

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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**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.