” Had Taleisha, Jaliah, the two non-traditional age commuters and, to a smaller extent, Ayana, who found individual connections but no significant community, been able to find compatible social communities, their experiences may have been very different. All three were willing to engage if the right opportunities had presented themselves.

Self-confidence and Ownership

Bandura (1997) indicated that people’s beliefs in their own efficacy influences the decisions they make, the courses of action they pursue, how long they pursue them, and the amount of effort they put into tasks, particularly when faced with obstacles and challenges. In contrast, “the inability to exert influence over things that adversely affect one’s life breeds apprehension, apathy or despair” (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). When individuals are able to select and create

environmental supports for what they want to become, they are able to impact the direction of their lives (Bandura, 1997).

Hayden was sure he would find friends, “I usually click with my teammates I knew I wouldn’t have trouble making friends. I can make friends. I never had a problem with that.” He also felt he was in control of his decisions and his future. “I felt like whenever I had class it was my decision [to attend or not]. I didn’t have nobody telling me what to do. I set my own destiny and I gotta finish, just accomplish this and graduate and finish.” Hayden’s belief in his own ability to meet people, make friends, and succeed academically demonstrated the effectiveness of self-efficacy in his experience. Darryl gained confidence from other students reaching out to him. He said:

Some people had no problems coming out and trying to be friendly. When I first came I wasn’t really going out to be friends with everybody, but as I got comfortable it was because some people were just nice. It gave me some confidence to step out and be nice back.

For Darryl, it took others reaching out to him to give him the confidence to engage in relationships and build connections in the community.

Darryl recognized that just persevering through the challenges presented by his financial limitations and an athletic injury that was impacting his experience was something he felt good about.

I am proud of myself because I know how hard it was. People just don’t understand how hard it is when you don’t have money. It is hard to be

successful in classes. I had to hustle and borrow books on friend's time.

You know it is a lot. But you just keep going.

In the narrative on Darryl he talked about overcoming a difficult time of loneliness. Persisting through that time and dealing with financial stress helped build Darryl's pride in himself and belief in his own ability to complete the degree at William Woods.

Some of La-Keysha's confidence came from her decision just to attend college, particularly given the life that has led her to William Woods University.

There are so many *wrong* things that I could be doing that I am doing everything that is right for me, right for La-Keysha. I wouldn't change my life for anything. The things that have happened have sucked, but they have made me who I am and made me stronger. I love that I do love my life without it being padded or cushioned. Life is not all roses and dandelions and it is never going to be. I am going to make it. I am going to be and do all those things that people in my life have told me I am never going to do. I am going to do them because I know I can do them. I have that will power.

Just prior to the interview, much to her surprise, La-Keysha was elected to be president of two academic organizations. Her active club involvement and advance to leadership positions within the organizations increased her confidence. Leadership positions were a way to further impact both her current student experiences as well as future career.

I was thinking I could never be president of something, but people said you are so wonderful you are so organized. Everybody thought I was good for it. So I thought okay. I am very much the kind of person who puts my best foot forward and I have taken it as the thought that maybe I need this involvement.

Regarding speaking to a faculty member about a concern she had, Jaliah, felt it was important to speak up or change will never happen. She said:

I am a person that has learned to voice how I feel, period. Even if it is bad, I have learned to give that. There are right ways to do it. You have to say it because things won't change if you don't. Even if nothing changes at least I feel like I have put it out there, how I feel, and you can take it or not. I feel within me I have done my part. And now if the changes come, I know I did something to make change.

Her belief that she could impact change gave her confidence to speak up when she felt there needed to be change. Without this belief, one can feel apathy and hopelessness rather than a sense of control over the future (Bandura, 1997).

Motivation and Goals

In my analysis, I did not find that the non-traditional students lacked self-efficacy or confidence, but given that they could not find compatible communities, there were fewer opportunities to engage in or demonstrate the same types of efficacy and confidence on campus. Yet, another key part of self-efficacy is found in students' motivations, such as academic goals, and values. Control over learning can lead to increased academic motivation and increased

academic achievement (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Jaliah took pride in her grades. “I have always tried to do my best to get good grades [and] I am doing fairly well; I mean my grades are a result of who I determine to be and what I have tried to give. It is just for myself.” Jaliah, a first generation college student, was very motivated in her commitment to her academic goal. When asked what lead to her success she replied:

Determination, I think that I feel like this was a God given desire to be a social scientist. I love school and I want to continue to learn, but I didn't come this far to be mediocre and to come out among regular people that just want to do regular work. I have given a lot of time a lot of my life to this. I felt like I have no family here in Missouri when I moved here....I did not know one person and I came here for a purpose.....I don't want to just make it by....I feel like this is where I have been led to be you know.

Sometimes I haven't given 100% but I have given my heart to this and I can't quit.

Similarly, Ayana has a strong self-awareness and has confronted faculty, staff, and students when she felt discriminated against or treated unfairly. She saw this as a way she could change things for herself and maybe others:

I feel like although there is a lot going on you know I am not a dog that will lie down and play dead. I feel like it is my responsibility not to get up and run away and be another transfer student that came in and was left out or got ran off because of issues going on. My goal is to finish at William

Woods University. I want to finish here. I want to make a difference before I leave and I want to put a footprint here.

Dana indicated that she was determined to go to school out of state. For her, this was giving herself a chance to succeed on her own. “I need to do this on my own without everybody telling me what I need to do and being all in my groove. I just need to be me. Even without my boyfriend. I don’t want him to be a distraction.” As mentioned before, she also felt she needed to get more involved and push her comfort zone so she purposely applied to be a community advisor so she would be forced into more interaction.

Evidence for the importance of self-efficacy was found throughout the experiences of these participants. All the participants in this study, at the time of the interview, believed they would indeed complete a 4-year degree and anticipated it would be from William Woods University. Ayana later decided to transfer, which displayed a belief in her ability to control her future through navigating another transfer experience.

Participants’ Perceptions of the Institution’s Commitment to the Welfare of Students

Not one participant felt the institution, William Woods University, was committed to their welfare or success, at least not at the institutional level. Ayana was very specific about the institution’s lack of commitment: “As a Black student I feel like I am inconvenienced, very inconvenienced as far as everything we have to deal with. It is almost as if nobody cares....There was nothing about ‘we want you to succeed here’.” Ayana and La-Keysha both mentioned after orientation that students, not just transfers, are left on their own. La-Keysha describes it this

way “Once you are here, you are here, and after a week of everyone caring about you. You are kind of forgotten about.”

When asked about an institutional commitment, Taleisha again mentioned the focus being more on traditional students:

No I don't think the institution thinks of us. The focus is on fraternities and sororities; White, young, youth of America at this school. I think they are trying a little with the multicultural department, but I don't think they get a lot of support.

For her, it felt as if the institution simply was not aware that there are non-traditional aged students of color on the campus. Although not as specific, Darryl also mentioned the school being geared to a certain type of person, which is not his type.

If you really think about this school, it is geared for a certain type of person....a person that likes horses or likes the country life. You can tell from just how this campus is....They have some events for us but it is geared more towards one type of people.

Darryl was not as clear in defining who the 'us' and 'they' were, but the implication involved diversity of some kind.

While the feeling of overall institutional support was lacking, participants did find support and positive relationships with individuals within the institution. Several students mentioned the Office of Multicultural Affairs and appreciating the support and programs offered there. Participants were often able to mention

specific individuals who were helpful, such as the Director of Multicultural Affairs, staff in financial aid, admissions, or the Office of Student Life.

Within the revised theory (Braxton et al., 2004), positive interactions with faculty are seen as a form of institutional commitment. This was a place where William Woods did excel in its commitment to these students. Positive remarks about relationships with faculty were common among all but one of the participants. Even Ayana, the only participant to specifically mention a negative experience with a faculty member, had found a good relationship with other faculty on campus. Jaliah valued interactions with most faculty in her major. Jaliah indicated her relationships with faculty were the best part of her experience at William Woods. Taleisha referred to faculty as friendly and indicated she was comfortable in their offices and appreciated them inviting her in to chat and discuss work.

Hayden, La-Keysha and Darryl all mentioned having the same professors for several classes and appreciating the relationship with these faculty members in their major. La-Keysha indicated that her involvement with faculty impacted her decision to return to William Woods each semester. In addition, the small class size, particularly in their major, was something these three liked. They also found it helpful that typically one of the faculty members in their major was also their advisor so they knew and trusted the person.

Dana was the only student who had not yet been able to develop a connection with faculty. While other students liked the fact that they had the

same teachers for several classes, for Dana this was a problem because she had not been able to connect with her faculty.

This semester I only have one new teacher that I didn't have last semester. So yeah I had to get use to that also. But I guess it is kind of cool because I don't have to get use to new teachers and new ways of teaching and stuff like that. That was a positive. I still have not been able to make that connection with the teachers that I want, but I have already accepted it.

In spite of participating in a research project with a faculty member she still felt she had not connected with faculty here, like she did at her previous institution. At the time of the interview she was participating in interviews for a new faculty member and hoped that would result in a new faculty member she would enjoy.

Tinto's (1993) early research indicated that the low student-faculty ratio of smaller colleges may help degree completion. In this study, relationships with faculty at William Woods were valued and/or appreciated by all but one participant; however, without the faculty connection, the perception of institutional commitment to these students was zero.

Summary

In this study, I used a revised theory of student persistence and another lens using aspects of Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy to explore the experiences of students of color transferring to William Woods University, a small, private, not-for-profit residential college. Each of the seven participants had varying experiences, but enclaves and social communities contributed to students' satisfaction of their experience. Contrary to some research (Tinto, 1993), which

indicates that the small minority populations at smaller institutions prevents these institutions from providing as many subculture options for students, five of the seven participants were able to find subcultures on the campus. Participants found compatible communities in athletics, organizations, and relationships with other students of color at a nearby institution. Non-traditional aged participants, who were also commuters, may have found small connections but were not able to find smaller communities they related to on the campus. Having the support and involvement that came with membership in student organizations and participation on athletic teams created a smaller, more comfortable community for these students, which made the experience better or at least bearable.

When cultural programs and events were hosted by the institution, these were appreciated, yet several students mentioned that more could be offered to bring the community together. None of the participants saw these events as an indicator of institutional commitment, although the literature has shown that these types of events can impact a student of color's perception of the institution (Rendon et al., 2000). It may have been that there were not enough of these events to warrant the credit or it is just not a connection these students made. Ayana even felt the institution should be doing more to recruit students of color to the school.

The most significant barriers to finding a community were living off campus, age, commuting, and the experiences of an unfriendly environment. Only one student disclosed experiencing what she felt was blatant racism, and these experiences occurred both in and out of the classroom. The non-traditional

students were unable to find similar students with whom they could share experiences. The five participants who were either athletes or actively involved in student organizations found compatible social communities, most of which were with members of their own race; La-Keysha and, to some extent, Hayden were the only exceptions. La-Keysha had little involvement with other African Americans on campus and both she and Hayden dated outside of their race.

Each of the seven participants had made a decision to leave their previous institution and attend this one for reasons that benefited their futures. Arguably the act of transferring can be seen as an act of self-efficacy in itself. Other examples of self-efficacy were evident in each participant's experience in some way. A common theme among them was the idea of having already transferred once, or in some cases twice, making the decision to leave William Woods seemed like an unwise one. Strategies for making the best of, or surviving, the decision to stay varied. Several joined clubs to benefit their campus experience, build resumes, and make connections. Some participants gained confidence from these experiences, as well as from interactions with other students. Several participants advocated for themselves on policies or speaking out in hope for change. As of fall 2011, two participants had graduated from William Woods University, one transferred to another institution, and four remained enrolled.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

As transfer student enrollments continue to grow across the country, particularly enrollments of students of color, it is important that campuses understand these populations and what contributes to their success (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007; Wellman, 2004). As institutions committed to increasing the degree attainment of students of color search for strategies to assist their work, it is important that they focus on finding out which efforts are most effective (McPherson, 2010). For the most part, the findings in this study support existing literature on transfer students and/or transfer students of color. Most of this previous research was conducted at larger institutions, leaving practitioners and policy makers at smaller institutions with limited research findings to relate to their populations. The present study contributes to our understanding of the small college experience of transfer students of color. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the results of the current study as they relate to the study's conceptual framework and past research. I conclude the chapter with implications for theory, research, and practice.

Relationship to Theory and Literature

In this study, I found support for the revision of Tinto's original theory on student departure, developed by Braxton et al. (2004), as being relevant for assessing persistence for traditional age and residential transfer students of color. As a reminder, a diagram of the theory is found in Appendix A. The following sections are organized by the themes of the conceptual framework.

Communal Potential

Braxton et al., (2004) expressed concern for minority students' potential for community at residential institutions. In addition, Tinto (1993) speculated that at smaller institutions, it may be harder for racial and ethnic minority students to find social enclaves. These were true for the participants in this study as well. Most traditional age participants in this study faced challenges finding connections and communities on campus, but were eventually able to socially integrate themselves more than the non-traditional age commuter participants. Data in this study revealed that for some traditional age participants communities could be found among athletic teams, with other student athletes, and for some within academic student organizations. Participants felt that the institution catered to mostly White first-year students therefore most connections were the result of participants seeking these interactions themselves.

Braxton et al. (2004) indicate that for minority students "whose cultures of origin do not resemble the dominant culture of their college, a cultural enclave... of students who share the same culture must be found. If not, such minority students will not perceive that potential for community exists" (p. 33). Several participants found social enclaves in student organizations, especially within organizations related to their academic pursuits. Evidence of this was found in La-Keysha's narrative. She indicated she knew few other African American students, but that her involvement in academic clubs was a major reason she returned each semester. For her, the community came from the organizations, not race. Ayana, would have liked to see more diversity at the

institution; however, she found communities in several student organizations, at her on-campus work-study job, and although it took awhile, within her residence hall. Her connections were mostly outside of her race which for her was not ideal. She indicated she would have liked to have more connections with other African American students. Dana had also joined an academic club as a way of seeking more involvement in the community. She enjoys the additional involvement but admits that her closest connection in this club is another African American student. It may be that for residential transfer students of color at small predominately White institutions, the ability to find communities is hindered, but not completely stymied by institutional size and the number of enrolled students of color.

For La-Keysha, Ayana, and to some extent Hayden, communities extended beyond race. Dana and Darryl also had immediate communities with their teammates who were not all the same race. Research has found that students of color at predominately White institutions are less likely to perceive themselves as socially integrated into the dominate campus culture as much as White students (Gloria et al., 1999; Hawkins & Larabee, 2009; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Tinto, 1993). This was probably true for participants in this study. Of the five traditional age participants, only La-Keysha's communities and connections were all predominately White. While the other four had found some communities outside of their race, these connections had not come without their challenges.

Participants did indicate they felt that the campus culture was developed around traditional White students, partly due to the emphasis on Greek life.

Fraternity and sorority membership is promoted during orientation and was seen as an institutional priority by the participants. It is no surprise that research has shown that minority students are significantly underrepresented in these organizations at predominately White institutions (Sidanius, Levin, Van Laar, & Sinclair, 2004).

The importance of the community provided by athletics for three of the participants was substantial. Transfer athletes of color fully expected to find, and did find, an immediate community with their team. Teammates were not all the same race. Hayden, Darryl, and Dana, the athletes in this study, all indicated that without the connection to their sport, their experiences would have been even harder and for some lonelier. In addition, these transfer athletes connected with athletes from other sports of the same race who were not teammates. This was particularly true for Dana and Darryl whose closest connections were their teammates and other African American athletes from other sports. In spite of there possibly being fewer opportunities for involvement and a small population of students of color at William Woods University, residential and traditional age participants had found and relied on these communities.

The same, however, was not true for the commuter participants of non-traditional age. These students were less likely to find common communities of any kind. Braxton et al. (2004) had not designed this theory with commuter students in mind, so it was perhaps no surprise that these participants saw less potential for communal potential. Current literature (Braxton & McClendon, 2001-2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Townsend & Wilson, 2006) indicated

that living in residence halls can provide opportunities for community membership. In this study, as in other research, residential students did not necessarily find communities in the residence halls, but living on campus did provide more opportunities for campus interactions and involvement. Both Jaliah and Taleisha indicated their commuter status and age impacted their experience. Both felt the campus was more committed to traditional age residential students. Tinto's (1993) original theory supports what these students experienced. He believed that residential campuses were designed for students whose main and perhaps only responsibility is being a student. Interactions on residential campuses are designed to occur in residence halls, dining halls, meeting places, and within the social programs; therefore, commuters who often have college as one of several priorities struggle finding community in this environment (Tinto, 1993).

Other research also indicates that both commuters and transfers often feel marginalized when universities do not consider students on the non-traditional path (Kodama, 2002). Townsend and Wilson (2009) found varying results on the importance of social integration and transfer students' ability and/or willingness to pursue social activities on campus. For some transfers in their study, the importance of social integration was mitigated by the decision to live off campus and the need for employment. The same was true for the commuter participants in this study, although both indicated they still would have liked to have seen more opportunities relevant to them.

Proactive Social Adjustment and Psychosocial Engagement

When students with proactive social adjustment skills are able to adjust to the demands and pressures of a college environment, they become more socially integrated and persist (Braxton et al., 2004). Braxton et al. (2004), in the revision of Tinto's theory, indicate that students with proactive social adjustment strategies realize they need to learn the norms, values, and behaviors of the new community and respond in a positive way to these new and potentially stressful environments. Participants in this study utilized different strategies but were proactive in their approaches. Hayden indicated he had never had a problem meeting people and was willing to seek interaction with others. He felt as long as other students did not disrespect him, he would be fine making friends.

Darryl, talks about "learning the ropes" from an African American upperclassman like him and meeting people through teammates. For Darryl, having a connection to someone like him and other students reaching out to him gave him the courage to invest in his experience by stepping out himself and being nice back to other students. Jailah and Taleisha, the non-traditional commuters, were open to seeking out experiences with other students, but opportunities for this were limited. Jailah studied some with other students in her major when she could find academically serious students and both she and Taleisha interacted with faculty outside of the classroom. Participation in the LEAD program also forced all participants to engage, at least passively, in programs offered through LEAD.

According to Braxton et al. (2004), the psychological energy students invest in their social integration is considered psychosocial engagement and takes a considerable amount of energy. Students who invest in social opportunities that result in positive experiences are more likely to perceive themselves as socially integrated within the campus (Braxton et al., 2004). La-Keysha, Ayana, and Dana all invested time and energy in academic clubs on campus, which resulted in increased perceptions of social integration for each of them. For La-Keysha, this investment was substantial as she invested a considerable amount of time and energy into these experiences through additional leadership positions. Darryl and Hayden's investment was mostly in their athletic experience, but neither had the option to go home on the weekends so they did invest time in social activities with students at both William Woods and Westminster College.

Braxton et al.'s (2004) revision of Tinto's theory as it pertains to psychosocial engagement and proactive social adjustment is not as visible for the two commuters because they found less opportunity for social interaction with peers. According to Astin (1984), this energy investment not only includes the types of social interactions referred to above (e.g., meeting new people, socializing and joining student organizations), but also time and energy on studying and seeking out involvement with faculty and other students. This academic investment was where the non-traditional age commuter participants were able to invest psychosocial energy. Both Jailah and Taleisha were committed to academic success and did seek out interactions with faculty. However, their schedules and campus opportunities did not allow for

involvement in academic organizations or provide opportunities for casual socializing with peers. These participants were not able to and at times chose not to, invest enough energy into the experience to feel socially integrated, making this part of the theory not relevant for them.

Institutional Commitment to the Welfare of Students

The impact of participants' perceptions of institutional commitment to the welfare of students on their persistence was not as evident in the data. This theme refers to the institution's concern for the growth and development of its students (Braxton et al., 2004). In other words, the more students felt the institution cared, the more likely they would be to integrate and persist. Data in this study showed that in spite of not feeling a commitment from the institution, six of seven participants still persisted. Participants did feel a commitment from faculty, which is one indicator of institutional commitment. This was where William Woods had excelled in their commitment to participants in this study. All but one participant had experienced positive interactions with faculty. For some, this support came in the classroom or with academic organizations, for others having access to faculty in their offices allowed for meaningful interactions. Several appreciated that their academic advisor was also their professor. For Dana, the only participant to indicate she had not found connections with faculty, the interactions with faculty at William Woods had not been as meaningful as the ones at her previous institution. While she did not mention any specific negative experiences she had just hoped for more of a

connection. Unfortunately, beyond faculty connections, students indicated they did not feel an institutional commitment.

It appears that the lack of institutional commitment to the welfare of students was not a strong enough theme to deter participants' persistence, but I would argue that further research targeted at understanding students perceptions of the institution's commitment to the welfare of students would be needed before the specific impact of this could be determined. Participants may not be consciously aware of what institutional commitment is and what it feels like within their experience. In addition, the interview language and structure I used in this of the study may not have been conducive to capturing this part of the student's experiences. Determining how best to access these types of perceptions remains a challenge. It may be that increasing students' perception of the level of institutional concern may result in increased social integration and improved experiences for these students.

Ability to Pay

Ability to pay was a concern for at least six of the participants. Research suggests that ability to pay impacts students adjustment and persistence but its direct impact on persistence is not fully understood (Cabrera et al., 1990). The specific impact of ability to pay on students' integration and persistence was not a specific focus of the study. Yet it was clear for two participants that in addition to the stress of paying for their education at William Woods, they also believed their lower socio-economic status impacted their integration with faculty and students in some situations. For athletes in the study, the opportunity to use their talent

to pay for their education was the reason they were attending and persisting at William Woods University. Two athletes referred to their sport as a job, which might mean that without the job they may not persist at this institution.

Institutional Integrity

The final theme of the theory, institutional integrity, represents the degree to which students believe an institution is true to its mission (Braxton & Hirschy, 2004). Braxton et al. (2004) indicate that this is revealed when actions of administrators, faculty, and staff do not conflict with the mission and goals of the college. In addition, research indicates that students arrive at college with images and expectations of what to expect, and when these expectations are met, student satisfaction and engagement with the institution is increased (Braxton & McClendon, 2001/2002; Hartley & Morpew, 2008; Hellend et al., 2001/2002; Tinto, 1993). None of the participants transferred to William Woods expecting to join a large population of students of color. Six participants arrived fully expecting to have to navigate the experience of attending a predominately White institution. Taleisha indicated she did not really give diversity much thought until she arrived, but given the location of the institution, she was not shocked at the limited diversity. A couple of others said they knew the institution was predominately White, but were surprised that what little racial diversity there was appeared to be limited to just African American and White students. There are additional areas related to institutional integrity (e.g. fairness in policies, true to mission) that did not emerge in this study but could be considered in future research.

Self-efficacy

Braxton et al. (2004) draw on Bandura's (1997) definition of self-efficacy, which involves the belief that an individual has the ability and skills to engage in a course of action and influence a particular outcome. Other researchers (e.g., Gloria et al., 1999; Rodgers & Summer, 2008) believe that for minority students attending predominately White institutions, self-efficacy does impact persistence and can be a useful tool for understanding minority student persistence.

Participants in this study all believed they had the ability and skills to finish their degree at William Woods. They also believed they had improved their experience at William Woods by deliberately engaging in such things as joining clubs, accepting leadership positions on campus, engaging with faculty, and having the courage to meet new people. For the non-traditional students, these decisions involved more investment in academic work and experiences with faculty than the residential students who engaged in both academic and social investments.

Rodgers and Summers (2008) believe self-efficacy is found in specific motivational tendencies, such as academic goals and values. They believe that African American students at predominately White institutions would not perceive social support from others, including faculty. Results of my study were mixed in that several participants at times felt disconnected from particular faculty (Darryl, Ayana, and Dana) yet others felt very supported. In spite of some negative interactions with faculty, Darryl and Ayana both mentioned positive interactions with other faculty that were important to them. For Darryl this had come outside of the classroom and for Ayana it involved a research project with a

faculty member. La-Keysha, Jaliah, and Taleisha all found the support of faculty in their major invaluable.

Bean and Eaton (2000) believe that a student with positive self-efficacy “returns to the environment to reinvest in his/her success in the academic and social milieu of the higher-education environment” (p. 58). Evidence of self-efficacy was found in participants’ ability to navigate their experiences. At times, just completing the transfer process can be seen as a demonstration of self-efficacy. For example, Darryl indicated that prior to attending William Woods he had been out of college altogether. After working a year, he realized this was not the path to the future he envisioned so he explored options for returning to school. Participants believed that transferring to William Woods University was a decision that would impact their future goals.

For some, self-efficacy was seen in investments in particular experiences, such as seeking out leadership positions, purposefully engaging in social activities, changing majors, and, in one case, driving over 200 miles round trip to attend class. Other research on students of color and self-efficacy (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Torres 2006) has established that students of color who were able to create cognitive maps on how to succeed were able to make the necessary adjustments to become successful. These data support their conclusion. Hayden and Jaliah both navigated over 6 semesters at William Woods and graduated in May 2011; four other participants remain enrolled.

Implications for Theory & Research

My study focused specifically on participants who were persisting at the time of the study. One participant did choose to transfer at the end of the spring 2011 semester; following up with this participant may add to our understanding of transfer student of color experiences. These are challenging data to capture; however, this side of the story would create a more complete picture of the transfer experiences of students of color.

In addition, further study on the self-efficacy of students who choose to depart and those who persist would help clarify the role of self-efficacy in the experiences of transfer students of color. For example, had I not interviewed Ayana, evidence of her self-efficacy would have gone unnoticed; Ayana would have been just another student who failed to persist. Institutions simply looking at their transfer statistics cannot fully understand the experiences of their students. A longitudinal study of students while at an institution would allow for a more in-depth look at self-efficacy, adjustment strategies, and student experiences over time. Although this study included participants at various stages of their college completion, studying students throughout their experience would increase our understanding of the full experience of these students. Further understanding is also needed to determine whether there are different forms and levels of self-efficacy. It may also be that there are different ways of utilizing self-efficacy. A more in-depth look at self-efficacy may uncover ways to increase or promote self-efficacy as a way to help students persist.

This study found some evidence of the impact of ability to pay on students' experiences and persistence. Institutions committed to increasing their student of color population need more information on the financial resources and options for transfer students of color. More research is needed on the financial challenges students of color face at small private institutions. This research needs to include implications beyond just the ability to pay for their education. There is more to learn from the stories of La-Keysha and Darryl and the implications of socioeconomic status on their experiences.

I found strong support for the argument that residential students' commitment to the institution and persistence was influenced by their ability to find common communities for socialization, their proactive social adjustment strategies, psychosocial engagement, and self-efficacy. Persistence of the participants was less influenced by their perception of the institutional commitment to the welfare of students. There was some support for the impact of ability to pay on social integration and persistence, but institutional integrity did not emerge as being influential; the lack of evidence for these themes could be due to the fact that neither theme was a specific focus of the research for this study. Overall, however, the participants' experiences support much of what is found in the revision of Tinto's theory and self-efficacy. Braxton et al., (2004) believe their revision of Tinto's theory is relevant for residential campuses and these results seem to support their claim particularly for residential students.

The relevance of Tinto's theory for commuters, specifically non-traditional age commuters, attending residential colleges has less support. These

participants expressed having less opportunity for communal potential because of their off campus living situation, outside employment, limited access to both other students of color and students their age, and the institution's lack of commitment to providing opportunities unique to their needs. Less communal potential left these participants with fewer opportunities for proactive social adjustment, resulting in low reported levels of psychosocial engagement. However, despite the limited experiences and investment in the campus social environment of the two commuters in this study, one participant has graduated and the other remains enrolled.

The revised theory used as a lens in this study was intended for residential campuses; therefore, further research on the experiences of transfer commuters of color attending residential campuses would be useful. This study revealed that participants who were non-traditional age still persisted in spite of not attaining the social integration Braxton et al. (2004) believe necessary for persistence. Increased understanding of these participants' experiences can lead to opportunities for small residential institutions to expand their missions and support the non-traditional commuter student as well. There is also a need for research on traditional age commuter students of color. Commuter students agreeing to participate in this study happened to be non-traditional. Additional research on traditional age commuters would contribute to the understanding of their experiences.

This study represents the experiences of transfer students of color at William Woods University who agreed to participate. Many of their experiences

were supported by previous literature perhaps allowing for some transferability to other small, private, residential institutions; however, this study should be duplicated at other small institutions as way to both continue to test and expand empirical research on students attending smaller institutions.

Implications for Practice

The undergraduate campus program at William Woods University has long served the traditional, residential, predominately White population, and social programs may not have evolved with the demographics of today's potential college students. I recommend that William Woods, and other similar institutions that have historically enrolled predominately White, traditional students, evaluate their services and programs and more deliberately consider the needs of transfer students of color. Both traditional and non-traditional age participants indicated that they feel many programs, such as orientation and social programs are designed more for traditional students with the implication being young, traditional age, White students.

Nationally, most states are experiencing declines in their population of traditional age college attending students and as increasing numbers of non-traditional age students return to or enter college, institutions will need to rethink their traditional ways of providing programs and services (Finney, 2010). Some of these students may be returning through the community college system. Campuses that have long served the traditional age, White, and first-year residential student need to consider the demographic profile of today's prospective college students. These demographics may be the key to sustaining

enrollments in the future. Articulation agreements and/or partnerships with community colleges may prove to be significant pieces of the enrollment strategies for institutions like William Woods in the future.

President Obama has set a national agenda of increasing the number of college educated Americans (Baun, 2010). For this to be a reality, enrollment gains are not going to come from “affluent white young people who are already so likely to attend college-particularly four year colleges....” (Baun, 2010, p. 25). Equally as important, is helping adults returning to or just entering college persist to graduation (Baum, 2010). Institutions should ask themselves whether their services and programs have evolved with their population.

Specifically, William Woods University needs to consider how they serve the non-traditional student on campus tours, at orientation events, and in providing opportunities for engagement. In reviewing the orientation schedules from the past several years, the majority of events would not be of interest or even value to non-traditional students. A breakfast for non-traditional students was added to the fall orientation schedule, which was a start, but continued support and programming will be necessary to increase their engagement throughout their experience. I anticipate that this will look much different than programs and support currently offered by the Office of Student Life. Increased support for traditional transfer students of color is necessary as well.

I recommend that William Woods consider how they structure orientation and social opportunities with regard to students’ heritage. Both non-traditional and traditional students of color need to see themselves represented in programs

and activities. Tinto (1993) suggested that residential institutions that cater to young recent high school graduates need to consider their non-traditional students, which he refers to as adult learners, yet 18 years later it appears these institutions have not been paying attention. He believed non-traditional age students also experience marginalization in traditional programs as they juggle college and other responsibilities (Tinto, 1993).

William Woods University and perhaps similar institutions need to consider how to support transfer students of color who are not athletes. These students are on their own to find relationships and communities that link them to the institution. This is not meant to imply that transfer athletes of color do not need support. Data in this study showed that the athletes felt they would have an initial community with teammates when they arrived; whereas non-athletes were trying to find that first initial community on their own. Options here might include educating faculty and peer mentors on the challenges these particular students face. La-Keysha and Ayana had indicated that after orientation they felt left on their own. At William Woods, these numbers are small enough that faculty and/or peer mentors could be assigned to follow up with these students as they progress, or advisor training could include more information on assisting these students. All the participants in this study who had been able to find smaller communities and social interaction had done so without much assistance from the institution. William Woods's faculty and staff should take a more active role in assisting these students with opportunities for engagement, either through personal attention or specific programming.

While this study showed that transfer students of color found William Woods through athletic recruitment processes and their own searches for specific degrees, those responsible for admissions should consider recruitment strategies for increasing the representation of these students on campus. Why are admission recruiters not at community colleges and college fairs finding more of these students? At the institutional level, William Woods should consider a strategic plan for growing the enrollment numbers of both non-traditional age and traditional age transfer students of color. National demographics currently indicate significant college enrollment growth among students of color and community college students (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010, 2011). Increasing the number of students from these demographics can help the institution meet enrollment goals. In addition, Dana, when asked what she would tell perspective transfer students of color considering William Woods, said:

I would say there are not many of us around here, but I would also tell them they should come here so there can be more of us here. I would tell them this is not a bad place to be. I liked it.

Recruiting more transfer students of color would help William Woods reach enrollment goals and improve experiences for other students of color. Currently at William Woods, in the traditional program 90% of the population is Caucasian (personal communication, October 8, 2011). Ayana, Dana, and Jaliah indicated that having more students of color would potentially improve their own experience.

Increasing enrollment numbers of students of color may lead to opportunities for improving the campus climate for these students; however, this is not the only way to address the issue. Institutional climate and processes within a community can impact perceptions students of color have about the campus community. As indicated earlier in the literature review, challenges associated with succeeding in college are even more stressful for minority students at predominately White institutions (Swail et al., 2003). There are programs and actions institutions can control that can be designed to assist students in navigating college rituals with which they are unfamiliar (Rendon et al., 2000). Specific programs and actions that William Woods could consider implementing are described below.

Currently at William Woods University, the Director of Multicultural Affairs is not a full-time position but should be. This can increase both support for students of color as well as educational opportunities for all students. In addition, both budgeting and resources for this position should be evaluated through some type of self-study. Consideration should be given to designating space for students of color to gather and meet. Having a multicultural space may increase students' perception of the institutions commitment to their needs and welfare. Additional cultural programming through events, discussions, and speakers can increase cultural awareness for all students.

Most participants indicated they had not experienced racially hostile environments at William Woods, instead they implied a culture of ignorance when it came to race. The Student Life staff and faculty at the institution need to

consider options for combating the ignorance. The mission of William Woods indicates: “An independent voice in higher education, William Woods University distinguishes itself as a student-centered and professions-oriented university committed to the values of ethics, self-liberation, and lifelong education of students in the world community.” In supporting their mission to be student-centered and committed to the values of ethics, self-liberation and the education of students in the world community, it would be important to address ignorance in students understanding of other races, ethnic groups, and cultures. The LEAD program would be one starting point for dialogue. Discussions, speakers, and programs designed to challenge students current ways of thinking on diversity would be one way avenue for education. In addition, at William Woods one of the objectives of the current common studies curriculum is diversity (William Woods University, 2011). Results of this study should be shared with faculty overseeing the common studies curriculum to generate discussion on the potential for addressing these issues in the classroom as well.

Residential institutions, large and small, are often designed to engage students on campus and create unique living and learning environments (Cohen, 1998; Tinto, 1993). The residential life staff at William Woods needs to capitalize on missed opportunities for students of various races to interact in the residence halls. A starting point for this may be in the training of student staff working in the residence halls, hosting more cultural events in residence halls, and considering more deliberate ways to draw more students to residential programs in the halls. La-Keysha indicated that student staffs try to host events, but no one

attends. These efforts need to be evaluated and supported by upper level staff in the residential life office. Participants valued interactions with faculty, therefore residential life staff should consider ways to include faculty in residential programming as a way to add value to residence hall programs.

Traditional-age and residential students appreciated the connections they had established with Westminster College students of color. William Woods's Student Life staff should consider specific efforts to collaborate with the staff at Westminster College to offer joint social and/or cultural programming for students of color. Traditional students saw the connection with Westminster College students as a positive way to increase their social network. These interactions were often at local pubs and off campus apartments; promoting collaborative events on campus may increase the opportunities for these interactions and possibly increase students' perception of the institutions commitment to the welfare of students.

William Woods University needs to evaluate their commitment to students of color and make this clear to students. Participants sensed no institutional commitment to their success. A self-study on the issue may reveal there is more being done than participants realize or the institution may find shortfalls in their delivery of services to these students. The self-study, should include evaluation of staffing, budget resources, and programming commitments to these students. Several participants commented on how much they appreciated telling their stories. Included in this analysis, William Woods should develop opportunities for transfer students of color to meet with staff and faculty to share their

experiences. There is much to be learned from these students' stories that would help direct resources for improving their experiences and, ultimately, their persistence.

Finally, I should share the results of this study with faculty, staff, including coaches, and perhaps students at William Woods. The voices of these participants should not be shelved when my study is complete. Using the participants' stories to educate the William Woods community about the unique experiences of this small population may inspire faculty and staff to consider their role in the success of these students. If faculty understood the impact of their interactions with these students, I believe more would make efforts to reach out to these students. The same is true for Student Life staff and athletic coaches. Results of the study may create "ah ha" moments for staff members who perhaps do not realize they have designed orientation and other programs around the needs of a particular majority of the campus. Deliberate consideration needs to be given to making sure all populations are represented and served appropriately.

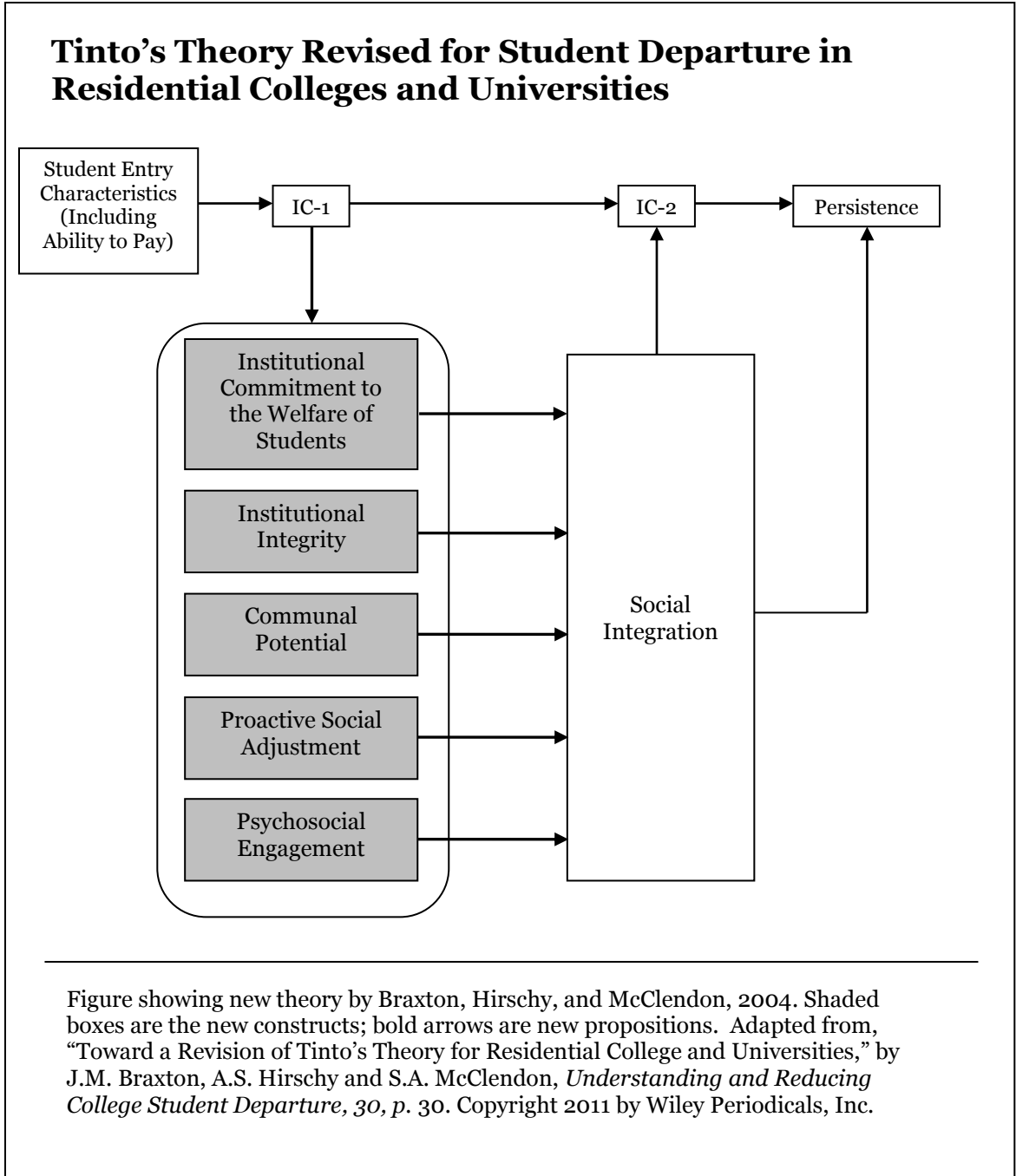
Summary

Braxton et al., (2004) introduced their revision of Tinto's theory and suggested it be tested at residential colleges and with minority student populations. This study did just that. In addition, this study presents the voices of students attending a small private institution, an often unresearched population. Results reinforce past research findings, which support the importance of students finding smaller communities for connections and socialization regardless of the size of the institution. Typically these communities involved

students of the same race; however, this was not exclusively the case. Participants engaged with academic organizations had done so knowing these experiences were opportunities to expand their networks on campus.

Transfer students themselves are a resilient group of students, as they have, at least once, made the decision to navigate the process of moving from one institution to another in search of an education (Tinto, 1993). This decision alone was a bold act of self-efficacy. Whether it was athletics, academics, or one close friend that led them to William Woods, the participants had confidence in their ability to complete a degree and believed they controlled the outcome of their experience at William Woods. Each had or was navigating barriers related to ignorance, finding connections, commuting, and financial support and, for two participants, age. All participants implemented their own strategies for integration, which varied from active involvement in clubs to close academic relationships with faculty. As of fall 2011, one student had transferred, four remained enrolled, and two had graduated. And as Hayden indicated, this meant “trumpets and joy and all types of celebration.”

APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B

E-mail Invitation to Participants

Greetings WWU transfer student,

I am conducting academic research on transfer experiences here at William Woods University; specifically for students who identify as students of color. On your admissions application or in OwlNet you self-identified as a non-Caucasian by checking one of the boxes related to race and ethnicity other than Caucasian. If you indicated “two or more races” you are also included in this e-mail. I am very interested in your experiences as a successful transfer student here at William Woods. This research is being conducted as part of the doctoral dissertation research I am completing at the University of Missouri.

This e-mail is inviting you to participate in one interview designed to be approximately 45 – 75 minutes in length. Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no repercussions for choosing not to participate. Your participation may however; may help the institution improve its policies and processes for transfer students now and in the future.

Your participation in this study is confidential. Your name will not be linked to the data or results. Your actual name will be replaced with a pseudonym and no other personally identifiable information which would link you to the data will be used. Should you agree to participate you may opt out of the study at any time with no repercussions. To volunteer to participate **please contact me at vmitchel@williamwoods.edu or stop by my office in the McNutt campus center by March 11th.** Once I receive your e-mail I will send you a copy of the informed consent and set up an interview time. Interviews will occur after spring break on campus at a time and in a location which is convenient for you.

Please consider participating in this opportunity which may help improve the transfer experiences for future WWU transfer students.

Venita M. Mitchell

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study name: Understanding the Experiences of Students of Color Transferring to a Small Private Institution

Investigator: Venita M Mitchell

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study will inquire about the experiences of students of color who transfer to William Woods University. The specific purpose of the study is to understand and describe the experiences of transfer students of color who are successfully persisting here at WWU.

INFORMATION

As a participant in this study you will be taking part in a 45 – 90 minute audio recorded interview. You will be given the opportunity to review the analysis of your information for accuracy; however, this is not required. While participants reviewing this information would be important to the research, it is not an additional requirement of participation.

RISKS

There is minimal to no risk to you, the participants. You may withdrawal from the study at any time. You are encouraged to be honest and there will be no repercussions for criticism of university processes, faculty or staff. Documents related to this study will be kept off-campus in my home office. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym and the master list which matches your name to the pseudonym will be kept separate from the data.

BENEFITS

This information is being used for dissertation research being conducted for a degree at the University of Missouri-Columbia. A goal of the study is to improve the transfer student experience for students of color at William Woods University. Results of the study will be shared with relevant faculty and staff at the university and may be presented at local and national conferences.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to Venita Mitchell, the primary researcher conducting the study and perhaps one additional person helping transcribe the interviews. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Your name will be removed from transcripts of

the interview and a coded pseudonym will be used instead. All data will be kept for 7 years after the study is complete and will then be destroyed.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for participation in this study; however, to thank you for your time at the end of this interview you will be offered two movie passes to a local theatre. These tickets have been purchased by me and are a thank you for your time.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Venita Mitchell at William Woods University, or [573 592-4239]. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Erin Hansman, Coordinator of the Human Subjects Research Committee, William Woods University at (573) 592-1116, or Dr. Casandra Harper, Dissertation advisor, at harpercas@missouri.edu. For any questions related to the rights of Human Subjects you may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri at 573 882-9585.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. You may also choose to remain in the study but to not answer specific questions. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form and I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX D

Potential Interview Questions

Background and Transfer

- Can you tell me about your previous institution and your decision to transfer from there?
- What made you choose William Woods University and what was your impression when you first arrived on campus?
- What has the transition been like for you?
Prompt: How difficult or smooth was the transfer process?

Institutions Commitment to the Welfare of Students

- What, if any, support have you received from the institution since arriving?
Prompts: advisors, knowledge of policies, tutoring, and faculty help
- As a transfer student of color do you feel that this institution cares about your success (or persistence as a student)? Why or Why not?
- Have you found most of the polices pertaining to you fair and appropriate or not?
-

Experiences, Expectations, Self-efficacy and Social Integration

- What expectations did you have about the social environment/culture here before you arrived?
Prompt: Did you expect to find students from a similar background as you or not?
- Where did these expectations come from?
Prompt: College fair or had you visited campus prior to transferring?
- Have your expectations been reality? Please explain.
- If Residential: Tell me about life in the residence halls?
Prompt: What kind of interactions do you have with other residents in your hall? Have you initiated these interactions?
- Do you have a roommate on campus? If yes, how has this experience been for you?
How easy has it been for you to get along with a roommate?
- If commuter: As a transfer commuter are you on campus for anything other than classes?
- Have you joined any clubs or organizations since arriving on campus?

- What made you take advantage of these opportunities? Or, What has kept you from taking advantage of these opportunities?
- Have you found other connections on campus? How did you get involved with this/these connection(s)?
- Overall how would you describe the social opportunities available to you on this campus? Is this what you expected?

-

More on self-efficacy

- What challenges, if any, do you feel students of color face on this campus?
 - Follow up: How have you managed these challenges?
- Have well have you gotten to know faculty on campus? What about other staff on campus?
- Do you find it easy to initiate conversations and interactions with other people on campus?
- What about other students? Have you found it challenging to meet other students here?
- How much control do you think you have over the social opportunities you have on campus?

Persistence

Do you plan to graduate from this institution? If yes, to what do you most attribute your success here at William Woods? If no, why not?

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VITA

Venita M. Mitchell was born in Farmington, Missouri. She grew up in Richmond, Virginia and calls Virginia home. She attended Ferrum College in Ferrum, Virginia before transferring to Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, where she completed both her Bachelor of Science and Master of Science Degree.

At the completion of her Master's degree, Venita worked at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee as their first Director of Intramural Sports and Sports Information Director. She next worked at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas as the Director of Club Sports. In 1993, she returned to the small college environment as the first Director of Recreational Sports at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. After one year in this position she transitioned to the Director of Student Development and was then promoted to Assistant Dean of Student Development. In this position, she was responsible for programs and staff involved with orientation, a first-year student course, the student judicial process, fraternity and sorority life, and student leadership development.

In 1998, Venita moved to Fulton, Missouri and began work at William Woods University as the Director of Leadership. She served for nine months as the Interim Athletic Director before assuming her current position as Vice President and Dean of Students in 2000. In her current position at William Woods University, she oversees all aspects of a comprehensive student life department at a small residential institution and is a member of the president's executive cabinet.