A Qualitative Examination of the Support Systems Impacting the African American

Student Persistence, Retention and Graduation at a Predominantly White, Research

Extensive, Land-Grant Midwestern University

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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Dr. Jeni Hart, Dissertation Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

Dissertation entitled

A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE SUPPORT SYSTEMS IMPACTING

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT PERSISTENCE, RETENTION AND

GRADUATION AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE, RESEARCH EXTENSIVE,

LAND-GRANT MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Presented by Elijah Andre Thorn, Jr.

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Jeni Hart, Advisor

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Dr. Joe Donaldson

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Dr. Karen Cockrell

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Dr. Lisa Zanetti

DEDICATION

It has been a lifelong dream of mine to complete a terminal degree in a subject area that allowed me to engage scholarship, research, presentation and practice that serves students who are first-generation, low-income and underrepresented racial minorities, who attended predominantly white institutions. Working with students who have these characteristics is important because they describe attributes that normally serve as barriers to college completion. However, I know that there are exemplars or students who when confronted with these challenges, tap deep into themselves, as well as familial and institutional support systems to achieve success in college. This was my reality as I embarked upon my college journey. As a young boy, growing up in the Marble Manor Housing Projects in Las Vegas my experiences there and my desire to improve my circumstances and those of my family, provided the "hunger" in me and helped me to develop the determination that has allowed me to get to this point in my career.

I could not have completed this journey without the support and encouragement from my family, my wife, Stephanie White Thorn, Esq., my mama, Mrs. Shirley Ann Johnson, my two sisters, Pamela Green and Latrice Feaster, along with my nieces and nephews AJ, Mahogany, Mauricia, Jaden, Kellen, and Yakini. I do hope I set a good example for you to follow. I also wanted to acknowledge my extended family (aunts uncles and cousins) in Nevada, California, Missouri and Louisiana.

I still remember my mama collecting business cards from staff and administrators at the University of Nevada, Reno as I participated in the orientation program. At the end of the day, she presented me with a stack of cards and said to me "now baby, I never

went to college, so if you need help, don't call me…call these people here, they are here to help you." My mama's words resonate with me as work with students every day.

My former colleagues, lifelong mentors and fellow CSD'ers in the University of Nevada, Counseling and Educational Psychology (College Student Development) track, thank you all for the counseling foundation. My mentor Dr. Mary Finn Maples, Dr. Newt Maples, Dr. Steve Maples, Dr. Melissa Choroszy, Dr. Linwood Vereen and Dr. Edil Torres-Rivera. I also want to send a shout out to Dr. Paul Mitchell and Dr. Patricia Miltenberger who supported my personal and professional development.

I would especially like to thank my loving and supportive wife of almost twenty years, Stephanie White Thorn, Esq. We started taking classes in ELPA and had the goal of finishing together, just as we did when we completed our Master's degrees. Well you kept your end of the bargain finishing Law School, but it took me a "little" longer. Thanks for putting up with me, my relocation to remote locations, our 1 ½ year of living apart from each other. I love you more because the sacrifices we have made for our careers have not altered our love and devotion to each other. You are my moon and my stars and I could not have made it without your love and support!

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ABSTRACT

American Student Persistence, Retention and Graduation at a Predominantly White, Research Extensive, Land-Grant Midwestern University Completion of a college degree serves as an necessity for many individuals who want to transform their lives, change their socio-economic status and have a better chance of living the "American Dream". For African Americans students, completing a college degree can be challenging due to some significant academic and institutional barriers. The current research is replete with studies highlighting why students leave higher educational institutions. However, African American students throughout this nation persist and graduate despite some seemingly insurmountable odds. Through the use of Critical Race Theory and phenomenology as the methodological framework, this study examined the lived experiences of African American students' academic and social engagement and how they have impacted the retention, persistence and graduation of participants. Purposeful sampling procedures were employed to recruit thirteen participants and the researcher adhered to Seidman's (1998) model of a three-interview sequence and arrived at five overarching themes that emerged. A) Not my first Choice, B) Fitting in and being isolated, C) Racial Aggressions, D) Resilience/Personal strength and/or "I have something to prove", and E) What's missing. A Conclusion and recommendations for research practice and policy is also discussed within the context of this study.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Chapter Introduction

According to Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1933), the forces that contributed to the development of African Americans' participation in higher education should be viewed within an historical context. He argued

> How we have arrived at the present state of affairs can be understood only by studying the forces effective in the development of Negro education since it was systematically undertaken immediately after emancipation. To point out merely the defects as they appear today will be of little benefit to the present and future generations. These things must be viewed in their historical setting. The conditions of today have been determined by what has taken place in the past, and in a careful study of this history we may see more clearly the great theatre of events in which the Negro has played a part. We may understand better what his role has been and how well he has functioned in it (Woodson, 1933, p. 9).

The history of African Americans in American higher education can be traced back to before the Civil War. This represented a time in which segregation and racism permeated issues of access to higher education for African Americans before emancipation. Fleming (1984) suggested before the Civil War, African Americans were forbidden from receiving a college education that was accessible to Whites. Fleming (1984) concluded that during this turbulent time in history, it was assumed that allowing African Americans the opportunity to learn in the nation's institutions of higher education would dismantle the advantages Whites earned through slavery and disrupt the constructed racial and social divisions between Blacks and Whites. Although creating a future inequitable educational system was a goal, there were Blacks who had achieved a college education prior to the end of slavery.

According to Lucas (1994), there was evidence that "no more than twenty-seven others were listed in the roster of all black graduates, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation" (p. 158). Following the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, a "separate, but equal" doctrine was the law, which essentially created separate institutions strictly for the training of newly freed slaves. Goodchild and Wechsler (1997) described "an American Compromise as northern educational leaders invoked the ideas of Booker T. Washington and allowed southern politicians and administrators to establish a racially separate and unequal system" (p. xxxi).

Under this system, the second Morrill Land-Grant act of 1890 created a *de facto* system of segregation under which junior colleges (what are now called community colleges) and land-grant universities were created specifically for African Americans. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 also was instrumental in creating Agricultural and Mechanical colleges for Blacks by the turn of the century (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). This act provided a venue for Blacks to be educated at state-funded (public) institutions. During this time, and separate from the Morrill Act, Oberlin College followed the teachings of renowned abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1846) when it opened its doors to Blacks and provided educational opportunities for "the oppressed of every color in every clime" (p. 138) long before it was popular to do so.

There were three major movements that precipitated the rise in African Americans' participation in higher education. According to Anderson (1997), Negro philanthropic organizations, missionary philanthropic organizations, and industrial philanthropic foundations all contributed to the financial support of Black institutions of higher education. Negro philanthropic organizations, including religious denominations

such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), formed the creation of Black colleges and universities. Missionary philanthropic organizations according to Anderson (1997) "rallied their colleagues to support classical liberal education for Black Americans as a means to achieve racial equality in civil and political life" (p. 433). The primary organization created for this type of philanthropy was the American Missionary Association (AMA), which created colleges for newly freed people. Examples of these types of institutions include Fisk University, Dillard University, Talladega College, and Tugaloo College.

Industrial philanthropic foundations were created by wealthy individuals for the sole purpose of developing a few select institutions to educate Blacks in higher education (Anderson, 1997). These foundations also debated the role of education and liberal arts training as they related to larger issues of Black political and social life. These philanthropic foundations included the General Education Board, Anna T. Jeanes Foundation, Phelps-Stokes Fund, the Carnegie Foundation, and Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund; and all subscribed to the Hampton-Tuskegee program intended to provide African Americans industrial training, which focused on manual labor. These organizations provided the necessary training and funding to develop secondary and post-secondary opportunities for Blacks in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Another milestone in the development of African Americans' access to higher education took place in 1954. *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* (1954) provided the impetus for the African American presence in American higher education. Before this ruling, Black students who wished to attend college tended to enroll at religiously based institutions such as Oberlin College, or at Historically Black Colleges or Universities

(HBCU). This landmark decision resulted in public colleges and universities "opening" their enrollments to Black students and integrating white campuses and can be identified as the single most important event that resulted in the integration of American higher education (Lucas, 1994).

Despite increased access into higher education for African American students over time, retention, persistence and graduation rates for this population were not equal to those of white students. Even more recently throughout the 1990s, the nation's college dropout rates for African Americans were 20-25% higher than for white students. In fact, 70% of African American students attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) did not complete their degrees, compared to 20% of African American students attending HBCUs (Davis et al., 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 1992; Steele, 1999). The gaps in African American students' educational attainment or graduation from PWIs pose significant challenges for students, college campuses and higher education in general. In addition, more needs to be done to explain the phenomenon that contributes to this gap in achievement for our nation's African American college students; and consequently, institutions need to be accountable for shrinking this gap once the institutional and systemic explanations have been identified.

Statement of the Problem

The *Brown vs. Board of Education* desegregation case, along with race-conscious admissions and financial aid policies have helped to increase the number of African American students admitted into American colleges and universities. However, this increase in African Americans admitted has not translated to successful academic completion of college degrees. According to an American Council on Education ([ACE],

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2005) study, *Minorities in Higher Education*, 59 % of white students graduate within 6 years of enrolling in college, whereas the graduation rate for African Americans is 38%.

When looking specifically at PWIs, Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) have suggested that African American students experience a high degree of social isolation, alienation and overt racism. These findings, suggest environmental issues associated with socialization and alienation among African American students contribute to lower graduation rates of African Americans as compared to white students.

Parker and Scott (1985) stated that African American students often feel as if they are uninvited guests in a strange land when they describe their experiences at a PWI. These student experiences have contributed to feelings of discomfort and alienation and to their decision to leave the institution. Other research studies indicated that African American students who do not sufficiently establish supportive communities at PWIs are more prone to experience social isolation, uneasiness and stress, which can lead to attrition (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Gossett, Cuyjet & Cockriel, 1998; Lang & Ford 1992; Ponterotto, 1990; Sailes, 1993).

According to Tinto (1993), the consequences of this continuing exodus of African Americans who depart from higher education is not trivial, either for the individuals who leave or for the institutions they left. He also argued the more students' norms, values and beliefs were congruent or aligned with the institution, the more likely students are to become academically and socially integrated into the educational experience. However, it is worth noting that Guiffrida (2004) has questioned the applicability of social integration research on minority students at PWIs.

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Because of the complexities of student attributes, combined with institutional barriers, there is no clear and agreed-upon understanding of causes and cures of student attrition. Tinto (2006-2007) clearly advanced his ideas about possible causes of attrition by stating "knowing why students leave does not tell us, at least directly, why students persist" (p. 6). Therefore more research needs to be conducted in an effort to understand how other influences such as high school experiences and family support contribute to persistence in college. Although the issues mentioned are not all-encompassing, research surrounding why students persist might be useful in teasing out the complexities and creating an increased understanding of subtle, but important, factors contributing to minority student persistence at a PWI.

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

I used Critical Race Theory (CRT) throughout this research as the lens to view student experiences. According to Schneider (2005), Critical Race Theory practitioners believe that "race is an ideological and social construct that serves as a tool of oppression" (p. 3). CRT attempts to "re-value" the notion of race by emphasizing the voices and re-telling the experiences of people of color. By providing a counter-story to the narratives that tend to dominate reality, the CRT researcher challenges the status quo and shares the stories of people of color in terms that might be less appeasing to Whites and others from the dominant culture. Therefore, by utilizing this approach I was able to give credibility and life to the narratives of those student voices often marginalized on a predominantly white campus.

While conducting this research, a guiding principle was the work of Ladson-Billings (2000); she concluded "critical race theory framework in my scholarship is

intimately linked to my understanding of the political and personal stake I have in the education of Black children" (p. 272). This meant that all aspects of my life were invested in this type of research, for example that of a parent, community member and of a Black person. Thus, my lived experiences were crucial elements in my investigation and understanding. Finally the goal of CRT was to take corrective actions against these oppressive structures by unapologetically challenging the scholarship that dehumanizes and depersonalizes students of color. This was a major contribution of research using CRT, and one I intended to incorporate.

Purpose of this Study

This study sought to examine the experiences of African American undergraduate students who utilized support systems at a predominantly white, Midwestern, Land Grant, research university. Because multiple studies highlight that African American students who do not sufficiently establish supportive communities at PWIs become more prone to experience social isolation, uneasiness and stress, which can lead to attrition, (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Gossett, Cuyjet & Cockriel, 1998; Lang & Ford 1992; Ponterotto, 1990; Sailes, 1993), it was important to examine the extent to which these students have used these familial and on-campus support systems. The extent to which we can understand students' utilization of these support systems may be useful in terms of determining the influences various support systems have had on student retention, persistence and graduation.

This study also explored the role these support systems played in students' collegiate experiences. This reflexive and narrative process provided the host institution

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descriptive data from students' lived experiences, which was beneficial toward changing or improving the environmental or climate issues for certain groups of students.

Research Questions

This qualitative study examined the experiences of African American students' who were involved in a variety of support systems, both on and off campus, and how this involvement contributed to persistence toward graduation. Several questions drive this research: (a) How do African American students perceive the totality of experiences at a predominantly white, Midwestern, Land Grant, research university?; and (b) What role, if any, do institutional and community support systems play in those students' collegiate experiences, including persistence toward graduation?

Design of Study

I conducted a phenomenological study, bounded by one research university. According to Geertz (1979), qualitative research of this nature emphasizes the voice, experiences and culture of the participants. Kuh and Andreas (1991) supported the practice of qualitative methods in the field of student affairs. This research approach provided more description about student experiences and served to balance the overwhelming amount of quantitative research available within student affairs, particularly related to persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) acknowledged that "the research methodologies have almost exclusively been quantitative and positivistic in their orientation" (p. 632). Hence, there was evidence for the need for this type of narrative examination of students on college campuses. Finally, Kuh, Whitt and Shedd (1987) suggested higher education professionals "learn about student life by becoming

engaged with students in their living environments, the library, and their playing fields"
(p. 397). And this study intended to engage students in and about those environments.

<div align="center">Significance of Study</div>

Relevant descriptive studies are necessary to provide insight into the various kinds of supportive structures students utilized and the degree to which these supportive structures contributed to the educational attainment and graduation of African American students at a predominantly white campus. Furthermore, studies such as mine challenge the higher education community to rethink strategies for improving the retention and persistence of African American students who, along with Hispanic and Native American students, tend to have the lowest rates of retention and persistence (Swail et al., 2003). Such studies may also inform the development of an institutional model or strategy that can be used to determine which support systems best contribute to persistence and graduation.

My study proved beneficial to the host institution in an effort to understand African American students' experiences, including persistence to graduation. Recent retention and graduation statistics from the host institution reported that 4-year graduation rates are some 11 % lower for African Americans (AA) when compared to the total full-time student (33.5% for AA, compared to 44.7% total); 5-year graduation rates were almost 16 % lower for African Americans (49.2% for AA, compared to 65.8% total) and over 7 % lower for African Americans graduating within the sixth year of enrollment (60.1 % for AA, compared to 67.8% total). This was of particular importance in light of the fact that first year retention rates for African American students are slightly above the

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total student population at the selected host institution (83.6% AA to 85.3% total) (University Registrars' Reports, 2009).

<p style="text-align:center">Additional Context of the HI</p>

There were a series of very public racial incidents around the time of the study at the HI that influenced some of the experiences of the student participants. Because they played such a critical role in the lives of the participants in this study, I present a short description of them. The descriptions that follow are based upon the participants' unsolicited accounts, as well as my own perspectives as a African American student at the HI.

In February 2010, an incident referred to as "Cotton Ball Incident" occurred. Two white students at the HI spread cotton balls in front of the campus Black Culture Center. In addition, a year later, in February 2011, the campus was "rocked" again by another incident involving a student spray-painting a racially explicit epithet (the N-word) on a statue in front of a residence hall. Both incidents occurred in the month of February, which is Black History Month, further amplifying the meaning of the incidents for the campus community, and for Black faculty, staff, and students in particular.

Students responded to the first incident by calling for a "Town Hall" style meeting with administrators, in which there were "heated" exchanges. Administrators were criticized for their slow and inadequate response to the Cotton Ball Incident. As a way to educate all students on campus about race and racism, among other social justice concerns, the students called for a required diversity course to be added to the core curriculum at the HI. There was a second Town Hall to discuss the spray painting

incident. As with the Cotton Ball Incident, students asked the administration for appropriate resolution.

The perpetrators of both incidents were not prosecuted with hate crimes (felonies), as the students had insisted, and sentences were handed down to these individuals for lesser convictions. In the Cotton Ball Incident, the perpetrators received sentences of 2 years' probation, revoked drivers' licenses, and 80 hours of community service. The subsequent spray painting incident resulted in a guilty verdict for second degree property damage, and not a hate crime.

From the African American student perspective, the administration should have called the incident a racial one with racist intent, in addition to pursuing the arrest and prosecution of the assailants. In light of how the administration handled these situations, the African American students took a more critical/adversarial and non-supportive posture with the administration. In fact, the response from the administration at the HI appeared to be a farce in the face of the "zero tolerance" rhetoric that the administration had been communicating in many public statements, campus-wide e-mail messages, community forums, and town hall meetings.

<center>Definition of Terms and Concepts</center>

In order to establish a uniform nomenclature for this study, I define several terms below.

African Americans: people of African descent who were born in the United States and who reside within the US. This term may be used synonymously with Black or historically, Negro.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): refers to the body of work from researchers who frame their scholarship with the belief that racism is a permanent variable in American life and is used as a tool of oppression (Schneider, 2005). Liberation and transformation of an oppressed population can occur when notions of race and retelling of stories of oppressed people of color are emphasized and re-valued. The work of Ladson-Billings (2000) is central to this theory and serves to guide my work.

Historically Black College and University (HBCUs): refers to postsecondary institutions created around the end of the Civil War as a place where newly freed Black slaves could go and receive training.

Persistence: Persistence occurs when a student who enrolls in college remains enrolled until degree completion (Hagedorn, 2005).

PWI: refers to Predominantly white institutions that have the overwhelming majority of their student population identified as White (Non-Hispanic) or Anglo.

Retention: "is the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the institution through graduation, most often related to a single institution" (Mathies, Gardner & Bauer, 2006, p. 2). This definition is often used synonymously with persistence; however, retention emphasizes the institutional responsibility rather than that of the student.

*Support systems***:** may include but are not limited to any of those academic, social, personal, familial, institutional and administrative support systems mentioned throughout this research.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the lived experiences of African American students at predominantly white, Midwestern, Land Grant, research university in the United States. By highlighting the prominent literature on student persistence and retention, gaps in the literature emerged as they relate to ways to increase persistence toward degree completion for some groups of students, including African Americans. The descriptive approaches I used in this study endeavored to highlight some of the support systems students identified as useful and to provide recommendations from students' lived experiences to potentially improve degree attainment of African American students at the institution of study.

There was also an institutional benefit for this proposed study, as administrators and student affairs personnel might be able to use the findings from this study to further clarify and improve services and programs that student participants in this study have identified during this research process. As a former administrator at this university community and someone is committed to improving the experiences of African Americans, I will share information about the support systems student participants highlighted as being particularly helpful or problematic in order to enhance the future experiences of all students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To create a foundation for this study, I conducted reviews of two bodies of

literature—one theoretical and one content-driven. The theoretical review focused on

CRT in terms of how it has emerged in the literature within the context of higher

education. This provided the necessary foundation to discuss how I used CRT to guide

my research and amplify the experiences of the student participants in order to inform

practice and policy that may increase persistence and retention of this vulnerable

population. I also described the critical models related to persistence and retention that

informed my research. The content-driven literature review highlighted the history of

African Americans in higher education and specific studies that emphasized African

American student issues of persistence, including how support systems help or hinder, as

they attend institutions of American higher education.

Theoretical Literature Review

Critical Race Theory

Since the early twentieth century, the American higher education system has

wrestled with the issues of access, persistence, retention and graduation of African

American undergraduate students (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano & Lynn, 2004). These

challenges are often more difficult for African American students who attend

predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Critical Race Theory is a useful theory to guide

the examination of different phenomena from the perspective of African American

students and has shown to be effective in uncovering the various issues, difficulties, and

successes of this student population (Gordon, 1999). CRT provides a powerful lens to explore the challenges facing African American and other marginalized groups as they matriculate at our institutions of higher learning within the United States.

Gordon (1999) summarized that CRT has its roots in the nineteenth century and is closely associated with Critical Legal Studies (CLS). According to Gordon, Critical Legal Studies focused on the law and the impact of "judicial conceptions of how race will be negotiated in the sphere of litigation and legislation" (p. 1). Key individuals within Africana thought, including David Walker, Maria Stewart, Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Edward Blyden, Anna Julia Cooper, Rufus Lewis Perry and W.E.B. Du Bois, have used CRT in their work. Gordon summarized that this group of scholars not only wrestled with the notion of freedom, but extended the discussion to include the liberation of "Blacks," "Negroes" and "negres" (p. 2).

The concepts of freedom and oppression are key components in the application of the concepts of CRT to the progression of African American college students. Within a higher education context, freedom and oppression are viewed from the perspective that those individuals with a college education will be liberated and acquire a personal freedom to learn, grow and experience the fullness of life. Conversely, those without a college degree may become exposed to more oppressive forces making it difficult to achieve the same level of growth, development and life experience as those with a college degree (Gordon, 1999). Iverson (2007) posited that CRT "originated in the 1970's from the work of legal scholars to contest the absence of attention to race in the courts and law; however, its use and influence has extended to other disciplines" (p. 588).

According to Iverson, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) are credited with advancing CRT within the context of educational research.

Proponents of CRT are identified as progressive and often liberal Marxist thinkers, who among the most notable scholars include Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw and Derrick Bell (Gordon, 1999). CRT practitioners believe that "race is an ideological and social construct that serves as a tool of oppression" (Schneider, 2005, p. 3). Ultimately, by utilizing this approach researchers are able to give credibility and life to the narratives of marginalized people. CRT also attempts to "re-value" the notion of race by emphasizing and re-telling the voices and experiences of people of color. By providing a counter-story to the dominate narratives, CRT researchers challenge the status quo and express the stories of people of color in terms that might make Whites and others from the dominant culture uncomfortable. Specifically related to my research interests, CRT can give life to the experiences of African American students on PWIs.

Saddler (2005) described three themes that practitioners of CRT use to view the world. The first theme is the belief that racism is a part of American society. Next, CRT challenges the experience of white European Americans as normative. The final theme attacks liberalism and the natural belief in the law to create an equitable and just society. This theme implies that while liberalism and belief in law are important, they are insufficient to challenge the status quo in a real, sustained, and systematic way.

When conducting educational research utilizing CRT, researchers often look to the work of Ladson-Billings (2000), who described the importance of having a political and personal stake in the education attainment of Black children. She clarified, "all of my

'selves' are invested in this work; the self that is a researcher, the self that is a parent, the self that is a community member, and the self that is a Black person" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 272). CRT researchers are committed to unapologetically challenge scholarship that dehumanizes and depersonalizes groups of people. Practitioners of CRT within the context of higher education are interested in presenting the experiences of marginalized or oppressed groups to shed light on inequity and injustice. Perspectives framed by CRT can be used to remove the barriers to educational attainment and liberate the members of oppressed groups toward personal success.

Asch (2001) discussed utilizing CRT in the context of the 1990 *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),* which is designed to protect "people with disabilities from discrimination in, and promote their access to, employment, governmental services, and public accommodations" (p. 391). However, from a CRT perspective, theorists have found that legislation such as this, which is designed to protect, serve, and assist those who need the protections the most, has only tolerated advances of marginalized groups who have been discriminated against and promoted white (dominant) self-interest. This is evidenced by the continued challenges and struggles that people with disabilities still face, in light of almost two decades of "protection" from discrimination.

The experiences of Blacks in America have some similarities and differences when compared to those experiences of people with disabilities. Asch (2001) compared the experiences of Black Americans in the 1960s to being blind in America. She concluded that blindness is a confining handicap that has moments of extreme helplessness. However, Asch determined that blackness was not a handicap…the "Negro has all of his (sic.) faculties but the handicap of blackness comes from outside and is

imposed by force or threat of force…the handicap of the American Negro has been the American white" (p. 412). These are strong sentiments, but Asch concluded it is possible to create a society where it is irrelevant to be blind or Black. In order for this to occur, the dominant culture needs to acknowledge the power and privilege it has over others. This serves as a critical first step toward developing an empathetic understanding of how a discriminated people, such as a blind or African American person, may feel on a daily basis when living with the impact of legal and political decisions of the dominant culture.

Using CRT in higher education. The tenets of CRT challenge higher educational institutions to do more to ensure that ethical decision-making and civic responsibility are prevalent among all stakeholders. Procario-Foley and Bean (2002) argued a need for a decision-making process that "recognizes historical conditioning and the dialectical relationship of theory and practice becomes an active part of the discourse" (p. 106). The traditional role and function of the universities and colleges were initially seen as critical to shaping the social construction of identities, developing students' critical faculties, and empowering people from lower socio-economic status and populations who were identified as underrepresented. With the current challenges to the American higher education enterprise (e.g., threats to Affirmative Action, institutional fiscal constraints), these processes will continue to be vital to higher education in the future. Approaches such as CRT remain an important part of the required discourse needed in order to examine the historical past, as well as the political and institutional/organizational future of American higher education. Without it, dismantling racism throughout higher education and in society becomes more difficult.

Cautions of CRT. Practitioners may face anger, frustration, and political dangers when applying Critical Race Theory. Milner (2007) reiterated the challenges confronting researchers utilizing Critical Race Theory and the dangers that may be seen, unseen and unforeseen. Moreover, there are some additional challenges for researchers who share a similar marginalized background or culture as those groups being studied. The researcher's affinity may lead to high emotions when discussing the experiences of people of color.

In addition, Milner (2007) noted that CRT practitioners should consider multiple aspects of identity, but not without caution. Further, certain identities, like socioeconomic status (SES) should not be used as proxies for race. For example, Milner proclaimed socioeconomic status (SES) does not account "for all of the inequitable situations in which people find themselves, both within and outside the field of education" (p. 390). CRT researchers must also take into account the racial, gender, and cultural experiences as they also relate to SES. The implication for researchers using the tenets of CRT in investigating campuses is to highlight the racial (and other interlocking) disparities created by institutional policies and practices and use this information to influence positive change and increased resources for all vulnerable populations within the institution.

Milner's (2007) work also helps CRT practitioners understand that many colleagues who are unfamiliar with CRT may be disinterested and/or indifferent when asked to reflect on research using a CRT perspective. Therefore, one of the major considerations for a CRT researcher should be that this type of research "along the color line" will not be palatable to some individuals and some institutions. Research that

involves people of color historically has been misrepresented, exploited, silenced, and taken for granted in education research (Milner, 2007). Despite this, it is necessary for CRT researchers to challenge these perspectives by intentionally giving voice to those previously silenced and misrepresented populations in a way that honors and uplifts participants and preserves their dignity.

Next, I explore the theoretical literature about attrition and persistence in higher education. To remain true to CRT, I critique the extant literature that has ignored or misrepresented students of color. I believe understanding these theoretical perspectives and their critique is important to frame this study as I move forward.

Attrition and Persistence Models and Critiques

Tinto (1975) developed his initial theory of attrition based on Durkheim's theory of suicide and presupposes that social integration, and ultimately persistence, occur as students increase their level of commitment to an institution. This model consists of six characteristics that begin prior to matriculation and progress through postsecondary education. Additionally, Tinto's model highlighted the academic and social skills developed in both formal and informal settings. These academic and social skills become the building blocks on which students' institutional, academic and career commitments are based. One of the shortcomings of Tinto's model is the exclusion of off-campus academic and social interactions. Another noted limitation is the absence of the "external campus factors such as financial aid, family obligations and external peer groups in his student drop out model" (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003, p. 44) . In addition, a number of authors argued that Tinto's theory is severely limited when applied to minority students (e.g., Rendon, Jalamo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992).

According to Tinto (1993), the consequences of this exodus of African Americans from higher education are not trivial, either for the individuals who leave or for the institutions they have left. Tinto also believed that the more students' norms, values and beliefs are congruent or aligned with the institution, the more likely they are to become academically and socially integrated into the educational experience. This is problematic for many African American students and assumes that in order to successfully accomplish this congruency or alignment, an African American student would have to assimilate to the norms and values of the dominant culture.

Studies indicate that African American students at PWIs who do not sufficiently establish supportive communities are more prone to experience social isolation, uneasiness and stress, which can lead to attrition (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Gossett, Cuyjet & Cockriel, 1998; Lang & Ford 1992; Ponterotto, 1990; Sailes, 1993). Strange and Banning (2001) suggested that African American students at PWIs often feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. Black Culture Centers (BCCs) and other specialized services provide a supportive environment from "which larger campus involvement can emerge" (p. 631); however these services may not be enough to fully address attrition.

In later research, Tinto (1993) acknowledged that financial issues might contribute to long and short-term, as well as direct and indirect consequences on college persistence. In 1998, Tinto expanded his perspective on dropouts to include a three stage process: (a) separation from previous environment, (b) adjustment to the new environment and (c) incorporation into the new institution's environment. This update does acknowledge the limitations of the approach as it relates to addressing students from

communities of color and the cultural contexts that students of color must negotiate as they attend PWIs.

Other studies have suggested that there is a potential policy issue as it relates to an institutions' emphasis on allocating resources to recruitment and retention initiatives. Cuseo (2002), in his cost-benefit analyses of student recruitment and retention efforts, claimed that student recruitment "requires substantial institutional expenditures" (p. 2). These expenditures include the hiring of recruitment staff, the cost of travel and costs for marketing materials. Cuseo concluded that these costs typically range between $200-$800 per student may not be cost effective. Similarly, Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1985); Rosenberg and Czepiel (1983) and Astin (1975) agreed that that "retention initiatives designed to manage student enrollment can be many times more cost-effective than recruitment efforts" (p. 2). The net effect, according to these authors, is that multiple students may be retained for the same costs of recruiting just one! This emphasizes retention efforts and strategies to retain students as an economically feasible option rather than simply focusing on recruitment (Swail et al., 2003).

According to Swail et al. (2003), non-traditional students and students of color live with a more complex reality. Students do not easily "disassociate from their culture, belief system and familial support network to become integrated and accepted into their new way of college life" (p. 49). From the scholarship about persistence for African American students, particularly at PWIs, Tinto's (1975) model was insufficient in addressing the complex cultural and family dynamics of students of color.

Bean and Eaton's Psychological Model. Eaton and Bean (1995) and Bean and Eaton (2000) expanded Tinto's (1998) model by integrating psychological and

sociological aspects into the model. The purpose of this innovation was to better visualize and understand the retention process. This model emphasized the significance of behavioral intentions and attitudes that are influenced and shaped by students' experiences with the institution. Eaton and Bean's model incorporated student coping strategies and behaviors into how students transition into college. They stressed, "Coping is also dependent on the situation, timing, and the behaviors with which the individual is familiar and comfortable" (Bean & Eaton, 1995, p. 619). Both Bean and Eaton and Tinto (1982) indicated the level of adaptation, as measured by social and academic integration, should be a reflection on students' intention to persist or depart. Again, this type of integration often involves assimilating into the social and academic norms of the dominant culture and does not take into account the unique cultural, familial and social norms that African American students bring with them to a college or university.

Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) examined both Tinto's (1982) student integration model and Bean's (1982) model of student departure and found a blended model of the two provided a better persistence model. Braxton (2000) and Reason (2003) posited that the largely unquestioned and widespread acceptance of Tinto's (1982) model contributed to the reason scholarly inquiry into college student attrition slowed during the mid-1990s. Due to the rapidly changing demographics of college students, Braxton (2000) called for new research to "reinvigorate scholarly inquiry on the departure puzzle" (p. 3), further supporting the need of a study such as mine.

Swail's Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. Swail's (2005) persistence model focuses on: (a) the cognitive and social attributes a student

brings to the campus, and (b) the institutional role in the student experience. These factors combine to comprise a model that puts the student at the center of the experience while also addressing many of the financial, structural, familial, cultural and psychological shortcomings of some of the earlier models presented. Swail's Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement involves three forces working in concert with one another to harmoniously achieve increased student retention and persistence.

Cognitive factors involve aspects that relate to knowledge, intelligence and academic ability students bring with them to the college environment. These cognitive factors or variables also involve the decision making and goal commitment processes that help students negotiate whether to leave or remain at an institution (Bean, 1982). It is the intersection of the social and cognitive factors that shape and guide the decision making process. Other relevant variables such as academic preparedness, ACT/SAT scores, course selection and academic integrity in high school, campus climate and commitment to educational goals and the institution are developed during this decision making process (Swail et al., 2003). However, this process falls short in accounting for the reported incidents of test bias in ACT/SAT examinations (Steele, 1999) along with other achievement gap issues associated with African American and other ethnic minority students.

Social factors include a variety of interpersonal, familial and peer-driven interactions that have a direct impact on student persistence. As Swail et al. (2003) reflected that Tinto's (1975) earlier work is related to Durkheim's suicide theory, they posit that "like suicide victims who were totally removed from the social fabric of society, students who are likewise removed from the social fabric of the college

community are more likely to leave college than persist" (p. 63). Hence, students who come from supportive environments are more likely to persist than students who do not. Furthermore, as Spady (1970), Terenzini and Pascarella (1984) and Tinto (1982) concluded, social and academic integration are correlated with persistence and to the academic and social growth of students. Thus, the fit between the values of students and those of the faculty are also important in terms of students' comfort level in establishing meaningful relationship with faculty and with the institution.

Institutional factors involve five components that Swail (2005) suggested have contributed significantly to become one of the social change areas of institutions that enroll predominantly traditional-age (i.e., 18-24 year old) students. These factors include recruitment and admissions processes, financial aid, academic services, student services, and curriculum and instruction. According to Rendon et al. (2000), these factors unite to contribute to an institution's reaction to the importance of retention, persistence and completion.

Swail's (2005) Model of Persistence and Achievement places institutional factors at the base of the triangle because it "forms the foundation for college success" (p. 79). The other two sides of this triangle involve cognitive factors, (e.g., critical thinking skills, learning skills and time management), and social factors such as family influences peer influences and social coping skills (Swail et al., 2003).

The goal of Swail's (2005) model is to achieve equilibrium. When the cognitive and social values of the institution and students are in alignment, then equilibrium or balance occurs. If this is not achieved, then students are out of balance and at risk for being successfully retained. It is within this aspect of Swail's model that institutions can

ensure there is congruence and alignment between the needs of both the students and those of the institution. However, it should be noted that this model may not be appropriate for all African American students who come from backgrounds and values that differ greatly from those values that are held at many institutions of higher education. According to Swail (2005) the impact of this model is that students who do not modify or integrate their values into that of the institution in order to survive may be at risk for retention and persistence. This may be exacerbated at institutions where the values and norms are different, such as PWIs.

<div align="center">Content-driven Literature Review</div>

Historical Overview of African Americans in U.S. Higher Education

From slavery to the twentieth century, African Americans have sought access into institutions of higher education. The history of African Americans in American higher education can be traced back to before the Civil War. This represented a time in which segregation and racism permeated issues of access to higher education for African Americans. Fleming (1984) suggested that before the Civil War, African Americans were forbidden from receiving a college education, which was readily accessible mostly to white males. During this turbulent time in history, it was assumed that allowing African Americans the opportunity to learn in the nation's institutions of higher education would dismantle the advantages Whites earned through slavery and disrupt the constructed racial and social divisions between Blacks and Whites. Although creating an inequitable educational system was a goal, there were Blacks who had achieved a college education prior to the end of slavery. According to Lucas (1994), although the numbers are small,

there is evidence that "no more than twenty-seven others were listed in the roster of all Black graduates, prior to the Emancipation Proclamation" (p. 158).

Goodchild and Wechsler (1997) highlighted "the American Compromise as northern educational leaders invoked the ideas of Booker T. Washington and allowed southern politicians and administrators to establish a racially separate and unequal system" (p.xxxi). Fleming (1984) explained the number of historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCUs) grew from one in 1837 to more than 100 in 1973 and "grew out of state desires to avoid admitting Blacks to existing White institutions" (p.4).

Facilitators of African American Participation in Higher Education

Key legislation has helped to open the doors of the American academy to African Americans. This included the 1865 U.S. Freedman Bureau, which helped newly freed slaves with food, medicine, jobs and education. The second *Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890* led to the formation of historically Black Land-grant institutions. As the original *Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862* created state-supported, public institutions, it was the second the *Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1890* that provided a means for Blacks to be educated at state-funded (public) institutions. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) tended to create a welcoming, supportive, and culturally relevant learning environment for African Americans students attending college throughout this time (Fleming, 1984).

However, a careful examination using CRT critiques HBCUs and their adherence over time to their missions, student and faculty successes, enrollment patterns, quality of education indicators, funding patterns and a shift from "Predominantly Black Colleges and Universities" to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Fleming, 1984). This

is problematic because HBCU institutions have changed their complexions over time; becoming less predominantly black and more integrated, in order to receive federal funding. This has impacted many financially struggling institutions to abandon their "predominant" focus and emphasize increasing their numbers of non-black students in order to survive (Fleming, 1984).

Wealthy individuals created industrial philanthropic foundations for the sole purpose of developing a few select institutions to educate Blacks in higher education (Anderson, 1997). These foundations also debated the larger political issue of whether these institutions were going to be focused on training the elite. Rather than emphasize training the elite in society, these philanthropic foundations had the foresight to put their time, talent and resources toward creating opportunities for blacks. These organizations provided the necessary training and funding to develop secondary and post-secondary opportunities for Blacks in the late 1800s and early 1900s, including private HBCUs.

Jackson (2007) highlighted negative educational conditions for African Americans in American higher education and examined the influences of changes in policy and programming intended to improve the educational pipeline issues for this vulnerable population. The Coleman (1960) study of Equality of Educational Opportunity, which consequently became *Section 402 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, was the first empirical study to examine the underachievement of African Americans in education. Notably, Coleman found "teachers who instruct African American students tended to be less well credentialed than those who instruct White students" (p. 2). This disparity continues today and serves to oppress African American students and compromising their educational gains (Saddler, 2005).

CRT activism shaping higher education policies. Proponents of CRT *outside* of higher education also began utilizing critical perspectives that had a direct impact on higher education policies. Glen (1996) connected the work of many White social justice advocates and their contributions to fighting for equality, access and fairness within American higher education to allow for educational opportunity for all Americans, including Southern, poor Whites and people of color. Glen's account illuminated the work of the Highlander Folk School (HFS) and its grassroots struggle for economic and social justice in the Appalachian areas in America. The years between 1953 through 1961 marked a fundamental shift in the activities of the HFS to include challenges to school segregation. Student protests were fundamental in working to desegregate schools and with Black student protests in the Civil Rights movement. The HFS also attempted to build a transformative experience by hiring a Black graduate student to provide "prospective" from the Black community.

Rosa Parks, the Civil Rights activist who was arrested in 1955 for refusing to give up her bus seat in Montgomery, AL, noted that her attendance at the HFS's 1955 desegregation workshop was the "first time in my life I had lived in an atmosphere of complete equality with members of the other race" (Glen, 1996, p. 162). The creation of a collaborative partnership between poor, powerless, disenfranchised African Americans working with white, social justice-minded allies created a powerful and useful model that led to the passage of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), which I discuss below. This particular ruling had the potential to disrupt the racial status quo for all levels of public education and was a watershed moment in U.S. history.

Court rulings. Several court cases proved to be instrumental in increasing African American participation in higher education. These federal decisions and legislation contribute to a substantial body of work that set out to increase the access of African Americans in institutions of higher education. One of the most significant cases was the 1938 *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*. The case ruled in Gaines's favor and forced states to either integrate or establish separate professional programs for African Americans. Lloyd Gaines was a Lincoln University (MO) graduate who sought admission into the University of Missouri, School of Law. In response to the ruling, law makers decided they would rather build a separate institution at Lincoln University, than to admit him into the University of Missouri Law School.

The monumental *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* (1954) case concluded that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. The landmark case provided the impetus for the African American presence in American higher education. Before this ruling, Black students who wished to attend college tended to enroll at religiously-based institutions, such as Oberlin College or at HBCUs. This court decision resulted in public colleges and universities "opening" their enrollments to Black students and integrating white campuses (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

However, although institutions were told to integrate, many were resistant and some had to be forced to allow African American students to attend (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). In addition, many institutions created a hostile and untenable environment for African American students that had a detrimental impact on their persistence, retention and graduation from many integrated institutions (Yosso et al., 2004). The net result was the student experience was difficult and challenging for African

Americans. These experiences of African Americans, who previously entered segregated institutions, served as the impetus for the development of specific programs designed to encourage a critical mass of African American students to attend college (Yosso et al., 2004). Furthermore, these experiences fostered the development of other programs and services to address the wide range of issues surrounding persistence and progress toward a degree for those attending a previously segregated institution (Yosso et al., 2004).

Retention and Persistence

The negative experiences among African American students attending newly desegregated institutions advanced the discussion from issues associated with access into institutions of higher education toward issues of retention and persistence (Fleming, 1984). It is appropriate to distinguish between terms "retention" and "persistence" to place these issues in proper context for understanding how they influence the student and the institution respectively. These words are often used synonymously, but place a different emphasis on the responsibility for each action, depending on its use. Hagedorn (2005) suggested *retention* is an institutional measure and *persistence* is a student measure. She reinforced the point by stating "institutions retain and students persist" (p. 93). This distinction is notable when describing the different responsibilities of individual students and institutions of higher education.

The work of Saddler (2005) highlighted the impact that Critical Race Theory had on higher education since the ground breaking Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Saddler uses the work of scholars such as Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Dubois, Marcus Garvey, Janice Hale and Martin Luther King to advocate for equal education for African Americans. He also re-stated some of the basic

underpinnings of CRT and identified ways that CRT could be used to investigate

educational gains or losses after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling.

Saddler (2005) expressed that today "we can argue that African American youth

are not only mis-educated but actually "de-educated" (p. 44). The term "de-educated" is

used to illuminate the point that Woodson (1933) made many years earlier to suggest

African American youth are being systematically excluded from the educational system

and/or being systematically destroyed within that system. Borrowing from Woodson, it

is the "de-education" process that severely limits and prohibits access of African

American students from the transformative and, liberating benefits of receiving a college

education in order to improve their lives and ultimately, the race. As Swail (2003)

echoed "education has a profound impact on both the individual and society at large, and

it is one of the surest ways to increase one's social and economic levels and overcome

the barriers of poverty and deprived social conditions" (p. 4). Therefore, an African

American who attains a higher education can possibly reverse the "de-education" effects

that Woodson worked hard to eliminate long ago.

Some 4-decades after the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education*, African

American students were still not on par with others in terms of retention, persistence and

graduation rates. It is important to compare PWI and HBCU persistence and graduation

rates because most African American students attending institutions of higher education

attend PWIs. Throughout the 1990s the nation's college dropout rate for African

Americans was 20-25% higher than for white students. In fact, 70% of African American

students attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) did not complete their

degrees, compared to 20% of African American students attending HBCUs (Davis et al., 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 1992; Steele, 1999).

The gaps in African American students' educational attainment or graduation from PWIs pose significant challenges for students, college campuses and higher education in general (Swail et al., 2003). In addition, more needs to be done to explain the phenomena that contribute to this gap in achievement for our nation's African American college students. A concerted effort to shrink this gap needs to be initiated once the institutional and systemic explanations have been identified. Iverson (2007) noted that one way to do so is by elucidating "ways in which Whites are primary beneficiaries of policy initiatives intended to serve historically disadvantaged and underrepresented populations (e.g., affirmative action policies)" (p. 589). Once these explanations have been discovered, then institutions would be able to make informed decisions about specific necessary actions to address these gaps in educational attainment.

Political influences of persistence. Throughout their history, American universities have had varying patterns of responsiveness relating to their ability to adjust to the contemporary social issues of retention, persistence and graduation of African American students. Policies and programs originally were designed to increase access to higher education institutions for students from ethnically and lower socio-economic backgrounds (Jackson, 2007).

Policies like the GI Bill, the Civil Rights Act, A Nation at Risk, and Affirmative Action were among those that had the potential to create significant increases for African Americans in higher education. However, Jackson (2007) suggested the effectiveness of

these programs is questionable because these policies and programs still failed to level the playing field and address the retention and persistence of underrepresented students. Had these programs been effective, higher education would be much less likely to face the same challenges today.

Although the passage of many of these groundbreaking legal actions helped to create a pipeline for access into higher education, Jackson (2007) highlighted that there were "blockages" in the pipeline that denied African American students free-flowing access to institutions of higher education. He emphasized these challenges by highlighting the disparities in African Americans enrollment in preschool between 1990-1999, which decreased by 5.4%. Finally, Jackson restated the importance of using the educational pipeline to determine African Americans' readiness for education at the subsequent levels. The impact according to Jackson is that by the time these students become college age, the numbers of African Americans available to apply for college have dwindled.

Role of institutional support and CRT in persistence and retention. Harper and Quaye (2007) examined ways in which student organizations provide space for identity expression and development among African American male students at PWIs. This work also drew a connection between the tenets of CRT and social justice as a way to develop cross-cultural communication skills, student leadership and organizational involvement. They argued that these components contribute to a supportive structure for disenfranchised student populations who attend higher education institutions. This study is important to student affairs professionals' ability to comprehend the complex issues related to the attrition of African American males, outcome disparities and

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understanding of "how persisters and successful undergraduate men translate their racial statuses into educationally purposeful engagement" (p. 128).

Harper and Quaye (2007) conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study that focused on the lived experiences of high achieving (3.0 GPA and above), African American student leaders at large, Midwestern, PWIs. This study resulted in two sets of findings, one pertaining to leadership development in Black and mainstream organizations and the other focused on ways in which student organizations developed the members' cross cultural competence. The first theme that emerged emphasized the reasons students decided to get involved in African American student organizations. Another theme focused on the opportunity for participants to learn how to work with people who were different in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status and religion. Many students in their study termed this process "learning to deal with White people" (p. 138).

Harper and Quaye (2007) stated:

> Clubs and organizations offered platforms through which the African American men in this study could champion Black causes; advocate for support and resources to meet the needs of racial/ethnic minority students; and offer a voice that was often missing when decisions were being made regarding campus policies, the allocation of resources, and the selection of speakers and entertainers that student organizations brought to campus. (p. 140)

The researchers also highlighted the creative ways in which African American men persist at PWIs and perform well despite having real personal, academic and social

challenges. They concluded by cautioning administrators and student affairs professionals to expect students to speak on behalf of all racial/ethnic minority students, particularly if they see the value of students participating in diverse organizations. This expectation would likely decrease some students' willingness to consider mainstream student organizations as suitable outlets for engagement. Black students should be free to engage in mainstream organizations that have a sincere interest in promoting the issues and concerns of marginalized groups at a college campus without feeling like tokens.

The work of Chaisson (2004) added some concrete and specific ways in which Critical Race Theory can be practiced on a PWI campus. Chaisson (2004) provided many resources a practitioner of CRT could use in order to transform and liberate programs and services within a PWI. Specific suggestions Chaisson (2004) highlighted included the suggestion that professors within universities could expose students to controversial content through films and readings to illustrate privileges of whiteness. Specific resources such as the film *Black like Me* (Griffin, 1960) and Johnson's (2001) book, *Privilege, Power and Difference,* can be used to illustrate many salient points that highlight instances of power and oppression with students.

The book, *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (Tatum, 2003), can also be used to provide students with a contemporary framework for understanding racial and cultural differences. Chaisson (2004) suggested African American students attending PWIs typically write papers that include terms such as: "these people," "those people" and "their own people." This language is also used by many white students to distance themselves from the experiences of people of color. To address this, CRT is a useful guide. CRT seeks to delegitimize whiteness as the norm

and works to deconstruct the system of privilege and hegemony it has built. This is done by creating critical discourse in the classroom that emphasizes the advantages that white privilege has had on the educational process. Chaisson (2004) believes that seeking to create a consciousness of this privilege is the first step towards achieving racial justice and equity (p. 348).

Villalpando (2004) examined the concepts of CRT by comparing and contrasting it to Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit). Both CRT and LatCrit build upon the growing body of research in higher education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, Deyhle, Villenas, & Nebecker, 1998; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tate 1997). Villalpando stated both CRT and LatCrit attempt to expose patterns of covert and overt exclusion and racial inequality and work to dismantle them and "remove their obstruction to the success of Latinos in higher education" (p. 42).

According to Villalpando CRT and LatCrit collectively make

> suggestions for student services practitioners interested in creating truly holistic and more meaningful programs and services for Latinos and African Americans by consciously acknowledging that these students might experience varying degrees and forms of racial discrimination at their university. (p. 43)

University officials must be careful in creating holistic programs without considering uninformed assumptions that might lead to services students did not request or do not need. LatCrit's emphasis on language, culture, identity, sexuality and immigration status has some usefulness for CRT. It can be used to support many of the "diversity within diversity" issues that exist among bi-racial, bicultural, bi-sexual, bi-

lingual students and any other students who may not be socialized to fit neatly into fixed notions of race, gender and sexual orientation. CRT practitioners may appreciate the challenge issued to student services professionals to acknowledge the varying needs of students and not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Finally, Villalpando (2004) invites higher education programs and services to be more receptive to seeking feedback about the needs of Latino and other minority students, rather than making assumptions about what they need. This supports the need for qualitative and critical race (or LatCrit) analysis on college campuses in order to create and sustain the most effective student services that can enhance student persistence.

Lived Experiences of and Support Services for African American Students at PWIs

There is a vast amount of literature that addresses the experiences of African American students who attend PWIs. However, this section will highlight the lived experiences of African American students attending PWIs, to be consistent with a CRT approach. As stated in chapter one, Parker and Scott (1985) stated that African American students often feel as if they are "uninvited guests in a strange land" (p. 67) when they describe their experiences at a PWI. Additionally, these experiences have contributed to African American students' feelings of discomfort and alienation on predominantly white campuses and contributed to their decision to leave the institution. However, Strange and Banning (2001) concluded that support systems such as Black Culture Centers (BCCs) and other vital services can "make the campus climate more welcoming and ultimately more supportive in terms of helping Black students find congruity with the campus environment" (p. 631).

Patton (2006) conducted a qualitative phenomenological examination using CRT of the experiences of students who interacted with the BCC at the University of Florida. Patton found that BCCs have become one of the most supportive locations for Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in recent history. In addition, BCC programs served as supportive systems that assisted first year students with the orientation process and transitional period.

Beginning with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, BCCs proved to be indispensable in providing safe spaces for students who were entering institutions of higher education in unprecedented numbers. Patton (2006) described Black student enrollment in "the 1960s at southern PWIs leaped from 3,000 to 98,000 students, with similar increases in the North" (p. 628). BCCs served as havens for students who experienced racial hatred, discrimination and unfriendliness within the campus environment. Patton suggested that BCCs historically have housed Black student unions, historically Black fraternities, sororities and other retention programs to promote academic and social opportunities for students.

Finally, CRT proponents are committed to policies that empower individuals to act within their environment to challenge the dominant ideology and reverse the trends that have historically placed African American student achievement and graduation rates at the bottom. Many of the aforementioned studies focused on historical, political and institutional aspects influencing the African American student experience. However, it is also important to focus on the broad role that higher educational institutions play in the graduation process. As Carey (2008) stated:

If there is a single factor that seems to distinguish colleges and universities

that have truly made a difference on behalf of minority students, it is

attention. Successful colleges pay attention to graduation rates. They

monitor year-to-year change, study the impact of different interventions on

student outcomes, break down the numbers among different student

populations, and continuously ask themselves how they could improve.

Essentially, they apply the academic values of empiricism and deep

inquiry to themselves. (p. 8)

The first set of full graduation rates that included data disaggregated by gender

and race/ethnicity was not made public until early 2004 (Carey, 2008). Without these

data, changing trends of persistence and graduation rates and their relationship to men

and women in various racial and ethnic groups cannot be measured. Carey's work

highlighted the responses among many university staff members who, over a 10-year

period, participated in a variety of institutional retention committees, consultant reports

and retention and graduation initiatives. Carey found that many of the strategies

developed from the knowledge acquired from these institutional initiatives were not acted

upon in a competent, sustained and intentional manner. This might have an impact on an

institution's willingness to change to address the evolving needs of African American

students. This failure to act, according to Carey, "stemmed from an institutional climate

where helping students earn degrees rated far below other priorities" (p. 11).

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the pertinent literature as it relates to CRT;

persistence and retention; and the African American experiences in higher education

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from an historical, political, and applied perspective. Using CRT, I critiqued the over-use of established theories such as Tinto's (1975) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure (Student Integration Model), Bean and Eaton's (2000) Psychological Model as well as, Swail's (2005) Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement. A content-driven and historical account of African American students' access, retention, persistence, graduation, and the institutional and organizational influences on these factors were also examined guided, in part, by a CRT lens.

In Chapter 3, I will explain the research parameters used in order to carry out my study. My goal within Chapter 3 was to link the approaches of phenomenology and CRT to my approach for interviewing students and capturing their experiences as they thrived and survived at a predominantly white, Midwestern, research-based institution.

CHAPTER 3

INQUIRY METHODS

Introduction

This study sought to examine the lived experiences of African American students on a predominantly white, Midwestern, Land Grant, research university in the United States. According to Patton (1990), phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: "What is the structure and essence of the experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (p. 69). The phenomena explored in this study are African American students' experiences at a predominantly white institution and the role of support services within these experiences.

Institutional Context

The site for this study was a large, predominantly white, Carnegie RU/VH (very high research activity) university situated in the Midwest region of the United States. The institution had an African American undergraduate headcount for the fall 2009 semester of 1,665, which represents 7 % of the total student population. Undergraduate students at the institution matriculated into the 11 academic divisions (schools and colleges) throughout the campus. The institution also had a suite of scholarship programs and academic support programs for underrepresented, ethnic minority students, including a Black Student Government, Black Culture Center and Black Studies Program. This institution also reported 47 black faculty among all of its ranks of faculty including tenured, non-tenured, and non-regular faculty (University Registrars Reports, 2009).

Participants

According to Siedman (1998) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), a researcher studying

the experience of people at a particular site must gain access through the person who has

the responsibility of the operation of the site. Because this research involved students at a

postsecondary institution, I sought input, guidance, and support of administrators from

the Vice Provost of Enrollment Management and the approval of the Institutional Review

Board, to gain access to student demographic information. I also worked with my

graduate advisor and a number of campus stakeholders (e.g., Learning Specialist in the

Learning Center, Director of the Multicultural Center, Director of the Black Culture

Center and Director of McNair Scholars Program) involved in retention initiatives.

These individuals assisted in the development and revision of the interview protocol.

There was evidence of the Vice Provost of Enrollment Management, acting as a

gatekeeper at the HI, wielding his/her power over me (the researcher) after I sought and

allegedly secured approval for assistance with gaining access to students to assist with

this research project. After securing written support for my project from the gatekeeper

for the purposes of supporting my research project to the HI Institutional Research Board

(IRB), this "approval" and access to student participants was subsequently rejected, once

my project received IRB approval. The Vice Provost of Enrollment Management would

no longer speak with me directly and referred me to a subordinate once I persisted with

questions surrounding the denial of access. This forced me to alter my research plans and

delayed my data gathering process.

The administrator from the HI's Registrar's Office indicated that it was a

violation of Federal Educational Rights for Privacy Act (FERPA) for the registrar's office

to send an introductory e-mail message that was approved by the IRB to African American students at the HI. Like the students interviewed in this study, I still persisted and utilized a convenience sample from colleagues at the HI to obtain the required participants. After I secured IRB approval, I was denied access to this information at the last minute. This caused me to rely on my institutional colleagues, who assisted me in gaining access to students who engaged in the various programs and services at the HI. I forwarded a request for volunteer participants in my study to the directors of various support programs at the HI, who then sent a recruitment e-mail message to their respective list serves soliciting their participation in the study (see Appendix A). Interested students were asked to contact me for an interview. Once the students contacted me directly, we arranged an agreeable time, date and location to meet to conduct the interview. I interviewed 13 participants through this colleague-based referral process. To thank participants, each of their names were entered into a drawing for a $25.00 Walmart Gift Card.

Nine females and four males participated in the study. Three of the participants were classified as seniors, three had junior status, and seven were sophomores. The participant pool also included three non-traditional students (e.g., transfer, over the age of 25, parent). Seven participants were from the state where the study was conducted and the remaining six were from out-of-state.

Data Gathering

Data were collected during the fall 2010 and spring 2011 semester. Interviews were the primary data source, complemented and were triangulated with field notes in a reflexive journal gathered throughout the study. The interviews took place between

September 2010 and January 2011. The phenomenological design was suitable for the data desired, as understanding participant perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of events occurring in their lives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) might add new knowledge to the literature on student retention and persistence on college campuses. Moustakas (1994) posited that an individual's inner perception is dependable and verifiable and "Every mental act includes presentation, a cognition, and a feeling, each of which is directed toward a phenomenon" (p. 50).

The phenomenological design provided the opportunity to gain knowledge African American students attending a PWI, based upon participant perceptions of lived experiences. New perceptions always hold the possibility of contributing knowledge regarding any object" (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 53). A phenomenological design requires participants to reflect back upon their experiences of being an African American student attending the HI to reawaken the meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas also posited that the process of recalling an experience as a natural one that serves to clarify shading with detail that refines new voices, sounds and visions.

Interview is the primary method phenomenological researchers use to gather data. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) have characterized the phenomenological interview as one in which the participants describe their experiences of some phenomenon with as little direction from the interviewer as possible; however, I adapted that approach slightly. Specifically, I conducted three interviews and I used semi-structured protocols (see Appendix: B, C and D) for each of them. I kept fairly close to the interview questions and asked follow up questions when additional clarification or detail was needed.

I employed the Seidman (1998) model of a three-interview sequence where "the first interviews focused on life history, the second interview gathered details of the experience, and the final asked the participant to reflect on the meaning" (pp. 11-12). I developed three, five to ten question interview sessions. I allowed the participants to share the necessary background information to establish a relationship and get acquainted with the student participants during interview one. Next, interview two consisted of the students sharing their experiences interacting with support systems, and interview three allowed students to share the meaning of these experiences and discuss any emerging trends or themes. To enhance the credibility of my study and to adhere to ethical research standards, prior to the start of the interviews, potential participants were asked to read, review, and sign an informed consent form (See Appendix E). In addition, each interview was recorded with the permission of the participant and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

In line with qualitative research methods, analysis began with the first interview and continued after all data were collected (Seidman, 1998). I used an inductive analysis approach (Hatch, 2002), as it offered the best method to organize analysis and search for patterns of meaning in the data so that descriptions about phenomena under investigation could be made. I looked for patterns, or themes, and categories that emerged from the data, rather than fitting the data to match a hypothesis (Creswell, 1998). In addition, my analysis is informed by CRT. Thus, Saddler's (2005) themes of CRT presented in Chapter Two provided a loose structure for theme development. Only those patterns and themes that emerged from the transcripts or were deductively identified through CRT tenets were further examined.

I used data reduction in order to analyze the qualitative data from the student interviews. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the process of data reduction involves using 3x5 cards to write field notes, including summaries, theoretical notes, working hypotheses, concepts and hunches. I also made note of any specific emotion, non-verbal communication, or situational cues placed on data provided by participants. I also created field notes during the data reduction process to assist with bracketing.

Moustakas (1994) recommended the following three steps that I attempted to follow during when conducting my phenomenological reduction:

1. Bracketing the focus of the study that concerns the topic and the central research question.

2. Horizontalization, which is a process that involves treating every statement with equal value. Data discovered to be insignificant to the central research question is removed, leaving only the textual meaning and invariant aspects of the phenomenon.

3. Codifying the horizons and themes into a logical textual description of the phenomenon, which moves me closer to identifying the essence of the phenomenon.

I used data management software (NVivo) to organize interview textual data and to streamline analyses of the themes that emerged from these data. This involved creating the essence of the students' experiences by analyzing the thick descriptions of the students' transcripts and examining and patterns or themes that emerge from the data. During this process, I analyzed the data to look for repeated statements, meaning of phrases and duplication of responses from participants to determine a proper saturation of

a particular theme that was emerging from the rich data. These broad categories, or themes, were assembled together using the NVivo program to record and group emerging meaning units together. While doing this, I made sure to bracket or set aside my experiences pertaining to the phenomenon being examined.

Prior to the study, I identified my assumptions about the study, however, no study is without bias, I attempted to mitigate bias in my study by bracketing my assumptions. According to Creswell, (1998) bracketing assumes people can separate their personal knowledge from their life experiences. When bracketing, I utilized Moustaka's (1994) method for phenomenological analysis to set aside prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again for the first time" (p. 85).

As an African American researcher, I have acknowledged my positionalities and direct encounters during my many years being in higher education that have led me to this study. However, I attempted to empower participants to share their experiences without imposing my worldview on them. I attempted to provide them with an opportunity to share their uncensored experiences in hopes they would assist with the changing of programs and policies at the HI.

<div align="center">Positionality and Assumptions</div>

As an African American person who served as a staff member in an office at the HI that served students of color, I have worked directly with students from underrepresented minority groups, including many of the study participants. I am also a person who has attended and worked at multiple PWIs, I am a CRT practitioner, and I have experienced racism. In addition to the perspectives I hold in light of my

positionality, I have a number of assumptions related to this research. First, the available amount of research from a historical and political lens provides an opportunity to enhance and expand the available scholarship by advancing issues of persistence and retention of African American students from a CRT lens. Second, examining the experiences of African Americans attending PWIs using CRT might provide insight to different strategies and techniques to be used to better understand those issues influencing African Americans as they enroll in a variety of institutions of higher education. Third, an increased understanding of these strategies and techniques might be useful in improving the support services at PWIs that may ultimately lead to increased retention, persistence and graduation of African American students.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

I obtained trustworthiness by addressing the following concepts: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Below, I describe the ways in which I enhanced the trustworthiness of my study.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described credibility as confidence in the "truth" of the findings, as the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. Prolonged engagement is one way to address credibility and this can be demonstrated by the amount of time spent during the interview process. During this study, I spent approximately 39 hours of interview time (13 participants in 1-hour interviews at 3 interviews each), not including the considerable time it took to transcribe the interviews. I transcribed for approximately 117 hours (39 hours X 3 hours) to prepare

these qualitative data. This transcription process allowed me additional time to engage with and immerse myself in the data.

Member checks, which are the act of verifying data and interpretations with study participants, helped to mitigate investigator bias (Padgett, 2004). I conducted member checks with each participant after the interviews were conducted. Additionally, peer debriefing and support (PDS) groups have also been shown to address the issue of trustworthiness by identifying and mitigating some of the biases of the researcher. PDS is the act of sharing the study with disinterested parties to expose biases and test emerging ideas. According to Padgett (2004), PDS can also improve rigor within the methodology, and provide an outlet for exploration and clarification throughout the study. I used PDS groups throughout my study to enhance credibility by sharing emergent findings with colleagues and stakeholders of the institution, such as my colleagues at the HI and other graduate students in my graduate program. Thematic data was shared with a number of graduate students and other stakeholders at the HI to determine internal consistency of the themes that were noted. Those thematic groups not meeting the majority of the reviewer's positive assessment for actually being a theme would not be allowed to be continued as a theme and would be removed.

Transferability

I addressed issues of transferability by providing thick descriptions of the phenomena that are discussed and described by the research participants. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this can provide the "database that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers" (p. 316). After transcriptions of each of the three interviews were conducted, I had approximately 350 pages of usable

data. These data allowed me to provide detailed accounts of the students' experiences and the volume of data also provided additional detail about the experiences students described. In addition, I used exemplars from the narratives of the participants to highlight the richness of the data. I utilized a CRT and phenomenological lens in order to write student accounts, adding to the quality of the stories I described. By employing these strategies, I hope that readers will be able to identify whether the findings and their implications are transferrable to their own settings.

Dependability

Dependability can be addressed by utilizing an audit to examine the process and satisfy the stakeholders of the research, such as the Black Culture Center, Multicultural Center and Learning Center at the HI, to ensure the specifics of confirmability have been addressed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted data reduction and analysis, data construction and synthesis products, process notes, and materials relating to intentions and dispositions and instrument development information. These materials were well-organized and would allow other researchers to follow the processes I used in data analysis.

Confirmability

For the purpose of confirmability, I used a reflexive journal. This process involves keeping a relative "diary" that recorded information about me as researcher and my method. The goal of this process was to provide data about the human instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the following components to a reflexive journal, to which I adhered: a daily schedule of research logistics and a personal diary that includes an opportunity for catharsis and reflection on my own values and interests. Also, the

reflexive journal helped me negotiate various aspects of the pre-entry to closure process. Finally, I completed a methodological log that I used to record methodological decisions emerging from my own insights (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the relatively small number of participants (13). This proved difficult to obtain the saturation needed to establish redundancy and to be able to provide a sense or essence of the overall picture of the various voices and perspectives of a broad range of African American students at the institution. However, in Chapter 5, I discuss the salient findings that move toward the presentation of an essence. I tried to include gender and academic year diversity in the sample. However, based on the dearth of African American males on college campuses in general (Yates, Pelphrey & Smith, 2008), and at the HI in particular, my ability to increase participation among African American males was a challenge.

Additionally, I served as a staff member at the host institution and was actively involved in creating the research questions and conducting the actual research with study participants. The fact that I had been familiar with many of the research participants, based on my previous institutional role, might have been viewed as compromising the trustworthiness of the study because students may have felt compelled or pressured to speak positively or negatively about a program or office for which I was employed. Conversely, the fact that I am African American and was a staff member at the host institution may also have been of benefit to the study, as it may have helped me gain access to and the trust of students who were willing to participate.

Another limitation is that this study did not attempt to capture the narratives of those students who left the institution. The narratives of students who left were critical for a comprehensive story of the experiences of both students who were retained as well as those who did not persist at the institution.

Finally, there are some inherent tensions between phenomenology and CRT that should be noted and discussed. While phenomenology seeks to create a fairly generalizable essence of a phenomenon, CRT seeks to dismantle the systemic racism by highlighting the individual and unique voices of those who traditionally or systemically been excluded. Addressing these two realities in this study can be challenging in terms of remaining true to either approach, especially when attempting to articulating findings or future implications for practice and research at the HI.

Conclusion

This study focused on the experiences of 13 African American students attending PWIs. Studies of this nature allow researchers to "walk in the shoes" of these students to elicit the aspects that matters most to them, as it related to supportive structures that influenced their retention, persistence and graduation. I worked with the stakeholders of the institution to carry out this research, including the campus Institutional Review Board, campus administration, and a diverse group of African American students. It is through an examination of students' lived experiences that the higher education community will have some hint of what can be done to better understand those factors which contribute to their ultimate academic success.

I present the findings from my study in Chapter Four. I will introduce the chapter by sharing the essence of each participant's experience. I then followed these narratives with more nuanced themes that emerged across the narrative data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this section, I created individual student narratives, which incorporated

interview data, family background, factors contributing to their decision to attend the host

institution (HI) and the student's personal experiences at the HI. To protect the identity

of the participants, I used pseudonyms, rather than their names. Their names and a

snapshot of demographic characteristics are included in Table 1. In addition, any

references to specific programs, services or individuals may or may not have been

changed. After introducing the narratives, I identify cross cutting themes that capture the

essence of these participants' experiences as African American undergraduates at the HI.

Table One: Participant Demographics

Student	Sex	Interview date	Grade	Hometown	Student Status
Andrea	Female	12/15/2010	Sophomore	Chicago, IL	Traditional
Allison	Female	12/14/2010	Sophomore	Rialto, CA	Traditional
Betty	Female	12/15/2010	Junior	St. Louis, MO	Traditional
Carleah	Female	02/07/2011	Sophomore	Houston, TX	Traditional
Calley	Female	12/15/2010	Sophomore	Chicago, IL	Traditional
Dillon	Male	12/09/2010	Sophomore	Columbia, MO	Traditional
Derrick	Male	01/28/2011	Senior	St. Louis, MO	Traditional
Donte'	Male	01/28/2011	Senior	Dallas, TX	Traditional
Jonte'	Female	12/14/2010	Sophomore	St. Louis, MO	Traditional
Kenny	Male	12/17/2010	Sophomore	St. Louis, MO	Transfer
Lisa	Female	02/9/2011	Senior	St. Louis, MO	Non-Trad Parent
La Keisha	Female	12/14/2010	Junior	St. Louis, MO	Non-Trad (40+)
LaDesse	Female	01/19/2011	Junior	Alexandria, VA	Traditional

Andrea

Andrea is a 19 year old sophomore who came to this institution from a Chicago suburb. She characterizes herself coming from an average, middle-class African American family. She considered an offer from Purdue University because they also had her academic program (psychology) but felt that the host institution was her first choice because of the scholarships that the institution offered her.

Andrea mentioned her family members as highly positive influences when describing some factors contributing to her going to college. She also mentioned that she did have a therapist while growing up and this influenced her major career choice of psychology a great deal. Andrea indicates she has a passion for "helping people" like she was helped and that has led to her participation in various activities and helping people at the HI.

Andrea mentioned her interaction with and subsequent hiring in the Academic Retention Services department as instrumental in her development at the HI, along with her involvement in the Women's Center. She characterized the helping process this way:

> I think if they provide help then you are able to better yourself to do better. Once you do better, then you want to stay. The better you are doing, the more you want to keep doing what you are doing and makes you want to work harder.

Andrea also mentioned some key individuals who supported her. She identified the staff in the Women's Center, a Student Services Coordinator, as well as the researcher in Academic Retention Services (ARS) as key individuals who provided personal assistance.

Andrea described some specific situations relative to her experiences at the HI. Specifically, she felt as if the HI only values diversity and cultural awareness when there

is an "incident."   "Unless someone throws cotton balls, and it's like unless something tragic happens, and I'm not saying that's the most tragic thing that can happen, something happens and people notice it, that's when people start coming to the BCC." Other than that, she felt as if the institution does not acknowledge the fact that there is a Black Culture Center (BCC) during campus tours "unless we have a tour of Black students."

Andrea shared that racial isolation, combined with her wanting to be closer to home, have contributed to her wanting to transfer several times. However, she persevered and indicated that she has quelled those feelings because of her progress in her major and her campus involvement.

> Now I'm having the realization that a lot of these experiences and people I've met that I dislike and despise, have definitely made me more mature. So, now I just want to keep going, so I can get out. That's really my whole perspective, I really want to graduate. I want to just keep going so I can graduate and start my life.

Allison

Allison grew up in a predominantly Latino and African American area of Rialto, CA. She indicated that she has strong ties to her family, including her mom, a brother, and an aunt she described as "a second mom." Her father lives with her half-sister in the same state as the HI.   She indicated this is one of the factors that attracted her to consider college in the Midwest. She stated that she chose the HI because she also has an aunt residing within the state and she wanted to attend college close to family, after considering offers to Howard University in Washington DC and three others within the same state as the HI. Allison explained that she chose to attend the host institution because "they offered me the most money so that's the one that I went with…And it's not such a bad place to be."

Allison represented her transition into the HI as a "little bumpy" after coming to the HI sight unseen. She grew up in a diverse environment in southern California, so coming to a PWI was strange. She "had never been on a predominantly white anything before and it was different for me to be the minority instead of the majority on the campus, so it's different." To deal with the academic transitions to the HI, she indicated that she utilized tutoring within the Student Success Center (SSC) whenever possible, stating "I always sign up for a tutor whether I need them or not, because you never know." She also utilized the services of her academic advisor. "I also meet with my advisor, Ms. Boyd-Kennedy, every semester, no matter what. I e-mail her all the time, we talk; so, I never let myself go astray, I'm always talking with somebody."

Allison also revealed that the required activities, suggested by the MAP Program (an academic support program for scholarship recipients) within the Office of Academic Retention Services (ARS) also helped her to get involved and help with the transition at the HI. She summarized her strategy for networking on campus in the following manner. "Since I'm in the ARS program, they do encourage me to get involved in organizations that are major oriented and social, so last semester I got with the Legion of Black Collegians and I'm still a part of United Ambassadors even though they just got new ones. I've been on the dance team, so I've met people and through knowing people and I get help." As Allison shared her techniques for connecting on campus from an academic perspective, she also discussed activities from a social standpoint by stating that she does not go out a lot, but she does have a lot of "associates" here at the HI that she "says hi and bye to," but preferred to spend time with her boyfriend "because we're always together." Finally, she stated she is expanding her involvement in community service

organizations such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters, YMCA, and the United Way. She felt having a mentor as a first year student would have been helpful. "I think if they had some sort of mentor program going that people would for one: feel comfortable mixing together and for two: that's a good way to network as well."

As Allison prepared for the culmination of her experience at the HI, she appeared to be focused on continuing to do well academically and making her mark in her major area of communications by utilizing the services through the INROADS (national minority student internship) program and then going on to law school. She was also involved in the McNair Scholar Prep Program, which prepares undergraduate students for the rigors of graduate school; however she was unclear about what specific path her future will take. One thing was clear:

> I'm gonna use university resources, wherever I am, because those are always helpful and getting to know people in the offices, the advising offices and stuff like that…So, just talking to people, getting to know people and not just separating myself completely, cause I'm gonna have sometimes, so it's good to go to someone to ask them.

<div align="center">Betty</div>

Betty grew up in St. Louis, MO, and makes the distinction that she was raised in the "city" but moved to the "county" when she was little. She characterized herself as a first generation college student, growing up in a single-parent household with only her mother and younger sister.

When choosing a college, the decision came down between Marquette University; the University of Wisconsin, Madison; and the HI. The HI was chosen because of the financial support provided, which accounted for a "full-ride" scholarship for the first year. Betty stated "that (the amount of financial aid) impacted, because it was cheaper to

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come here. Going to Wisconsin, it's a lot of snow and my mama was afraid about snow days and getting stuck, not knowing people and all of that; and then my sister went to (another) university and she's only 30 minutes away" from the HI.

Betty indicated that her mother, who has an associate's degree, has played a huge role in her education. This is important, primarily because since Betty's mom completed the AA degree only, she is still considered a "first generation" student and the goal that Betty's mother has for Betty is to complete more education that her. This serves as a motivating factor for Betty to complete her BA and go on to graduate school. "Although my mom doesn't necessarily pay for me to go to school, if something were to happen and I was out of something, I would get it from her." Betty included her mother among the individual support systems who made a difference in her ability to become successful at the HI.

When discussing her transition into the HI, she indicated that she earned a 2.7 her first semester, but she knew that she could do better. As her course content became more difficult, Betty felt confused about her level of preparation for college level work. After starting as an engineering major, she eventually settled on math as a major because she felt if "I have a basic math background, it can lead to almost anything." Betty also indicated that she had very few study or time-management skills prior to coming to the HI. They did get better, although by trial and error. "I thought I was studying but I didn't have the study skills or preparation that I should have had." But she declared that "she will get there!" As she persevered, she had received academic and personal support from staff members within Academic Retention Services, along with the College Bound Program (a St. Louis-based college student preparation and support program) back home.

She concluded that she still relies on her mother's wisdom and guidance, although "I don't want her to say, 'do this!'" and she continued to keep in contact with one of her high school social studies teachers, who she sees when she goes home for breaks.

Betty specifically described the process of being a minority student who is interested in a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) field. She indicated that she understood how they were interested in increasing the representation of minority students within those areas but described it as "pulling the race card" if that is the only thing you have going. She stated that pursuing her degree in math provided her with more flexibility because "the College of Arts and Sciences makes it more open and if I decide to go on to pursue my master's, I can; but if I don't want to do that, I can switch to education and do something else."

Betty utilized the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) as an academic and professional support system while an engineering student, but kept with the organization even after her degree plans changed to mathematics. She also took advantage of the tutorial services offered through another program within the Student Success Center; the Learning Center and worked part time in the Career Center, helping students with their resumes and cover-letters, as well as basic career exploration.

Regarding racial issues at the HI, Betty characterized her experiences as simultaneously positive and negative. On the positive side, she felt it was good to have organizations such as NSBE because of the fun and academic activities they provide. She also posited that she likes to know where like-minded "African Americans are gonna be, it's helpful because we all have the same kind of goals." She concluded that having organizations such as these provide African American students with resources similar to

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those available at HBCUs.

On the negative side, she highlighted the challenge of being the only Black student in a science, math or engineering course and being singled out because she is by herself. "The professors pick up on it and kind of gravitate toward you and indirectly say, '[oh, you're the only one].'" Being the only one had an effect of feeling hyper visible in a classroom environment, feeling an expectation to be the spokesperson for her race or feeling she must be an exceptional student. "Just going off my class, when we came in, a lot of African American people came in and the number that will even graduate on-time or even from the university at all, is really low. And I just don't want to be that girl who was here and didn't finish so I'm lumped in with my race."

Although she indicated that she valued the programs and activities hosted by the Black Culture Center and Greek Life, time constraints prevented her from participating in those on a regular basis. Betty also highlighted the importance of organizations advertising their functions in a timely manner. This can ensure that the majority of students are utilizing their services.

Betty shared that she remained enrolled at the HI so that she can "buck the statistical trend" by contributing positively to the numbers of students who finish their education there. Following graduation, she sees herself enrolling in a master's program in mathematics education, with the ultimate goal of working in a non-profit organization in an urban school setting because "urban schools don't get the resources that they need, compared to well-off private schools."

Carleah

Carleah hailed from the greater Houston, TX area, which she described as racially

segregated by Highway 6. She characterizes one side, Missouri City, as predominantly African American and the other side, Sugarland, predominantly white. She noted that her high school was attractive to students from all over the district because it was a specialized academy, which made it "extremely diverse, but majority Black."

Carleah's decision to attend the HI was specifically a financial one. She grew up, as she described, "definitely higher, upper-class, nice house, and very very spoiled children." Her mother was a stay-at-home mom and after her father, who was a physician, died when she was 5, everything changed. The family's socio-economic situation suffered tremendously. After considering many private institutions, like Texas Christian University, Baylor, Houston Baptist, University and Howard University, she settled on the HI because it was "cheaper for me to go here than any other in-state school."

After arriving at the HI, Carleah indicated that she struggled during the first couple of semesters and listed being away from home, the increased responsibility for everyday things, and time management among her challenges early in her tenure at the HI. She also concluded that the fact that she received As and Bs in high school with minimal effort contributed to her academic challenges.

As previously suggested, Carleah's family endured significant economic hardships immediately after her father died. Her mother never worked outside the home prior to that; and her father was the sole breadwinner. Her mother kept her family in tact by going back to school, earning an associate's degree and working to address the mounting debt and to take care of her family. Carleah's mother is now the vice president of a company in Texas. She lists her mother as a significant positive influence on her life

after witnessing her resilience in the wake of her father's passing. She also identified some teachers, her high school guidance counselor, and her dance coach as other sources of support during her time in high school.

The transition into the HI was interesting for Carleah, who recalled one instance of how her white roommate (also from Texas) and she discovered their differing political viewpoints when arriving to campus, which led to their involvement in the U.S. presidential political campaigns; one of them supported Obama and the other, McCain. She recalled that this was the first conflict that she and her roommate had as she transitioned into her college experience at the HI.

Carleah indicated that she changed her major three times before the end of her first semester. Ultimately, she settled on human development as her major. At the time of this study, she was a second-semester junior. She lists ARS and her academic advisor in the Human Development and Family Studies Department as sources of academic support while at the HI.

As far as social support systems, Carleah expressed the importance of Legion of Black Collegians (LBC), the Big XII Conference on Black Student Leadership, United Ambassadors, Tour Team, and Summer Welcome Leaders as some of her activities she has engaged in to expand her leadership experience and to help other incoming students at the HI. She lists her supportive circle of friends, her current roommates, and her boyfriend as her personal social support system that has supported her throughout her collegiate career.

Carleah chose not to limit her circle of friends to only African Americans, but rather to "branch out and meet people from all over the place and not feel like I have to

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be the Black girl all the time, I can just be a part of the community." However, she indicated that she socializes by attending "Greek" parties within NPHC (National Pan Hellenic Council) organizations "because that's where all of my friends are that I want to party with are gonna be."

Finally, she indicated that activities offered through the LBC, Black Culture Center, and other places on the campus contributed to a supportive environment for students of color. She also stated that she felt the institution cared about its students and has created many opportunities for involvement for students of color.

Carleah envisioned herself receiving her master's degree in social work and hoped to get a job, even working for the host institution. She also planned to apply for Teach for America or possibly the Peace Corps. Ultimately, she saw herself working for her host institution, earning a terminal degree and having a family. She hoped to maintain ties within her profession and within her community through organizations, like The Links, which she describes as a organization that does "community services and it's just minority women who are of the same class, who come together with similar life experiences, doing things for the community."

Carleah concluded with her hopes that the host institution would understand that minority and African American causes on the campus should not have to prove that they deserve support and resources for programs and services. "We should not have feel as if we have to act a certain way or have a certain number of people at things, we should just, you know…we have this money and this organization, we should just work for what we're working for, not prove that it's necessary."

Calley

Calley hailed from Chicago, IL, and attended an all-girls private high school prior to attending the HI. She chose the HI after considering the University of Iowa; Northwestern University; the University of Georgia; and the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. She chose the HI based on its strong journalism program. She felt as if her level of academic preparation back home was appropriate for the challenges at the HI and has performed well since arriving there.

She described her background as middle class, living in a predominantly Black neighborhood, but also indicated that she socialized with other races. "Because that's how my parents are; we have family friends of different races and ethnicities and everything." Calley shared her family as playing a major role in her education and her mother and father both attended college.

Calley confided that her transition from Chicago to the HI was difficult because she did not like the size of the city. She described;

> I came here and toured before I actually accepted admissions, but I didn't realize how small it was until I came here, and I really didn't like it…I guess it's because I'm from a city, so I guess just adjusting to the smaller town, that was my only problem.

Calley also shared that her successful transition at the HI was also influenced by her proficiency in writing. This contributed to her degree choice and summer camps supported and developed her love of writing and increased the probability of her success in the field of broadcast journalism.

Calley listed several supportive influences during her tenure at the host institution. Among them were: tutoring support through the Learning Center, specifically her economics tutor; Academic Retention Services; her parents; and the professional student

organization, the National Association of Black Journalists. Calley felt strongly that the ARS department at the HI kept her on-track and provided her with resources to support her on-time graduation. She concluded that the support, along with her academic goals she set for herself, were all she needed to become successful.

From a cultural perspective, Calley indicated a culture shock of sorts. "I was pretty shocked when I came here, because I came from a predominantly white high school and I have a lot of friends from different races and ethnicities at home. Then I came here and I mostly hang with Black people and it kind of weird for me, because I'm not really used to that."

Calley summarized that in her home town, her group of friends is more diverse, primarily because the area she is from is more diverse. However, she feels "bothered by" the fact that all of her friends are now African American. She also stated that she attended functions at the Black Culture Center and they have been informative, but she acknowledged that her diverse classmates from other racial or ethnic groups do not feel comfortable going there because they feel that the center creates a divide for those who are not Black. She did not understand why the name of the Black Culture Center would intimidate anyone from going there or attending functions there.

Calley acknowledged that she frequently felt she wanted to transfer to another institution closer to home; however, she indicated that her commitment to the School of Journalism (J-School) caused her to stay. She lists a plethora of internship and job opportunities that she has been afforded as a result of her relationship with individuals within or affiliated with the School of Journalism, including an opportunity to continue her stay at the HI and enroll in the master's program in journalism. She also hoped other

minority students will utilize the vast resources available to them to strengthen their commitment to the J-School, rather than giving up after the first challenge.

Calley hoped to graduate from the HI and utilize her professional connections garnered through her affiliation with the School of Journalism to leverage future opportunities. She also hoped to continue to keep in touch with the individuals within ARS and other programs and services after she graduates.

Dillon

Dillon has lived in the same city as the HI for over 10 years and attended one of the local high schools. Prior to arriving at the HI, Dillon recalled his consistent and active involvement in clubs and activities, as well as performing solidly in courses at the high school level. However, he felt a bit more challenged when preparing himself for the rigors of college-level work.

Dillon recalled that he chose to attend the HI based of an opportunity to participate in one of the institution's summer bridge programs. He felt as if this summer transitional period was just what he needed to contribute to his level of preparation for success in college. In addition, because he was local, he would continue to be close to his family.

Although Dillon felt he had the coursework necessary to be successful in college, he acknowledged that he lacked the maturity and study and time management habits necessary to become successful while balancing college freedoms. "In high school I could do it maybe 2 or 3 days before, and in college, I usually have to do it about a week before. So, it took me some time to understand that."

Dillon described his home environment as "middle-class" and mentioned that he attended predominantly white schools and lived in predominantly white neighborhoods, so he was not shocked when he enrolled at the HI. He also stated that his family members (mother and father) were always supporters of his academic pursuits.

Close friends, teachers in specific courses, and student organizations were among the many supports that Dillon mentioned utilizing while in high school. He specifically mentioned a group called the Minority Achievement Committee (MAC) Scholars, which was a minority student organization for junior high and high school students. This program was designed to support high achieving students (scholars) by providing summer and after-school academic support and college preparatory programs until they reached college. He credited this program and the summer bridge program as playing major roles in assisting with his adjustment in college.

Dillon expressed that his major selection process was a lot like finding his specialization or niche. He wanted to work in a certain area of business, so "now I am on the hotel and restaurant management track and now I've switched into that program and I am still getting a business minor."

After arriving at the HI, he indicated that some of the services that have been useful in his continued enrollment included the Black Business Students Association (BBSA), Academic Retention Services (ARS), and the faculty members and advisors who cared about students and guided him towards the "bigger picture of things that he needs to graduate" and the steps he needs to take to reach his career goals.

Dillon expressed mixed emotions about ARS. He noted how sometimes things were not as professional as he would have liked, and sometimes he received misleading

information; however, overall he felt as if ARS has been helpful and things are getting better.

Socially, Dillon recounted how certain groups on campus (e.g., fraternities and sororities) have supported students. Through "the forums that people have had and discussing issues on campus" these organizations appear to have contributed to a feeling of involvement and campus unity. "Even though I'm not specifically a part (a member) of these organizations, the fact that I can come and participate, it's kind of an open door thing for them."

Alumni involvement has also been a factor in Dillon's decision to remain at the HI. He has met some people who were here before he arrived and some who "I've met afterwards and I've stayed in contact with them to see what they are doing, the kind of degrees they have, what kind of field they're in and how long it's taken them to get to where they wanted to be." He also spoke to alumni mentors frequently on a personal and social level about things that he did not necessarily share with his family.

Dillon acknowledged that race has played a significant role in his development at the HI. Primarily his perspectives have been challenged and expanded by classroom discussions with peers and by other people's opinions and experiences. He agreed that those discussions have been healthy in terms of his own personal growth and developmental thinking. Dillon also discussed the role that specific cultural centers played in his development at the HI by highlighting his participation in study halls, forums, and activities designed to bring students together to graduate successfully. He also mentioned that he understood how, on a predominantly white campus, a cultural center may feel threatening to some. However, Dillon felt as if the advantages of having

a Black Culture Center as an information hub far outweigh the concerns students may have because "whether it's an event that happens on campus, or an event that happens nationally, you kind of hear about it here (at the Black Culture Center)."

Dillon thought that the HI can do some small things in order to further enhance the campus environment for students of color. He recommended: "just incorporate the rest of campus a little bit more to involve other organizations or get involved with other events on campus."

Dillon concluded that the number one reason he remains enrolled at the HI is because of the relationships he has built and how far he has come in his college career. At this point, "you get invested in certain organizations that you're with or certain settings or certain things you like to help improve with; it's hard to up and leave or to want to go somewhere else."

He anticipated graduating from the HI and moving to a larger city and working in his field. He viewed his experiences at the HI have exposed him to certain career options by prompting him to go out and get involved and to expand his knowledge and experiences in different areas. He looked forward to keeping in contact with this personal support systems (individual relationships) he has developed during his time and getting involved in the community wherever he resides.

Dillon felt as if the HI can better enhance the experiences of African American students by allocating more support for the growing numbers of students coming into the institution. He expressed that the services in ARS should expand with the numbers of students coming to the university. Finally, he believed that increased collaborations with Legion of Black Collegians and other organizations could work together to enhance

opportunities for leadership and getting involved.

<div align="center">Derrick</div>

Derrick attended a predominantly white high school in a suburban area of St.
Louis, MO. He is a senior, with a double major of psychology and sociology, and a minor
in History. He chose the HI over North Carolina A&T, an HBCU. He was also offered
an athletic scholarship to Fisk University. Derrick recalled one of the major influences in
his decision to attend the HI was the university's new student recreation center, which
was recently built and labeled one the best in the nation, in one men's magazine. The
ability to receive in-state tuition and an academic scholarship also influenced his choice.
Moreover, Derrick had numerous friends attending the HI from his high school.

Both of Derrick's parents also attended the HI and they influenced his final
decision to attend. Although he stated that he received good grades in high school, he
confessed that he did not have to study to earn his high school grades. He recognized that
this hurt him in terms of his overall preparation for college success. Additionally, when
he assessed other aspects of preparation, he soon realized that his parents had not saved
sufficient funds to pay for his college expenses, and ultimately, finances governed his
decision to attend the HI.

Derrick indicated that he was naturally gifted on the basketball court and in his
courses; however, he acknowledged that he lacked time management, study skills, self
discipline, and determination when coaches and teachers were not "on him" to succeed
and stay on top of things. Many of these skill deficits became evident early on in
Derrick's time at the HI and those, along with financial issues, contributed to his longer
than 4 year stay at the HI.

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Derrick shared much about how his independence developed over time. He did not use school counselors, mentors, or tutors while in high school, except when it came to ACT preparation. He also expressed that he continuously held a job since the age of 15 and after graduation from high school; he earned an internship with Ameren UE, a gas and utility company, in the auditing department. Derrick's mother also worked at Ameren.

Derrick recalled that his family's socio economic status significantly changed after his mother and father divorced shortly after he began high school. After the divorce, Derrick and his two brothers stayed with their mom in a two bedroom house. "It was really small with one bathroom, and for 2 years, I didn't sleep on a bed." Consequently, with his father absent from his life, he used his family's socioeconomic situation to fuel his passion for success and to complete his degree requirements without being a financial burden to his family. "My mother, she can't contribute anything financially, only to give me some money for books at times. And if I'm in a crunch, I may ask her for money to pay off a bill so I can enroll in class, so I can get financial aid to give her back."

While at the HI, Derrick acknowledged that his academic transition to college hit him during his first year when he was calling his mother "really upset, like mom, I'm getting Cs, I'm trying and I don't know what I'm doing wrong." This changed how Derrick addressed his academic difficulties. "Since my freshman year, I've definitely utilized the tutors, the free tutors offered by the university, with regards to help with my math because I really don't do numbers well."

Regarding Derrick's social support at the HI, he mentioned that he has been a

member of an historically Black fraternity (i.e., Kappa Alpha Psi) on campus since his

sophomore year. This also helped him academically. He said, "My grades have done

nothing but increase since then…we instituted study halls, every Tuesday and Thursday

and if you have classes with other members of the organization, we definitely sit down

and study outside of those study halls." When asked to further reflect on whether his

involvement in his fraternity influenced his academic success, Derrick posited this

response:

> So, if you tell me that, hey, it's a party tonight, but if I go to the party, I'll go for a few seconds and come home and study or make sure I study before the party. But it's not gonna be one or the other. It's not gonna be the party over academics. Because at the end of the day, one thing that was brought to me when I first came here is, it's your money and you're paying for the classes and you're paying for these grades. So, if you get an F, that's your money down the toilet and you don't have anything to show for it.

Derrick also shared how his fraternity involvement enhanced his professional and

career development, particularly when his advisor and fraternity brothers made it

possible for him to earn an internship with the Converse shoe company.

Derrick discussed his involvement in the Black Culture Center activities as well,

and characterized the space and the activities as "having a place to call yours." "If you

want to eat, they're gonna have food there. If you want to watch TV, if you want to see

somebody, they got computers, you can look at videos, it's whatever you want to do."

While Derrick shared many positive aspects of his experience at the HI, he also

faced racism. He described his perspectives about racial situation:

> When you get to college, you see pretty much everything. You see different walks of life, I've heard the N word, and I've been called the N word. It's kinda like, it's there. It's a lot of people's first test, like what are you gonna do? white or Black, there's a lot of white people and this is their first time seeing Black people or sitting next to a Black person on the bus, or in class.

He indicated he will focus on sustaining relationships within his fraternal organization because he knew those networks were important to maintain as he climbs the corporate ladder. To do so, he plans to return to the HI to update people on his success and catch up with people from time to time. He also realized the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with faculty and staff, in terms of building rapport and helping them to understand your situation and working with them, in the event that you need them. He stated "that's what they're here to do."

Derrick summarized that Black Greek letter organizations, Black Culture Centers, and Black student clubs and organizations contributed to an institutional culture that helped to build community and success among students of color. However, he believed these organizations should receive more funding and support from the university. To explain the differences between resources for Black organizations and others, he noted that while white fraternities had houses on campus and pledge classes of 150, Black Greeks were acknowledged with stone markers in front of the BCC and had pledge classes of four people. He did realize that funding for Black student clubs was available, but concluded that it is insufficient to be effective with everything that small organizations must do to remain viable.

> In LBC (the Legion of Black Collegians), we get $500 from LBC, that's all that we can get from them. That's all they have to offer. Whatever resource you have to use, whatever umbrella organization you have to use to funnel the money through, we'll take it. But, it's not enough. I mean, you can use that money for programming, whereas there's just so much you can do with that money.

Derrick acknowledged that he considered leaving the HI; however, his involvement in his fraternity and the social support systems that he has developed served as a major impetus for him to stay. From a financial perspective, he stated "I can't say

that I feel like it's worth it." However he plans to stick with it because his social networks have allowed him to have a guaranteed job upon graduation.

As Derrick approaches his graduation from the HI, he indicated that he planned to head to Massachusetts to assume a job with Converse. He stated that his makes him happy because "I'm doing me" and will be sustaining myself.

Derrick concluded his comments by highlighting some challenges he experienced at the HI and his strategies for improving the situation for all students. He focused on recruitment programs that bring in students of color from a variety of cities within the Midwest. He felt the program could have put more attention on academics. He described:

> You have a step-show, entertainment; you have a comedy show, entertainment; you get to kick-it and spend the night in college students dorm, entertainment; you have an optional day to walk the campus; optional day that's just a tour, it's not really business. What about sitting down with advisors to let you know what classes you should take and what majors and career exploration?

Derrick's personal experiences at the HI led him to reflect that there are some deeper issues and concerns that students should be interested in, besides only the social aspects. Specifically, students need to know the financial picture so they understand the true costs of education. "They also need to know that [the HI] gives a damn and doesn't just don't want their money; that they're taking a vested interest in them as a student."

<center>Donte'</center>

Donte' is a second-semester senior from Dallas, TX. He was raised in a military family and described his high school as a diverse, private college prep school that was located in the "lower economic side of Dallas." He prided himself on being a four-

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sport athlete, participating in track, basketball, football, and baseball while in high school.

Donte' had numerous options to choose from when considering college. He chose the HI over Howard University, Texas Tech, Hampton, University of Virginia, and the University of Texas. He also wanted to stay close to home so he could "just jump on a plane and go eat my mama's food or something." Donte's mother instilled many values in him, including becoming independent and being responsible for his own actions. He recalled his family's mantra of "I'm not gonna baby you, but if you mess up, it's your fault, it's not mine, and you can't go blame anybody else."

Donte' was attracted to the HI because a representative came to his high school and informed them that the HI had the number one journalism school in the nation. He and two other students, all of whom were best friends and interested in journalism, attended the HI. Unfortunately, Donte' acknowledged that by his senior year, none of them were still journalism majors.

Donte' felt of his preparation from high school for college level work was appropriate, largely due to the fact that many of his classes were college level and he received dual credit for some. He also noted that he took advanced placement exams to receive college credits prior to attending the HI. He stressed that his approach to studying had not changed since fifth grade. He took notes, kept his materials organized and reviewed them often. However, he said when he got to college, not having the same resources as he had in high school became a challenge. He did rely on teachers, administrators, and family members whenever he needed them. However, he was challenged by his lack of familiarity with a new institution in a new state.

When arriving at the HI, many people informed Donte' that he needed to study two or three hours outside of each class and he honestly admits "he didn't stick to those" because he felt he was smart and did not need that. Yet, he realized he needed to change his approach during his second semester. He said this was when got his "act together."

Donte' discussed his biggest transition to college was accepting that he needed to tap into support systems in college; because in high school, he was the mentor, tutor, and on student council. After he received his first semester grades, things just "hit home." They were not bad, but he did not want to tell his parents because they were not up to the standards he had achieved in high school. He recalled "I hadn't seen a 'C' in all of my education, so second semester was when I woke up. I always use the Spike Lee analogy; WAKE UP! That was when I woke up and realized I'm here for a bigger purpose." Being the "go-to guy" at his high school led him to deny help that was available to him. He said that "when I needed help up here, it took a while for me to actually admit to it."

Many academic support systems made a difference to Donte's transformation from his first semester to the Dean's list, which he called "Donte's List." The first was the library. He recalled there were people in the library who "actually help you find what you're looking for there." He indicated that these resources helped when he took his writing intensive courses. Next, Donte' mentioned the MAP program. He did all of the paperwork to complete the minimum requirements, but acknowledged that he did not maximize his participation in the program. He also identified upper-class students who were useful in his growth at the HI. As he prepared to graduate, it was evident that he patterned his progress at the HI after those upper-class students who were successful.

Donte mentioned "Spencer", who was a junior when Donte' arrived at the HI.

His relationship with Spencer allowed him to learn from his mistakes. He recalled that their relationship evolved to the point that "we weren't friends anymore, we were practically family." He considered Spencer as someone who was like-minded, who he could relate to.

Donte' credited the McNair Scholars Program as a valuable resource, but was not sure just how valuable it could be until he took full advantage of it. "I knew they were there, and once I actually got accepted into the McNair's Program, and it's as intense as it was, I knew I needed additional support, and I started utilizing those resources."

From a social standpoint, Donte' has surrounded himself with a small, but extremely close circle of friends. He also joined a predominantly Black fraternity, Omega Psi Phi. This organization provided him a much-needed social outlet, along with an opportunity to participate in community service.

Donte' indicated that his social circle mainly consisted of the activities related to his fraternity, the McNair Scholars Program, and Inter-Collegiate Communication (ICOM) organization at the HI. These activities allowed him to get experience in a variety of areas, including undergraduate research, the communication profession, and national networking with his fraternity brothers. He hopes that his fraternity will become a communication's honor fraternity.

As Donte' reflected on his tenure at the HI, he indicated he plans to remain connected to his "family members" and specific members of the staff at the HI. He also plans to be active with alumni activities associated with the HI. He specifically mentioned, "Natashua Davis in the McNair office, she's like my mother up here… She don't take no mess and she's always on me about something."

Donte' did not experience much overt racism while attending the HI. However, he did feel like a "statistic," meaning he was aware that many minorities who attend college do not finish and he felt some pressure to ensure that he "showed" that he deserved to be there. Donte' acknowledged that "the only racist thing that has happened up here since I've been here has been the Cotton Ball Incident." He indicated that this incident affected him in a minor way, but his biggest "problem is I just didn't want Black people outside the Black Culture Center picking up the cotton, themselves, so somebody can come back and joke that Black people still pick cotton in 2010."

Donte' frequently used the Black Culture Center at the HI and referred to it as his "laboratory." He recounted that having the center invited Black students to utilize the services and programs. He also said that non-Black members of the community were afraid to utilize the space or services because "Black" being in the title of the building.

Donte' concluded that although he did not utilize all of the services at the HI until he absolutely *had to*, he recognized the importance of the availability of resources and knowing that did provide him with some comfort that grew over time.

Donte' hoped to pursue a master's and PhD degree within the next 10 years. His research in the McNair Scholars' Program has contributed to this goal and he hopes to continue his work in visual communications and how minority students view African American males in the media. Donte' expected to continue utilizing a variety of support systems during the next phase of his academic and personal development. He also expected to become a support system for other students who might come from a similar background. Donte' concluded by stating "we need support systems, no mater how smart you are; how well connected you are; or in American society, how much money you have

and who knows your name, and how they know it…You still gonna need some sort of support system."

<div align="center">Jonte'</div>

Jonte' hailed from a very diverse community on the south side of St. Louis, MO. She attended a mix of private Christian and public schools throughout her childhood. To attend some of these schools, she was required to be bussed from St. Louis County into the city. She described her decision to attend the HI as a forced choice. Because she really did not know where she wanted to go, her mother made the decision for her.

Jonte' described her level of preparation for college work as ready, or she felt that she should have been, ready. During the first semester, she did not perform well. She attributed her first semester grades as a "learning experience" and not "a failure." She took responsibility for her attitude about her work and procrastination.

Jonte' described her family's socioeconomic status as ranging from poverty to lower middle-class. Her mother has earned two master's degrees; and her father did not earn a college degree.

Jonte's past experiences with support systems began with family and she listed her mother as one of her main sources of support who always pushed her toward success. She also credited her teachers for supporting her. She acknowledged that even though she was a strong high school student who received many awards and honors, she felt as if no one paid attention to her; others assumed that she was "supposed to do this, so it doesn't matter."

Jonte' expressed that her adjustment to college was difficult, but not because it was remarkably different from her high school experience. Rather, she stated her

transition was not difficult academically, "it was more life issues than it was academics and work." She described herself as "a rebel or radical type of person, who doesn't really follow the norm." She recalled procrastination and pride as her Achilles heels.

From a familial perspective, Jonte' confessed that although she and her mother do not always get along, she has been one of her most staunch supporters. She also mentioned another person who has allowed her to come out of her shell and become more outspoken about issues of concern for her. She specifically mentioned an incident when this person assisted her with "how to set someone straight…to kill them with kindness, or to just let them know?"

While at the HI, Jonte' labeled herself one of the students who "fell through the cracks." She did not receive a diversity scholarship and was not included in "the whole ARS, MAP Scholars Program." This caused her to wonder "why are there people here with lower scores and grades than me, getting money?" Additionally, Jonte' felt as if the HI provided no support for her during her first 2 years, including professors or programs.

Jonte' learned to advocate for herself and is now proactively seeking academic assistance from professors, programs, and services at the HI. She stated that she has consistently connected with helpful individuals and programs within Academic Retention Services, the Learning Center, and the Student Success Center. She has also engaged in the Black Women's Initiative and the National Association of Black Journalists.

She admitted that her involvement in activities has helped her to become more engaged and interested in campus issues, but she also felt a sense of complacency among the campus organization leaders. She referred to them as "watered down Gatorade" because she felt they were less than responsive to larger issues of campus community,

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especially in light of the "Cotton Ball Incident" and subsequent panels, discussion and forums designed to "appease" the campus community.

Jonte' experienced a significant number of racial incidents during her tenure at the HI. In one case, she felt singled out due to her race. Jonte' and a Black male companion were confronted and accused of "making too much noise" by the Program Assistant in a dining hall; while at the same time, in the vicinity, a white man, wearing only his boxer shorts entered a women's restroom, on an all-women floor. The Program Assistant indicated that she "didn't see the under-clothed white male, who entered the women's restroom." Jonte' mentioned that this incident was a negative infraction on her student conduct record and she was threatened to be arrested and kicked out of school. She believed the Program Assistant was threatened by the Black man exerting his voice, rights, and opinion, during the incident. Jonte' felt wounded by this incident and felt that she was not treated fairly or justly.

Jonte' was extremely critical of the Black Culture Center and other programs and services catering to Black students. Simply put, she felt they promote only social causes, and do not give attention to the larger socio-political issues confronting people of color at the HI. Specifically, she mentioned that students show up to Greek Fraternity and Sorority probate shows, when new members are revealed and introduced to the university community, but they do not come out to a forum about the Black experience.

> We can pack Conservation Auditorium [for a Greek probate show] but we can't even get people to come to an educational forum. A couple of weeks ago, they were talking about the African American experience on PWIs in the same building and same room, they even have free food and stuff like that to try to entice people, and it was only about 12-15 people there.

Jonte' acknowledged that she values the activities within the MAP Scholars

Program, but because she was not initially selected for the program, she felt like an outcast. Almost every student in her circle of friends was invited to participate. However, Jonte' participated in the other campus activities that many of her friends did not, because they were engaged in the MAP Program Orientation with their classmates.

Jonte' had no active motivation keeping her at the HI, only her will to graduate and "earn that piece of paper, which would signify that I have my ticket to the next train to go on. That's it!" She saw herself graduating and embarking upon a career in film production, and maybe go on to graduate school. The wounds that she experienced at the HI have motivated her to focus on her future. "Whether it's a white person calling you a nigger and you snap because of your last experience, but taking my experiences, they have shaped me to focus my attention on who I want to help and who I want devote my life to, I guess."

Through her academic and personal challenges at the HI, Jonte' has learned to recognize the importance of support systems. She plans to utilize them in the future to help her "get through those little elements and transitions in life." She considers these supporters as "mentors, friends, advisors, or father figures, or just people who are there for you."

Jonte' suggested including students who have a diversity of thoughts on panels and within the leadership of organizations. Student such as these may "look different on the outside, but contain the same passion and energy." Jonte' concluded that students like her are not appreciated or are misunderstood. She expressed the HI prefers students who are complacent and not independently outspoken or critical of the institution. Those students often get labeled as "too rebellious" or "too loud." Jonte' stated that being

outspoken can enrich the campus experience, rather than leaving the institution with a hollow feeling.

Jonte' concluded that rather than spending all of the money on street signs, bronze statues of tigers, and buildings, the HI needs to invest in programs so that no student is denied an opportunity to participate in structured programs designed for student success. She felt that this investment would provide an opportunity for Black students to have an improved experience here and would feel valued, rather than the feeling that the HI is only after students' money. "A better environment can change one's perspective on how you are treated at a university, especially being Black and you're already treated like shit."

Kenny

Kenny was raised in a single parent home with his mother and two older sisters in St. Louis, MO. He attended both public and private high schools in that area. Once he graduated from high school, he worked at the YMCA and was spending time with friends who attended the local community college. As a result, he started his career at one of the local community colleges, planning to transfer.

Kenny acknowledged that he did not take his college preparatory high school environment seriously; instead he just attended classes that were harder than those at the public high school he previously attended. He confessed that he never did really develop adequate study skills in high school, and "barely did any homework." Once he entered the HI, he did not perform well and was dismissed after his first semester. Through his appeal, the Dean agreed to allow him to go back to the community college and take a prescribed course load. Once he successfully completed those courses, he could re-enroll

at the HI. It was at that point when Kenny became a serious student.

Kenny did not know very many students at the HI, and those he did were not serious students; one graduated the semester after he arrived and two others were dismissed. The fact that Kenny lived off-campus during his first semester made his transition into the HI even more difficult. "It's hard to make friends, I didn't really know where to find people and help for anything I needed." He went on to describe his immediate transition as a situation in which "a lot of people make their friends their freshman year and you get all the experiences as a freshman living on campus, and I didn't get any of that."

Kenny mentioned living off-campus during his first year at the HI placed him at a distinct disadvantage. For example, "it took me almost a year to discover that there was a Student Success Center here." The only services he had utilized were tutoring support and Academic Retention Services; however, he did not use them until he re-enrolled. At that point, he met with "Mr. Harms upstairs and he talked to me and we got a plan of action of things I could do for the next semester."

Socially, Kenny met one student who was connected with one of the fraternities on campus and invited Kenny to events. This person helped him "get the hang of things" at the HI. Along with attending events that the fraternity hosted, Kenny got involved in the Black Programming Committee to help him connect on campus. Besides Kenny's best friend, he has a girlfriend at the HI. He also stated that he has a good personal connection with his advisor in the history department, who Kenny said has been extremely helpful because the advisor recognized that Kenny was stubborn and did not want to burden people with any of his problems.

Kenny did not mention any racial issues at the HI; however, he noted the Black Greeks and white Greeks have separate and distinct events, and "nobody does anything together." Because Kenny's close friend is a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, he was most familiar with their activities and their focus on academics, although he is not a member.

Kenny acknowledged that he had little connection to campus and felt this was due to being a transfer student who also lived off-campus. He mentioned that he saw signs about services, but did not understand that he could go there for assistance. He felt as if more needed to be done to highlight services to transfer students. Kenny stated that once students became aware of the available support resources, then they could use them correctly. As an example, he mentioned the Black Culture Center. He described the center as a place "with a TV, some free condoms, and a big meeting room" but nothing happens there. He felt there should have been more tutoring and more "Black services on campus" including the Black Culture Center.

Kenny mentioned how segregated Homecoming activities were at the HI. The campus is a "kind of segregated place, I feel like nobody tries to change that." He specifically mentioned that during Homecoming activities, there were activities for the larger campus and then a totally separate, Black Homecoming slate of activities. Kenny said "there is no need to have all that separation."

Kenny indicated the most significant reason to remain at the HI and to graduate was to "make my mama proud." This spoke to the sacrifices his mother has made to send him to private school and college because his "mom pays for everything."

Kenny saw himself going into the field of education upon graduation and planned

to pursue a graduate degree in hopes of becoming a college professor. He also planned to keep in touch with those individuals who have been supportive of him while at the HI, both face to face and through e-mail.

<center>Lisa</center>

Like several others, Lisa hailed from the St. Louis, MO area. She grew up in an affluent area called Barrington Downs. Lisa's mother passed away during childbirth (to her) and she was raised with her father, step-mother, and two older siblings until 2007. Her father passed away that year and she went to live with her older sister. Lisa attended a variety of public and private high schools during this very turbulent time in her life.

Lisa's father earned a PhD and her mother, a master's degree, before they passed away. Both were involved in education, counseling, and the clergy. Although her parents were highly educated, and Lisa had earned good grades in high school, she lacked many of the time management and study skills she needed to be successful in college.

Although Lisa grew up in an African American household, most of her friends were white. Lisa mentioned that she did not identify with African American culture until she was in junior high school. Because her father was a Baptist minister, she had been exposed to African American culture through religion, music, and dance.

Lisa described her transition into college as "focused on partying and having fun, at first." Although her high school GPA was solid, she did not have to study to get those grades. She thought she could apply the same techniques in college and achieve similar results. Although she expressed her "night life was off the chain," Lisa regretted this because it "hurt her on the tail end."

Lisa's experience was made even more difficult because the summer following

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her sophomore year, she found out that she was pregnant. The news of her pregnancy really caused Lisa to rethink her commitment to her academics and her need to develop her sense of self-determination and independence. She described this turning point by stating "although, people care, it's just your responsibility."

When her son was born, Lisa had to juggle financing the cost of her education, with the costs of diapers, formula, affordable housing, and childcare. She chronicled the challenges of attempting to secure these resources from a variety of social service agencies and the stress this caused on her ability to focus on her academics and on motherhood. As a result, Lisa either withdrew from courses or failed them all together. Throughout this time, her baby's father was of little to no help. Lisa learned a great deal from that semester and quickly made some changes, including adding some structure into her and her son's life.

In order to make up for the previous semester, Lisa took a heavy course load and attended classes for 8 hours per day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. "I think I had 18 credit hours that semester." The other days, Lisa worked two jobs; one at the Child Development Lab and "when I wasn't on the schedule for that, I did substitute teaching with the public schools." Lisa started to adapt to her "new" lifestyle. "I started putting my son to bed at 7:30 p.m. and I did my homework from 7:30 until about 11:30 and then I would go to sleep and I'd do it again the next day." It was also during that time her son's father started taking more responsibility with her son, and visited him every other weekend in Kansas City. That finally gave Lisa the relief she desired.

While at the HI, Lisa has engaged in Big Brothers, Big Sisters and was a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She also has participated in the Minority

Youth Entrepreneurship Program and worked at a summer camp for 3 years. She participated in these activities in addition to her academics and parenting responsibilities.

Lisa identified one academic support program: Academic Retention Services. She recalled that it was important for her to have someone she respected who "looked like her" to go to when she needed. "I felt like they wanted to see me succeed, because they were Black." She indicated that the accountability within their program also helped her.

Lisa felt that one thing the HI could do to improve the environment for Black students is to create more support for students with children. She felt the impetus for her persisting at the HI was the fact that she "didn't have anywhere else to go."

Lisa's social support included her sorority. When she was pregnant, Lisa depended on the members. In fact, she joined the "sisterhood" after she had her baby and indicated "they really stepped up, just helping me when I needed to be helped and now that I'm in a night program, they really, really stepped up and helped me just as a parent."

Lisa acknowledged engaging with Black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs) before she was initiated into one, purely for the purpose of partying. However, once she joined a BGLO, she then understood the importance and role of the community service and philanthropic activities that these organizations engage.

When pressed about her initial perception of BGLOs focusing on social endeavors at a PWI, Lisa responded by explaining how important socializing is to the norms of the HI. She also posited that activities hosted by many BGLOs are important ways for African American students to socialize, relax, and engage in culturally relevant events that the host institution may not understand, nor program toward. "We throw a lot of our

own events. Talking about the big picture of what the university does, *Campus after Dark*, those type of things, I guess they don't cater to African American tastes."

Administrators at the HI have recently discussed not permitting organizations to conduct events off campus. Lisa felt this should be allowed to continue, and the HI should not attempt to specifically cater social events for African American students, but instead should support the independence of these organizations in conducting their own social activities. Lisa also articulated the importance of balancing social life and academics for African American students at PWIs. This was a significant factor that Lisa struggled with and had to learn to deal with in her own journey at the HI.

Lisa also mentioned that utilizing personal support was important to her development and success at the HI. Lisa mentioned several individuals within the Office of Financial Aid as particularly helpful. Sheila, her financial aid advisor, Ms. Billye Freelon, and Pastor Taylor were Lisa's "go-to" people. She said the Black students know the helpful ones in the Office of Financial Aid. "And I'm not the only person who feels like that, everybody knows, if you're in trouble, then you better go talk to Pastor Taylor, if you're Black."

Lisa described only one incident she would call "racial" in nature during her tenure at the HI. She recalled when she was a first year student living in one of the residence halls, she entertained a few of her friends in her room. Her roommate called Lisa into the hallway to express her discomfort with the situation because "she grew up in a small town and there was only one Black guy in her school…and she didn't feel comfortable being around that many African Americans." Lisa reported, "she went off!" on her roommate and her roommate moved out soon after that.

Lisa utilized the resources of the Black Culture Center and mentioned their services as "awesome!" She also spoke fondly of a place that no longer exists, called the "Black Hole." This was a location in the old Student Commons area where large numbers of Black students met and socialized. This area was affectionately called the "Black Hole" a place where you can get sucked in for large amounts of time. When the new Student Center was constructed, the old Student Commons was torn down and Lisa felt the sense of community that students shared in that space was torn down as well. Even with the newly constructed and grand opening of the new Student Center, Lisa felt as if that sense of community and a central place for Black students to congregate did not exist. "That center of communication, that line of communication that ran through the whole Black population became facebook and it became a lot less personal… and just seeing the transition over the years, people have gotten a lot less communal and less centered as an African American community." Lisa felt that the Black Culture Center is fast becoming that new, comfortable social gathering spot on the campus. "So, that's why the Black Culture Center is important."

Lisa was finishing her sociology degree and was accepted into a master's program in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. She saw herself moving to the Kansas City area once she receives her MEd and has long-term plans to enter into a PhD program. With respect to the necessity for support systems in the future, Lisa pledges "I hope not to need them, necessarily." Her experiences losing her parents and being a single parent has led her to prefer self-sufficiency. Lisa suggested that people only utilize support systems when they *need* them, and not because they *should* utilize them. She

described seeking support in this way: "whatever the maximum benefits are with the least amount of work."

La Keisha

La Keisha is a 40 year old transfer student who grew up in the Kenlock area of St. Louis, MO. She started her college career at a community college in St. Louis after being laid off from her job with an airline. She received an associate's degree in 2008. La Keisha then attended a 4-year, public university in St. Louis. She currently resides in Jefferson City, MO, with her younger sister and commutes on a daily basis to attend classes at the HI. She described her current situation at the HI as "horrible" based on some misinformation she received when transferring to the HI from another campus. She had hoped to finish her degree in business management but due to the difficulty with credits transferring, and the time necessary to complete that degree, La Keisha is taking the path of least resistance, changing her major to general studies in order to finish as soon as possible.

La Keisha expressed that she has had some "horrible life experiences" to get her to this point, including being charged with child endangerment and experiencing "people being rude." Specifically, she highlighted the difficulty she encountered during her transfer from a community college in St. Louis, to the HI. She recalled that when she arrived at the HI, during her first semester, professors "threatened to kick me out of classes" because she hadn't completed some requirement, prior to transferring. When describing her advising process while transferring, she exclaimed "communication is HORRIBLE; it's horrible, horrible, horrible." La Keisha's account that she was misinformed, not told, or was misled to believe certain aspects as it related to her transfer

credits and class standing before enrolling at the HI, was a powerful example. She now has a bitter taste in her mouth. La Keisha stated that she had a serious adjustment to the stress associated with her current living situation; a severe knee injury, which restricts the amount of time she can sit; and level of academic preparation to become successful at the HI.

La Keisha's described a complicated family situation. She is a single mother, who has a teenage daughter who lives with La Keisha's mother in the St. Louis area. LeKeisha's mother referred to her as an "educated fool." La Keisha also had a sister, with whom she lives with in Jefferson City, along with her sister's four children.

La Keisha has not had many supportive experiences, primarily because she believes that she has not been informed about possible resources. She stated "you have to know about them in order to get into them." In addition to the poor advice she received about transferring, La Keisha expressed that other vital information about making a successful transition at the HI was withheld from her. This information, according to La Keisha, would have pointed her to resources she would have utilized to improve her decision making and allowed her to take advantage of much-needed tutorial and personal assistance. At this point at the HI, she has only utilized group tutoring for her finite math and statistics class, but had to quit in order to work at Wal-Mart to help with the cost of commuting to school on a daily basis. La Keisha described her statistics tutor as extremely helpful and willing to meet with her after hours to provide her with the assistance she needed when she could not make the group sessions due to her work schedule.

La Keisha believed that many of the social support systems are not applicable to

her because they focus on the "babies" and are not appropriate for 40 year-old, transfer students. However, she has engaged in the aforementioned tutorial assistance and the TRIO Program, which focused on first generation, low-income students of color at the HI. Those programs have been beneficial to La Keisha up to this point.

La Keisha described feeling out of place at the HI because of her race. She shared that she was the only minority student in a class and her experiences going to the professor, who was "a foreigner." La Keisha recalled that the "foreign" professor made her feel uncomfortable and was unapproachable when she attempted to seek assistance from him. In the end, she felt out of place and was apprehensive about asking for help from other professors in courses in which she was struggling. Ultimately, La Keisha did not feel that she fit in at this campus and she was "just here until I finish…I am in the wrong place and I feel it every day I'm here."

La Keisha reported that although she participated in the new student orientation at the HI, the tour guides failed to point out many of the culturally based resources, like the Black Culture Center, and the Office of Academic Retention Services. She recalled that they did make a point to highlight the social resources like where to go party and drink. When La Keisha asked what was there to do for older students, she recalled the tour guide as responding "unless you like to party, there's really nothing for the older guys, you can do theatre, things like that." That response cemented in La Keisha's mind that the HI really did not cater socially to non-traditional students. Therefore, La Keisha's reaction was "Ok…I guess that means I'll be bored."

La Keisha recalled much about her difficult transition and recommended that the HI make changes to their orientation programs to provide relevant academic information

to students that they may need when they encounter problems and challenges. She felt this was especially needed for non-traditional and transfer students. After some time, La Keisha feels she knows the vital information she needs to point her toward success. "Now that I have spoken to the right people, I have some of what I need for next semester and maybe the semester after that so that I can be successful."

La Keisha was extremely determined and committed to complete her course of study at the HI. She stated that even though she has had a difficult transition, one thing that she is not, is a quitter. "One thing that I am going to do before I leave this planet is I am going to get my degree." It appeared that she was finally in a position to advocate for her own success.

Once La Keisha completes her degree, she plans to leave the state and leverage her current position to work with Wal-Mart wherever there are opportunities. "I can go anywhere in the world with Wal-Mart…they are on five continents." La Keisha acknowledged the difficulty of trying to persist at the HI, given all that has occurred. "So, I'm still struggling, and I'm gonna struggle until it's done."

La Keisha also suggested that the HI make improvements to the communication process to non-traditional students participating in their orientation programs. She felt as if there were some gaps in information about specific topics. Specifically, she felt as if information about the Office of Academic Retention Services "would be step in the right direction." Accurate information about admissions is another topic needing improvement in the orientation process. Consistent requirements for admissions within the same university system are also desired outcomes for La Keisha. If she was accepted into the Business program at one university within the system, she felt that she should also be

accepted at the HI. Clarifying this process prior to her enrollment at the HI would have provided her with the relevant information she needed to make an informed decision when she was attempting to determine her options, prior to enrollment.

<p style="text-align:center">LaDesse</p>

LaDesse is from Virginia. She lived there with her parents (African American mother and Ethiopian father), older sister, and younger brother. She was the salutatorian and a member of the National Honor Society at her high school. She was attracted to attending the HI after her parents and family friends thought it would be a good fit for her, based on her major of choice, Journalism. Because many of the programs on the east coast focused on communication, she thought coming to the Midwest to attend arguably "the world's greatest school of journalism."

LaDesse developed her interest in the field of journalism early. While she was reading some old magazines that her mother was throwing out, she came upon a Christian magazine with an interesting story on Christian journalists. From there, she started honing her writing skills and she contacted the local paper to ask if she could write a column from a high school student's perspective; and they embraced the idea. After that, LaDesse stated that that experience allowed her to develop her "voice" and allowed her writing to flourish as an aspiring journalist.

LaDesse felt extremely prepared and ready for the academic and social challenges that were before her as she prepared to enroll at the HI. Her college prep curriculum and time management skills, her campus visits during her senior year in high school, and her tremendous support from family and friends contributed to LaDesse's sense of confidence and preparedness. However, she did acknowledge that she had to refine her

time management skills when she enrolled in college.

LaDesse shared that her family members and friends always "spoke most truth to life" to her dreams and aspirations when she was growing up. She credited her dad who pushed her to apply not only to colleges within her price-range, but to put herself out there and "see what happens."

LaDesse did not have a tremendous amount of prior experience with support systems prior to enrolling at the HI, other than her family and friends. While at the HI, LaDesse has made use of the writing tutors when her term papers were due and was actively engaged with her professors. For example, she met with them periodically to see what she could do to improve a grade. She said getting to know her journalism professors was important to her success. She was also is involved in an the Campus Crusade for Christ; a women's a cappella group called AuNaturales, which has allowed for a creative and spiritual outlet; and is a member of the National Association of Black Journalists, which helps her make necessary professional connections. All of the activities have helped to keep LaDesse focused and grounded for her personal, spiritual, and professional growth.

LaDesse did not specifically label some of her experiences at the HI racist, rather she explained others' reactions were due to a "lack of knowledge of being around students of other color in classes or in my friend groups." One example she described was when her editor assigned her (as one of the few Black reporters) to cover a particular Black area of town. She felt the editor made some assumptions about her background, believing she would be more familiar with that area because she was African American. She ended up telling the editor that she "may not have shared the same experiences as

these people, but would be happy to report on it."

LaDesse used the NABJ and the Black Culture Center at the HI and stated that when they have had social events and gospel choir events there, it was like "having a home base" and allowed her to link her Campus Crusade for Christ friends with Gospel Choir friends. She felt these were great resources to have.

LaDesse indicated that the push to invest time developing relationships with faculty along with getting involved on campus has challenged her not to "play it safe" but to become vulnerable and get out of her comfort zone. She sees herself using these strategies as she completes her degree and plans to pursue a master's degree in social work in the future. She hopes to blend journalism and social work to promote social justice issues.

<div align="center">Cross Cutting Themes</div>

This section highlights cross cutting themes and describes participants' descriptions of engagement in a variety of support systems at the HI and their impact on their retention, persistence and graduation at the HI. Many participants spoke about familial, financial, and personal reasons for making an increased commitment to finishing their stated educational goals at the HI. Most expressed external reasons for persisting, ranging from making parents and other family members proud to not having any other place to go. Others stated that their internal connection to campus was so strong that they would in no way leave after they have invested so much in their education. These external and internal reasons for persisting at the HI spoke to specific motivational factors students used as positive (or negative) forces to support their resilience and drive to keep focus on their educational goals. Finally, non-traditional students indicated the

most cautious responses when addressing their reasons for persisting. Their responses suggested that they remained at the HI to "prove something" to family members and/or loved ones. I noted them as "cautions" because of their tenuous commitment to remaining at the HI and achieving their stated goals.

The following five themes reflect the ways in which participants experienced their time at the HI; a) Not my first choice, b) fitting in and being isolated, c) racial aggressions, d) resilience/personal strength and/or "I have something to prove", and e) what's missing?

Not my First Choice

This theme characterizes participants' decision to attend the HI out of default. Most participants in my study did not choose the HI as their school of first choice. They identified other institutions to attend but in the end opted for the HI. More than one student listed a desire to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), which was the main reason the HI was not top on their list. For a number of participants, family and financial reasons were the deciding factor of how students ultimately "ended up" at the HI.

> Allison: Initially, I wanted to go to Howard, which is in D.C. I don't have any family at Howard, so not such a wise choice. She suggested that I apply to [this institution], UMSL, Washington University in St. Louis and Missouri Baptist. Of all those universities, I got into three. [This institution] offered me the most money so that's the one that I went with. And it's not such a bad place to be.
>
> Andrea: [This institution] was not my first choice, I wanted to go to Purdue, hands down. [This institution] gave me a lot of money. I felt like Purdue was very elite and they had a good forensic psychology program, which is what I specifically wanted to go into.
>
> Jonte': It wasn't much of a decision. It was pretty much my last choice. I was indecisive. I got accepted into a lot of schools and I really didn't

know where I wanted to go. My mama just pushed me in this direction. She was like; yeah you're going to [this institution].

Students discussed the roles educational costs and financial aid played in their decision to attend or remain enrolled at the HI. Like Allison above, participants highlighted the fact that the HI offered them the most money, and that was the main reason why they chose to attend.

> Carleah: I got the Diversity Award at [the institution] and it ended up being cheaper for me to go here than any other in-state school. Because the schools I applied to in Texas were private schools; TCU, Baylor and Houston Baptist University and I also applied to Howard. I got into everywhere I applied, got scholarships to wherever I applied, but in comparison to those scholarships, it was nothing compared to what I got at [this institution], so I went along with my financial aid.

> Calley: They had the best journalism program and my parents felt really comfortable with this school and they knew they would get their money's worth if I came here, because it has such a great program for journalism; and I was offered more scholarship money.

Fitting in and Being Isolated

The theme of Fitting in and Being Isolated highlights how the participants' integrated into the established culture at the HI. While many students described experiencing times where they fit into the campus culture, some described experiencing moments of isolation. The descriptions of the lived experiences of these students provide a rich account of how they were able to cope and make adjustments to various situations that arose at the HI.

> Carleah: I have remained here because I feel like I have great opportunities here, [the HI] is a wonderful university. I think [the HI] does care about their students, and the Black community is really strong. People may have other opinions, but I believe [the HI] has a really, really strong Black community that supports each other, in our events and things like that. When I look at other schools and think about what I could have

done there and what I have done here, I think I have maximized my time here.

Conversely, Andrea explains a more complex account of her experiencing of isolation at the HI. Prior to attending the HI, Andrea had both Black and White friends. While at the HI, she noticed that her friends on Facebook looked and acted different than the ones from back home. She described her Facebook friends at the HI as more diverse than her social media friends from back home. While her Facebook friends were more diverse, the white and Black students at the HI were in reality segregated and "stand offish." So she observed if you were to look at social media, the students at the HI appeared to be integrated and cohesive, but in reality the students at the HI were segregating themselves. She stated:

> There's definite segregation, which just blows me. I guess because so many people were so different from each other, that I don't understand that.

The recollection of "stand-offish" and segregated experiences that Andrea recalled contributed to her difficulty fitting into the cultural milieu at the HI and contributed to her sense of social isolation.

Dillon felt that establishing and maintaining relationships was an important factor in helping him to fit in and remain invested in his education at the HI.

> The number one reason why I stay at this university is because of the relationships that I have built already and how far I've come in my college career. Because once you kind of start something like that, and you get invested in certain organizations that you're with or certain settings or certain things you like to help improve with, it's hard to up and leave or to want to go somewhere else. So once you kind of get comfortable somewhere and put time and invest something into certain environments, you want to continue to finish your period at that environment and make it better than what it was when you came.

In addition to peer relationships and co-curricular activities, students referenced

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some specific academic programs that assisted with fitting in at the HI. For example, students noted GPA expectations for scholarships, requirements to get involved on campus, and writing programs as critical to their success and retention.

> LaDesse: Since I am Diversity Award recipient, I was involved in actively seeking my professors to talk to them about where my grade was and what I could do to improve, that kind of thing. Now looking back on it, I probably would have been a lot more shy about going up to my professors because I've always heard that that was the thing that you should do, but if I wasn't pushed, I probably wouldn't have done it right away. I'd say those were the two biggest things, for sure. Making connections with professors makes the journalism program feel more like a home. This is where I have the most connections, in journalism. I don't know what would be otherwise.

> Carleah: I was in a FIG [Freshman Interest Group] my freshman year, but I changed my major and it wasn't helpful any longer. It wasn't directed toward my interests anymore. And the MAP Program [through Academic Retention Services], that was the reason I joined LBC, because I had to join something. Also, United Ambassadors (UA), I did join because the MAP program requires you to join and I joined things that interested me and I continue to be involved throughout college.

> Calley: I use the tutoring center this semester, especially because I had an Econ course that was really challenging and it was a mess. It was a 5-credit hours, so I had to get tutoring for that. And Academic Retention Services, I would talk to two of their retention staff about like if I faced any difficulties in my courses, and like what should I do and stuff like that? They've been pretty useful. With my tutor, I probably wouldn't have received my grade that I have now in Econ if I didn't sign up for tutoring. And I wouldn't have signed up for tutoring if I wouldn't have talked to the two people in Academic Retention Services.

Racial Aggressions

Relating to the Theme of racial aggressions, the HI had a number of highly publicized racial incidents targeting African American students during Black History Month that formed participants' experiences. These events touched a "nerve" on the campus and led to numerous racial forums, discussions, demonstrations, and meetings designed to administratively respond to concerned students.

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In February 2010, students spread cotton balls in front of the Black Culture Center

at the HI. This event has come to be known as the "Cotton Ball Incident" on campus.

Andrea and Donte' shared vivid emotions about the Cotton Ball Incident, its aftermath,

and how it made them feel about being students at the HI.

> Andrea: I just feel like it's just..personally I feel like [the HI] doesn't care
> about cultural awareness. They're like ok, yeah, we have the Black
> Culture Center [BCC] and of course we have Hillel; I just feel like the
> BBC is not as known. They just don't care. They do care, but they don't
> as much as they need to. Unless someone throws cotton balls, and it's like
> unless something tragic happens, and I'm not saying that's the most tragic
> thing that can happen, something happens and people notice it, that's
> when people start coming to the BCC.

> Donte': The only racist thing that happened up here, since I've been here
> has been the Cotton Ball Incident. Funny, I was actually on residential life
> staff with one of the individuals who was arrested for placing the cotton
> balls outside the Black Culture Center. And everybody was like, "were
> you gonna talk to him?" I was like, "yeah. I wanna know." I don't want to
> know if he's racist; I feel like that's something he has to live with too.
> You did it, you got caught, now you gotta live with it. Now, do I feel like
> he's really racist? Personally, now, I feel like he's being stupid. My only
> problem is I just didn't want Black people outside the Black Culture
> Center picking up the cotton, themselves, so somebody can come back and
> joke that Black people still pick cotton in 2010. That was my own issue;
> just leave it there.

The Cotton Ball Incident was not the only racial event that students mentioned

that contributed to feeling unwelcome at the HI. Participants in this study shared a

number of personal incidents, which they classified as racist in nature. These dynamics

manifest themselves in a variety of contexts, both in, and out of class. Jonte' shared an

incident involving a male acquaintance visiting her in her residence hall. She highlighted

how her Black male friend was treated differently than a white male, who was also

visiting the hall, at the same time.

> There were times at my dorm when there was a Black male outside my
> dorm room, and having two PAs (Program Assistants) come talk to him

stating that he was too loud. While that was going on, a white boy right next door to my room was going to the bathroom. Meanwhile, there were only girls' bathrooms on every floor. He walked in the bathroom and while their attention was focused on us, they couldn't see anything else; even though they could see him walk past, but they couldn't really see him because they were too focused on us. They tried to convince us why they didn't see him. I had to tell them "you didn't see him go to the girls' bathroom, in his boxers, no shirt, no shoes?" He wasn't bout to make that trip down the steps to go to the men's bathroom. Even getting a write up on my permanent college record, it wasn't even the main focus. My friend was and just to see that unveil, he was just calm trying to talk to a hall coordinator about the incident that was going on. Her blowing up and threatening to call the cops, and her threats to kick us out, all because she was threatened by his Black presence, his voice. He wasn't loud or nothing. That's an unbiased view too.

Lisa also recalled a situation with her roommate, which escalated, and as a result, her roommate moved to a new room. As Lisa re-told this story, she believed that her roommate's response was motivated by racism because her she was uncomfortable with African Americans.

> My freshman year, I had a roommate, and I remember having like five of my friends they were in our room. She was white, upper-class; she came from a small town. And the first time she walked in and my friends were in there, she called me in the hallway, and she said "Lisa, I'm just being honest with you, I grew up in a very small town, there was only one Black guy at my high school; you know, I just don't feel comfortable around that many African Americans." That's what she said to me. I went off! Oh man, I went off! Needless to say, she moved out, soon.

> She told me, "I won't have my friends in here if you'll just agree not to have your friends in here." I said, "I'm not doing that. As a matter of fact, we're gonna hang out here, from here on." I just said that to be mean, or to be an A-hole, but, I was so offended. I mean I just couldn't believe she said that and thought it was ok. She really thought that that was an ok thing to say to me. So, she moved out and did this whole dramatic scene about how I was a bitch and everyone she talked to agreed with her, and how everyone on the floor agreed with her that I was a crazy bitch. She couldn't believe I reacted like that, I should be glad that she would just be honest with me about it.

> Allison described an encounter with racially insensitivity at the HI. She

shared, "I remember one time I was sitting in someone's room in a residential hall and this guy was saying 'colored people'. And I was like, 'What? Who says that nowadays?' And he meant it. I mean, he just didn't know." Derrick also shared some of his experiences with racism at the HI by his fellow students:

> I've heard the N word, I've been called the N word. It's kinda like, it's there. It's a lot of people's first test, like what are you gonna do? white or Black. There's a lot of white people and this is their first time seeing Black people or sitting next to a Black person on the bus, or in class. It's a challenge, outside of your town or outside of your house, this is it!

Resilience/Personal Strength and/or "I have Something to Prove"

Students displayed resilience in many ways, often relying on intrinsic and extrinsic sources of support to propel them toward their goals at the HI. They described engaging in success behaviors such as seeking assistance and utilizing a variety of support systems. Some participants described campus-based programs, services, and individuals that were useful to them. Since there is no generally agreed-upon definition for resilience, for the purpose of this study, I will utilize definition from Waxman, Gray, and Padron (2002) who describe resilient students as "those who succeed in school despite the presence of adverse conditions" (p. 1).

This theme captured participants use and reluctance to use campus-based resources in order to improve academic performance. The responses highlight varying degrees of comfort with utilizing these resources. However, one thing appears to be clear; those who utilized them typically received some positive returns on their investment of time, energy and trust.

> Donte': I ended up being a part of the McNair's Program and that's really when I started utilizing everything on campus. I was working in residential life at the time when I was applying, so I knew of the resources that were there; but like I said, I wasn't using them yet. I knew they were

there, and once I actually got accepted into the McNair's Program, and it's as intense as it was, I knew I needed additional support, and I started utilizing those resources.

Kenny: I would say that I came to ARS for the first time; that was when I was on the verge of getting kicked out. I didn't know what to do. I met with Mr. Harms upstairs, and he talked to me. We got a plan of action of things I could do for the next semester. I still have it somewhere. And we just outlined what I would do in certain situations, and admissions told me I couldn't come back, so it was helpful. Regarding tutoring, I struggled with a class and came in found out that they had tutoring and I signed up for it. It was useful.

However, while the HI has put in place systems to address the academic,

financial, social, cultural and personal needs, participants discovered that some of

these systems were inadequate to handle the specific needs of non-traditional

students. La Keisha recalled a harsh, but intense experience when she arrived as a

transfer student:

I came here with the intention of finishing a degree in business management, to find out that… not to say that it wasn't possible, but instead of taking one year to complete at [city university], it will take me two. And I had to do a semester here before I can even apply into the business program, which some of the classes that I had to take for the requirements I had already taken and passed, which was a damper on my program. So I pretty much got fed up and said FINE, just give me one year and I'll do General Studies. So that's where I am now. So I'm a reluctant General Studies major.

She expressed frustration and powerlessness, as she attempted to navigate

the academic and support systems that were designed to help her. She believed

that the institution intentionally set up barriers to discourage her from attaining her

goal:

I am definitely out of place. And I can feel that on this campus more so that I did when I was in St. Louis. I try not to use race as an excuse for some people's behavior and my Finite and my Stat teacher were both foreigners, and I'm sure they both understand. But my Stat class, I was the

only African American in that freaking class and I felt like he only helped me because I was the only African American in the class. And it made me feel so bad when I would sit down and talk with him, when he would be pressing the issue about what it is I was missing and then, he'll say, "do you understand?" And I said to myself, "if I understood, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you." But, I really, really, really feel out of place and feel like I really have to do well in order to fit in with the rest of the people on this campus. And right now, I don't see any way of doing that. I don't think I will fit in on this campus. I'm just here until I finish. I am in the wrong place and I feel it every day I'm here. I am not a quitter. And I refuse to let this institution knock me off my block. I am determined to finish. When everything is against me, I am not going to quit. Because this is something I must have. So if I don't get what I need from the people that were here to help me, so be it. I'll figure out a way. 'Cause it will be done!

Kenny, like La Keisha, also transferred into the institution from a community college. He also expressed some difficulty with successfully navigating the transition from community college to the host institution. And despite the challenges, he found personal strength and drive to stay at the HI.

Kenny, who lived in an apartment after transferring to the HI, shared his experiences negotiating the support systems while living off campus.

It's hard to come here, not being a freshman and never living on campus. It's hard to make friends, I didn't really know where to find people and help for anything I needed. I didn't even know that the Student Success Center existed until second or third semester here. I was just thrown in here. I lived in Campus Lodge my first year here. It was hard. A lot of people make their friends their freshman year and you get all the experiences as a freshman living on campus, and I didn't get any of that. So, I just came in and ended up meeting the right people.

Kenny's adjustment points to the different ways in which the HI supports the traditional students (first-year, first-time freshmen who live on campus) through integrated programming. However, transfer students and students who live

off-campus their first semester, often don't receive those parallel services and programming for student success.

La Keisha points to other units at the HI that could do more to assist transfer students like her:

> I did find out that the retention people were starting, hopefully next semester to put this information out there for incoming [transfer] students, for them to know that Academic Retention Services is out there to help them. So, I guess that will be a step in the right direction. At least they've found that there is a problem and they were trying to correct it, so we just need everybody else to follow suit. Starting with admission, actually, since students first start with admissions, that would be a good place to start because you don't get a lot of information from admissions…Now that I'm here, I'm stuck here. I mean I could always go back to St. Louis, but that's like taking a step backwards and I'm trying to move forward.

> I have no clue about anything that's available to me as an African American student, as a transfer student, as an older student living on a young campus. I don't know nothing about any of that. And no, I didn't get it in the mail, and no I didn't get it in orientation.

In addition to feeling there were no resources on campus to assist her, La Keisha also lacked family support. Despite the lack of overall campus and familial support, she persevered.

> My family thinks I'm a know-it-all. They think that I am a know-it-all and I am too good to be a part of their family. They feel that I'd rather be isolated from them. And I think they really just don't like me. My whole adulthood, my family calls me for everything. They know that if they call me, I'll be able to find the answer and it makes me feel bad that they feel that way towards me, that they feel like they can call me because they know I can find the answer for them. But, you know, I'm 40 and you think that I would be able to get over it. I haven't because I was raised with a family. It was always family all the time. We have family gatherings all the time, we were always there for each other and it's a shame that they treat me the way that they do. I'm pretty much an outsider. My mom said that if I died before she did, she would put in my obituary, one line: "An educated fool." I don't know what I've done to deserve that.

Jonte' described her internal drive to graduate as the factor that kept her going despite obstacles. She said:

> To get that piece of paper, really, is my motivation. It's nothing here that's really enticing me to stay here, like [school] spirit… I'm just focusing myself to get this piece of paper and move on so I can go on and do what I need to do… And family things that I try to overcome. That piece of paper would signify that I have my ticket to the next train to go on. That's it!

Carleah, expressed how she attempts to prove herself by over-compensating because there are so few African Americans at the HI. "As far as race, it hasn't been a negative at all. If anything, it has encouraged me to make sure I'm represented, make sure I'm in class, if I'm the only African American, I can't be late, I can't not have my work, because it stands out a little more."

What's Missing?

A number of participants identified other resources on campus that could be added or improved upon to assist African American student persistence and graduation. They recommended resources so that they would not have to rely on their personal resilience to assure success. Allison posited:

> I guess if I can choose a specific thing [missing], it would be to have mentors. And LBC has actually started to do that this year, because I'm a mentor for a freshman. And basically our role is to take them and when you talk to them and communicate with them a lot and make sure that they're on the right track and really see what they're thinking about… I think if they had some sort of mentor program going that people would for one, feel comfortable mixing together, and for two, that's a good way to network as well.

Donte' echoed the need for mentoring.

> More student interaction, and when I say that, I mean it gets students to come, also gets students to bring other students. I think that's what helped

me. To use the support systems, and to encourage capable students who can guide incoming students to using the support systems.

Students also highlighted the need for more support for diversity programming and curricula. For example, Carleah shared:

> Pablo in Multicultural should not be in that little room. I mean, yeah they're moving next semester, but that was including people from like, Hispanic, Asian, and you have one office for that? I love that the BCC has its one main center, but every diversity group that we have is like, put to the side; so that can be from the LGBTQ, Women's Center to everything, it's just thrown away. And the *Maneater* newspaper had double our space. Do you need all that space to write a newspaper? NO. Personally, I think a lot of times, they'll give you a diversity program, but it's just not enough. It's never enough.

Kenny posited:

> I think that we have a Black Culture Center but there's really not much in there. There's a TV, some free condoms, and a big meeting room. Nothing happens there. I feel like in order to help Black students, there should be more Black services on campus. Maybe more tutoring should go on over there, just for Black students.

Students listed a number of support services that are currently missing or lacking at the HI. Lisa pointed out a need for additional support for non-traditional students, specifically, students who were parents. She stated, "It's like an invisible population." Kenny added that more support for transfer students is needed, stating that many students make their friends their freshman year and because students also live on campus that year, they get a lot of supportive experiences.

Carleah's account described the powerlessness that long-standing organizations like the Legion of Black Collegians (LBC) feel having to justify their viability year after year. The organization, a Black student government, must request financial support from the student body, and according to her, it is an annual challenge. She stated, "LBC goes through a lot to prove that they need the money that is given to us."

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Jonte' pointed to the role the Black community itself plays. During the Cotton Ball Incident, she felt the entire campus community, and Black administrators specifically, sought to maintain status quo, rather than insisting on more responsiveness to incidences of racial insensitivity and injustices. Ultimately, she said the Black community felt powerless to act further and she felt as if nothing was accomplished. She indicated "Yeah, I went to the town hall meeting and I was there to support, and then the university offered no support after that." Kenny, like Jonte', took issue with the HI and Black community's response to the Cotton Ball Incident. He added, "When somebody throws cotton balls at the BCC, everybody wants to get mad and hold a meeting… But, once it blew over, that was it, nothing else."

Both Calley and Carleah were not satisfied with the institutional response to the incident; further, Carleah felt more support for established programs was necessary. She stated,

> I don't think that there's anything that's new that needs to be created, especially when I look at other schools in [our athletic conference] and see the things that they don't have and we do. Like we have our Black Culture Center. While we don't think it's very big, it's much larger than other schools. We have an official Black student government, with funding; we have a minority student recruitment team, a diversity recruiter and things like that. I don't think anything new; I think [the HI] has done a great job putting those things in place, but I do feel they need more support.

When attempting to capture the feelings about their experiences at the HI, the results appear to be mixed. Some African American students felt the HI is moving in the right direction, providing a supportive infrastructure for students. However, others felt that the HI has some ground to make up in terms of providing the full array of services

and related resources for the diversity of students who attend the HI, and especially the African American students.

Chapter five will discuss the findings in more detail. I will also discuss implications for policy, practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to utilize a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to examine the lived experiences of African American students who attended a predominantly white, Land Grant, Research University in the Midwest. The descriptive approaches I used in this study illuminate some of the support systems that the study participants identified as useful and contributed to their retention and persistence at the HI. Their narratives also pointed to aspects of their experience that were difficult, including individual and institutional racism, and they persevered despite them. In addition, I remind readers that the participants' stories in Chapter 4 were told as an intentional attempt to value their experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2005). Sharing the individual narratives allowed me to stay truer to CRT, despite the methodological tensions that phenomenological approaches create to develop a collective essence of all the students' experiences, which is what I try to do in answering my research questions below.

According to Ladson-Billings (2000), practitioners of CRT within the context of higher education, like myself, are interested in sharing the experiences of marginalized or oppressed groups to shed light on inequity and injustice. Central to CRT, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2005) believe the following tenets, which inform this study:

a)   Racism is an endemic and is deeply ingrained in American life and is used as a tool of oppression.

b)   Liberation and transformation of an oppressed population can occur when notions of race and retelling of stories of oppressed people of color are emphasized and re-valued.

c.)   Critical race theorists are post moderns, who believe that form and substance are closely connected. CRT theorists reject white privilege and seek to leverage the power dynamics to provide a liberation or self-determination among oppressed groups.

Below, I discuss the major findings and how these findings serve to answer the research questions through my theoretical framework. In addition, I show how the findings relate to and expand upon the extant literature. I conclude with implications for policy, practice and future research.

Research Question 1

The first question I address is "How do African American students perceive the totality of experiences at a predominantly white, Midwestern, Land Grant, Research University?" For participants, race and racism played significant roles in shaping their lives at the PWI.

Race and racism. One cannot attempt to answer this question from a CRT perspective without acknowledging several historical court cases that proved to be instrumental in changing the complexion of higher education in the United States and, specifically, at the HI. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, one of the most significant cases challenging segregation at predominantly white institutions was *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938). The court ruled in Gaines's favor and forced states to either integrate or establish separate professional programs for African Americans. Lloyd

Gaines was a Lincoln University (MO) graduate who sought admission into the HI's School of Law. In response to the ruling, law makers decided that they would rather build a separate institution at Lincoln University, than to admit him into the Law School. In line with this ruling, the HI opted to remain segregated, rather than integrate its academic programs. The HI's decision set the foundation for subsequent separate and parallel programs at the HI.

The monumental *Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka Kansas* (1954) case is another instance that fundamentally and significantly changed the face of higher education at PWIs. The Brown case concluded that segregated public schools were unconstitutional and provided the impetus for African American access to higher education at PWIs. This ruling, in effect, overturned the Gaines decision, leading the HI to change its policies and practices to be more inclusive of African Americans.

However, as we arrive at the 60-year anniversary of this landmark decision, and 50 years after the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, I echo the words of noted CRT scholar, Derrick Bell (1992) "And we are still not saved" (p. vii). Although significant progress has been made in terms of increased numbers of African American students attending higher educational institutions, including the HI, these laws have not erased the institutional structures that continue to impact African American student rates of retention and graduation, specifically at PWIs. Further, African American students often feel as if they are "uninvited guests in a strange land" when they describe their experiences at a PWI (Parker & Scott, 1985, p. 67). Participants in this study reported similar feelings.

CRT scholars are called to address power dynamics that lead to hegemony among dominant groups in higher education (Chaisson, 2004) and feelings of isolation and marginalization for those outside the dominant groups. To illustrate this at the HI, participants shared several examples of racism on campus. Allison shared that one of her hall mates referred to a group of students as "colored people." Derrick revealed that he had heard the N word, and he had been called the N word.

Moreover, the February 2010 event, known as the "Cotton Ball Incident" at the HI, proved to be a significant and powerful racial incident. In fact, while I was aware of the incident and its impact on African American students at the HI, I did not anticipate the extent to which participants would move our conversation to discuss the role it played in their lives. This event touched a "nerve" on the campus and led to numerous racial forums, discussions, demonstrations, and meetings designed to administratively respond to concerned students and strengthen community at the HI.

Many participants were not satisfied with how campus leadership responded to the incident. In every case, these occurrences led participants to feel powerless, as few of the offenders were never confronted or disciplined in this supposed "zero tolerance" environment. Harper (2012) indicated when racist incidents such as this happen; they are akin to "environmental toxins" that led to dissatisfaction and psychological distress among students (p. 18). The institutional response or lack thereof, contributed to a sense of helplessness among students and supported a sense of "this is the way things are here" or an acceptance of these kinds of racially discriminatory remarks and behaviors at the HI.

Racial aggressions were recurring issues and in some cases, an accepted part of the established culture at the HI. Given the institutional history, recurring incidents involving racial slurs (e.g., spray painted on a statue near the residential halls), and the power of racist symbols (e.g., Cotton Balls placed on the grounds of the Black Culture Center), led African American students to feel powerless to do anything about the permanence of racism at the HI. In addition to feelings of powerlessness, these incidents damaged the psyche of the participants, these types of acts from a racist person serves to "engender marginalization, inflict varying degrees of harm on minoritized persons; structures that determine and cyclically remanufacture racial inequity; and institutional norms that sustain white privilege and permit the ongoing subordination of minoritized persons" (Harper, 2012, p. 10).

For students, the lack of a required diversity course also served as a message that the campus leadership did not care about diversity in general, or them in particular. African American students at the HI, along with other students, pleaded for a diversity course requirement to be added to the university's core curriculum. Most of the participants believed that a diversity requirement for all HI students could potentially prevent future racial incidents. Students were hopeful that a requirement would be added when the campus hired a Chief Diversity Officer in 2006. Even with a diversity officer in place to advocate for the students' request, when faculty voted on whether to add a diversity requirement, it did not pass. This signaled yet again to students that their diverse perspectives and needs were unimportant at the HI, which reinforced questions of self-doubt and belonging (Bean & Eaton, 2000).

Coping and persisting. As participants matriculated at the HI, there were some institutional factors that influenced their ability to remain focused and persist. On a positive note, many of the participants acknowledged the scholarship commitment from the HI as the basis for their decision to enroll. Although most (10 out of 13) of the participants articulated that the HI was not their first choice, the generous financial assistance that the institution provided was a key factor in choosing to attend the institution.

Once on campus, nearly all participants provided graphic accounts of how they intentionally adjusted to day-to-day activities to overcome the feelings of isolation (Swail et al., 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Experiences of social isolation are consistent with research studies that found that African American students who do not sufficiently establish supportive communities at PWIs are more prone to experience social isolation, uneasiness, and stress, which can lead to attrition (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Because my study focused on students who persisted, the social isolation they experienced did not result in departure from the HI. However, it is possible that other African American students did leave the institution due to incidents of racism and social isolation.

Although students who participated in this study had some difficulty overcoming isolation, they demonstrated flexibility, resilience, and determination to persist. One way students tried to overcome isolation was through developing a more diverse group of friends According to Chang (1996) racial diversity has a direct positive impact on the individual student because it may lead to increased engagement outside of class. These

relationships, in addition to other support mechanisms, were instrumental in helping students adjust to the challenges they faced at the HI.

African American students' participation in the mainstream student activities is somewhat surprising from a CRT standpoint because these students did not rely exclusively on the culturally specific activities to support their persistence at the HI. Contrary to what many white students and faculty may think, students in my study each achieved varying degrees of integration into the "mainstream" by engaging in "mainstream" programs, activities, and services.

It should be noted that there were a number of students, most notably, students from out-of-state, who tended to be most satisfied with the day-to-day environment at the HI. Those students who were most critical of the HI were from in state. This is an important discovery as I further discuss these findings and may have implications for further research.

Overall, the student experiences at the HI reinforced previous studies that found that African American students experience a great deal of social isolation, alienation, and overt racism (Feagin et al., 1996; Gossett et al., 1998; Lang & Ford, 1992; Ponterotto, 1990; Sailes, 1993). The African American participants at the HI developed resilience and perseverance, despite encountering some shocking and surprising circumstances (Waxman, Gray & Padron, 2002). Demonstrating their fortitude and resilience, the participants intended to graduate from the HI despite racism. While internal drive was a major factor in their persistence, they also leveraged support from the Black community and others. Next, I discuss more about those services and individuals who participants identified as particularly helpful throughout their time at the HI.

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Research Question 2

The second research question asked "What role, if any do institutional and community support systems play in those student's collegiate experiences, including persistence toward graduation?" As introduced above, there was institutional support that played meaningful and positive roles in the study participants' collegiate experience.

Financial support. For example, as previously mentioned, most participants reported that the financial assistance that the HI offered to recruit traditional-aged students of color to select, enroll, and to live on the campus was significant. This financial support is the primary reason most of the study participants chose to attend the HI.

However, participants noted that the financial support was also self-serving. While their enrollment improved the image of the HI as a diverse community, the HI failed to adequately address the issues surrounding these scholarship recipients' ability to succeed in a safe, welcoming, culturally responsive, and supportive environment. In addition, neither of the non-traditional aged transfer students received this sort of financial support, which suggested that certain students are "privileged" over others within the community of color at the HI. Through recruitment efforts directed at traditional-aged African American students, the HI is engaging in interest conversion, which is the act of "encouraging racial advances for Blacks only when they also promote white self-interests" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Ultimately, the initial institutional commitment of financial resources to some African American students who attend the HI may be a small cost to pay for the university to appear to embrace diversity.

Ethnic organizations and services. More positively, and perhaps less self-serving for the HI, all study participants indicated that they gravitated toward many of the ethnic-specific student clubs, organizations, and services that were available. Students listed organizations such as: the Black Business Students Association; Legion of Black Collegians; National Association of Black Journalists; and programs such as, Academic Retention Services; Black Culture Center; and the "Divine Nine" Black, Greek-Lettered organizations that comprise the National Pan Hellenic Council (NPHC). A number of these offices and organizations were specifically designed to support students. Their positive regard for such offices and organizations reminds us of how important they are to the success of African American students (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Involvement with organizations, programs, and services at the HI that emphasize "Multicultural," "Black," or ethnic-specific programs reinforce the concepts of CRT, particularly when African American students respond to racial conflict from fellow students, staff, and administrators. These spaces and organizations are viewed as relatively safe, culturally supportive, and affirming environments. In addition to safety, these environments often include African American activities, cultural programs, and other academic programs that serve as important cultural enclaves for these students at a PWI (Tatum, 2003).

Much like the participants in Harper and Quaye's (2007) study, the students in this study were involved in African American student organizations and at the same time were "learning to deal with white people" (p. 138). Participants utilized an assortment of culturally-specific organizations and programs to find their way to academic, cultural, professional, and social integration at the HI. The variety of institutional support

programs became safe spaces to assist African American students while they were learning to "deal with white people" at the HI, which they encountered daily through coursework and co-curricular activities in which they were engaged.

Cost of involvement. Students' narratives included evidence of "stereotype threat" (Steele, 1999). Specifically, participants shared experiences of being negatively stereotyped by peers and others. As a result, they felt they constantly had to "prove" that they belonged. Becoming involved on campus became one way to prove that they fit. For example, a number of study participants indicated that they persist at the HI even after incurring significant debt; overcoming racial obstacles; being misadvised; and in some cases, surviving racist and discriminatory scenarios within social and academic environments. One primary way students overcame these challenges was by becoming over-involved in leadership roles within student clubs and organizations.

Student involvement in clubs and organizations offered platforms for students to voice their needs and concerns when decisions were being made regarding campus policies, the allocation of resources, and the selection of speakers and entertainers that student organizations brought to campus (Harper & Quaye, 2007). While this over-involvement was critical to participants' emotional well-being, it occasionally had a detrimental impact on time-to-degree, lengthening the time it took to graduate beyond 4 years.

Thus, we must be cautious when considering evidence that points to the positive relationship between involvement and persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Students like those in this study connected involvement with trying to belong, and they did persist, but it often came at the expense of an additional year or two at the HI. Thus,

the amount of student engagement must carefully and delicately be managed so that students' level of involvement in campus support systems does not detract from their time to degree.

Academic support. Like with culturally-specific organizations, students also reported participation in "mainstream" student organizations and support services such as the Learning Center, Student Success Center, Freshman Interest Groups, and advising offered by academic colleges at the HI. These academically-based support systems at the HI provided a great deal of educational support to most of the students who utilized them. In addition, students discussed some of the valuable personal interactions with specific faculty and staff in a variety of on-campus offices, including academic advisors, the Learning Center, and McNair Scholars Program.

However, many study participants argued that there were insufficient institutional resources to support retention efforts at the HI. For example, based upon the narratives of the non-traditional student participants in this study, increased resources and attention are needed to effectively assist them with academic and social adjustment issues. A one-size fits-all approach is not appropriate for a dynamic and complex institution, such as the HI.

Family and community. Many participants also noted the value of external networks, including family. Students reported sharing experiences and challenges with family and community members from home. According to Swail et al. (2003), non-traditional students and students of color live with a more complex reality. Students do not easily "disassociate from their culture, belief system and familial support network to become integrated and accepted into their new way of college life" (p. 49). Participants

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confirm Swail et al.'s finding. In fact, most study participants reported positive and supportive familial experiences that provided a caring, reassuring, or motivating quality to their experience at the HI. In fact, the role of family was so important that they indicated the major factor as to why they are attending college was to "make my mama proud."

Although most students described positive familial experiences, some participants like La Keisha, remind us of just how nuanced family dynamics can be. In some cases, family dynamics can be challenging and unsupportive, thereby having an adverse effect on a students' ability to thrive and achieve in an increasingly demanding educational environment. What stands out here is the value of listening to the narratives of those student voices, which are often marginalized on a predominantly white campus (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Their experiences are varied, warranting multifaceted approaches to best support all students. Further, environmental factors, including family dynamics, will affirm Black collegians' sense of belonging, facilitate their involvement in the academic and social life of campus, and/or marginalize them in ways that deny access to supportive networks that are critical for their success (Flowers 2002, 2003; Strayhorn, 2012).

<div align="center">Recommendations for Research, Practice, and Policy</div>

I began this study by reviewing the extant literature on student persistence and retention in higher education. Tinto (1975) theorized that social integration, and ultimately persistence, occurs as students increase their level of commitment to an institution. A number of authors argued that Tinto's theory is severely limited when applied to minority students (e.g., Rendon, Jalamo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992). My findings also challenge Tinto's theory. Students in this study were not fully integrated at

the HI, but were involved and were persisting. It should be noted, however, that the students' involvement, specifically those engaged in leadership positions, contributed to their persistence, however their persistence came at a cost. In most cases their engagement added additional time toward completing their degrees.

While it was outside the scope of my study, some findings suggest that students who were from the state where the HI was located had a different experience than those from another state. Thus, future studies should compare the experiences of African American students at the HI from in state and out of state and explore any differences that exist between their experiences. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be undertaken with the 13 participants after they graduate to follow up with the participants or similar studies at other institution types could be conducted to see if my findings are transferrable to other settings. Finally, additional work is needed to create another model of persistence that goes beyond Tinto to adequately address African American students and non-traditional students to further understand the differences that might exist. Perhaps a study of non-traditional African American students could be conducted to specifically address their unique experiences and support systems necessary to achieve success at the HI.

Researchers need to be as "clear about the social, political, historical and contextual nuances and realities that have shaped the research participants racial and cultural ways of knowing, in both past and present" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 395). Tinto (1993) acknowledged that he did not do this, leaving researchers with a flawed model of persistence for African American students. Not only should researchers follow Ladson-Billing's call for CRT, but practitioners at the HI should adhere to CRT work both inside and outside of the classroom, as well. This is especially important during

racialized and racist incidents at the HI. Institutional leaders at the HI should work to elevate the voices of those members of the university community who have been marginalized, discriminated against, and treated in a racist and disrespectful manner.

A more concrete recommendation from this study is for the HI to evaluate the value of duplicative programs for Black students and "mainstream" students. For example, there are two student governments: the Legion of Black Collegians (LBC) for Black student government and Missouri Students Association (MSA) for "mainstream" student government. There are also duplicate homecoming activities, one entitled The Black Family Reunion and "traditional" Homecoming.

The duplications are an issue for two reasons. The first reason is that they speak to a continuous separate but equal doctrine. Rather than becoming inclusive and equitable, the HI chooses to have separate, parallel, and duplicative services for specific groups of students. The second reason the duplication of these activities is an issue is because continued support of these vital programs is vulnerable, especially during times of constrained budgets and fiscal cuts. Programs and services that focus specifically on students of color are among the first to be cut or merged into other "mainstream" programs when tough fiscal decisions are made (Patton, 2006). When these programs go away, or are merged with mainstream programs or other inclusive programs, this leaves students served by these programs vulnerable and uncertain. In order to ensure the viability and sustainability of these important cultural programs, the campus leadership should consider merging the "mainstream" programs into those established for students of color at the HI.

Additionally, separate and parallel programs are a double-edge sword. On the one hand, the HI is attempting to address issues of diversity and inclusion by offering financial, academic, and social activities specifically for African American students. On the other hand, while the HI has undertaken these efforts in good faith, it has done so without disturbing the hegemonic structures that exist. I would argue the need to dismantle the hegemonic structures and ensuring that an inclusive and diverse structure is supported by integrating diversity and multiculturalism into the established traditions at the HI.

CRT researchers seek to dismantle these hegemonic structures so there will ultimately be no need for parallel programs, services, and activities. When institutions finally ensure that *all* programs and services are equitable, integrated, and inclusive of all the talents offered by African American students, there would be no need for CRT. Stakeholders in higher education have much work to do to realize this dream.

The final and most significant policy recommendation for the HI is to ensure ethical decision making when discussing issues of race and racism affecting a specific group of people. During the most discussed racial incidents in this study, students believed the institutional response pointed to a systemic problem of racial insensitivity, and a lack of understanding among university administrators about what students need when issues of a racial/ethnic nature emerge. Students felt they were talked *about* rather than spoken *with* when dealing with administrators at the HI. This sort of institutional response ultimately tokenized and dehumanized African American students and it should not be tolerated in the future.

Based upon this study, African American students at PWIs expect swift and appropriate responses from institutional representatives that go beyond the "zero tolerance" rhetoric and encompass a true commitment to diversity, fairness, respect, and equity when dealing with systemic issues. When there is a failure among university administrators to respond appropriately, students often experience feelings of mistrust, anger, and that they do not matter. To echo Harper (2012), "in order to get beyond persistent racial disparities and to realize the vision for a version of American higher education that is truly equitable and inclusive, we must first take account of racism and its harmful effects on people in postsecondary contexts" (p. 22)—and those at the HI must heed this point.

Conclusions

As I interpret the themes presented in the previous chapter: a) not my first choice, b) fitting in and being isolated, c) racial aggressions, d) resilience/ personal strength and/or "I have something to prove," and e) what's missing, I am reminded about the racialized lenses of CRT that guide this important work. CRT seeks to delegitimize whiteness as the norm and works to deconstruct the system of privilege and hegemony it has built (Chaisson, 2004). This is done by creating critical discourse in the classroom that emphasizes the advantages that white privilege has had on the educational process. Chaisson (2004) believes that seeking to create a consciousness of this privilege is the first step towards achieving racial justice and equity.

Therefore, as we approach the 60th anniversary of the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (1954) decision and the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act (1964), both of which have had significant impact on access for African Americans, I am hopeful that

institutions of higher education will continue to change and ultimately transform into accessible institutions where all students can learn. However, my hope is tempered; I am cognizant of hegemonic systems that tend to keep African American students in higher education from keeping pace with their white counterparts when it comes to retention, persistence, and graduation from colleges and universities.

The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration, and Immigration Rights and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary* (BAMN) has upheld the 2006 ban on race-conscious college admissions policies, creating a discriminatory systems of determining school admissions criteria (College Board, 2014). This decision, in light of all of the historical cases noted in this study, provides a complex and difficult reality for colleges and universities wishing to use this nation's laws to build the rationale for creating opportunities for students along racial lines. However, we cannot let the challenges hold us back. We must learn a lesson from the perseverance and success of the African American students in this study and continue to work to dismantle racism in our institutions of higher education.

As a critical race researcher and a former administrator at the HI, I too, have experienced racism and have been contacted for support and advocacy by students who experienced racism at the HI. It is my hope that a CRT approach can be utilized to call attention to the pervasiveness of racism, and empower African American and other oppressed students by lifting their voices and sharing of their stories. I hope the HI will use a CRT approach to dismantle the sustained hegemony that exists in a variety of programs, policies, and practices, including maintaining duplicate programs for Black

students and mainstream students, rather than insuring that diversity, inclusion, and respect become a sustained value at the HI.

A vehicle to better understand marginalized voices at the HI, such as those echoed in this study, is by conducting qualitative research from a CRT perspective. This is a powerful way to leverage diversity at an institution that so heavily values research. I hope this study will serve as a model of a way in which institutions can engage students in solving complex institutional problems. Using storytelling as a mechanism to hear the voices and experiences of people of color can add to the discourse and challenge the status quo. I hope the HI will listen.

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Appendix A

E-Mail to Potential Subjects

Dear Student or Staff member of the MU community;

My name is E. Andre Thorn and I am a PhD candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program at the University of Missouri, College of Education. I need your help! As a part of my dissertation research, I am working on a study examining the support systems that influence retention, persistence and graduation of African American students on predominantly white campuses.

I realize that you are very busy, but I would really appreciate your participation in this research study, which will consist of three, ½ hr interviews (1 ½ hrs total). This is a voluntary research study and it has been approved by the MU Institutional Review Board (IRB); IRB# 1176497.

To qualify for participation, you must (a) be a currently enrolled MU undergraduate student, (b) must identify yourself as African American and (c) must be classified as a sophomore, Junior or Senior (no first-year students). Participants will be entered into a drawing for a $25 MU Bookstore gift card.

To discuss your participation in the study or if you have any additional questions, please contact me via e-mail at Thorna@missouri.edu or by phone at 573-424-2695.

Please contact me by November 19th and forward this e-mail to other undergraduate students in your social and organizational networks.

Please excuse the cross-posts and thanks in advance for your support.

All the best!

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Protocol: Interview One

1. Explain a bit about your background <where you grew up, high school attended, type of student, etc>? -Probe

2. Tell me how you arrived at your decision to attend this institution.

3. How did you assess your level of preparation prior to coming to this institution?

4. Describe any study or time management habits you had prior to coming to college.

5. Describe the environment you grew up in <racially, ethnically, socio-economic, etc.>-Probe

6. What role has your family played in your education?

7. What were your past experiences with support systems, <such as mentoring, counseling, tutoring, or other support programs>, prior to coming to college-Probes

8. Describe your transition to college.

9. Describe your process for selecting your major.

Appendix C

Semi-structured Interview Protocol: Interview Two

1. Describe the academic support systems you have utilized. 1b. How have they been useful in your continued enrollment?

2. What has been your experiences utilizing social support systems (e.g., student organizations, extracurricular activities, service activities) as a student at this institution. --Probe.

3. Describe the social support systems you have utilized 4b. How have they been useful in your continued enrollment?

4. Describe the personal support systems <i.e., family, staff, counselors, friends and faculty> you have utilized as a student at this institution. --Probe

5. What role has race played in your college experience?

6. Describe the role cultural centers or African American based resources, organizations or programs play in your undergraduate experience.

7. What additional support or services do you believe the institution should provide to contribute to your persistence toward graduation?

Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Protocol: Interview Three

1. Given what you have previously stated about your life and your experiences as a student at this university, how would you say this has contributed to your reasons to remain at this institution?

2. Where do you see yourself going in the future? Immediately after graduation? 5 years from now? 10 years from now? Probe: how has your university experiences influenced these plans/aspirations?

3. How do you see yourself utilizing support systems after graduation?

4. How do you make sense of all of these discussions about support systems on a campus like this?

5. What recommendations do you have for the institution to better enhance the experiences of African American students?

Appendix E

Informed Consent & Participation Form

Informed Consent
E. Andre Thorn
A Qualitative examination of the support systems influencing African American student persistence, retention, and graduation at a predominantly white, research extensive, land-grant, Midwestern university.

I am conducting a study that involves research. The purpose of this research project is to examine support systems impacting African American students' retention, persistence and graduation while attending a predominantly white campus. Below is a description of the procedures that will be followed along with information about any procedures, which are experimental.
In order to participate in this study, you must be 18 years old or older.

No person will be contacted unless additional information is needed.

1. There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts that might occur as a result of your participation in this research project.
2. The benefits to you or to others that may reasonably be expected from the research are that you may be able to positively impact the experiences of African American students on predominantly white college campuses.
3. The results of this study <u>may</u> be used in official University of Missouri reports.
4. Confidentiality of records shall be maintained in that a participant's name will not appear on the survey or in the published study itself. The data will only be reported in aggregate form. The researcher will securely maintain all records associated with this study, including but not limited to, audio tapes, instruments, copies of written informed consent agreements, and other supportive documents for a period of seven (7) years from the date of completion of the research.
5. If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact E. Andre Thorn at 573-424-2695 or Faculty Advisor Jeni Hart at 573-882-4225. For additional information regarding human participation in research, please feel free to contact the UMC Campus Institutional Review Board Office at 573-882-9585.
6. Please understand that your participation is voluntary, your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Also, you do not have to answer any questions that may be asked.
7. Please also understand that your relationship with MU or the Office of Academic Retention Services will not be affected by your consent or refusal to participate in this study.

8. In the event that significant new findings are developed during the course of the research, which may relate to your willingness to continue participation, new information will be provided to you.
9. There will be approximately 60 students invited to participate in this study.
10. Those who agree to participate in this study will be asked to participate in the following:
   a. Participants will be offered free pizza and soda at a focus group meeting which will inform participants about the study.
   b. Complete an informed consent and participation form.
   c. Participate in a three separate 10-15 question interviews about your student experiences utilizing a variety of support systems while attending a predominantly white campus.
   d. These interviews will be videotaped for follow up review by researcher.
   e. Participants may be contacted for additional information or clarity about their responses.
   f. These three interviews should last no longer than 45 minutes each.

You will be provided a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Participants signature   Date
By signing this section, you certify that you agree to participate in this study and are 18 years old or older. **If you are not over 18, you are not allowed to participate in this study.**

_____   _____
Investigators signature   Date
E. Andre Thorn
573-424-2695 phone
573-884-4353 Fax.

Vita

Elijah Andre Thorn was born in Bastrop, Louisiana. He grew up in Las Vegas, Nevada and calls Las Vegas home. He attended the University of Nevada Reno in Reno, Nevada where he completed a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice in 1987 and a Masters of Arts degree in Counseling and Educational Psychology with an emphasis in College Student Development in 1998. He served as Admissions and Recruitment Coordinator and Student Development Coordinator, EOP and Access Programs at the University of Nevada, Reno while he completed his MA.

At the completion of his Master's degree, Elijah worked at the University of Missouri, Columbia as the Assistant Director of Academic Retention Services, an academic and cultural support program for students of color at the university. In 2010, he resigned from this position to become an Institutional Research Analyst for the University of Missouri, working on special projects integrating Academic Affairs and Student Affairs at the university.

Elijah was moved to Anchorage, Alaska in August 2011, when he was presented with an opportunity to become the Director of the Multicultural Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage. In his current position, he manages the day-to-day operations of a vibrant academic and cultural center that provides services to over 4,000 African American, Hispanic, Asian, International and Native American students. He also supervises a staff of four professional and seven student staff. He also serves as an adjunct faculty member in the Guidance Department, teaching Guidance 150, Creating Success in College. He has been married to Stephanie White Thorn, Esq. for 20 years.