

12-20-2009

## **An Investigation of the Impact of Student Government Involvement at one Public Historically Black University on the Career Choice of African American Student Participants**

Morolake Laosebikan-Buggs  
*University of New Orleans*

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An Investigation of the Impact of Student Government Involvement at one Public  
Historically Black University on the Career Choice of African American Student  
Participants

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Administration

by

Morolaké O. Laosebikan-Buggs

B.A. 1994, Florida International University  
M.S. 1996, Florida State University

December, 2009

## **Dedication**

This document is dedicated to the two people in my life who matter most, my daughter Julianne and my son Logan. Thank you for supporting “mommy” all the way.

I did it for you.

## Acknowledgements

I would be remiss in saying thanks to anyone, without first thanking God. The Lord has continuously shown his goodness, mercy, and faithfulness to me and my family throughout this process. The last few years have been marked with numerous and unexpected changes: Hurricane Katrina, forced relocation to a new city, job loss, the birth of a new baby, and an economy that constantly made me wonder how we would survive. But then I was reminded that God keeps his eye on the sparrow, so I knew he would surely watch over me. I thank him for keeping his word and his promises.

I would like to thank my mother, Funmilayo Laosebikan for being the best mother, father, and friend any daughter could have. It is indeed a blessing to have a “prayer warrior” in your life, and you are my ultimate weapon. I thank you for praying with me without ceasing. I could always tell when you prayed for me, a calmness of spirit would overtake me, and I knew it would all be okay. You are the best cheerleader! When I was feeling down, your words of encouragement constantly reminded me that I could complete this task. Even though I am sure my graduation won’t be as “cool” as Julian’s, I suspect that it will be worth the trip! I love you so very much!

To the other members of my family, Lois and Silas Ashley, and especially my aunts: Dr. Arike Logan, Toké Malone, Folasade Amole, thanks for supporting me spiritually, mentally, and financially. It is because of you that I was able to complete this journey without fear. Knowing you have a family that support you in your time of need is something I wish everyone in the world was blessed to have.

The doctoral journey is already a difficult and winding road, and it is even more so when you are over 400 miles away, so thanks to my friends in New Orleans, Janice Fortia, Deon Ridgell and Mr. and Mrs. Tucker, giving me a place to sleep, feeding me and caring for me, and making me feel so at home whenever I am in NOLA.

I want to thank all former student government leaders who participated in this dissertation research, your willingness to share your experiences was vital to this study. This project would not be a reality without your input.

I wish to thank all the student leaders I have advised in the past but with very special love to my former students and student government leaders specifically: Ford Graham – who taught me how meaningful and far reaching a student advising relationship could really be; Melody Baham and Tom Gallen – who were both the epitome of what student leadership should look like; Matt Coleman, Peter Young, Trey Hawkins and Nate Hole – I love you guys just for being you; Janelle Bakke – who taught me that women could be engineers and still be cute; Jered Bocage – my eternal personal assistant and my dream for all student leaders “realized”; Phillip Agnew – who spoke success over me when I had yet to claim it for myself; and James Bland – who showed me that

true leadership sometimes means standing alone....I will NEVER forget you for standing with me.

I also want to thank my friends who encouraged me throughout this process, lending me their expertise and their “ears” as I went along this journey. Thanks to my former supervisors and constant mentors, Dr. Daniel P. Nadler, Dr. Nancy Turner, and Dr. Vincent June. Many thanks also to my number one “chica” Michelle Williams, and my “co-conspirators”, Dr. Monique Igbinoba-Cummings Anyiesa Johnson, Dr. Darice Richard, Afua Owusu, Dr. John Warford, and Maj. Joseph Torrain; my friends in the program, with special thanks to Dr. Debbie Krentel and a special “shout out” to my editor Dr. Leonard Williams.

Thank you to Dr. Andre Perry, Dr. Marietta DelFavero, Dr. Al Alcazar and Dr. April Bedford for agreeing to serve on my committee and guiding me through this process. Also, thanks to my former chair, Dr. Barbara Johnson for lighting a fire under me and finally getting me on the road to a Ph.D.

My thanks would not be complete if I did not thank my husband and long time in-house editor, Julian. Your love knows no bounds and your unconditional support is unmatched. Thank you for looking after our children when I needed to make deadlines and explaining to Julianne what it means when “mommy has to write”. Along with my husband, I would like to thank my children, Julianne and Logan who are my two greatest blessings from the Lord above. I would have never finished without you. Thanks for waiting for me, despite the fact it took a little longer than I expected. Now, I’m all yours!

Finally, thank you to everyone who prayed **for me** and **with me**, and to any of my former students or friends who I may have forgotten, please forgive me and know that I still love, respect and value each one of you for the indelible mark you have all made on my life.

May God continue to bless and keep each one of you is my prayer.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate student participation in collegiate student governance, the impact of that involvement and its influence on career choice for African-American participants, and to enlighten educators about role and value of collegiate student government participation. If participation in student government and involvement in leadership activities is important in the overall development of a student, then the benefits and characteristics of that development may appear after the student graduates and enters society and the workforce (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). Studies conducted over the last twenty years have attempted to measure the impact of involvement and leadership development on college students after graduation (Cress, et. all, 2001; Sommers, 1991) but not much has been written about the subject specifically tied to student government (Downey, Bosco and Silver, 1984; Kuh and Lund, 1994; Schuh and Laverty, 1983; Sermersheim, 1996).

A qualitative case study/cross case analysis of multiple participants was utilized for this project. Following the collection of data through the use of a written participant profile and oral interviews with each of the survey participants, case studies were constructed and presented in a narrative form to allow the individual personalities of the participants to emerge. The use of cross case analysis allowed the researcher to group the data into themes and highlight patterns that cut across each case, more narrowly defining what related factors were significant to the impact of student government participation and the selection of a particular career choice.

The findings from this study indicate that while the impact of student government participation has an overall positive effect on students who participate, including greater career competency and self confidence, students attribute their choice of career to their chosen undergraduate major or other factors. Study findings revealed evidence that the impact of student government involvement was limited in its direct influence on career choice.

Keywords: Student Government, Career Choice, African-American Students, Student Involvement, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Higher Education

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to answer a basic yet complex question: what impact does student government participation have on career choice? More importantly, how does it affect the career choice of African-American students attending public Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs)? Can student government alumni reflect and articulate the value of their involvement on their chosen career choice? Given the substantive data and significant amounts of research on how college affects students, (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella, Blimling, 1999; Cress et. all, 2001) and vocational/career choice (Martens & Cox, 2000; Gaffer & Hazler, 2002; Holland, 1997; Zagora & Cramer, 1994; Zekeri, 2004; Zinser, 2003) surprisingly, there is very little empirical research on how the programs, activities, and level of participation in student government holistically affect those students who participate (Chickering & Dalton, 2001). This knowledge void calls for research in the area of student involvement and career choice as combined factors of study, could fill a much needed gap within the literature, and better inform student participants as well as student affairs staff.

This study will focus on African-American student government alumni who attended a public four-year HBCU and their reflections on the impact and value of their student government involvement on their chosen vocation. Research will be conducted using Astin's (1984, 1997) Involvement Theory (this theory explains that involvement or active engagement in academic and other activities is positively related to student

learning and development) as well referencing Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) work, How College Affects Students, which notes that "individual student characteristics are likely to play a major role in different dimensions of [college] career choice" (p.465). Astin (1997) believes that the more students are socially involved in campus life, the more likely they will persist and graduate. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also identify students' major field of study as a major determinant of future occupation, as well as addressing the effect of institutional racial composition on career choice. The influence of attending an HBCU on African-American students was highlighted by the authors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and was also contrasted to the level of students' co-curricular involvement and its effects on career choice during college. The authors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) uncovered research that suggested that certain types of cocurricular involvement contributes to the choice of a career (p. 517), noting that "choice of a career as a lawyer, was enhanced by being elected to a student office" (p. 517). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that "overall, it is difficult to form a firm conclusion about the impact of attending a historically Black institution on African Americans' career aspirations...[although] Black colleges appear to enhance the career aspirations of [their] students" (p. 485).

HBCUs can be given recognition for enhancing the career aspirations of their students, and given the value the universities often articulate in various publications and websites on co-curricular involvement, the relationship of this involvement on the lives of college students cannot be underestimated (Lehr, 2002; Cress, et. all, 2001).

Most scholars who study the impact of college on students agree that what happens outside the classroom - the other curriculum - can contribute to valued outcomes of college...40 percent of students, the do-it-yourself side of college [what took place outside the classroom] was the most significant [part of the] educational experience. (Kuh, 1995, p. 124)

Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996), concluded that, based on their research on the *Student Learning Imperative* from the American College Personnel Association (1994), “students’ out-of-class experiences appear to be far more influential in students’ academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and academic and student affairs administrators think” (p. 157). The influence should also be apparent in its affects on career choice.

There are several published studies that have focused on African-American student involvement, (Parker & Flowers, 1994; Sutton, 2001; Holmes, Sullivan, & Letzring, 2002; Littleton, 2002; Flowers, 2004, Townsend, 2006) but most specifically highlight African-American student involvement on the campuses of Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). There is a dearth of research concerning African-American student leaders who attend public HBCUs. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of student government involvement, of public HBCU alumni, on career choice. HBCUs continue to prove their worth in their laudable graduation rates. According to the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) website, (<http://www.uncf.org/aboutus/hbcus.asp>) over half of all African-American professionals are graduates of HBCUs. “While the 105 HBCUs represent just 3% of the nation’s institutions of higher learning, they graduate nearly one-quarter of African

Americans who earn undergraduate degrees. Put another way, HBCUs graduate 75% more of their African American students than other schools do." Study and investigation of HBCU alumni in both their campus involvement and career choice, will provide insight into the continually growing professional African-American HBCU graduate.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Birnbaum (1988) commented on the essence of higher education through a provocative paradox stating, "American colleges and universities are poorly run but highly effective" (p. 3). Student government may share this same paradox as on most campuses it might be the student organization plagued with the most issues, all while being the most dynamic and well run of all student organizations on campus (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006).

Student government has the potential to positively impact the growth and development of college students in a variety of ways. This positive impact can be tied to both the general benefits of involvement (Kuh & Lund, 1994), and the most specific benefits of representing the needs of others and assuming a leadership role on campus. Regardless of the effectiveness of student governance power, the involvement of students in governance related activities is a positive element of college student participation.



However, the impact and level of participation in student government is often difficult to determine. There is no holistic database that contains information regarding the number of students who participate in student government nationally, the impact of their funding, or the number of students who vote in elections. However, between 2003 and 2007, according to data compiled by the American Student Government Association (ASGA), the first nationwide professional student government association, provides a “snapshot” of SGA by the numbers (<http://www.asgaonline.com>):

- There are over 5,100 known college student governments in the United States.
- At more than 71% of schools nationwide, SGA officers are receiving some sort of monetary compensation. (Elected SGA officers earn salaries at more than 85% of public institutions.
- Depending on the student government association, the larger the enrollment, the more likely the schools are to pay the salaries of student government officers; of the smallest schools (1,000 students), just 30% compensate their officers, while 87% of larger schools (over 30,000 students) remunerated students for their participation.

While student government is an active student organization, it has a unique set of organizational issues. A student in the average student organization may deal with the issues around how to have an effective meeting, how to engage the membership, and how to apply for student activity fees. But student participants in student government deal with a plethora of different issues. Their charge is not to deal with the specific needs or desires of a particular group, but to improve the quality of academic, social and professional lives of their fellow students. This charge comes complete with strong lobbying groups vying for student dollars and access, a tentative relationship

with the official university leadership, and elected students with their own public and hidden agendas (Cuyjet, 1994; Crume, 2004).

No other group on campus faces criticisms related to voter apathy (Lipka, 2005a), disbanded student governments (Collison, 1992; Cage, 1993; U. of Colo. at Denver Students, 1994; University of Wisconsin, 1994; U. of Central Florida's Student Government, 1996), controversy over the use of student activity fees (Collison, 1992; Student Leaders at Gannon U, 1996; Hoover, 2005) and the rate of elected student leaders salaries (Student Government Presidents, 1997). Student government undoubtedly is an exclusive student group, because it has the money (in some cases, specifically in Florida and California, complete oversight in the allocation of over more than \$10M in student activity fees), resources, and capital like that of no other student organization, and because of this, may have more influence its student participants than other campus leadership organizations on the educational and career paths taken by its participants.

Despite the amount of research that has been conducted on student government as a group (Downey, Bosco, & Silver, 1984, Cuyjet, 1994, Coates, 1985, Kuh & Lund, 1994; Crume, 2004, Spencer, 2004), it has rarely been the organization of choice to study. Recent studies have taken a closer look at various student organizations/groups from Resident Assistants (RAs), students who work for the University Housing department and serve as live-in staff on a floor with residents, (Posner and Brodsky, 1993) to Greek Life/fraternity and sorority involvement (Kimbrough, 1995, Adams & Keim, 2000).

Although these studies have proven useful, there is a need to study the impact of student government involvement in a more concentrated context.

Downey, Bosco, and Silver's (1984) study, the "Long-Term Outcomes of Participation in Student Government", has not been replicated or given further examination in over 25 years. This might be attributable to its ambiguous finding; the data did not support claims of either positive or negative long-term outcomes of participation in student government. Furthermore, the study substantiated an earlier study conducted by Schuh and Laverty (1983) on the perceived long-term influence of holding a significant student leadership position. This study revealed that students' leadership experiences had little or no influence on their non-working lives (such as marriage, child rearing, and religious activities) but did impact the development of their skills in leadership, decision making, planning, organizing, and teamwork. Ten years later, Terrell and Cuyjet (1994) edited an entire journal issue of *New Directions for Student Services* dedicated to student government, entitled "Developing Student Government Leadership". This journal edition addressed a multitude of topics directly related to student government participation including: what students gained from participation (Kuh & Lund, 1994), building ethical and effective relationships with student government leaders (Golden, 1994), student activism (Chambers & Phelps, 1994), assessing minority participation (Lavant & Terrell, 1994), student government as a provider of student services (Cuyjet, 1994), and challenges for the future of student government. Over a decade later, Crume's (2004) study on the development of SGA as

its own student subculture, is the last significant study on student government participation.

Recent research on student involvement in the past two decades has focused on individual participation of specific student populations including women (Spencer, 2004; Komives, 1994; Beck, 1997), African-Americans at PWIs (Parker & Flowers, 1994; Sutton, 2001; Holmes, Sullivan, & Letzring, 2002; Littleton, 2002) or outcomes of involvement in campus leadership opportunities (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Lehr, 2002). Even with positive outcomes reported as a direct affect of this involvement, the lens of career choice has been woefully absent.

The context and reasoning as to why career choice is an important element of this study is best stated by Parsons (1909 p. 3):

“No step in life, unless it may be the choice of a husband or wife, is more important than the choice of vocation.”

The importance of career development and its intersection between race, gender, self concept, and participation is critical and essential to the depth of this study. Because career choice can be affected by so many environmental factors ranging from the current economy to parental influence; gender to academic ability, and beyond, understanding if or how ones participation in a student group like student government, has on career choice may reveal both positive and negative effects.

The meaning of the word “career” is interpreted differently within the literature with words like “occupation”, “vocation” and “career” used synonymously and interchangeably. Because of the fragmented nature of career theories (each focusing on

a specific part of the process), when looking for a definition of career, several definitions can be found. For this study, we will use the definition given Patton and McMahon (1996) which defined career as “the variety of occupational roles which individuals will undertake throughout life. It includes: paid and self-employment; the different occupations which a person may have over the years and periods of unemployment; and unpaid occupations such as that of student, voluntary worker, or parent” p.4. This definition will be utilized in this study, because of its encompassing of student as an identifiable career.

This study will investigate the relationship and impact between student government involvement and its affect on career choice. Previous studies conducted on former student leaders (which will be outlined in the literature review) have suggested that involvement in campus life has both a positive and measurable influence on student development (Astin, 1984, Chickering and Resisser, 1993, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling, 1999). However, there are very few studies that investigate the relationship between the factors of involvement in student governance and career choice. In an effort to explore the relationship between student involvement in campus governance and its long-term affects on choice of employment, this study will examine the impact of student government participation and career choice selection specifically within African American student populations at public HBCUs.

### *Research Questions*

The primary research question to be answered in this study is: according to the perceptions of African American student government alumni, what impact, if any, will student government participation have on the career choice of the respondents?

Secondary questions addressed within this course of the study will include:

- RQ1: How do factors like gender, parental influence, leadership participation, positions held, career exposure/development and articulated and/or changed major of study affect the student's career choice?
- RQ2: To what extent can participants articulate their student government participation's affect on their career choice? What factors do student participants identify as the most influential on their career choice?
- RQ3: Will there be a relationship between student government participation and career choice, and if so, what will that relationship be?

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to address the current knowledge void by exploring and understanding the role and impact of student government participation on the career choice of African-American participants.

Numerous studies have been conducted, particularly over the past decade, in an effort to verify the impact of student involvement on student development and learning (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Moore, Lovell, McGann, & Wyrick, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Involvement refers to the physical and psychological energy given to an activity (Astin, 1999, p. 519). Greater involvement on the part of the student leads to greater degrees of student learning and personal

development (Astin, 1999, p. 529) Furthermore, Kuh et al. (1991) contends that “students who are involved in powerful out-of-class experiences are likely to have a much more satisfying college experience than those who do not participate” (p. 2). The research on the impact of college life on students is unequivocal: personal development is enhanced when students are engaged in purposeful out-of-class activities like student government (Astin, 1997). Student government provides an opportunity for students to hone their skills related to decision making, ethical conflicts, and career related proficiencies (Cress, et. all, 2001).

In contrast to studies on the impact of student involvement, is the impact of career choice. Students go to college for a myriad of reasons; however, most report that they go because they see it as a means to higher wages and better employment. Because many college students arrive not knowing why or what they intend to study, the choice a student makes to join student government may just be another way in which to clarify career choice. Harold Howe (cited in Sheils, McGee, Boyd, & Monroe, 1976), the former US Commissioner of Education, conveyed the significance of early career development in college and the utter uncertainty students have regarding why they choose to attend:

Teenagers go to college to be with their boyfriends and girlfriends; they go because they can't think of anything else to do; they go because their parents want them to and sometimes because their parents don't want them to; they go to find themselves, or to find a husband, or to get away from home, and sometimes even to find out about the world in which they live. (p. 64)

The pressures of finances and time related to being a college student have changed since the early 1800s, when institutions were established to educate sons of the elite and

wealthy (Horowitz, 1987, Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) currently, students cite getting a better job or developing ones' own career possibilities at the top of the list for reasons for college attendance. Because colleges and universities bear the burden of assisting students with clarifying and identifying their major field of study (Brown, 2004) which invariably leads back to career choice, it seems fitting to study the possible impact of one student organization - student government, on the career choice of student participants.

Brown (2004) noted that students are impacted by a variety of experiences during their college years. Career development during the undergraduate years reveals that students usually change their plans after entering college due to a myriad of expected developments and serendipity ... combining to provide more opportunities for career choice than at any other time in ones life. Surely student government participation may be one of many factors to cause students to view their possible career choices differently.

### *Significance of the Study*

Kuh et al. (1991) proposed that "the impact of the college experience on students is increased when they are more actively engaged in various aspects of college life" (p. 5). So what is the impact of student government participation on the student college experience? Student government participation is said to positively affect a number of outcomes in higher education including: personal growth, problem solving skills, critical thinking, moral development, self esteem, civic engagement, and career



competence and aspirations (Downey, Bosco, & Silver, 1984; Austin, 1991, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1996).

Further review of the literature highlights three primary influences on student government participation: persistence, satisfaction, and increased levels of competence. Persistence is a directly measured outcome associated with involvement in student government (Astin, 1993; Astin, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Littleton, 2002). Students who are involved are more likely to have high educational aspirations and to attain a degree (Downey, Bosco, & Silver, 1984; Astin, 1993; Astin, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Students who are active in out-of-class experiences are more likely to be satisfied with their entire college experience (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Kuh et al., 1991). Out-of class experiences, such as involvement in clubs and organizations, increase competence. A significant measured outcome of student involvement in student government has been increased levels of competence; both in gains in cognitive competence (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999; Whitt & Miller, 1999) and in personal competence (Kuh, 1995 and Whitt & Miller, 1999). Research indicates that personal competence is gained through student club and organization involvement (Kuh, 1995; Whitt & Miller, 1999).

Student leadership participation is associated with career development and skill development. Decision making skills, the capacity to cope with ambiguity and complexity, and willingness to take risks (Cress et al., 2001, p. 22) are increased by involvement in leadership opportunities. Student leadership opportunities increase one's marketability and employability value (Kuh et al., 1991; Moore et al., 1998).

Employers seek employees with communication, problem-solving, interpersonal, teamwork, personal management, and motivation skills (Kerka, 1990; Williams, 1998; Zinser, 2003). In addition, skills developed through student leadership opportunities vests students with the skills employers seek in those they hire (Aksoy, 1998).

Agbor-Baylee's Cyclical Model of Student Career Motivation presents a multivariate interactive model to explain student career selection (1997). Agbor-Baiyee contends that commitment to a given career mediates shifts in a student's motivation from being largely extrinsic to intrinsic motivation which has a multiplier effect on career motivation" (p.467). If students are impacted by a variety of experiences during their collegiate study, including in classroom and out-of-classroom experiences, this research may show that the influence of student government participation may cause students to develop an interest in law, education, student affairs, and government/public policy, all career choices reinforced by involvement in student governance. According to Agbor-Baiyee (1997) model, what develops from a students' experience, perceptions, and attitudes, their professional career choices, would be affected by the external influence of student government participation.

This study may be significant for future practice, research, and policy. In terms of practice, the study will be important to several constituencies. One constituency will be concerned with student governance and leadership development programs. The results of this study will provide data on how students perceive their student government experience, as communicated by the former student leaders themselves and their observers. This data may be used to identify skills that are important when creating the

components of a student government leadership training program as well as research tools focused on the effects of student government involvement.

The members of the National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) may also benefit from this study. Since NACA offers a sequence of student government specific trainings and workshops, and NASPA offers training for minority students seeking careers in student affairs, the results may provide both organizations, and other professional associations with a commitment to student and/or African-American specific leadership, with a better understanding of how student government involvement may influence career choice and the selection of higher education as a career.

Student government leaders themselves may also benefit from this study. The results of this study will provide select student leaders an opportunity for self-reflection and a better understanding of what and how their involvement affected their final career choices. The data may also allow current student government leaders to assess their status as leaders and identify goals they aspire to achieve with respect to future career aspirations.

The study may also hold significance for future research. This study will examine student government from the lens of past involvement, however future studies may examine the effects of involvement in student government on career choice at multiple institutions (PWIs, private HBCUs, and minority-majority serving institutions). This type of study will expand on what is known about the affect of student government participation on career choice and may identify a group of students to track over time.

Such a longitudinal study may give practitioners more information on the value of student government participation long-term.

This study will employ qualitative methods of data collection to analyze the relationship of participation in student governance and career choice. This study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the effect of the relationship between student government involvement and the career choice of a select group of student leaders. Future studies may utilize qualitative methods to gain a broader understanding of the leadership practices of these students. Such data would enrich the knowledge base concerning the value of student government as an organization and its impact on student participants.

Finally, this study may be significant in terms of future policy. Institutional policymakers may utilize the data concerning the participation of students involved in student governance, and provide measurable outcomes of involvement for students as well as the university. Administrators may take this information into account when determining funding for student involvement, student leadership, and general co-curricular training programs.

### *Overview of Methodology*

Based on the literature review, a qualitative research approach for collecting data was selected. The rationale for using a qualitative research design using case study/cross case analysis approach is simple. The questions developed for this study could not be answered using conventional quantitative methods. Through this

approach, the study will be descriptive in intent and exploratory in form. A qualitative research design will allow for a better understanding of the situations, experiences and meanings of a particular and unique group of participants.

Following the reasoning of Johnson & Christensen (2004) this study was viewed as “exploratory,” (p. 17) as there has been little research previously published in this area.

This study will focus on African-American student government alumni who attended a public four-year HBCU and their reflections on the value of their student government involvement on their chosen vocation. One public, HBCU has been selected as the site for this study. The research design will be a qualitative case study of ten to fourteen student government alumni (former student government executive branch officers), who attended the same four year, public, historically black college/university (HBCU). Potential students will be identified by student government archival records (past meetings’ minutes, agendas, bills, and state statutes) and oral history research, as well as through communication with former advisors and student affairs staff.

Once former leaders are identified, letters explaining the purpose of the study will be sent to all participants inviting them to participate in the study. The interview protocol will frame the outline for this study which will assist the researcher in gaining a thorough understanding of the development of the student government at a large, public, four-year HBCU as well as an understanding of what factors, if any, affect career choice as a cause of involvement. To answer these questions, a qualitative case

study/cross case analyses approach will be utilized. Interviews will be conducted, audio taped, and transcribed verbatim as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). Interview data will also include field notes, reflecting the personal observations, feelings, biases, and perceptions of the researcher (Maxwell, 2005, Creswell, 2003, Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A qualitative approach as opposed to a quantitative approach was determined for this type of study because of the desire to glean information from the perspective of the study participants. In contrast, a quantitative approach would begin with an assumption by the researcher and would follow by producing numerical data which would reflect *how many* students thought their participation affected their career choice but would fail to answer the questions of *how* and *why* such participation had any effect at all.

### *Definition of Terms*

This study will use the following operational definitions to ensure the readers' understanding of the terms that will be used throughout this study:

Co-curricular involvement: Refers to formal and informal activities and programs conducted by or for students in the school, college or adjacent community..."that are not directly part of an institution's formal, course-related, instructional processes" also known as extra-curricular involvement or "out-of-class experiences" (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): The Higher Education Act of 1965, defines an HBCU as: "...any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency ..."  
(Provasnik, 2004).

Student Involvement theory: Refers to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience. According to this theory, the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater the amount of student learning and personal development. (Astin, 1999) Involvement can include academic work, participation in co-curricular/extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty and staff.

Student Government Association (SGA): A student-governed and student elected organization that provides representation, advocacy, and student services for its student constituents. It also serves as the official voice of the student body to the university administration. Traditionally, student government will include 3 branches: executive, legislative and judicial; which provide a variety of programs and services for the student body.

Predominantly-White Institution (PWI): An institution of higher education where the majority of the student population is identified as "white".

Career/Vocational Choice: The process by which students choose a career path or occupation including the variety of occupational roles individuals will pursue over their lifetime.

### *Organization of the Study*

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic of the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, an overview of the methodology to be used in the study, and the organization of the study. Chapter Two will review the literature relevant to the topic. Chapter Three will describe the methodology used in the study, including sampling techniques, a description of the procedures used in data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will describe the findings of the study while Chapter Five will focus on a discussion of those findings and their implications for future practice, research, and policy.

### *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework that will be utilized for this study was developed by Agbor-Baiyee (1997), who developed a multivariate model to explain student career selection. The model known as the “Cyclical Model of Student Career Motivation” is a hypothetical model and has not been applied to any particular subset or population. The model includes six basic components: 1) the student as well as his (2) experiences, (3) perceptions and attitudes toward a career, (4) extrinsic motivation, (5) commitment, and (6) intrinsic motivation.



Agbor-Baiyee (1997) contends that commitment to a given career mediates shifts in a student's motivation from being largely extrinsic to intrinsic motivation which has a multiplier effect on career motivation" (p.467). If students are impacted by a variety of experiences during their collegiate study, including both in classroom and out-of-classroom experiences, this research may show that the influence of student government participation may cause students to develop an interest in law, education, student affairs, and government/public policy, all career choices reinforced by involvement in student governance. According to Agbor-Baiyee (1997) model, what develops from a students' experience, perceptions, and attitudes, their professional career choices, would be affected by the external influence of student government participation.

Figure 1 displays the model in detail (Figure 2 displays the major components) for student cyclical career selection that will serve as the foundation for exploring the affects of student government involvement on the career choice of HBCU alumni.

Figure 1:

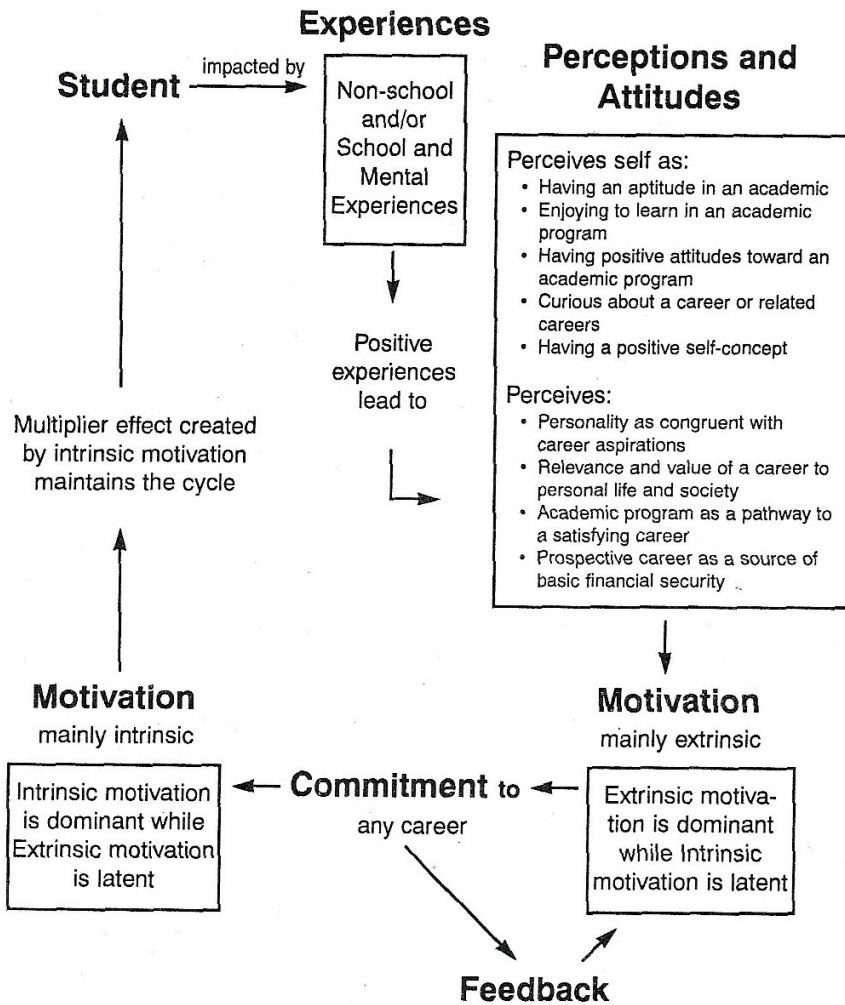
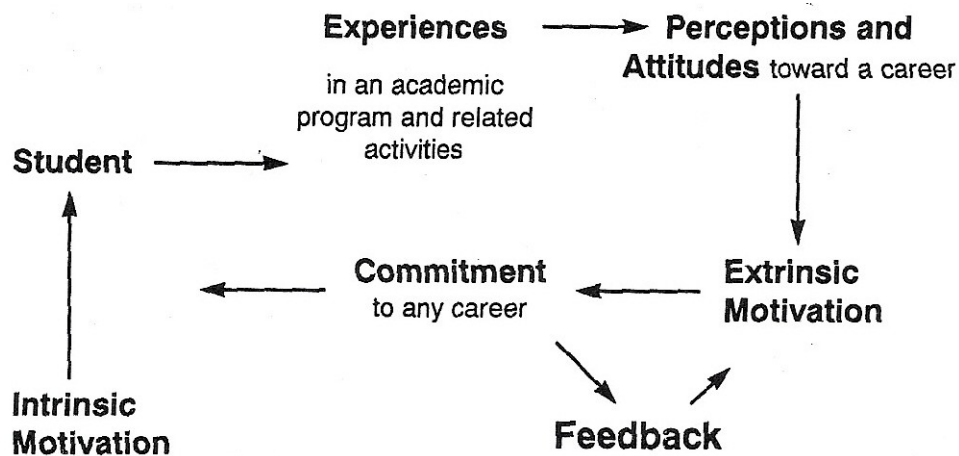


Figure 2:



### *Summary*

In summary, the researcher intends to contribute to closing the knowledge gap which currently exists in the literature by investigating the impact between African American alumni participation in student government with factors relating to career choice.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study is to investigate collegiate student government and the impact of that involvement and its influence on career choice for African-American alumni from a public historically black college/university (HBCU), and to enlighten educators about role and value of collegiate student government participation. The following literature review will be conducted in five general areas, within the context of student government participation and career choice in a higher educational setting. The literature was reviewed, organized and categorized under the following headings: General Overview of Student Involvement and Student Organizations, History of Co-Curricular Involvement, Role and Purpose of Historically Black College and Universities, History, Role and Purpose of Student Government, Research on Student Leadership and Student Government participation, Student Involvement and Race, and Review of Career Development Theory.

The related factors of student government involvement, race, and career development are key elements that will guide this research study as well as lend foundational elements for the impact and relationship between student government participation and career choice within the American higher education system.

The final section of this chapter will provide the reader with an overview of the conceptual framework for the study.

### *General Overview of Student Involvement and Student Organizations*

Over the past century, numerous researchers have argued the benefits for students who become involved in co-curricular activities and take advantage of leadership opportunities on their campus. Student organizations provide the vehicle for students to learn, practice, and model leadership. The outcomes from this involvement have been identified by many experts in the field (Astin, 1997, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Hernandez, 1999, Terenzini, 1999) and include more effective interpersonal skill development, cultural awareness, and social awareness skills that result in long-term career, social, and personal gains (Astin, 1999). In addition, students self reported proficiencies in decision-making, administrative skills, budgeting and accounting, and bureaucratic and programming abilities (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Schuh and Laverty, 1983). Kuh (1995) noted that 85% of responding college students reported that college participation and leadership positions assisted them in the tasks of planning, organizing, managing, and decision-making.

Most researchers have agreed that student learning and development in college is positively influenced by the level of student involvement (Astin, 1993; Astin, et al., 1994; Kuh, 1995). Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1999) articulated four assumptions about the effect of out-of-class experiences on the cognitive development of a college student. First, out-of class experiences are influential on development. Second, not all of these experiences are positive. In Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling's research, living at home, fraternity/sorority involvement, athletics, and working in an off-campus employment setting were sometimes found to have less than positive

impact. Third, programs in student affairs needed to better capitalize on student learning outcomes and the utilization of co-curricular experiences. Finally, in cases where co-curricular associations were found to have a positive impact, there were definite opportunities for active student involvement.

This involvement was defined by Astin (1984) as the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devoted to the academic experience, both curricular and co-curricular. During the 1920s - 1930s, there was resurgence in the philosophy of the development of the “whole” student and the promotion of two specific domains of development: cognitive/academic and affective (Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling, 1996). The foundations for this philosophy came, not as much from institutional faculty, as from the staff who were hired to address student issues. Love (2005) found that these staff members have continued to be the initiators, planners, and evaluators of co-curricular programming. If it is a basic proposition that human development is an organizing purpose for higher education (Chickering and Reisser, 1993), and colleges and universities are charged with producing leaders (Boatman, 1999; Ehrlich, 2000), then the significance of opportunities for student involvement and development is apparent.

When discussing involvement, Street (1997) described student organizations as the element of campus life that offers one of the best opportunities for involvement. Street (1997) made two important assumptions about student organizations that must be considered. First, student organizations, while beneficial to student involvement, also serve as an important resource for the institution. Secondly, student organizations

play an important role in student development and satisfaction. Stanford (1992) made a similar assumption about student organizations and co-curricular involvement. Stanford (1992) concluded through research that “relationships do exist within organizational and non-organizational involvement and areas of student development among student leaders” (p. 23).

Twale (1988) asserted that student activities provided three basic objectives to assist in the development of students. First, such activities provided physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual forums to facilitate development. Second, involvement allowed the identification of cognitive skills and affective learning patterns as measurable goals. Finally, co-curricular involvement motivated and developed faculty and staff to become capable of fulfilling the first two objectives while serving as positive role models for students.

Barsi, Hand, and Kress (1985) identified five personal traits which all student leaders should possess and which are attainable through various types of student involvement. Street (1997) and Twale (1988) discussed these traits and they included a well developed value system, human relations skills, the ability to be flexible, a sense of insight and perception, and a positive and realistic self-concept. A study by Kuh (1995) found that 85% of college seniors responding to a survey (n = 126) reported having learned those very skills by participating in leadership positions and by being involved while they were in college. Other similar studies (Schuh and Lavery, 1983; Bialek and Groves-Lloyd, 1998) have produced comparable results.

Street (1997) highlighted AT&T's Human Resources Study Group, who conducted a study in 1984 reviewing managerial performance and progress for over 2000 graduates who were involved student leaders on campus. The results indicated that next to a student's chosen field in an undergraduate major, the second best predictor of performance was a student's level of involvement in co-curricular activities. Similar studies have compared the level of a student's co-curricular involvement with post-college factors such as social, civic, and professional involvement, number of leadership positions held, post-graduate salary figures, and job satisfaction.

Another study conducted by Swenson (1983), noted and determined the confidence of the relationship between co-curricular involvement post-graduate characteristics. His follow-up study of student leaders from three prominent universities, graduating between 1956 and 1981, targeted student government officers, committee chairs, club presidents, residence hall officers and Greek officers. Of the 200 respondents to the survey, 81% earned higher than the average salary of a college graduate, 100% reported a significant degree of satisfaction with employment, and the entire sample perceived that the credit for their participation in current civic activities was attributable to involvement in co-curricular activities while enrolled in college. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also identified students' major field of study as a major determinant of future occupation, as well as addressing the effect of institutional racial composition on career choice.



### *History of Co-Curricular Collegiate Involvement*

The American higher education system traces its early beginnings to the founding of institutions like Harvard University (1636), The College of William and Mary (1693), and Yale University (1701) in the 17th and 18th centuries (Horowitz, 1987, Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). These institutions were established to educate sons of the elite and wealthy, primarily for the ministry (Horowitz, 1987, Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). During this period, little emphasis was placed on out-of-the-classroom learning. Rather the focus was on intellectual, moral, and civic development through the academic (in-classroom) curriculum (Geiger, 1999).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *in loco parentis* (Latin for “in place of the parent”) the notion that students were immature and in need of parental supervision by administrators, guided the university-student relationship throughout this era (Cohen, 1993, Geiger, 1999). The next 100 years ushered in further changes for higher education including the establishment of state/land grant universities (1862), the arrival of previously excluded student populations such as women and African-American students (Eisenmann, 1998) with the founding of Oberlin College in 1833 which admitted both women and African-Americans, and the Second Morrill Act in 1890, establishing sixteen historically black colleges and universities, and the emergence of co-curricular activities (Horowitz, 1987, Geiger, 1999; Thelin, 2003).

College students became involved in co-curricular activities such as literary societies, debating clubs, service groups, and campus media organizations (Cohen, 1993, Geiger, 1999, Thelin, 2003). In 1776, Phi Beta Kappa became the first Greek-letter

organization, functioning as a literary and debating society for college students (Thelin, 2003). Social fraternities and sororities were also established during this time. Administrators often disapproved and banned involvement in extracurricular activities because they were not part of the formal educational curriculum of the institution (Thelin, 2003).

Athletics and other forms of physical education were also established to offer recreational activities for students (Horowitz, 1987; Geiger, 1999; Thelin, 2003). Some denominational institutions disapproved of these activities, citing that they were a diversion from religious pursuits (Nuss, 2003), which at that time was the focus of academic endeavors.

Athletic activities expanded after the middle of the 19th century; Rutgers and Princeton played the first intercollegiate football game in 1869 (Nuss, 2003). By the turn of the 20th century, efforts to promote student growth outside of the classroom were in place. Along with literary societies, Greek organizations, and intercollegiate athletics, student councils and student government associations were avenues that provided experiences beyond the curriculum (Nuss, 2003).

Up to this point, the desire of students to operate and participate in activities outside of the classroom, were merely tolerated by the college administration. Since faculty were responsible for decision making, the need for a shared student governance model was not yet a reality, but it was on the horizon.

### *Role and Purpose of Historically Black College and Universities*

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) came into existence during a time when African-Americans were denied access to institutions of higher learning in the United States, primarily in the South, and faced restricted access in other parts of the country. The articulated collective purpose of HBCUs has been to provide African-American students with opportunities for scholarship and professional training, particularly for those who might be denied access to college elsewhere. Now in a multicultural and ethnically integrated society, HBCUs still remain very relevant. The general relevance of black colleges and universities can be seen in their ability to provide a more socially cohesive environment for minority students. They are also remarkably successful at preparing students for leadership roles in their community and the greater society. Lastly, and most pertinent to this study, HBCUs successfully prepare students for the job market, particularly in the fields of the hard sciences and engineering (Wenglinsky 1997).

While there are many definitions of what makes a black college or university historic, in 1965 the U.S. Congress formally designated as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) those institutions that were founded before 1964 whose principal mission was the education of African-Americans. Most of these schools were founded immediately before the Civil War or in the decades afterwards by Christian churches, many of them funded through the Freedman's Bureau and private philanthropy.

Today, according to the Department of Education, there are 104 federally designated HBCUs, which are eligible to receive federal money through Title III of the Higher Education Act. This group includes 40 public 4-year institutions, 10 public 2-year institutions, 49 private 4-year institutions, and five private 2-year institutions located in eight south Atlantic states, eight central southern states, two mid-western states, one northeastern state, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands.

Despite commitments to HBCUs from levels as high as the U.S. presidency, the question is still asked in this country: Are HBCUs still needed? HBCUs were created to allow African-America access to institutions of higher learning in the United States and their collective purpose has been to provide black students with opportunities for scholarship and professional training. Three of the most salient justifications have been presented in defense of these institutions. They are as follows: 1) HBCUs provide a more socially cohesive environment for minority students; 2) they are remarkably successful at preparing students for leadership roles in their community and the greater society; and 3) they successfully prepare students for the job market, particularly in the fields of the hard sciences and engineering (Wenglinisky,1997). There have been relatively few empirical studies to test these justifications, or to determine if HBCUs offer educational benefits that do not exist at mainstream institutions. Studies that have been done provide us with some empirical evidence for the continued justification of HBCUs.

Thomas (1987, 1991) and Trent (1991) found that black students attending HBCUs were most likely to major in business, engineering, or the sciences. This is an

important finding because of the support provided to the national labor force in these critical fields. From the vantage point of the graduates and the African-American economic community, the income potential and ultimate income contribution from these fields is higher than that of the liberal arts and fine arts fields.

Nettles (1991) studied the characteristics of post-secondary students and their institutions that were associated with student achievement (as measured by GPA), and student progression (as measured by the number of credits taken per semester). There was found to be no relationship between GPA and the racial composition of the institution, but he did find that black students had lower progression rates at institutions where they were the minority compared to those rates of black students where they were the majority.

Finally, a study conducted by Astin, Tsui, and Avalos (1996) suggested that black students attending HBCUs are more likely than black students attending mainstream educational institutions to complete their degrees. When a number of factors are taken into account, including prior student achievement (as measured by high school grades and SAT scores), institutional size, and institutional selectivity, black students at HBCUs were found to be 17% more likely than their counterparts at mainstream schools to earn their degrees.

### *History, Purpose and Role of Student Government*

“It is conceivable that an institution could philosophically find no real value in a student governance system and not support any kind of formal student association. This situation is probably rare today, but the early history of higher education did not identify student governing associations nor suggest any need for their existence. Traditionally, faculty and/or the founding clergy acted *in loco parentis* and as decision-makers within the institution. Even today there may be individuals within an institution who do not value the role of student input.” (McKaig & Policello, 1999 p. 2)

Student governments emerged as official organizations in the early 20th century.

As student enrollments on college campuses across the country increased, so did interest in student self-governance (Coates, 1985; Horowitz, 1987; Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). A study on early student governments (Coates, 1985) finds that in 1901, students at the University of North Carolina had already formed an unofficial student government organization until they gained recognition from the University President in 1904, the group then became known as Student Council (Coates, 1985).

Crume (2004) described the development of early student governments as swift and reflective of a changing campus constituency:

Over the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, student government, continued its rapid growth on college and university campuses. Student government was so pervasive by the 1950s, the college or university without a student government was the rarity. As the student-run governments on college campuses proliferated, the organizations took on increased importance and significance for college life...Student governments became sources of student recognition, power, and influence on campus. Students were excited to get involved in campus politics as a primary source of personal enrichment and high visibility on campus. (p.3)

Alexander (1969) noted that student governments were seen as useful for teaching students about the value of self-governance and the democratic processes.

While literature on the origins of student government is relatively limited, Horowitz (1987) described the role of early student governments not as organizations designed to empower student leaders, but to foster communication with administration and to co-opt elected leaders. "Self-governance meant that while undergraduates might give opinions and advise, they could not make the rules, or at least not the important ones" (Horowitz 1987, p. 108). Because of this contradiction in the very foundations of student government, the role and purpose of student government is somewhat difficult to define. Even the societal shifts of the 1960s and the 1970s as illustrated in the anti-war movement (Cohen, 1993; Horowitz, 1987; Nuss, 2003; Thelin, 2003), the shootings at Jackson and Kent State, college riots, and other political shifts that allowed students to become more involved in shared governance, did little to expand the role of student government (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006). "The expanded participation appeared to give students more influence, but the real power remained with the administration" (Horowitz, 1987, p. 108). The focus of student government shifted from political issues to campus issues, including, but not limited to; rising student tuition and fees, library hours and parking.

Student government leaders were called on to spend time with the college/university president, comment on student issues and affairs (Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005), serve as ambassadors to important university guests and visitors, and to wield power and influence among their peers on campus (Kuh & Lund, 1994). Student government leaders responsibilities grew to also include allocating fees, determining programs and services that would be offered to/and for students; thus increasing their

access to the university administration (Cuyjet, 1994). Student government participation served as a practical training ground for students who aspired to similar positions of authority and leadership post graduation.

Beyond the elected representatives and officers, student governments also became the focal point for many conflicts and controversies on the college campus. As issues emerged regarding residence hall hours, grades, faculty evaluations, food, libraries, and even the selection of a new college or university president, the leaders of student governments were often consulted for their advice, opinion, and/or representation (Kuh & Lund, 1994, Cuyjet, 1994). Viewed by the administration and faculty as the *voice* of the students, student governments were directly involved in the day-to-day operations of many institutions. Over time, student governments have become a fixture in higher education. They have also become a reflection of the mood and temperament of the student body at large, mirroring the concerns, worries, and quandaries of the student population on campus.

Recognizing that each student government as well as its university governing board, is unique, and that the powers allocated are inherent by each institutions' constitutional construct, it is difficult to narrowly define the role of student government. Bolman & Deal (2003) maintain that organizations are "(1) complex, (2) surprising (or unpredictable), (3) deceptive, and (4) ambiguous" (p. 24-27), and the organization of student government is no exception. McKaig and Policello (1999) wrote that "an analysis of an institutions philosophy toward the culture and value of student involvement is critical in order to give context to the role of student government at



individual higher educational institutions” (p.1). However, in a broader context, the actual role student government plays at most institutions is indisputably important. Traditionally, student government is one of the oldest and most constant student organizations on campus, and regardless of their specific roles and responsibilities, contributes much to campus life for students, faculty, and staff (Emmett, 2000).

Although some functions of student government vary from institution to institution, there are some student government functions that are relatively consistent (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006): (1) student government serves as the official voice of students to the administration (representation); (2) student government allows students to participate in the decision-making process of university governance (voice); (3) student government provides ethical and responsible collection and dissemination of student fees; and (4) student government recognizes student organizations as well as the coordination of the activities of clubs and organizations on campus (advocacy).

Most student government bodies are designed to be representative. Students are elected by their respective electorate (school/college, academic standing, major of study, etc.) and are responsible to the constituents who elected them to office, with the intent that the elected student official will advocate the wishes of this group. Jaeger (1999) and Emmett (2000) both note that the expectations the university has of the student government will have a major impact on the role it can play on campus.

In contrast to McKaig & Policello (1999) concerns of the campus devaluing of student government and student input, Golden and Schwartz (1994) affirm the

importance of student government and its impact on both its participants and the college community:

“Student government is essential to the campus community. Replicating our nation’s representative government process, student government provides students with the opportunities to view a political governing body in action and realize the importance of voting and participation.” p. 19

### *Research on Leadership and Student Government Participation*

The value of student government to the institution of higher education has been recognized by researchers (Golden & Schwartz, 1994; Kuh & Lund, 1994; McKaig & Policello, 1994). Student government leadership is positively related to self-reported gains in leadership ability and has a significant positive effect on perceived leadership competence. Student governance also has the potential to positively impact the growth and development of college students. This positive impact can be tied to both the general benefits of involvement (Kuh & Lund, 1994), and the more specific benefits tied to representing the interests of others and assuming leadership positions on campus (Astin, 1999). Miles, Miller & Nadler (2008) write: “Regardless of the potency of student governing body power, the involvement of students in governance-related activities is a positive element of college participation.” p. 2.

The preparation of college students as societal leaders is a significant mission of higher education. From the inception of colonial colleges, founded to train clergy, to today’s degree programs, leadership development has been vital to higher education (Cress et al., 2001; Roberts, 2003). Student involvement opportunities have been

identified as a factor that helps develop leadership abilities (Cress et al., 2001; Kuh, 1995; Kuh et al., 1991). A limited number of studies have explored student leadership through involvement in the areas of Greek life and student government. Studies have also focused on race and student participation in campus organizations, specifically African-American populations.

One of the most notable early student government studies focused largely on the long-term outcomes associated with student government participation (Downey, Bosco, & Silver, 1984). The alumni in this study indicated that they had a higher level of satisfaction with their occupational choice due to their leadership role in student government while in college, however the overall study did not reveal any long-term effects resulting from participation.

This study was followed ten years later by a similar study which sought to determine what students gained from participating in student government (Kuh & Lund, 1994), with students reporting substantive gains and influences in civic and humanitarian involvement.

Few studies have examined the outcomes of student government leadership on alumni (Schuh & Lavery, 1983, Spencer, 2004). Schuh and Lavery (1983) surveyed alumni of a women's institution (St. Mary's College), a religiously affiliated institution (Notre Dame), and a public institution (Indiana University). The student alumni participants reported the long-term impacts of their student government participation on various parts of their lives including: marriage, religious activities, communication skills, decision-making skills, further educational experiences, and career choice. The

study had more representation from student body presidents and senior class presidents than any other types of leadership positions (including resident assistants, presidents of student clubs) within the study. According to the respondents, involvement as a student leader had the least amount of influence on religious activities, marriage, and further educational experiences. Involvement has shown significant positive influence on their relationships with individuals outside of their family as well as on their participation in civic duties (Schuh & Lavery, 1983). Participants also reported their college leadership roles as having the greatest impact on the development of skills including leadership, decision-making, planning, organizing, and teamwork (Schuh & Lavery, 1983; Spencer, 2004).

Schuh & Lavery (1983) study participants communicated that their experiences had the greatest influence on the skills they developed more than on any select activities of their post-collegiate lives. Influence on career choice was significant, as 65% students in the sample indicated that their leadership had “some influence, considerable influence, or tremendous influence” (p. 30) on their career choice (Schuh & Lavery, 1983).

Rather than asking students to reflect on specific leadership experiences, Schuh & Lavery (1983) interviewed college seniors asking them how they had changed during their collegiate experience and what experiences contributed to these changes. Student government experiences are identified as more meaningful in the development of social and practical competence than other involvement experiences (Schuh & Lavery, 1983). Student government leadership yields skills integral to workplace

competence. These skills include decision-making, understanding fundamental organizational processes and structures, group process and teamwork experiences, as well as oral, written, and visual communication skills (Kuh et al., 1991; Schuh & Laverty, 1983). Decision-making and teamwork skills are emphasized in other studies of student government leadership, as well (Kuh et al., 1991; Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

Downey, Bosco, & Silver (1984) studied long term impact of student government participation and compared the responses of alumni who held student government leadership positions opposed to those who had not engaged in such opportunities. This study sought to examine the perceived long-term impacts of student government involvement. The alumni in this study indicated that they had a higher level of satisfaction with their occupational choice because of their leadership in student government while in college (Downey, Bosco, & Silver, 1984).

Leadership participation in student government is positively associated with the development of confidence, autonomy, sense of purpose, and career competence but negatively correlated with altruism (Kuh et al., 1991; Schuh & Laverty, 1983). Even though there are some contradicting results (studies have shown both positive and negative correlations with altruism), participating in student government influences humanitarian attitudes for some individuals (Kuh et al., 1991) and may influence civic involvement (Kuh et al, 1991; Schuh & Laverty, 1983). That increased influence on attitude and civic involvement could also influence the career choice of student government alumni.

### *Research on Student Involvement and Race*

The higher education literature contains numerous studies attesting to the beneficial academic and professional effects of attending HBCUs for African Americans (Allen, 1992; Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

However, research has demonstrated that in general, student involvement is related strongly to student success, the literature does not contain many studies examining the relationship or affects of student involvement for African American students at HBCUs.

For purposes of this study and to further illuminate how involvement in student government could affect the career path of African-American students, a review of the research on leadership and race was conducted with a concentration on the leadership experiences of African-American students.

Arminio, et. all (2000) used phenomenological research methods to explore the leadership experiences of traditional aged (18-24) African-American, Asian American, and Latino students at a mid-sized state institution and a large research institution. This was a longitudinal study in which 108 students of color were interviewed over a span of three years. Students were questioned on their leadership experiences and behavior, as well as their opinions, values, and feelings on student leadership (Arminio et al., 2000).

Incongruence between the leadership experiences of students of color and conventional notions of leadership were one of a number of themes that emerged from the interviews (Arminio et al., 2000). These themes included: the leader label, personal cost of leadership, role models, and group allegiance before individual needs (Arminio et al., 2000). Most of the students reject the label of "leader," viewing themselves as

merely being involved. The students stated that being labeled a leader separated them from other students in their racial group (Arminio et al., 2000).

Students also reported feelings of experiencing personal losses due to their leadership affiliation rather than personal gains (Arminio et al., 2000). Personal losses included the loss of privacy, interdependence, associations, and collateral relationships (Arminio et al., 2000). Students of color at the mid-sized institution identified with on-campus role models who were older students in similar leadership positions. Interestingly, many of the student leaders in this study identified leadership role models within their family or the church (Arminio et al., 2000); but noted a lack of faculty or staff role models on campus.

Students of color in this study expressed a strong sense of group responsibility, teamwork, and the product of the group (Arminio et al., 2000). They took on leadership roles because they were elected by peers, not for individual benefit. Some of the students expressed that their families expected their involvement in campus life, because of a sense of responsibility to their race and community at large (Arminio et al., 2000).

Most studies related to student government have measured outcomes associated with holding a leadership position within the organizations. Kezar and Moriarty's (2000) study found that the type of involvement has varying influences on development based on student background. Specifically, they found that involvement in positional leadership roles (i.e., election to a particular office in student government or a student organization) was a significant extracurricular predictor of leadership for African

American women (Sutton & Terrell, 1997; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). Conversely, non-positional (outside of elected or appointed leadership positions within any group) leadership experiences were significant predictors of leadership ability for African American men (Sutton & Terrell, 1997; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000).

The history of student governance since the early 1930s shows that its most active participants traditionally are Greek fraternity and sorority members (Horowitz 1987; Crume, 2004). It is no surprise that the literature would reaffirm this with student reflections on the value of involvement.

Recent studies focused on the African-American leadership experiences in Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs). In a quantitative study conducted by Walter Kimbrough (1995), the role of BGLOs in leadership development was examined with Black Greeks and non-Greeks at a Predominately White Institutions (PWI). The students assessed their self-perception of leadership skills and their participation in leadership activities. The study also explored the value of leadership and leadership experiences as well as the ability of organizations to provide leadership experiences. Greeks and non-Greeks shared similar thoughts on their leadership status as well as the value of their leadership skills and experiences. Almost half of non-Greeks were active in other campus organizations and held at least one leadership position on campus (Kimbrough, 1995).

The majority of both Greeks and non-Greeks report that campus leadership is an essential skill for African-American students. Both groups indicated that African-American organizations (ex. Black Student Union), provided leadership opportunities



at a “higher level” (p. 68) than predominately White organizations such as the campus newspaper, programming board, or student government (Kimbrough, 1995). All greek participants within the sample, reported that BGLOs were beneficial to the campus and provided Black students with leadership opportunities (Kimbrough, 1995). However, non-members had negative or ambivalent feelings about BGLOs, indicating that they were not always beneficial to students or to the campus (Kimbrough, 1995).

Another study (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998) examined leadership among African-American Greek students. However, this study looked at the impact of BGLO membership on Black students at PWIs as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Greeks overall showed higher level of confidence in their leadership skills than non-Greeks at both HBCUs and PWIs(Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Particularly at HBCUs, Greeks almost always had significantly higher perceptions of their leadership ability and leadership skill development than non-Greeks (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). The research of Kimbrough & Hutcheson (1998) indicated that Greeks at HBCUs believed that their membership in BGLOs contributed to their leadership skill development to a greater degree than non-Greeks; this difference is not reported similarly at PWIs.

The outcomes of involvement particularly within student government have been explored very little in the literature. Involvement in relation to its possible affects on career choice, even less so. But career development has been explored in depth, with a variety of dominant career development theories that can be considered in combination with this study.

### *Research on Career Development Theory*

Career development theory implies that there is in fact a theory surrounding how we choose our given occupations. Most of these theories recognize that there are countless factors that influence one's choice of career. The various influences on a student's post collegiate career decision-making process are widely discussed in the professional career development literature. Some are related to intrapersonal characteristics including: age (Luzzo, 1999; Super, 1992); gender (Farmer, Wardrop, Anderson, & Risinger, 1995; Murray & Hall, 2001); race/ethnicity (Liu, 1998; Mau & Fernandes, 2001); sexual orientation (Nauta, Saucier, & Woodard, 2001; Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003); class year (Long, Sowa, & Niles, 1995; Luzzo, McWhirter, & Hutcheson, 1997); levels of self-efficacy (Gianakos, 2001); approaches to career decision-making (Niles, Erford, Hunt, & Watts, 1997); career assumptions (Laker, 2002); and levels of indecision (Gaffner & Hazler, 2002; Jurgans, 2000). A number of external factors may influence college decision-making, including: student involvements such as athletics (Martens & Cox, 2000); institutional types (Zagora & Cramer, 1994); and interpersonal interactions with others such as family (Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002) or mentors (Packard, 2003; Packard & Nguyen, 2003).

Research has also examined numerous influences on African-American career choice (Brown, 2004; Falconer & Hays, 2006) including degree aspirations (Simpson, 1996; Carter, 2002), and parental involvement (Otto, 1989, 2000; Hartman & Harris, 1991; Hoffman et. al, 1992; Fisher, 1999; Hairston, 2000). These studies discuss a variety of factors related to the post collegiate decision-making process; however, little research

exists on how students' involvement in campus leadership, specifically within student government, may factor into their decision-making process related to their career choice.

In the field of career development, several theories have are consistently cited in the literature. This study will review the following prevalent and applicable career development theories related to this study: Ginzberg's Theory of Career Development (1972), Super's Theory of Vocational Choice (1954) and Holland's Career Typology (1959), in addition, we will review some contemporary analysis on each of these popular and prevalent theories and their lack of connectivity to African Americans (Hairston, 2000; Hairgrove, 2002) as well as parental influence on career choice. Finally, we will review the Hunter Student Affairs Choice Model (1992) and the Agbor-Baiyee Cyclical Model of Student Career Motivation (1997).

### *The Origins of Career Development*

The history of career development began in 1909 with Frank Parsons' book, *Choosing Your Vocation*, provided the framework of career development theory (Herr & Cramer, 1996). Parsons' book identified and explored three basic steps: (1) the understanding of one's self, (2) knowledge of the requirements of the jobs available (including their levels of compensation and conditions of success),(3) and a career choice based on true logic (Issacson & Brown, 2000). Parson's work emphasized the importance of active involvement in the search for ones career choice (Parsons, 1909).

The major significance of Parsons' work was that these three steps have had far reaching influence "on much of the career development work that followed" (Stitt-Godhes, 1997 p.6).

### **Eli Ginzberg's Theory (1972)**

Ginzberg's (1972) refined and revised career development theory expands on the earlier work of Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951). Ginzberg (1972) suggests that students pass through three distinct stages of career development before making any substantial career choices. Savickas and Lent (1994) identify three stages of Ginzberg's theory, and span from birth to 17+. The stages are (1) fantasy, which involves role playing and imagination (child), (2) tentative, which involves recognition of one's interests abilities and values (adolescent), and (3) realistic which involves identifying an occupational choice (college student/young adult). This study will concentrate on the realistic stage of this theory, which encompasses college aged students and older. In the realistic stage the focus is more on available careers and the benefits and skills needed to obtain said career (Savickas & Lent, 1994; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Ginzberg's (1972) theory like many of the other prevalent career development theories has been challenged due to its failure to address issues relative to diverse groups. However, Ginzberg(1972) does identify issues of class within more homogenous groups.

### **Super's Theory Vocational Choice Theory (1954)**

Donald Super (Savickas & Lent, 1994) has written extensively on vocational development, with an emphasis on the role that self-concept plays in vocational choice. Super (1992) writes that vocational choice has six life and career development stages that are as follows: (1) crystallization (ages 14-18), (2) specification (ages 18-21), (3) implementation (ages 21-24), (4) stabilization (ages 24-35), (5) consolidation (age 35+) and (6) readiness for retirement (age 55+). For the purpose of this study and based on the estimated age of participants (between 24 – 40), we will concentrate our attention on stages four (stabilization) and five (consolidation) of Super's model. These two stages encompass the age groupings represented in the recent alumni population, which is the focus of this study.

### **Holland's Career Typology (1959)**

One of the most widely known theories in career development is that of John Holland. According to research, Holland's Career Typology developed in 1959 assumed that at the time a person chooses his vocation, he was a product of his heredity and environment. He believed that from our experiences we develop a hierarchy of habitual and preferred methods for dealing with necessary social and environmental tasks in our lives. Basically we choose occupations based on needs and satisfaction. More simply, we are attracted to professions in which we have proficiency and gain satisfaction. Holland (1959) developed six classes of occupational environments and six corresponding personal orientations, also called personality types. The six personality

types are listed: realistic (R), investigative (I), artistic (A), social (S), enterprising (E), and conventional (C). There are numerous methods of measuring the Holland types of individuals and many of them are used today with college students to help assist them with careers choice (Savickas & Lent, 1994). Instruments such as the Vocational Preference Inventory and the Self-Directed Search have been found successful in assisting students with occupational choices (Savickas & Lent, 1994; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Trusty, Ng, and Ray (2000) conducted a longitudinal study on the career choices of four of the five major U.S. ethnic groups (Asian/Pacific Islanders, Latinos, African-Americans, and Caucasians). The results for Caucasian students were most consistent with Holland's hypothetical construct regarding the effects of variables on choice of academic and workplace environments Trusty, Ng, and Ray (2000), used Holland's Social Typology and noted the following:

According to Holland (1997), career-related choices are based on personality; and personality develops within a broad context of biology/ heredity, psychology, and environment. Environments (e.g., family, school, peers) offer reinforcement of particular activities as students learn and grow. This reciprocal socialization process results in the development of interests, skills and achievements, self-perceptions, styles, values, and traits. Individuals tend to choose educational and work environments consistent with these [interests]. (p. 49)

Criticism of this model includes limited application of the theory on people of color (Savickas & Lent, 1994; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997; Trusty, Ng, and Ray, 2000) as well as the dominance of women in the social, artistic, and conventional personality types. Holland attributes this discrepancy to societal pressures pushing women in to careers of this type (Trusty, Ng, and Ray, 2000).

While Holland's work is heavily cited in the literature, and serves as the bases for many of the more recent models of career development, the researcher is currently unsure of its level of utilization in this study, other than its influence on heredity and environment on career choice, due to its perceived limited applicability.

### **Hunter's Student Affairs Choice Model (1992)**

Deborah Hunter's (1992) article entitled "How Student Affairs Professionals Choose Their Careers" examines the factors associated with choosing student affairs as a profession. Clearly students who choose student affairs are exposed to positions once unknown to them. Hunter (1992) identifies six considerations that may attribute to the shift in career choice for those who work in student affairs: encouragement by those already working in the field, critical incidents, shared values with student affairs professionals, others' reactions to employment in student affairs, uncertainty about career paths in student affairs, and improving campus life.

Students going into student affairs graduate programs identified three major functional areas in student affairs that introduced them to the profession: residence life, student activities, and new student orientation (Hunter, 1992). They also communicated "critical incidents" that made them aware that a career in student affairs was an option. Hunter found that students expressed that they shared similar values to the student affairs professionals who played a prominent role in their lives, this coupled with the encouragement of these professionals to consider a career in student affairs was significant in their decision making. Students communicated that they wanted to

make things better for other students, for many, due to their less than positive undergraduate experiences (Hunter, 1992).

### **Agbor-Baylee's Cyclical Model of Student Career Motivation (1997)**

The Cyclical Model of Student Career Motivation (Agbor-Baiyee, 1997) presents a multivariate interactive model to explain student career selection. The model includes the following components: (1) the student, (2) his/her experiences, (3) perceptions and attitudes of careers, (4) extrinsic forces, (5) commitment, (6) and intrinsic motivation.

Agbor-Baiyee (1997) writes:

...the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of a student have direct influence on the motivation for a given career. The model argues that commitment to a given career mediates shifts in a student's motivation from being largely extrinsic to intrinsic motivation which has a multiplier effect on career motivation (p.467).

With Agbor-Baylee's model in the forefront, we will apply this lens to students and their interaction in college student government. Agbor-Baiyee (1997) cites outside influences (including people, friends, family, etc.) as an influence on career choice. Student affairs professionals in their daily interactions with students may be a vital part of this cyclical model of influence on college choice, particularly for student government participants.

### ***Conclusion***

If John Holland's (1959) career development theory is correct, we all are a product of heredity and environment. Hunter (1992) identifies what can happen when students are exposed to different environments and stimuli and the possible results



from exposure and involvement. Parsons (1909) indicated in his three step formula that, in a wise choice of vocation, knowledge of opportunities in different lines of work is one of the major factors that affect one's career decisions. As students explore their available opportunities in college, this is an apt period for change. Research has shown that role models, friends, college faculty and staff, and experiences can change the course of career choice (Hunter, 1992, Love, 1995). If this is true, it may also be possible that student government participation can change the course set for career development.

In summary, the development of student government leadership among college students has been a primary mission of institutions for centuries (Cress et al., 2001; Roberts, 2003). Student experiences outside of the college classroom, including leadership opportunities, are important to leadership and personal development (Astin, 1993; Astin, 1999; Moore et al., 1998; Whitt & Miller, 1999). Studies on student leadership and students of color have examined leadership positions in Greek life and race (Arminio et al., 2000; Johnson, 1995; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; McKenzie, 1990; Sutton & Terrell, 1997; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) as well as student government (Astin, 1992; Downey, Bosco, & Silver, 1984; Kuh & Lund, 1994; Kuh et al., 1991; Schuh & Laverty, 1983; Schwartz, 1991).

Vocational choice research reveals that career plans often change after entering college due to a myriad of external and internal factors. Career choice can be influenced by a mixture of expected maturity, environment, heredity, influence of others, and chance. This review of the literature has revealed an infinite amount of factors and

influences that can affect career choice. However, this study will contribute to the literature by allowing for a deeper understanding of student government, African-American career choice and the relationship and influences of involvement on career choice. This study will be designed to address this knowledge gap in the literature.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

A major element of this study is to explore the impact and the perceptions of student government involvement on the career choice of study participants. The primary goal of this research will be to explore alumni reflections of their respective student government experience and its impact on their current career choice. This chapter will provide the reader with an understanding of the methods used in this study to address the research questions.

This chapter explains the rationale for using a qualitative research design, the rationale for using a case study/cross case analysis, ethical considerations, data collection; including proposed participants and site selection, as well as data analysis. This chapter will address issues related to validity, delimitations, and limitations of this study. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the role and biases of the researcher in relation to the overall study.

#### ***Research Questions***

The primary research question guiding this study is: How do former student government participants perceive the impact of their student government experience on their current career choice? The secondary research questions are:

RQ1: How do factors like gender, parental influence, leadership participation, positions held, career exposure/development and articulated and/or changed major of study affect the student's career choice?

- RQ2: To what extent can participants articulate their student government participation's affect on their career choice? What factors do student participants identify as the most influential on their career choice?
- RQ3: Will there be a relationship between student government participation and career choice, and if so, what will that relationship be?

### *Rationale for Using a Qualitative Research Approach*

This research project employed a qualitative case study/cross case analysis design. The use of qualitative research has become common in the fields of psychology, history, and education. A number of influential books have been written in an effort to promote and support the value of qualitative research as well as to offer instruction on the processes involved in the utilization of this specific paradigm. Particularly significant were Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Glesne's (1999) *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, Bogdan and Bilken's (1998) 3rd addition of *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* and Creswell's (2003) 2nd addition of *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed*. These researchers offer a historical perspective of the development of qualitative methodology from its earliest uses at the Chicago School in the early 1920s and 1930s, to the current uses in a wide variety of topics including the experiences of underrepresented populations.

The questions developed for this study could not be answered using conventional quantitative methods (Patton, 2002) because the study objective was to be descriptive in intent and exploratory in form. The qualitative research design allowed

for a better understanding of the situations, experiences and meanings of the particular and unique group of people (Frankel & Devers, 2000).

The research question posed to former student government leaders, exploring the question, “does student government participation impact the career choice of African-American HBCU graduates?”, is a socially constructed, complex, and varied question. The intent was to identify specific factors or influences related to active student involvement that may be present in student government organizations and how that involvement may affect career choice. Through conversations and interviews with the participants, the researcher gained an understanding of how former students perceive their student government involvement experience at HBCUs, as well as the impact of that involvement on their career choice.

Qualitative research seeks to answer the research question by understanding a particular event, role, group, interaction, or reality of the circumstances of the individuals involved in the study (Creswell, 2003; Huberman & Miles, 2002). It is an investigative process where the researcher makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, cataloguing, and classifying the subject of study (Huberman & Miles, 2002). To that end, the researcher collects data *from* the participant through interviews and interaction, *about* the participant by observations in the field and in the interview session itself (Huberman & Miles, 2002).

The decision to pursue this study as a qualitative work is directly related to the belief that we as researchers can learn an immeasurable amount of information, data, and truths, relative to people and the way they interact with their respective

environments, just by asking participants to reflect on their involvement. This method of inquiry was used in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the influences of student government participation on the career choice of African-American students.

### **Case Study Approach**

After establishing the research questions that were determined to be the most salient to this study, it was clear that the type of methodological approach needed was a case study. According to Creswell (1998), research that utilizes a case study approach is one in which the “researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (p.15). The case study is restricted by time and the persons or activity under study. The case in this study was HBCU graduates who participated in student government. Creswell (1998) cites Stake (1995) in identifying the case study approach as a tradition that requires detailed descriptions of the setting and the participants, followed by analysis of emerging themes. The development of themes and coding into patterns, is the end goal of case study driven research. The goal is to make sense of all the data collected and present it to the reader in a way that connects them to each participant.

The case study approach was selected in order to organize and present the data collected from each of the participants in the most comprehensive, systematic and in-depth method possible (Patton, 1990, p. 384). Individual case studies were constructed through the compilation of the raw case data, construction of case records and the

creation of written narratives to allow for an increased understanding of each subject and their unique experiences in context of their current lives.

A case study approach was appropriate for these respondents because of three necessary conditions identified by Yin (1994). These conditions include: (1) how or why questions were posed by the study; (2) the researcher had no control over the events; and (3) the event or phenomenon, was a contemporary one. This study asked the “how and why” of career choice related to student government participation. The second condition applies as the researcher had no control over the events but rather will attempt to understand the phenomena in a current real-life context. Yin’s (1994) third condition is met because the study explored current career choices in the present. Finally, the case study method was preferred as there was no prior research to determine how student government participation influenced career choice.

### **Cross Case Analysis**

Although each case is rich with detail and insight, an objective of this study was to define and determine patterns across the varied demographics of participants. This required a cross case analysis. This cross case analysis involved grouping together the participants’ responses to the common set of questions that were presented (demographic information and the comments during the interview sessions) and analyzing different aspects related to the central issue of study (student government participation and career choice). The assumption was that similarities, patterns and/or

trends would emerge, but these facets or components, would not reduce or diminish each participants' experiences or perspective into a single "norm" (Glesne, 1999, p.5).

However, the use of cross case analysis was effective in the identification and extrapolation of "lessons learned" by the subjects included in the research sample (Patton, p. 425). Differences were as important as similarities in creating these lessons. While student government participation and its influence on career choice was the primary focus of this study, there were distinct variations in the career paths, personal lives, and post-SGA identities of each respondent. The cross case method allowed the subjects to retain a sense of individuality and uniqueness, yet offered a way to group the data into organized categories/themes. Inevitably, patterns emerged that indicated trends or similarities related to this group, attributed to their shared experiences.

### *Role of the Researcher*

While the researcher had prior interaction with some of the participants through community or campus involvement, this previous contact did not compromise either parties' ability to remain objective throughout the study. Because the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection (Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Merriam, 1988) a special effort was made to ensure that the integrity of the study and the researcher was conveyed to the participants within the study. The researcher's role also is an on-going investigative process, where the researcher makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing, and classifying the object of study (Miles & Huberman, 1984).



In conducting a qualitative research study, Merriam (1998) and Creswell (2003) suggested that the researcher conduct their study taking into account six important characteristics. The first characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The researcher must acknowledge, understand and counteract their bias and subjectivity (Merriam, 1998, Creswell, 2003). As the primary data collection instrument, I acknowledged both my biases and subjectivity because of the empathic nature of my role as a student affairs professional and my preconceived notions of student government as a participant.

The second characteristic of qualitative research is that it involves fieldwork (Merriam, 1998, Creswell, 2003); the natural setting of each participant is vital. Because these interviews were conducted with student government alumni living in various parts of the United States, it was not always possible to interview participants in their natural setting. The majority of the interviews were conducted in person (if the participant was within a radius of 40 miles or less), however, three of the interviews were conducted by telephone.

The third characteristic of qualitative research is the importance of making meaning from the data (Merriam, 1998, Creswell, 1998, 2003). The researcher must strive to understand and glean meaning from the data. This was done by careful and repeated coding of the data until emergent themes were realized. This research method allows the researcher to be adaptive, a key advantage of qualitative research.

The fourth characteristic of qualitative research is that the nature of qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998, Creswell, 1998, 2003). The ability to paint a

vivid picture of the setting, time, place and participants of the study will add to the depth of this study. Through the use of my field notes, observations, and transcriptions, the research will attempt to provide thick, rich description of each setting and participant.

The fifth characteristic of qualitative research is process. Qualitative research is concerned with the process participants go through to reach their final destination; not the outcomes or the products (Merriam, 1998, Creswell, 2003). As the researcher, I explored this process with each participant as they shared their stories. Special care was given to ensure that each participant's process was reflected in their narratives.

Finally, qualitative research is an inductive process building on concepts, ideas, and theories as the study progresses. Likewise, I did not start this study with a hypothesis in mind, but an assumption of how similar experiences and incidents among related participants may have yielded a similar process.

### *Data Collection*

#### **Site Selection**

Research was conducted at one Historically Black College/University (HBCU) classified as a Masters I/Research University – comprehensive postsecondary institution by the Carnegie Foundation (The Carnegie Foundation, 2005). Creswell (1998) asserts that “in a [qualitative] study, the participants may be located at a single site” (p. 111) The university “fact book” identifies the university as a large, urban, four-year, public, residential institution. Located in the southeastern part of the United

States, the university is located in close proximity to the state capital. Its geographical location adds a unique perspective to the study because of the higher than usual levels in which student leaders interact regularly with government officials, lawmakers, and other members of state government. According to the university website, current university enrollment is over 12,000 students, 80.9% were undergraduates, with over half of the student population reported as female (58%). 91% of the total student population self-reports as African-American.

### **Participant Selection**

The criteria for selection of participants included 1) holding of a significant leadership position within student government (i.e. executive branch positions) 2) prominence in SGA document research; (i.e. participants status/notoriety during their term in student government and post-graduation) 3) accessibility in site city or surrounding areas; 4) an alumni of the university, with no more than fifteen years since their student government involvement. The fifteen year interval was selected to ensure inclusion of recent graduates as well as student government participants who may be more established in their careers. Past student government member participants included only elected representatives.

The SGA executive branch includes the president, vice-president, senate president, senate pro-tem and any other positions that were considered executive branch positions during the fifteen-year period, as defined by the governing SGA body. This sample could have included between 50 – 60 participants. However, because

many of the participants held various positions within SGA, the current sample included between 35 - 40 participants. Only individuals who completed their degree requirements, graduated from the institution, and whose current address and/or contact information was readily available were selected for further study. Data also was collected to identify viable participants from SGA archival (past meetings' minutes, records, agendas, bills, and other resources available to the public) and oral history research. The alumni association at the site was contacted to assist in identifying and gaining contact information on all possible student participants as well as a review of the public membership files of student government.

The respondents included in the study were extremely diverse in age and life experiences. The youngest participant was between 22-25 years old, while the oldest was between 38-42. The sample included two women and eight men. All but two of the participants had been active in student government for more than four years and all but one was employed.

Potential subjects were first contacted via electronic mail and/or telephone and invited to participate in the study. After agreeing to participate individuals were sent a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix D) and a participant demographic sheet (Appendix B). Completion and return of these documents was required prior to the scheduling of an interview session with each of the subjects.

### **Gaining Access (Gatekeepers)**

Creswell (2003) asserts that in order to gain access into an institution, the researcher must establish a relationship with administrators of the institution who serve as “gatekeepers” and can provide necessary access to the intended subjects. However, since this study included alumni, who have already graduated and are no longer students at the university, my need for formal access through the university was limited. I submitted the appropriate materials to the institutional review board at the University of New Orleans, requesting an expedited review process. Using Akili State University records, including publicly available student government information files, the list of possible interview subjects was created.

Several identified participants who were initially unable to be located, were found by the snowball or chain sampling method (Creswell, 1998). As explained by Creswell (1998) my relationship with each participant afforded me the opportunity to identify other viable “information rich” participants (p. 119) and gather the necessary contact information. This was a great resource for this study as one particular entry in the archival data was found to be incorrect. University faculty and staff advisors were consulted because they possessed substantial institutional knowledge and involvement with the Akili Student Government Association, and were utilized for historical reporting purposes only. The student government records were used as the primary source to identify individuals who had been elected or appointed to SGA executive branch positions between 1991/2 – 2005/6.

## **Participant Profile/Questionnaire**

A demographic survey (Appendix B) was developed to collect basic information on each graduate who agreed to participate in the study. Information from the demographic survey was collected prior to the initial telephone contact to determine the participant's interest in involvement in the study. The survey included information such as name, age, gender, years enrolled, academic major and minor, level of parents' education, occupation of parents, level of financial assistance, and graduating grade point average (GPA). Other information requested included employment status while in school, number of hours worked per week, and other extra/co-curricular activities. The demographic data was used to construct a participant profile before the interview was conducted, and to gain insight into the possible influences these factors may have on their career choice as well as choice of student government as their primary college student organization involvement.

## **Interview Guide**

The interview guide (Appendix F) was adopted for the interview session to allow the meetings to remain conversational and flexible, while ensuring that the same material was covered with each of the respondents included in the study. It also allowed for consistency in the information provided by the participants. Patton (1990) asserts that this approach provides a methodical way of gathering information and "provides a framework within which the interviewer would develop questions, sequence those questions, and make decisions about which information to pursue in

greater depth” (p. 201). Furthermore, the use of the interview guide helped make the best use of the limited time that was spent with each subject. It also ensured that the predetermined topics of this study were included in a more relaxed and natural manner (Patton, 1990 p. 376-378).

### **Interview Process**

Bogdan and Bilkin (1992) state, “an interview is a purposeful conversation usually between two people that is directed by one in order to get information” (p. 135). All interviews began by asking respondents about their level of involvement in student government. Interviewees were asked to respond at length to questions about student government, their involvement in student government, what they learned from participating in student government, and any effects this involvement may have had on their career choice. Example and opinion questions were formulated to generate data about the perceived relationship of the participants’ involvement in student government on their career choice. While each respondent was asked the same basic questions, additional, specific inquiries were developed based upon participants’ responses and review of the information provided on the written demographic profile.

The results of each interview were used to shape a complete picture of participant and to enrich the overall findings.

The average length of each interview was 45-60 minutes. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Field notes were also taken during each session to record

additional details related to each participant (voice inflection, facial expression, body language, etc.).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Creswell (1998) states that researchers have a responsibility to protect the privacy and identity of their participants. Researchers are expected to adhere to the ethical guidelines established by their university or organization (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 1999; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). When considering research and the proper ethical considerations, the goal is to ensure that each element of research is conducted correctly. To that end, the researcher took the necessary time to explain the consent form to each participant, before the beginning of each interview. Each participant was reminded of their right to make informed decisions about their participation in the study, to withdraw from the study at any time, and to be protected from unnecessary risks (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2003).

Upon the completion of coding and data analysis, identifying participant information was removed and replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. No personal information was revealed in any written reports; no report will be provided to participants' alma mater or the researcher's home institution; data will be kept in a locked file cabinet for three years, then shredded; and access to data will be restricted to the project director and supervising faculty.



## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis took place simultaneously as data collection was being conducted to allow the researcher to focus the study as it unfolded (Glesne, 1990, p.130). A filing system was created to include the following information related to each subject: signed consent forms, participant profiles, field notes, and transcribed interviews. Data was analyzed according to college major, gender, current profession, student government participation and other related factors, to determine if any noteworthy differences existed. The methods of triangulation, peer/external reviews and other validity checks were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of data collected (Maxwell, 2005). Analytic files were also developed to hold any supplemental materials related to the study. The interview transcripts were all hand-coded. This decision was based on the researcher's need to review all of the data to look for common issues and themes and discrepancies. It was also determined that the participant "voices" could be diminished if sorted by computer software.

Documents were coded and data associated with the aforementioned major themes were highlighted using a color-coded system (designating a different color for each theme). After coding was completed, vital pieces of data were transferred to index cards. The cards contained the participants' pseudonym as well as possible sub-headings or categories that could be applicable. The index cards were sorted under the themes listed above.

Using Microsoft Excel and placing the demographic data from all the participant profiles into coded columns, a matrix was then created to give a visual representation of the data compiled for the study.

The demographic data profile was very useful in the preparation of the individual case studies for each subject. Each case includes anecdotes or vignettes that appeared to be particularly significant to that participant and their student government experience.

The matrix and index cards were also instrumental in conducting the cross case analysis. While a number of similarities were noted among the participants included in the sample (number of years in SGA, college major, graduating GPA, etc.) a considerable number of contradictions were also found (i.e. educational attainment of parents, background, reasons for involvement, etc.). These will be discussed in detail in the findings section of this document.

## **Validity**

Validity is important to the researcher and the target audience of the work (Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2003). Without trustworthy research and results, the work of the researcher falls flat, validity is proven by evidence, not the methods employed to find it. This topic was based on qualitative design model, and because of this, will not utilize random sampling, control groups, or other known “checks and balances” that are available to quantitative researchers (Maxwell, 2005, Creswell, 2003). In working toward validity, the researcher must identify what is the most significant threat to the

results. There are six criteria that were utilized to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data. The researcher employed the following strategies:

- (1) **The Researcher as primary validity check:** I ensured that questions were stated clearly and accurately to participants to ensure correct understanding/interpretation. I also verified information against multiple sources, and worked diligently to consider rival conclusions and possibilities (Maxwell, 2005).
- (2) **Use of Rich Data/Direct Quotations:** I used verbatim quotes from the interviews to ensure an accurate depiction of what the participant's recollection of events. This will ensure that the researcher's interpretation of participant feedback did not shift from "opinion" to "fact".
- (3) **Checks on Researcher Bias/Reactivity:** Although I may have started this study with some ideas and speculations of the possible outcome, it was my role to perform the investigation without bias. My role as the researcher was to act as a collector of data. I conducted my research through more traditional means such as purposeful sampling and one-on-one interviews as opposed to the non-traditional means used during the initial pilot study (original posting of my survey on facebook.com, myspace.com, etc.) in the hopes that any reactivity bias was eliminated.
- (4) **Participant Validation aka "Member Checks":** I solicited feedback from participants, requesting their review of their transcripts for accuracy and reliability.

- (5) **Triangulation:** Data was collected through multiple sources including SGA archival documents (past meetings' minutes, records, agendas, bills, campus newspaper, internet searches and state records) oral history, interviews, and observations. The researcher is painfully aware that triangulation does not in and of itself create validity, however, it is still one of the most essential reliability tools. Gaining information from multiple sources added to the richness of the data as well the reliability; consideration was always given to the validity of data taken from similar sources.
- (6) **Use of Peer Review/External Review:** I have discussed the interpretations of my research among my peers (two former doctoral students, both in the field of education, served as peer readers) and utilized their feedback. This provided useful insights as well as a necessary challenge to the data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) write, "Qualitative analyses can be evocative, illuminating, masterful — and wrong," (p. 262) The strategies used are done so to provide the reader with sufficient trust in the data (peer reviews of data, data displays, detailed process selection, coding explanation) and gives the researcher the ability to validate and strengthen the research (Merriam, 1998).

## **Delimitations**

The researcher recognizes certain limitations inherent in this study. The first is that the data was self-reported. While research (Pace, 1984) shows that self-reporting is a reliable method for data collection, one could question the authenticity of responses

given based on participants reflections of the past. These reflections could be more generous or detracting than how they actually occurred. Another consideration is that participants are being asked to recall information from three to fifteen years ago. Some of the participants' reflections of the past may be selective, which can impact the results of this study.

The focus of studying alumni who were involved in student governance at an HBCU will allow for a somewhat in-depth analysis of a smaller subset of a particular population. However, since this is not a longitudinal study, with a pre-test and post-test format, but rather a "snapshot in time," it is not possible to state unequivocally a "cause and effect" relationship between student government participation and career choice. The researcher requested former student government participants to reflect and possibly detect a "causal" relationship. Students who are attracted to student government join for a variety of reasons. Because any apparent postgraduate benefits of participation in student government may be attributable directly to their participation, the lack of a non-SGA related group is delimitation. Conceivably, students who are predisposed to becoming involved in student governance, may differ from their uninvolved peers and therefore already more apt to perceive a relationship.

Thirdly, this study focused on former students who were involved in formal student government activities. It does not account for other types of involvement (specifically full-time employed students, RAs, or other involvement) and as a result, the sample of alumni in the study may be skewed towards backgrounds with the

financial wherewithal to allow the student the time to participate in such activities, in lieu of working full-time while in college, as well as leaders in other organizations.

In addition, as discussed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), and others (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999; Love, 1995; Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006) it is virtually impossible to separate the affects of the involvement in a group like SGA from the informal effects of student's interaction with their peers and student affairs personnel (i.e. SGA Advisor, Dean of Students, VP for Student Affairs, etc.). Is student participation in student government and its influence on career choice attributable to the actual experiences and/or activities of student government or is it simply a result of frequent and ongoing interaction with similarly-minded peers and mentoring adults?

Finally, this study will not be easily applied to other institutions and other types of student government participation. Varying institutional environments, majors and programs of study offered, types of student governments, and types of students who choose to matriculate at a particular institution could restrict the results. Nevertheless, the underlying theoretical assumptions and methodology of this study, as well as the findings of this study should be of assistance to others who use the results as a benchmark or starting point for future related research. The study may add to the literature on the history and contributions of student government as well as the long-term outcomes and impact of involvement on career choice.

## **A Final Word on Researcher History and Bias**

Because of the nature of qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument calls for the identification of the personal values, biases, and assumptions at the launch of the study. Gay and Airasian (2000) suggest that it is difficult to be both involved and unbiased. With regard to my own biases, it was my hope that my personal contribution would be useful and positive rather than damaging to this study. My perceptions of student government involvement and its effects on career choice have been shaped by my own positive and varied experiences.

When I first started college, like so many African-American students at predominately white campuses, I quickly joined the Black Student Union (BSU). I personally joined for all the wrong reasons, mainly because of my strong romantic interest in the president. He was an upperclassman, and he was everything I wanted in the opposite sex: articulate, smart, handsome, and politically astute. At the second or third BSU meeting of the semester, he notified the body that the student government association programming committee had proposed reducing the budget for Black History Month from \$20,000 to \$10,000, because of this he was requesting three volunteers to join the committee. I quickly volunteered, along with two friends, and were scheduled to attend our first meeting that very Friday. Much to our surprise, the committee was a small group of only 4 or 5 people. They were nice enough and seemed really happy that we had decided to join their committee. We attended the meeting and were informed that if we attended three consecutive meetings, we would be considered members of the group, with all the rights and privileges given to its members, including

the power to vote. Three meetings later, we voted and defeated the motion to reduce the funding for Black History Month! We couldn't believe we did it! We felt so alive and politically aware! We knew that it was quite a new situation to find ourselves in a position of power, and to realize that if you knew the rules, you could control the outcome. But I hated the manipulation it took to achieve the outcome. With that lesson both well taught and well learned, I realized that if you wanted to change things you had to be willing to work within the system, not against it. My friends had no interest in this group, only in ensuring that the vote went in our favor. So even though my friends quickly took their leave and went on to do more things in the BSU, I stayed with the programming committee, serving as the chair and controlling its sizeable \$300,000 budget only 2 years later.

In 1993, after a shutdown of our student government for improper use of student fees, I decided I would give student governance a chance. The Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) had created a committee that recommended the reduction of SGA by more than two-thirds, from over 60 members to less than 20. Perhaps this would make student government better? I wasn't sure, but I was a rising senior and realized I could no longer do as much to better campus life unless I ran for a student government post. I didn't really care for politics, so unlike today's student government elections, I didn't have a campaign manager, a "street team", or the power of Facebook; I just told a few friends I was going to run and hoped for the best. The total enrollment of my institution was over 20,000 students, yet there were only 200+ votes cast in the election. I won my own student government election as the representative to largest



college within the university, the College of Arts and Sciences, by one vote. I was amazed that such a small minority of people (both as voters and as elected student representatives) could determine the fate of so many others. I served my term and was happy when it was over. I found I could easily plan and execute awe-inspiring campus events, but I was no politician. I thought this would be the end of my time with student government, and would just become a small part of my collegiate history and an even smaller entry on my resume.

Instead, student government has continued to take on a much larger role in my life and professional identity than I ever thought possible. Most recently, (1996-2006) I served as a student government advisor for two very different universities. As a student government advisor, I have been asked to serve as a workshop presenter, faculty member, and peer advisor for a variety of issues related to student governance. I have published articles and received national awards for my work. More importantly, I believe my own career choice was affected by my participation in student government and other co-curricular experiences. I remember being a senior in college, heading off to medical school, when I experienced my own “critical incident” and asked the then Director of Student Activities a question that changed the course of my life, “what do I have to do, to become you?”

Suddenly I was thrust into the world of Student Affairs, much like the participants in Hunter’s (1992) study. I didn’t know the first thing about Student Affairs or that even such a profession existed. But suddenly it was my own “critical incident” that Hunter (1992) references, that made me aware that a career in student affairs was

an option. I was now shifting my entire life's training, choice, major and vocation because of the influence my campus involvement made on what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

As I began my graduate training to work in Higher Education and specifically in Student Affairs, I started to explore functional areas that I considered a good fit for my skills and abilities. As I looked at possible professional positions in the field, I found student/campus life the most interesting and enjoyed this functional areas close interaction with students. I worked in the student union, as the graduate assistant to the director. Again, I was reminded how integral the role of student government is to the programs, functions, and services provided to students on campus. More importantly, how a small group of voters and an even smaller group of student representatives, affect so many outcomes on the university campus. For reasons unbeknownst to me, this student government was not fond of my supervisor and during the yearly budget process, decided to write her salary line out of the proposed budget. Through considerable lobbying by the student groups advised through the Union, a strong SGA Advisor, and an even more determined VPSA (who vetoed the budget until her salary was restored) we worked through the impasse. But I never forgot this experience and decided that if given the opportunity, I would serve as an SGA advisor who served as an advisor and a mentor to my students.

Because of all these experiences, I bring certain biases to this study. Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, these biases shaped my understanding and my view of the data. Despite the fragmented and questionable nature of student

governance, I believe in the basic intent, design, and power of student government. I believe that an ideal student government is more than just representative, but has the ability to positively impact the growth and development of students. Students are people too and just like politicians, they have proven to be subject to their own ideals, personality quirks and biases. While student government is intended to be “open and honest” with its constituents, I have seen “back room” dealings, favoritism, unfairness, and plain old dishonesty in the practice of its members. I also believe that student government works best when it is governance for students, by students; and I have seen this group work diligently make this concept a reality. With this in mind, I undertook this study with the perspective that student government is a necessary organization on the college campus, but far from perfect; furthermore, the influence of this particular student organization on its participants merits further study.

## **Summary**

The qualitative case study/cross case analysis design for this study allowed for an increased understanding of the situation, experiences and identity of these former student government leaders. Case studies were constructed and presented in narrative form to allow the individual personalities of the participant to emerge. The use of cross case analysis grouped the data into organized themes and provided a sense of patterns that cut across individual and particular contexts, resulting in the emergence of trends, similarities and differences that were significant to understanding this group. Finally,

we addressed data collection and analysis, validity, delimitations, and took a closer look at the role of the researcher's background and biases.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The study was conducted to explore and understand the role and impact of student government participation on the career choice of African-American participants. Included in this study is an exploration of participant reflections of their respective student government experience and its influence on their career choice.

#### *Research Questions*

The primary research question was: Does student government participation impact the career choice of African American alumni at a specific public HBCU?

Secondary questions addressed within the course of the study included:

- RQ1: How do factors like gender, parental influence, leadership participation, positions held, career exposure/development and articulated and/or changed major of study affect the student's career choice?
- RQ2: To what extent can participants articulate their student government participation's affect on their career choice? What factors do student participants identify as the most influential on their career choice?
- RQ3: Will there be a relationship between student government participation and career choice, and if so, what will that relationship be?

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides detailed information regarding the participants in this study, specifically their major/education, student government experience, and their current vocation. The second section includes the case studies of selected participants; in order to provide the reader a better

understanding of each participant individually. Quotations, archival documents and other data collected from the participant profiles and oral interviews have been included to ensure that the uniqueness of each respondent is maintained and their individual voices are heard. Common themes and cross-case analysis related to the research questions are presented in the third section. The final section explores themes that emerged during data analysis that do not address the research questions of this study but may be beneficial in understanding the experiences of HBCU student government alumni.

### *Akili State University Alumni Study Participants*

One four-year public institution was selected as the site for this study. The selected site was identified as Akili State University (ASU). 10 HBCU alumni, all graduates of Akili State University, chose to participate in this study. (3 additional participants agreed to participate but failed to return the consent form, which ultimately resulted in their elimination from the study.) Of the 10 participants, 2 were female and 8 were male. Table 1 provides a graphic display of the demographic information of the research participants at ASU. The table identifies participants, major, highest student government position held, and participant's current vocation. The table is followed by a brief annotated narrative that introduces the participants and provides information on their background and experience. In alignment with qualitative research methods (Patton, 2002), pseudonyms have been used for the name of the institution and the participants to ensure anonymity.

## Akili State University Alumni

Table 1. *Participant Demographic Information*

*N=10*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Highest SGA Position</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
<i>Charles</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Political Science</i>	<i>Mayoral Aide</i>
<i>Ace</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Pharmaceutical Sales</i>
<i>Deon</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Biology</i>	<i>Legislative Aide</i>
<i>Peter</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Attorney/COO</i>
<i>Grant</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Political Science</i>	<i>City Commissioner</i>
<i>Robin</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Political Science/History</i>	<i>Independent Publisher</i>
<i>Kennedy</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Global Brand Manager</i>
<i>Stacy</i>	<i>Senate President</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Housewife</i>
<i>Shawn</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Political Science</i>	<i>Attorney</i>
<i>William</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Public Relations</i>	<i>Doctoral Student</i>

### *Annotated Narratives*

In an effort to provide anonymity (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992), pseudonyms were used for all participants. It is therefore appropriate to introduce each participant through an annotated narrative.

Charles has been working professionally for three years. He graduated with a degree in Business and currently works in city government.

Ace has been working professionally for two years. He graduated with a degree in Political Science and currently works in the pharmaceutical industry.

Deon is the sole research participant with a scientific degree. He completed both his bachelors and masters program at Akili in science related disciplines. He has been working professionally for five years and prior to his position with the federal government, he worked as an assistant to the board of a large non-profit organization.

Peter joined the workforce over six years ago, after completing law school. Prior to his position as the COO of a new “start up” business, he was an independent business owner. He is not currently practicing in the area of law.

Grant currently works as a prominent elected member of city government. He has worked in this position over seven years. Prior to entering the workforce he was completing his degree at Akili. He was elected to office almost immediately after graduation. He was the first student government president to serve as a voting member of the Board of Trustees.



Robin is a writer/independent publisher of motivational multicultural children's books and videos. Prior to the creation of his publishing company several years ago, he worked as trauma and stress reduction specialist. It has been more than ten years since he has had any dealings with his alma mater due to his student government experience.

Kennedy, one of only two female research participants, has worked professionally in the business sector for over nine years. She completed her bachelors and masters of business administration from Akili.

Stacy is currently not working due to recovery from surgery. She completed Akili's 5-year MBA program and is currently pursuing an additional degree certificate in human resources management.

Shawn is a well regarded attorney and known for his victories in high profile cases around the state. He has over fifteen years experience as a litigator and is alum of both Akili State University and the neighboring predominately White state institution. He also serves on the Board of Trustees for Akili.

William earned a bachelor's degree in public relations and is in the process of completing his doctoral studies in history at a prestigious graduate school.

### ***Akili State University Institutional Description***

Akili State University (ASU), a public university located in a southeastern metropolitan capital city, is classified as Masters I/Research University – comprehensive postsecondary institution by the Carnegie Foundation (The Carnegie

Foundation, 2005.) Institutional focus is on undergraduate education, although the university awards limited graduate and professional degrees.

According to the university website and recruitment information, ASU's current enrollment is over 12,000 students, 80.9% were undergraduates, with over half of the student population reported as female (58%). 91% of the total student population self-reports as African-American.

According to the state report issued on student fee utilization, the Akili State University Student Government Association collects a student fee of over \$10 per credit hour. From this fee, it employs over 100 students in various committee appointed positions and pays the members of the Executive Cabinet, with the president making a salary of more than \$10,000 per year.

### *Research Participant Interviews*

Because of the diversity of each of the participants, including varying professions and schedules, no two interviewees were alike. Despite their differing and unique stations in life, each participant had common experiences. All participants have a minimum of a bachelor's degree, all of the participants served in student government for two years or more, and all served student government as a member of the Executive Cabinet, with all but one serving in the role of Student Government President, during their time at Akili State University.

### Case Study One: "Stacy"

*"I spent WAY TOO much time in SGA. And not enough time focusing on life **after** SGA."*

Stacy is one of two female participants in this study. A business major in undergrad, as a former student government leader, Stacy served the Akili Student Government over four years in various business related positions (including Budget Liaison, Budget Committee Chair, Senate Pro-Temp, and Senate President). Currently, she is living on a naval base out West, as a part of a recent relocation with her military spouse. She agrees to participate in the study, and I contact her via phone at the appointed time for the interview.

I've met Stacy in several different settings so when I call her, there is some familiarity that makes it easy for us to settle into a comfortable dialog, even over the phone. We proceed to verify her answers to the SGA demographic form, and she notes that in her various roles, she spent anywhere from 6-20 hours per week working for student government. But *before* our interview begins, her husband, who also served as a student government senator, notes that she should *amend* her reported number of hours. Because they got married in her senior year (he is younger), he notes that she was less involved once they started dating. She giggles and agrees to reduce the number of hours reported working for and in student government to an amount he can live with.

With that correction made, we move forward with the interview. But not before Stacy reveals that she is currently not working, because she is scheduled to have

surgery within days. She is donating a kidney to her mother, and was both grateful and excited to be a match. We discuss any fear or trepidation she may have about the surgery and surprisingly, she has no reservations. I am grateful that she has made time to talk to me about her student government experiences.

Stacy targeted most of her leadership involvement to the finance and budget committees of student government. She proceeds to explain her interest to connect her involvement in student government with her major saying: "...when I got in, I was attracted (to SGA) being a business major, to the Finance Committee and I wanted to get more involved in the process. I was just soaking it up and learning as much as I could."

As we conduct the interview, when we get to the questions related to student government and career choice, Stacy is concerned that she isn't "helping much" with her answers to the questions posed within my interview guide. I take the time to assure her that there are "no right or wrong answers", further assuring her that my interest rest solely in her experiences. However, her answer may explain her reluctance to share her thoughts: "No, I wouldn't say student government influenced my choice. Before I came to college, when I looked at what I wanted to major in...business really attracted me, I wanted to work for a Fortune 500 company,..."

Stacy tells me she learned several positive and negative lessons related to her student government involvement. She describes an incident as a business major at Akili. She says because of her involvement in student government, she didn't have time to pursue an outside internship. At the end of her sophomore year, she says she

“looked around and everyone had an internship except me”. Luckily, Stacy says the business school allowed her use her student government involvement as fulfillment of the internship requirement. However, even with this allowance made on her behalf, she still realized that she would only have two internships on her resume, and while her friends were working hard and building relationships with companies, she felt as if she “wasted time” working so diligently for student government. She reflects “I didn’t go the extra mile with my studies like I did with SGA. I think I did a disservice to myself.”

But while Stacy indicates that student government did not impact her career choice, she pauses to “connect the dots” and acknowledges that in a roundabout way, various factors, including her involvement in student government, had an overall affect on her current career path. In making the connections, Stacy realizes she is now pursuing a certificate in Human Resource Development, due in part to her status as a military spouse, whom she met and married while she was serving in student government. She notes that had she not met her husband while participating in student government, she fully suspects that she would be working for a Fortune 500 company and moving through the ranks of the business world.

Stacy didn’t really comment on her perceptions of her post student government identity. For her, it may just be a chapter in her life that is in the past. She concedes that she has had both positive and negative repercussions due to her student government involvement. However, she has chosen to focus on her life on the present:

It was a great opportunity being in SGA. But student leaders should never lose sight of the 'student' part of student leader. At the time, I didn't see I was in that mode. But after getting out of SGA and as my collegiate career was coming to an end, I just realized I spent WAY TOO much time in SGA. And not enough time focusing on life **after** SGA and after [Akili].

Stacy makes it clear that she did not perceive her student government involvement as exerting any influence on her career choice. She explains in various contexts that her career choice was determined long before she got to college. Once she arrived in college, she declared her major, progressed through her course of study and obtained her degree. Stacy notes that she became involved in student government due to both the influence of her peers as well as a willingness to connect her career aspirations (business) with her desire to be involved on campus (student government). It is further made clear in her involvement in student government, which was exclusively tied to areas related to her intended career choice.

### **Case Study Two: "Ace"**

*"I don't know where I would be without SGA"*

I am scheduled to interview Ace while he is in town for the annual Akili University Convocation, but we get our times mixed up, so I end up interviewing him in the airport as he waited on a flight headed to Miami for a speaking engagement. He apologizes multiple times for not making our other appointments and I assure him that it is okay, because I know this will be time well spent. I know Ace better than all the

other participants in the study because he is from my hometown. I thought his addition to the study was important because he was from out-of-state, where most of the participants hailed from all areas from within the state.

Ace is a study in contrasts, he is wearing a suit as he prepares to head to South Florida, but underneath his somewhat conservative attire, one can catch a glimpse of several tattoos (“mostly from my days in undergrad” he says). Ace has a reputation as an activist but also as a “party boy”. He is an extrovert (he is headed to Miami as a keynote speaker, scheduled to deliver a speech for a large conference) but also has a notably reserved side. He is so well spoken that people often comment on his avoidance of his true calling: as a minister or maybe a politician, but the Ace I know has always been, well, just Ace. He is fun, zany, thoughtful, patient, and always on the go.

He is preparing to board the plane when he realizes that he hasn’t penned his speech for his talk tomorrow. “I don’t know what it is about me but I always seem to work better under pressure.” he says. He only has thirty minutes before he has to board his flight, and since we had already gone through his demographic data and consent information over the phone, we dive right into the interview.

Ace mentioned that he worked about twenty hours a week for student government in various posts until he became president. Once he became president he notes that “everything was just intermingled with that...every moment was spent doing student government stuff”. Given his level of involvement, I am interested to uncover if he perceives his participation as impactful on his career choice.

I've known Ace for more than 3 years, but I never asked how he got involved in student government. Because of his active involvement (he served as freshman and sophomore class president, then student body president and vice president) I assumed he had some experience in student government in high school. However, Ace shared that he only got involved in student government as a way to meet people. By his own account, he was not "popular" in high school and since he was coming so far to go to Akili, he wanted to make sure he had friends to ease the transition.

When I started at [Akili] I was coming from high school and I wasn't very active, and one of my buddies was running for freshman senator... This shows how little I knew about student government, I didn't know there was more than one seat for freshman senator, so rather than run against him, I ran to be freshman class president. I didn't have any political aspirations I just wanted to meet people and get involved in something.

Ace currently works in pharmaceutical sales which as he says "has absolutely no relation to SGA". But like many of the study participants, Ace noted that if it was not for his student government involvement, he probably would not have the job:

Now that I think about it, being student government president did give me my job, all because my company sponsored the Homecoming Step Show. So when they came down, I got to meet the recruiter and it just all worked out. I wanted a job but my current career found me by virtue of my experience in student government.



Ace describes his time in student government as “an incredible training ground” noting that his involvement was positive, reinforced the importance of networking and a good work ethic, and illustrated the “practical application of the work world” in a smaller setting.

Ace describes student government as a vehicle that provides “access to people of influence” in a way that other student organizations cannot provide.

Student Government paved the way for my initial job choice in two ways. It provided me, first, with the relevant TOOLS needed in the workplace. Time management, people management, organization, and personal interactions are just some of the tools that student government instilled in me. The second was connections. As a SGA representative in ANY capacity, one is given access to a pool of influential people/companies that other people are not. Furthermore, for someone that is driven...the sky is the limit as you have both the tools and the access to many of the best jobs in the country.

As a student leader who, by his own admission, knew little about the structure of student government, he notes that what he did have was a “desire to be in the circle” which motivated him to work hard to become a well respected student leader. But more importantly, his student government experience and the desire to be a “behind the scenes power player” is still influencing his career path today. Over the sounds of the airport paging system, Ace shared that he is considering running for political office and wonders aloud if he should have harnessed his connections made in student government to run for office before he left the city where Akili is located:

In the last two years in student government I gained a reputation as a small time activist. I think before you heard about me running for office, I would want to be the person who guided the politician, who influenced the politician more than the politician himself. But I find myself thinking about the possibility of political office more and more, SGA is it on a smaller scale but still a large amount of money, and resources much like any politician would deal with; and the only reason I think I would even be able to do it would be because of my involvement in SGA.

With his jacket over his shoulder, and his briefcase in his hand, Ace bids me farewell and heads to his gate to board his flight.

Ace made and continued to make a direct relationship between his current career pursuits and his student government involvement. Not surprisingly, he mentioned that he was “always the kind of student who went to every career fair and workshop offered by Career Services”, indicating that he invested time ensuring that he would have a suitable career upon graduation from Akili. He now has a career in an area not previously considered before his participation in student government. Ace goes further in saying it would be almost impossible for anyone who had served in student government not to determine a connection between their involvement and their career choice. Ace viewed student government as an organization that provided opportunities beyond those offered in other organizations. Student government leaders did themselves a disservice if they did not take advantage of the contacts that student government provided and seized those opportunities.

### Case Study Three: "William"

*"I did student government in addition to...the career path that I had already chosen."*

I meet William one weekend afternoon at a local coffee shop. I was unable to find basic contact information but located him via e-mail after *accidentally* e-mailing his father. His father was gracious enough to provide me with his son's e-mail address and advised me that he was pursuing his PhD as well, and would probably be interested in participating in my study. I finally was able to make contact with William and he advised me that he would be in town the next week and we agreed to determine our meeting place once he arrived. Once he arrives in town, we were scheduled to meet at the library on Akili's campus but it was closed due to regularly scheduled summer break. William then recommended the dining hall on campus; I indicated to him that I thought it may be closed also since the university was between semesters. We then agree to meet at a local bookstore retailer that contains a coffee shop. I can't help but wonder who still eats in the undergraduate dining hall *after* they have graduated? But William is deeply involved with his alma mater and I find out during the course of our interview that he likes to stay connected to the campus by keeping his connection to current students.

I have never met William before this interview, but I recognize him as soon as I spot him entering the coffeehouse. He is commonly described by former student government presidents as the "smart one" or the "quiet one", and he looks the part. Dressed in an Akili polo shirt, he greets me coolly, which I attribute to both his first

time meeting me, and his somewhat shy and introverted demeanor. As we sit down to talk, he exudes a quiet confidence in everything about Akili.

William is the son of a university president, and his father worked as a history professor for over 20 years before serving as the president of another HBCU. As such, William's perceptions are steeped in an understanding of the history of the university and the history of the African-American struggle. A proud alum, during the course of our interview I noticed that he never abbreviated the name of his alma mater, it was *always* Akili State University, as if to remind the listener that the power of this school could not be diminished with acronyms, its impact so far reaching. Over the occasional sounds of an overly loud espresso machine, we discuss the intent of the study, review and sign the consent form, and begin the interview.

Like many of the other participants in this study, William got involved in student government due to the involvement and influence of his peers. He recalls how he was introduced to student government and notes his attraction to student government was also heavily attributable to the history of activism of student government at Akili. He shows me how he earned his reputation as the "smart one", telling me "I knew that the role of the student government president was a very exciting and very important role to the university community" and leading me on a one-man history lesson of the Akili Student Government Association and its activism, as well as the noteworthy student government leaders of the past. It is clear that his involvement in student government was not accidental, but deliberate and carefully thought-out.

William summarized his student government influence on his career choice (even as an active student government leader as early as elementary school) as an addition to what had already been decided as his career long before he came to college:

Really my decision to pursue a PhD came long before my involvement in student government. I always admired my father and determined that at a very early age, when I started participating in history fairs in middle school, that I wanted to be in the same profession that he was. I'm still in graduate school training for the career I want to pursue. So I did student government in addition to...the career path that I had already chosen.

William recalls that because he served in student government during a really controversial period, the lessons learned were due mostly to the trials and tribulations brought forth because of his participation in student government:

You really never know what you are capable of doing until you are tested, and SGA was a daily test of my morals, of my convictions, of my leadership, and of my discipline and I felt that I was strengthened in all those areas because of it.

We have an engaging conversation about the past, present, and future of his alma mater as well as his own unique student government experience, but because William's career choice has not been fully realized, until he finishes graduate school and officially enters the and to determine if student government will show a far-reaching effect on his career choice.workforce, it may be too early for William to fully realize his experience

#### Case Study Four: "Grant"

*"I think it has impacted my job choice, but I also think if I was not in government that the values learned would still stand."*

Grant is probably one of the most well-known former Akili student government leaders in and around the state. He was the first student member of the Akili State University Board of Trustees and he currently serves as an elected official in city government. Grant was elected after an effective campaign that garnered high student voter turnout, and became the youngest person ever elected to his post. He was reelected for three consecutive terms. He is also a member of the Network of Young Politicians; a program that unites elected officials under the age of 35 supports them with leadership and personal development training, as well as public policy support.

It is a crazy day and we meet on the first day that the "metro council" is back in session. It is also a day that I am extremely busy at work. I call his assistant to see if I can reschedule and she advises that I won't get another appointment to see him for over two months. Realizing I may not get another opportunity to interview him, I quickly get into my car and race over to City Hall for our meeting.

I am greeted by his assistant, and in noting my speed in which I got to their office, she offers me some water to ensure that I have cooled down. I sit in the outer office and observe men in suits moving about, greeting each other and catching up on the latest happenings since the summer recess. His assistant then comes and motions me to follow her to Grant's office. His office is full of dark and modern furniture. He has a picture of his wife, and his younger sister (also a recent Akili student government

president) on his desk. This is my first time meeting him formally and he is cordial and open. In spite of my request for 45 minutes, our interview is scheduled for only 30 minutes. His assistant reminds him that he has time on allotted on his schedule to prepare for the commission meeting scheduled in about an hour. He tells her not to worry and graciously indicates that I can have all the time I need to complete my interview.

I shared with Grant that I was unaware until an interview with another former leader, that one of my intended interview participants was also his wife. He laughed and said, "Yep, she's the Mrs. now." He asks me about whom I have interviewed and what years are included in my study. We talk briefly about the start of this new session and how even after seven years sitting on the metro council, he is still the youngest person serving on the board. I thank him for taking the time for this interview on this very busy day and I am convinced he means it when he says "I am happy to do it." He congratulates me on taking on this study and finishing this work.

With the small talk aside, and the review of the study, consent forms, and demographic data completed, we begin the interview.

Grant served in student government in a variety of roles, including student senator, the committee chairman, an escort to Ms. Akili State University, senate president and student body president. He notes that he spent forty hours or more working for student government in his various positions. But he laughs as he shares with me the story about his wife losing her election as Ms. Akili by only nine votes, and having to serving as the escort to her competition instead. He notes that he and his wife

knew each other, but they weren't dating at the time, in fact, they were not even in the same circle of friends. But it was a heartbreaking loss for her.

He also notes that he came to college fully intending to "do me" and was not trying to serve in student government. But a chance meeting with Kennedy (who is the last profile included in this study) changed everything, "it redefined leadership in a much more holistic, humanitarian, and service oriented way... that made a difference for me. That's what changed me to say I *should* be doing this, this is *exactly* how I should be spending my time."

Grant mentioned that when he first came to Akili his major was business, but he soon switched to political science. He notes that he was not interested in the corporate business model, and the business school, while highly ranked, was not the type of environment that he felt comfortable in. What was even more interesting was during the course of the interview he reveals that his childhood aspiration was to be a pediatrician. But he soon determined that even though he had the "passion" he "sucked in science and math" and lacked the necessary aptitude and skills for the position.

As a city official, Grant could easily identify the skills he learned in student government and cited "very practical skills such as budgeting, building coalitions, creating policy, campaigning and winning elections", as practical "takeaways". But he also noted a deeper political awareness and commitment to democracy that was fueled, due to his involvement. But more importantly, he clearly articulated that student government impacted his career choice in a variety of ways. He says that he when he



was a child, he wanted to pursue a variety of careers: teacher, pediatrician, and then a lawyer...but more importantly he “knew I wanted to do something!”. His vision for his life was to do something positive and to make a difference. Student government allowed him the opportunity to do both. Grant sums up the influence student government had on his career choice by saying “I think it has impacted my job choice, but I also think if I was not in government that the values learned would still stand. If it doesn’t attribute directly to my profession it certainly relates directly to values and skills I bring to it.”

#### **Case Study Five: “Deon”**

*“I would not be in my current job if it was not for SGA.”*

Deon is a special case study. He is somewhat atypical in comparison to the other respondents in the study because he became Akili student government president while pursuing a degree in public health administration as a graduate student. While he attended and graduated from Akili with an undergraduate degree in Biology, he notes that he lacked the time to get involved because of his involvement as one the drum majors for the widely known university marching band. He explains that he volunteered with SGA every chance he could get, but didn’t fully have the time to serve as president until he was a post-grad, serving as vice president during the first year of his program, and president the second year. Hailing from the southern part of the state, he currently serves as a professional staff member for the United States Congress.

We meet on a warm and sunny Saturday afternoon, and after walking onto Akili's campus to meet him, I couldn't help but note that he was so down to earth and such a willing participant. During the course of our conversation, I found him to be a kindred spirit. Deon shared a story that mirrors a similar story on which this entire research study is based. Deon wanted to be a medical doctor, and was studying biology when his involvement interests started to push him in another direction. When asked if student government impacted his career choice he answers in the affirmative:

Yes. It had a large influence, initially in undergrad I always wanted to go to medical school and become a doctor. But my involvement in student government and the interactions that I had there, piqued my interest in politics. That had a large influence on where I am now. I would not be in my current job if it was not for SGA.

Despite this influence, this interest did not move Deon to change his major or area of career interest, in fact, he went on to earn a graduate degree in public health in addition to his bachelor's degree in Biology.

He also shared that immediately after his graduation from Akili, he worked as an assistant to the board of a non-profit group. His student government experience is credited for his success in that position, as he conveys the following thoughts on his experience:

It has made me a better person for sure. My experience allowed me to experience professional leadership opportunities that I don't think I would had, had it not

been for student government. Also the opportunity allowed me to serve as a member of the Akili Board of Trustees. The professional experience of working on a Board served me very well, I still use a lot of the things I learned [at Akili] today.

Deon noted his interest in seeing me pursuing this study deeper, possibly considering a comparative study of leadership at an HBCU and contrasting that involvement with student leaders at predominately white institutions (PWIs). He also noted that a study of African-American student government presidents at PWIs would be an interesting study as well. I smile and agree but told him it would take my entire professional career to complete the scope of interest I have in this topic. Deon is passionate about the influence he attributes to his involvement and credits it for shaping his post student government identity. "Student government helped me define my passion. It helped me determine what I *really* wanted to do with my life." This identity is still centered on service and a concern for the next generation of students at the university, as evidenced by his comments. I thank him for his time and leave this interview feeling like I just had my own personal "aha" moment.

### **Case Study Six: "Robin"**

*"My SGA experience steered me away from everything I thought I wanted to be."*

Robin was the last participant interviewed for this study. He responded to my initial e-mail months after it was sent. I was not sure if I would be able to include him in the study, but I was told by many that only Robin would be able to effectively

communicate his “unique” student government leadership experience with me. It was somewhat difficult to find him because he no longer goes by the name he used while in school. He has changed his name and it took some time to track him down under his new identity.

By all accounts, he is regarded as a wildly popular student government president and was known for his willingness to put himself on the line for student rights. He is still remembered positively as evidenced by the campus newspaper, an article posted about him on the Young Alumni Network page, as well as reflections from faculty and staff who remember his time at Akili. We finally have the opportunity to talk one afternoon. It is now early fall, and the temperatures have fallen in many parts of the country, but as we talk, Robin mentioned that it was 80 degrees in the northeastern part of the US where he currently resides. Somewhat surprising given the time of the year, but far less surprising than what was in store during this interview.

By his own account, Robin doesn’t fit the “model” of the Akili Student Government President; he wears his hair in dreadlocks, isn’t fond of “shaking hands, kissing babies, and making false promises”, and has an aversion to three-piece suits. Robin describes himself as an “activist, who wanted nothing to do with the likes of student government”. He says “they were all so fake and stuffy, and me and my crew were popular and known on campus, so we had no real use for student government.” But Robin was approached by several students who wanted a change in student government so despite his description as a “strident Africanist on a campus where there was a distinct line between the cultural black folks and the regular black folks”, he was

able to garner the vote of thousands of students, and was elected as student body president. This is only more impressive by the fact that he was elected for two consecutive terms, a feat that has not been duplicated since his administration.

Robin began his student government involvement working as the assistant to the SGA Cultural Affairs Office. He says he got out of it when he realized “they didn’t really want to do anything cultural, they just wanted to throw parties with students’ money”. But when reviewing various records related to his time in office, I came across a police report that reveals that Robin had been arrested for various offenses, ranging from obstruction of justice to unlawful protests. In an effort not to derail the interview, I didn’t ask Robin exactly what issues led to his criminal charges and ultimately his arrest, so I conducted some additional research after our interview.

Apparently, his relationship with the president was tenuous and strained, in part due to his belief that students’ rights should be paramount on campus. When Robin felt that the president was not responding to those needs, he let his voice be heard in the form of student protests, sit-ins, and campus demonstrations. Police records and further discussions with members of the campus police department, revealed an alarming look at the suppression of dissident student (and faculty) voices during this period.

Robin originally came to Akili intending to major in business, but one semester in the business school made it clear he was too much of an independent to fit into the “cookie-cutter model of business”. Echoing Grant’s sentiments of the business school, Robin says:

I was an entrepreneur and yet the business school and I didn't fit. They didn't like my hair, they didn't like this and that...and I wanted to learn how to be a better business person. But the program at the time was getting a lot of money from industry to teach students *how* to work for businesses *not* how to run their own businesses, so I got out of there.

He then changed his major to political science and history and completed his degree in those areas. Despite his degree, he still works as an entrepreneur, serving presently as the co-owner of a publishing company with fellow Akili alum. But because of the tumultuous nature of his presidency and his time in student government, when Robin describes the influence student government had on his career, his thoughts and reflections on his involvement are considerably dissimilar from the other participants' interviewed. He shared:

Student government... hmm...it is kind of hard to separate it...I was an activist, and I had always wondered if you could affect change from the inside of a broken system. My answer was ultimately 'no'. But...what it did do as far as career, it furthered my unwillingness to be a mainstream career person. I had intended to go to law school, I had this assistant... she was supposed to turn my law school applications in, and when I got back from Africa, I found out that she never turned them in. By then I was so disinterested in law school. On top of that, when I got back from Africa the amount of issues and problems that I had to deal with in student government, including my possible impeachment, didn't allow me to pursue that path any further.

But what began as a quest to improve student life at the university ended bitterly with Robin marked as an enemy of the administration. Robin goes further, describing the pain and the need for healing once he left Akili.

The backlash I received from the University's administration was constant and relentless. The 4 years of harassment and abuse culminated in a student uprising that shut down the journalism building for two days and ended in a violent attack on students in main administration building.

These experiences, along with being charged with several felonies as a result of the uprising, caused me to pursue my passions and not a career. I had a strong dose of reality as a student leader, and learned that I was unwilling to compromise in pursuit of material and/or status gains.

The need for healing was important to Robin. He noted that unlike other past student government presidents, his first visit to campus since he graduated was just a few years ago, more than ten years after he left. He also shared that he saw the former president of Akili a few months ago and the president apologized for all that had transpired between them. He was shocked to receive the apology but reflected on how time made him view the time spent at Akili more positively:

The cauldron of [Akili] honed me spiritually into a reformed revolutionary, who understands that revolution is just a spinning wheel, while evolution is the path which truly heals. So, I've turned my hurt into healing and am all the happier for it.

Despite his experiences in student government, Robin still considered the overall experience to be positive. “Yes, my experience was very positive! The response by the administration is what was negative. We had the best of intentions, my whole thing was to empower people...”.

Robin went on to identify the most influential factors on his career path, citing the influence of his father who was a minister and a “humanitarian”:

The most influential factors for my lifestyle include my father's commitment to serving people, and a call to fight for justice I have felt all of my life. I chose the word lifestyle rather than career, because serving people and being committed to healing is more than a career. At times I feel as though I had no choice in the matter.

It is worth noting that Robin completely rejects the label of “career” in all his responses, preferring to use words like “passion”, “lifestyle” and other non-professional verbiage to describe his path. The affect his experience had on his career choices is evident and completely unexpected. While one could make an argument that student government had a negative effect on his career choice; I would offer an alternative view. Robin’s student government experience did not impact his career choice, at least not in a traditional linear fashion, nevertheless, it did allow him to discover an alternative career path realized only because of his involvement.

However, but to be clear, for the sake of this study, the researcher is categorizing Robin’s student government involvement as unimportant to his career choice. Robin observed in his comments that he had decided on a very traditional path of study,



seeking to go to law school and becoming a lawyer. But his student government experience taught him to “pursue my passions and not a career”. Because Robin did not believe his experience impacted his career choice, the researched honored his analysis and his very exceptional career path is not attributed to his student government involvement.

### **Case Study Seven: “Charles”**

*“It (SGA) had a major influence.”*

Charles is the very first participant I interview. He responds quickly to my request and before I know it, we are scheduled to meet at his office about a week later. I arrive at his office at the appointed time early one morning. Because he works in local government, I must go through a security screening and be cleared by Charles’ office before I am allowed to board the elevator that takes me to his floor. The state trooper is pleasant and makes small talk with me while we await my clearance. Once my clearance has been granted, he directs me to a set of elevators that takes me to the fourth floor.

Charles is a young man and could be considered the “baby” of the study, as the youngest participant and having the least amount of time elapsed since his undergraduate career. He holds a degree in Political Science and currently serves as the Director of Community Affairs for the Mayor’s office, in the local city near Akili State University. A self described “lover of politics”, while still in undergrad, Charles made

an unsuccessful bid for local political office. However, he is still recognized locally for his work for his commitment to access and diversity issues.

As I exit the elevator and head into this office, his assistant advises me that he is running a little late and allows me to have a seat while I wait. I check my tape recorder and my computer to ensure they are both operational, and by the time I power everything down, Charles walks into the office. He apologizes for his late arrival, and I tell him I don't mind, I was enjoying the panoramic view of the city, from this top floor location in City Hall. As he welcomes me into his office, I look around and notice a room full of collegiate memories and honors, both from his days at Akili and now in his new career. He is warm, engaging, and collegial, and because his SGA experiences are fairly recent, he has strong remembrances regarding his former SGA life.

When asked how he became involved in SGA, Charles noted that his attendance at Akili was a random act of chance. He planned to attend another well known private HBCU, but had a chance encounter with two Akili student government leaders during a rally at his high school. They convinced him that Akili was a better choice and his vehicle for involvement would probably be student government. Charles did not hesitate when asked if he thought about how student government may have impacted his current career choice. His outlook on the influence student government has had on his career was extremely positive.

Absolutely. I think it did, Akili SGA is a microcosm of the 'system' ....young people are still learning what it means to have power...budgets, dealing with people, long-term vision, and goals that a realistic. I utilize and harness my SGA

experience everyday in my workplace. It had a major influence. It is because of SGA that I will be pursuing my master's degree in American Politics at State University.

Like many of the other respondents, Charles identified an extensive amount of workplace confidence and competence that he believes to be directly attributable to his SGA experience. "I'm a better writer, have a much more succinct management style, and better analytical skills." Charles notes that his SGA experience was "life changing". But in addition, despite identifying the impact student government had on his career choice he also identified parental influence as an equally strong force that could not be ignored. "I strongly consider positive parental influence as the major factor in my career choice. The transparent display of servant leadership displayed by my parents engrained a sense of pride and responsibility to my surrounding community."

In his analysis, Charles unmistakably attributes his career direction to his involvement as well as the influence of his parents. Charles has highly educated parents; both holding advance degrees and attributed their encouragement to his career choice.

### **Case Study Eight: "Peter"**

*"I didn't think I would be doing this per se...but it still applies."*

A self described "average guy", Peter considers himself a little different than the archetype of a student government president. After serving his year as the Akili SGA president, he deferred admission to a prestigious law school to work for the Speaker of

the State House of Representatives. To make additional money, he also took a job as a hotel bellman.

I would work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Capital, and then from 5 p.m. to midnight I would work as a bellman at the (a local) hotel. My friends from college would ask me, 'Peter, why are you working as a bellboy?'

But Peter, who stands at an impressive 6 feet 5 inches tall, had a plan. He saved the money from his night job, to start a real estate investment company, investing in urban communities and troubled neighborhoods where housing is typically in disrepair. He owns several properties throughout the southeast, and recently expanded his company to include other ventures. All this before the age of 30, and certainly not average.

Peter finally went on to that prestigious law school, where his peers took notice of his dedication, as well as his humility, and his first year as a law student and selected him as one of three Students of the Year. While in Law School, he embraced student government again, serving as the student government treasurer and president; as well as president of the Student Bar Association.

Affable and kind, Peter fits our interview in during a hectic afternoon in his office. He currently works as the COO for a private long-term health care company. His thoughts about his student government involvement are thoughtful and insightful. More importantly, he makes me laugh because while he definitely understands and

acknowledges the importance of his position and history in the annals of student government, he really does just view himself, and acts like, a regular guy.

Peter mentioned that he had quite of few friends involved in student government indicating that peer influence was as major motivating factor in his involvement. When I asked Peter what influence his student government involvement, which spans 7 years and two very different institutions, has had on his career choice, he states, “I didn’t think I would be doing this per se...but it still applies. You are still forced to focus those skill sets learned during your time in student government.” Peter comments that while “SGA made me a better person, at least...I would like to think so. It made me more resourceful, and to appreciate the value of being well read.”

When I asked if Peter felt his experience was a positive experience, a negative experience, or both, his face grimaces as he is reluctant to characterize the experience as anything but positive. I explained to him that rather than just ask if it was a positive experience, as a researcher, I wanted to ensure that the question was asked in a way that would address the entire spectrum of a person’s experience. He hesitates to answer and finally remarks:

Negative has strong undertones to it. Without rain you can’t have rainbows.

Was it a sacrifice...hell yeah! A tremendous sacrifice. But hey, ‘no grind, no shine’. Was it negative...no....but it did force me to grow up a little bit. That’s the part that I can attribute to student government.

While Peter is a trained attorney he is currently working in an area that he perceives to be unrelated to his student government participation. Like the other

participants, he views his student government experience has positive, but does not attribute his career choice as a corollary to his student government service.

### **Case Study Nine: "Shawn"**

*"My (SGA) involvement moved me to my profession..."*

Shawn started our interview with his thoughts about post student government issues. We had just completed our review of the consent form and demographic information when he started his comments. I begged him to wait until I could get the digital recorder on! Our interview guide was utilized but the questions were asked out of sequence, instead allowing the interview to go wherever Shawn wanted to take it.

Shawn is the founding and managing partner of a successful law firm located in the same city as Akili State University. He attended ASU on a Presidential Scholarship. While at Akili, Shawn was the first student elected to be elected two consecutive terms as Student Government President. After Shawn received his bachelor's degree in political science and economics from Akili he went on to law school; earning his Juris Doctorate three years later. He is actively involved in various professional, civic and community organizations.

He was an extremely active student leader while in college, and continues his commitment to serving his alma mater as a board member of the Akili State University Foundation, Inc. He was recently appointed to the Akili State University Board of Trustees by the governor of the state.

I interview him in his law office after regular business hours. While the office is closed, it is alive with activity. Several attorneys are still in the office working on cases, waiting and hoping for a moment with their boss. But he is gracious and kind, holding off all appointments (with the exception of a local attorney who is seeking an endorsement in an upcoming race for judge) for our interview.

His office is full of awards won while a student at Akili as well as accolades bestowed on him as an attorney. He is a large man, with a warm smile and a kind heart. Before we started our interview, a young teenager, ran into the office to pick up something promised to her. As he gave her a large amount of cash, he gave an admonishment about her grades, and said if she was going to continue on cheerleading, her grades would have to come up, or he would cease to fund the activity. The message was given in love and received with seriousness as well as gratitude. He laughs as he explains to me that this is his goddaughter and her only problem is her parents (as well as him) spoil her too much. As I watch CNN on the large panel TV in his office, I am touched as he “shoos” out his assistants and other attorneys, as we prepare to sit down to talk. As the most senior participant in the study, his reflections of student government proves to be tempered by his years away (but never far) from his beloved alma mater.

Shawn describes his introduction to student government as an opportunity to get involved at a higher level, serving first as a student on a committee then answering an advertisement for student government Supreme Court Justices. “I saw a sign that said ‘Justices Needed’ and submitted an application.” He recalled working as a trainer for

student athletes and in housing as a resident assistant but noted “...I wanted to get involved. I did the trainer thing; I had been an RA, that wasn’t quite feeding the rush, so I had to do something else. Student government turned out to be a good fit.”

Shawn notes, “My (SGA) involvement moved me to my profession...I would probably would just rather be owning businesses, sitting in the sky somewhere (laughing)...you know.” When I follow up with the following question, “You don’t think you were interested in law until you got involved in student government?” He answers in the affirmative, but acknowledges that his first real involvement in student government started in the judicial area, so perhaps that experience set the groundwork for his future career.

As an attorney, a search on Shawn’s name and practice yields hundreds of results. I shared with Shawn that I read articles about him and how his mother’s unexpected passing had an influence on his career choice. His mood was somber as he reflected on his choices:

“That too...I think just growing up poor and the need to be more self sustaining, to help your people, that’s what makes it easy to be a lawyer...this type of lawyer. You can go be a bank lawyer, but that isn’t helping anyone but the bank. But doing this kind of work, it helps me stay focused on what I do. Helping others is really key.”

Shawn has had a considerable amount of time to reflect on his student government experience and his vocation since his days at Akili. To him the question of influence is not did his student government involvement affect his career choice but



rather how much and to what degree? Shawn has a history of self-employed business owners in his family and because of those parental influences, thought that he would open his own business as well. Shawn notes that he is the first in his family to go to college and just being given the opportunity to be on campus was a thrill. It was an opportunity that he thought best to take full advantage of, and he attributes his involvement in student government for everything he is today.

### **Case Study Ten: “Kennedy”**

*“SGA definitely had an affect, [but] it was not the primary influence on my career choice...”*

At Akili State University, there have only been 3 female student government presidents in the last 40 years. Two of the three female student body presidents fell outside of the time span originally designated for the study, with one serving the year prior and one serving a year after the selected fifteen year time period. But right in the middle was Kennedy.

During an interview with another former SGA president, he reflected and referred to Kennedy, citing her as the sole reason he ever got involved in SGA. He encouraged the researcher to interview her and he provided the necessary contact information to locate her. After several scheduling conflicts, we finally had the opportunity to talk. She was taking a trip to her corporate headquarters and so we finally had some uninterrupted time together, with me sitting in my home office and she on her cell phone in the car.

Kennedy was a part of an uncharacteristic and largely female dominated student government at the time she took office. Kennedy was one of the most interesting former SGA presidents interviewed; and her entire administration and post-SGA identity is largely different from her male counterparts. She is commonly referred to by both former and recent student government presidents as the “standard of servant leadership”. When I shared with her the comments from some of her peers she was humble as well as honored by the positive remembrances of her administration.

She is currently employed as a Global Brand Manager for a large company. She is also an author, speaker and community leader committed to helping people reach their potential and creating healthy relationships.

Kennedy served as in various roles in student government before coming president including freshman senator, senate pro-temp, vice president, and finally student body president. She describes her introduction into student government as a lonely experience. Saying she only knew one other person when she got to college and ran for office because it was a natural fit for her involvement. Kennedy felt that she was attracted to student government because “I like leading, I like leadership, and I like making a difference”. She says that you can make a change “through making policy or rebellion. I chose policy.”

Kennedy initially remarked that student government did not affect her career choice; noting that she went to school to major in business and to work for a large company. However, she did give careful consideration to becoming a clinical psychologist and attributes that to her SGA involvement. She said eventually she did

not pursue it because she “didn’t want to go to school for 7 more years....which would cause me to forfeit income and cut into my earning potential”.

But Kennedy went back to the question and asked if she could clarify her answer saying, “SGA definitely had an affect, while it was not the primary influence on my career choice, it did give me an advantage professionally when I first got into business that I would not have had if not for SGA.”

Kennedy recently published a book, an autobiographical work about a spiritual journey through love, marriage, divorce and remarriage. She talked about how connected her identify was with her SGA role and writing the book allowed her to be more free with the many people who held her in such high regard, without knowing about her own struggles in life.

Kennedy did not attribute her career choice to her involvement in student government, rather, to her college major. She wanted to become a business woman and similar to Stacy, stayed on a very traditional linear path to ensure the goal was met. She credits her involvement to greater vocational aptitude but not having any direct effect on her career choice.

### *Cross Case Analysis*

The cross case analysis was conducted in conjunction with the data collection for this project. The researcher grouped together the subjects' responses to questions included on the participant profile and the interview guide. This technique was effective in formulating both a collective sense of the experiences of the ten former student government officers included in the research sample and advanced answers to the primary questions guiding this study; would participants articulate that their student government participation impacted their career choice; would there be a relationship between SGA participation and career choice; how would that relationship manifest? This discussion of the cross case analysis begins by considering these three topics and then examines other related issues that emerged when the ten cases were considered as a group.

### **Effects of Student Government Involvement on Career Selection**

In this study, three of respondents are working directly in government, two in law, two in business, and one working as a independent business owner, one pursuing a terminal degree in History, and the other currently unemployed. Four of the study participants graduated with a degree in Political Science, an additional three in business administration, and two participants holding degrees in Biology and Public Relations respectively. 100% of participants reflected on their overall SGA experience positively, with 30% reporting some positives as well as some negative attributes of involvement.

70% of respondents (7 out of 10) spent 4 years or more in student government, with an average of 3.6 years of undergraduate student government experience.

The majority of the respondents indicated that their major and to some extent, their career, was decided when they arrived at college. Of the ten participants interviewed, only four changed their major or career intentions while in college. One participant (Peter), who is currently an attorney working for a small start up company, changed his major from English Education to Political Science noting:

Yes, like I said I changed majors from English Ed...I wanted to be a teacher. But I had a strong desire to effect policy change and I learned very quickly that real power comes from policy and government. Not inside the classroom. SGA made me think bigger...but I would have been a great teacher.

The second participant (William), noted that he changed his major from Broadcast Journalism (citing a desire to create documentaries) to Public Relations for its additional writing component, as well as it being a better fit for what he wanted to do in the long-term, and that was becoming a history professor at an HBCU. But he easily attributes that to a variety of factors, not just his involvement in student government:

Yes, I changed to Public Relations...it had much more of a writing component, I thought the skills were more related to what I was doing, and what I wanted to do in the future – which was History. Originally I was a broadcast journalism major because I wanted to write documentaries. I think I still can do that with the Public Relations and while I changed the major...I think it was influenced by a variety of factors, not just student government.

Our third noted participant, Deon, started out with a desire to become a medical doctor, but currently works in government as a professional staffer for the US Congress.

Yes, in undergrad I always wanted to go to medical school and be a doctor. But my involvement in student government and the interactions I had there, piqued my interests in politics. I would never be doing what I am doing now, if it was not for the opportunities I had in student government. It opened the door.

Finally, our fourth participant, Ace (who current works as a pharmaceutical rep) notes that if it was not for student government, he would have never considered the pharmaceutical sales field; it was his role as the student government president that lead to his current career, "... I wanted a job but my current career found me by virtue of my experience in student government."

While half of the participants (50%) believed that student government had *some* influence on their career choice, Deon, Ace, Charles and Shawn would be the only participants who directly attributed their current career pursuits as a *direct* impact of their student government participation.

### **Participant Perceptions of the Value of Student Government**

The comparative value of student government participation versus other types of campus involvement was commonly noted. Student government experience was noted for its affects on social and practical competence, self-confidence, and workplace competence. Furthermore, each of the student government alumni interviewed in this study indicated that student government had significant *overall* influence on their lives,

but acknowledged varying degrees of its influence on their career choices. Table 2 provides a summary of the results.

*Akili State University*

Table 2. Comparison of Articulated Participant Responses

(Did student government affect your career/vocational choice?)

Stacy	Ace*	William*	Grant	Deon*	Robin*	Charles	Peter*	Shawn	Kennedy
No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

\*Denotes participant attribution of change of major and/or profession due to student government.

The data represented in Table 2, shows an equal distribution among participants of whether or not their student government impact affected their career choice. The quotes below summarize the findings:

“No. I wanted to go into business and student government didn’t change that. But I think SGA has made me more aware of my surroundings and how to read people, and definitely has helped me professionally in knowing how to talk to people. You learn all those soft skills climbing up the ranks of SGA.”

“Absolutely. I think it did (influenced my career choice), ... I utilize and harness my SGA experience everyday in my workplace. It has had a major influence. It is because of SGA that I will be pursuing my master’s degree in American Politics at State University.”

“Being in SGA did affect my career choice. When I graduated, I didn’t know it, but until I got involved with SGA, I was on that typical newspaper track, then I took a job with a Public Relations firm because of my work in SGA.”

Participants even noted if its influence was to consider but ignore other career opportunities, some reflected on the road “less traveled”.

Because of SGA, I was really considering going on and becoming a clinical psychologist. But in the end, I didn’t want to go to school for 7 more years....which would cause me to forfeit income and cut into my earning potential.

This participant goes on to explain her perceptions of how student government influenced her in other ways:

SGA definitely had an effect, while it was not the primary influence on my career choice, it did give me an advantage professionally when I first got into business that I would not have had if not for SGA.

### **Positive Influence of Peer Group**

Not surprisingly, these former student leaders noted that their friends and fellow SGA members provided the strongest articulated influence on their joining and participation in student government. Astin (1993) believed that the students’ peer group was the strongest influence while in college. His theory states that students make and change their decisions based on their peer group and social networks. The results



from the current study supports Astin's (1993) findings and further emphasize that peers may also serve as a reason for why students continue to stay involved in co-curricular activities.

Participants in the current study were asked "how or why" they got involved in student government, and each respondent noted the role their peers played in their student government involvement. Several of the participants mentioned that they found their best friends and mates in student government.

In some cases, the influence and friendships with former leaders was the sole reason for involvement. The peer group which these participants shared their interest and experiences with, helped many of them discover aspects of their career identity.

Some examples of peer influence are reflected in participant comments. Peter who defined himself as "not an SGA guy", noted that his student government involvement was directed by the involvement of his college roommate.

I was interested in girls and basketball...anything but student government. But my friend...I was just his best man in his wedding...he said 'I'm going to run for SGA senator' and I was like....what's that? That's how I got involved. Like I said, I liked girls and basketball and I still do. *(he smiles a broad smile)* So I had a lot of acquaintance on campus so it was a natural when I ran for freshman senator."

Each of the respondents referred to a past or current member of SGA during their interview. Grant's comments gave some insight on the relationships between

former student government members and the peer influence still felt many former student government presidents:

I know the names of every one (every student government president) that has come after me, because I have been left and struck by something from their administration. When I was out of the office, I would log on the Akili University website to listen and watch the Board of Trustees meetings, just to see how they performed. We are so widely respected and the students who come into the office of president know that they have so many people vested in the outcome.

Deon indicated that the influence of one's peers continues even when participants leave student government:

We all stay in touch and try to help each other out. Let me say this...and I know this will sound harsh, so let me say it the best way I can. We help each other – current and past SGA presidents, because sometimes the students don't know what is in their best interests. But because of our involvement, we are often aware of things that the average student isn't aware of...we try to make sure that we always take care of the students and each other.

Clearly the role of peers in student government participation are widely noted in this study, however these findings have not been explored further in the current literature.

## **Career Competency**

Student leadership participation has long been associated with career development and skill development. Decision making skills, the capacity to cope with ambiguity and complexity, and willingness to take risks (Cress et al., 2001, p. 22) are increased by involvement in leadership opportunities. Student government participants in this study articulated an advanced mastery of workplace skill development due extensively to their student government experience.

Of the factors cited in the previous paragraph, the most obvious one relates to career development. All of the respondents credit student government with developing their workplace competency. Clearly, each participant noted that their student government involvement prepared them more for the workplace by giving them workplace competency in areas such as budgeting, organizational skills, and interpersonal relations. The research that served as the foundation of this study (Kuh et al., 1991; Moore et al., 1998) shows this is consistent with studies conducted on student government participants to date. One participant describes the influence of student government in the workplace:

Student government is a great boot camp for any one who wants to get into politics and it definitely gives you those very necessary skills for any workplace. The number one thing I talk about when I go into interviews is my experience in SGA: how to manage people and being over a team and administering a budget...

Another participant discussed how his student government experience gave him an awareness of self that he still uses in his work life:

I learned accountability. I learned that the decisions I make as a leader will determine my outcome in the future. I learned you can't please everybody, not to stress over stuff... and not to take myself too seriously...to surround myself with people who could support my weaknesses, I learned my leadership style, and by the time I was done with it I knew...to be successful I would always need someone who complemented my weakness and my strengths.

Cress (2001) identified student government involvement as an opportunity for students to hone their skills related to decision making, ethical conflicts, and career related proficiencies. These findings were consistent in this study.

### **Greek Involvement**

The literature and the interviews have indicated that members of fraternities and sororities perceive their involvement as positively affecting their leadership and social skills. Astin's (1997) involvement theory found that participation in Greek life encouraged students to actively participate in the college community until graduation.

80% of the study participants (8 out of 10) identified themselves as members of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) reaffirming the work of Crume (2006) and Horowitz's (1996) claims that student government is often dominated by Greeks.

Greeks have a long history of involvement in student governance, and have successfully harnessed the power of their influence, well-connected alumni members,

and sheer numbers, to ensure that they wielded power and control over the sizeable budget as well as over those seeking funding. What was unique to this study was that the eight participants were all members of one specific sorority and one specific fraternity. These two groups had great long-term involvement with the Akili Student Government Association and took responsibility to ensure that they had a viable, electable candidate running in each election.

Greek participation was viewed as positive when seeking office, but often viewed negatively once in an elected student government post. The comments made by three different study participants below, shines some light on the Greek issues within SGA:

...the bruhs (brothers) always wanted you to fix stuff for them. Especially when it came to getting their friends into the fraternity, man, you are the student body president... Yeah, but in the chapter I am just a member. It was hard for people to understand that the two positions were not interchangeable.

I was the first non-Greek SGA President...and I was able to crossover and garner the support and participation of thousands of students in spite of it...

... when I came in the 'greek thing' was really big, they ruled everything. It was the [Betas] against the [Gammas] against the [Thetas] and when I came into leadership, I tried to make it a non-issue. Of course people still had their own motives. I wanted to bring transparency and an unbiased approach to the way SGA functioned instead of representing your organization or personal agenda.

As outlined by Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1999) all student involvement experiences are not positive. In Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling's research fraternity/sorority involvement was sometimes found to have less than positive impact. This finding was echoed by study participants when discussing greek involvement in relationship to student government participation.

### **Involvement is not Always Positive**

All of the participants reported a graduating GPA of 3.1 or higher. But many of the participants discussed how much SGA had a *negative* affect on their GPA and their academic lives in general.

"...sometimes I put my involvement in SGA over the reason why I was in college. I put it over my academics. Where I would stay up all night at these senate meetings, instead of devoting more study time to my classes. Even though I did well in college and in my classes, I graduated with a 3.7 GPA...but you have to understand, I was used to getting straight "A's". I should have read a little more, retained more knowledge, just put more focus toward my academics instead of so much time to SGA."

### **Parental Influence**

The parental educational backgrounds of the study participants were varied, from parents who didn't finish high school to those who have completed terminal degrees. But the power of parental influence on the career development of students cannot be ignored. Numerous research studies (Miller, 1985; Hoffaman, Hofacker, &

Goldsmith, 1992; Otto, 1989, 2000; Fisher, 1999; Mau and Bikos, 2000; Hargrove, et. all, 2002; Hairston, 2000) have shown that the influence of parents is the primary factor in career choice and college students refer to their parents' ideas, values, and influence on their choice of career. However many of these studies were conducted on White middle class populations, bringing into question their validity on students of color. However, this study has reinforced these findings. Study participants noted their parents' commitment to their professions as an influence on their career choice. As revealed by Falconer (2006), one notable influence for several participants was the desire for financial freedom. The choice of a profession was heavily guided by this desire, several participants pursued their careers based on earning potential, with the hope of ensuring financial stability for the entire family. Consider how clear parental influence is on career choice, in the comments of the participants below:

The most influential factors for my lifestyle was my father's commitment to serving people, and a call to fight for justice I have felt all of my life. I chose the word lifestyle rather than career, because serving people and being committed to healing is more than a career. At times I feel as though I had no choice in the matter.

I'm currently in graduate school training for the career I want to pursue. I want to be an historian and college professor. By far, the biggest influence my career

choice has been my father. He is an historian and spent 30 years teaching at Akili. He's currently the president of another HBCU in Georgia.

I'm in this profession because I wanted to do something to help people who had less. This was mostly because of watching my mom struggle with balancing...I did it for her.

I chose my profession because I thought I would be set (financially). It was really a money choice. I wanted to be able to give and do for my family in a way my parents weren't able to.

### **Struggles with Post-SGA Identity and Community Expectations**

Described by one participant as the "SGA Slump" and another as the "letdown", it is defined as the year immediately after serving as SGA President and the sense of loss that comes from not having the same impactful involvement, as well as the benefits and advantages associated with holding such a high office. Many of the participants emphasized the difficulty of going "back to being a regular student" after their student government tenure was complete. Shawn connected this "slump" with career development in his comments:

The ego drop....you know, the mentality that 'I was SGA president' and therefore I am entitled to something greater is a bad way to go. They [former SGA officers] have got to start thinking about real life. In reality, they were just young person who *happened* to win an office. That *happened* to control some



money, and that only lasted for twelve months. When you put that experience in perspective like that, the context is clear. Students have got to parlay it into the next logical career step, and if they don't, shame on them...and they really only have 6 months to do it.

Participants also cited dealing with the high expectations that other Akili alumni (career and otherwise) as well as former SGA officers had for them, as the most difficult part of their post-student government career experience. Grant discussed his thoughts regarding the expectations Akili alumni had for their student government president and how it affected his professional career after student government. He commented on their impatience saying:

You are allowed no margin for error...I view that as a positive and as a negative. I'm happy that the expectations are so high, but at the same time, the balance has to be struck that we are 22 year old students who are graduating just like you, and, just like you, we are trying figuring things out how things go."

### **Student Affairs Staff Influence**

Shawn and Stacy both briefly discussed how the student government experience is affected by student affairs staff who interacted with them student government. Shawn particularly noted his student government advisor who also served as the Director of Student Activities, and his influence on his life is clear:

...we had a great Director of Student Activities in Col. Robinson who passed away several years ago. He involved himself in all aspects of our lives. So, he

wasn't just the Director of Student Activities. I think former Akili President Dr. Henderson said it best; he was like a little president for the people. *He was there.* He did his best to influence all aspects of the University that he could. Whether it was things he would do what he could do to help the band, he used to do cookouts for Physical Plant, you know that kind of stuff. I wish I had for you a copy of this letter he wrote to me, critiquing me as a student leader. He disagreed with me on something and he was a writer. He was the best. And I am not lying to you, if I ever get to be chair on the Board, he is going to get a building named after him.

As discussed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), and others (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999; Love, 1995; Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006) it is virtually impossible to separate the affects of the involvement in a group like SGA from the informal effects of student's interaction with their peers and student affairs personnel (i.e. SGA Advisor, Dean of Students, VP for Student Affairs, etc.). Shawn and Stacy's reflections on student affairs staff and their impact on their experiences are areas that could be further explored in future studies.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter will provide an overview of this study, a discussion of the findings and a revised conceptual framework. Because the experiences of HBCU student government alumni has been scarcely addressed in the literature, it was interesting to see first hand how students make meaning of the many differing and parallel ways in which they came to their decisions on their career choice. Using qualitative research as the method, this study investigated student participation in student government, and the factors of that involvement that influence career choice for these African-American participants. The implications of the research as well as recommendations for further research will be presented.

#### **Overview of Study**

The overarching construct guiding this study was individual case studies of former student government participants at a historically black university and an exploration of the perceived impact of their involvement on their career choice. Because of the similarity in roles of each participants and the common experience and culture related to their alma mater, these students have similar reflections and experiences. But each case study was unique because of the special stipulation of time and place exclusive to their time in student government. In particular, this study qualitatively examined the following basic question:

According to the perceptions of African American student government alumni, what impact, if any, has their student government participation had on their career choice?

Secondary questions addressed were:

1. How do factors like gender, parental influence, leadership participation, positions held, career exposure/development and articulated and/or changed major of study affect the student's career choice?
2. To what extent can participants articulate their student government participation's affect on their career choice? What factors do student participants identify as the most influential on their career choice?
2. Will there be a relationship between student government participation and career choice, and if so, what will that relationship be?

### **Discussion of Study Findings**

This study focused on African-American student government alumni who attended a public four-year HBCU and their reflections on the impact of their student government involvement on their chosen vocation. Research was conducted using Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) work, How College Affects Students, which notes that "individual student characteristics are likely to play a major role in different dimensions of [college] career choice" (p.465). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also identified students' major field of study as a major determinant of future occupation, as well as addressing the effect of institutional racial composition on career choice. The influence of attending an HBCU on African-American students was highlighted by the authors

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and was also contrasted to the level of students' co-curricular involvement and its effects on career choice during college. The authors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) also uncovered research that suggested that certain types of co-curricular involvement contributes to the choice of a career (p. 517), noting that "choice of a career as a lawyer, was enhanced by being elected to a student office" (p. 517). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that "overall, it is difficult to form a firm conclusion about the impact of attending a historically Black institution on African Americans' career aspirations...[although] Black colleges appear to enhance the career aspirations of [their] students" (p. 485).

Agbor-Baylee's Cyclical Model of Student Career Motivation was the multivariate interactive model selected to explain student career selection (1997). Agbor-Baylee contends that commitment to a given career mediates shifts in a student's motivation from being largely extrinsic to intrinsic motivation which has a multiplier effect on career motivation" (p.467). If students are impacted by a variety of experiences during their collegiate study, including in classroom and out-of-classroom experiences, the assumption was the influence of student government participation may cause students to develop an interest in law, education, student affairs, and government/public policy, all career choices reinforced by involvement in student governance. According to Agbor-Baylee (1997) model, what develops from a students' experience, perceptions, and attitudes, their professional career choices, would be impacted by the external influence of student government participation.

Based on the data analysis and the findings in this study, the results for each question were as follows:

### **Primary Research Questions**

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question of this study attempted to ascertain if factors like gender, parental influence, leadership participation, positions held, career exposure and major affected the student's career choice. Results indicated that the alumni in this study did not show great differences with regard to career choice as it related to these factors. Based on the results from the study it is apparent that even with varying levels of parental influence, similar paths in leadership positions, and two common majors, all the former student leaders were extremely committed to their original career choices.

This reaffirms the work of Holland's (1959) work; which assumed that at the time a person chooses his career, he or she is simply a product of his heredity and environment. Holland's belief that because of our experiences, we choose occupations based on needs and satisfaction. More simply, we are attracted to professions in which we have proficiency and gain satisfaction. According to the Agbor-Bayiee (1997) model, with only two students changing their original major and course of study, and several indicating that they considered exploring other career options, their intrinsic motivations (selection of majors to produce desired outcome/career) outweighed any extrinsic (student government participation) motivation.

It is safe to say that the relationship between student government experiences and perceived outcomes is, at best, complicated. Within this study, it appears that reported influences on career development are consistent with the findings of Kuh and Lund's (1994) study on what students gained from participating in student government. This research study echoed four major findings related to their study: 1) student government has no direct effect on career status or career pursuits for either professional or nonprofessional occupations, and significant indirect effects on both professional and nonprofessional occupations, 2) student government is credited with significant positive effects in students' perceived leadership competence 3) there is a significant positive direct effect on the social self concept and academic self concept of black men, and self-concept of women, and (4) student government has a positive direct effect on persistence.

Similar to the findings of Kuh and Lund (1994), student participants in this study were divided on whether or not student government had a direct connection to their career status or pursuits, with an equal amount of participants attributing direct impactful influence to student government and those who did not attribute any impact to student government at all. The data therefore is ambiguous, although with no clear majority in favor of either side, an argument could be made in either direction.

The issues related to gender were difficult to explore within this study. Of the 30+ participants who could be considered for inclusion for this study, only 15 served in the highest student government position of president. Of those 15 only 1 female president was available in the study. Despite research that indicates that African-

American women obtain degrees at a higher rate than African-American men, female participation at the highest levels of the Akili State University Student Government Association are surprisingly low. In this case, the sample size of female participants was too small to make any significant findings based on gender.

Parental influence was noted by several participants as a major influence on their career choice. Parental influence was more apparent in the context of this study in the form of parental encouragement. Mau and Bikos (2000) noted that the educational and vocational influences for African-American students can be further broken down by gender; reporting that influences for African-American males were parental encouragement, grades, and father's occupation, whereas African-American females were most influenced by parents' and friends' influence, as well as the head of household's education, intelligence, and grades. Parents' and friends' influence is clearly noted by Stacy and Kennedy in their interviews. The importance of encouragement and father's occupation were readily apparent for the men (particularly William, Charles and Robin) involved in this study. Participants did not communicate any expressed vocational pressure put upon them by their parents, but rather noted their parents' own commitment to their respective professions as an influence on their career choice. Financial stability was another major factor that was driven by parental influence, either the wish to provide in a way that their parents could not provide, or to provide a similar life for their own family as was provided for them by their parents. Falconer's (2006) findings resonate in this study, as the choice of profession was largely



directed by potential earning power, thus giving both power and status within a chosen profession.

### **Research Question 2**

The participants were more than capable to articulate what impact they determined student government had on their career choice. They ascribed more influence on personal career competency to student government than they did to direct effect on career choice. Again, Agbor-Bayiee's model (1997) reminds us that motivation is cyclical and constant. The lone exception in the study is a student who aspired to become a doctor but ascribed several factors, including his interest in student government, to changing his intended career path.

### **Research Question 3**

Although the career choice research reveals that career plans often change after entering college due to a myriad of external and internal factors, in this study, that was not the case. According to Holland (1997), career-related choices are based on personality, and personality develops within a broad context of biology/heredity, psychology and environment. Environments (e.g., family, school, peers) offer reinforcement of particular activities as students learn and grow.

The third research question, will there be any impact between student government participation and career choice, revealed evidence that the impact of student government involvement was limited in its direct influence on career choice. -

The participants of this study articulated several factors that influenced their career choice, but student government involvement was not an exclusive factor.

According to the model set forth by Agbor-Baiyee (1997), we identify commitment to career choice as the intrinsic motivator for the participants in this study, however; apparently student government cannot be credited as a known extrinsic motivator. The cycle was continuous and consistent. Students parlayed their student government involvement into a variety of professions, mostly concentrated in law, business, and government. Not surprisingly, Akili State University has a world renowned school of business, a newly established school of law, and by virtue of its location in the state capital, numerous opportunities for involvement in government. Alumni in this study took advantage of all the opportunities that student government had to offer, and used it as an affirmation of their selected career choice.

The results of this study has revealed an infinite amount of factors and influences that can affect career choice.

I was unable to separate the study respondents into two distinct groups based on major/profession. Because almost all ten participants were working in the fields of law, business, or government, there was no control grouping which to make any comparison. While Akili State University offers degrees in engineering, mathematics, as well as the humanities, those students may not have participated and ascended to high posts within student government within the selected fifteen year period.

### *Revised Conceptual Framework*

These former student leader interviews were assessed in general from a cyclical model framework (Agbor-Baiyee, 1997). This framework was selected because of its integration of several applicable theories; Astin's (1984; 1997) student involvement theory, noting that active involvement is positively related to student development; Holland's Career Typology (1959) highlighting the simple fact that we choose occupations based on needs and satisfaction; and Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) findings that students' major field of study is a major determinant of future occupation.

I continuously examined participant comments in relation to whether student government participation contributed or shifted eventual career choice. This integrated model served as my frame of reference for the student government leader experience in terms of the data gathered during the interviews.

### **Agbor-Baiyee's Cyclical Model of Student Career Motivation**

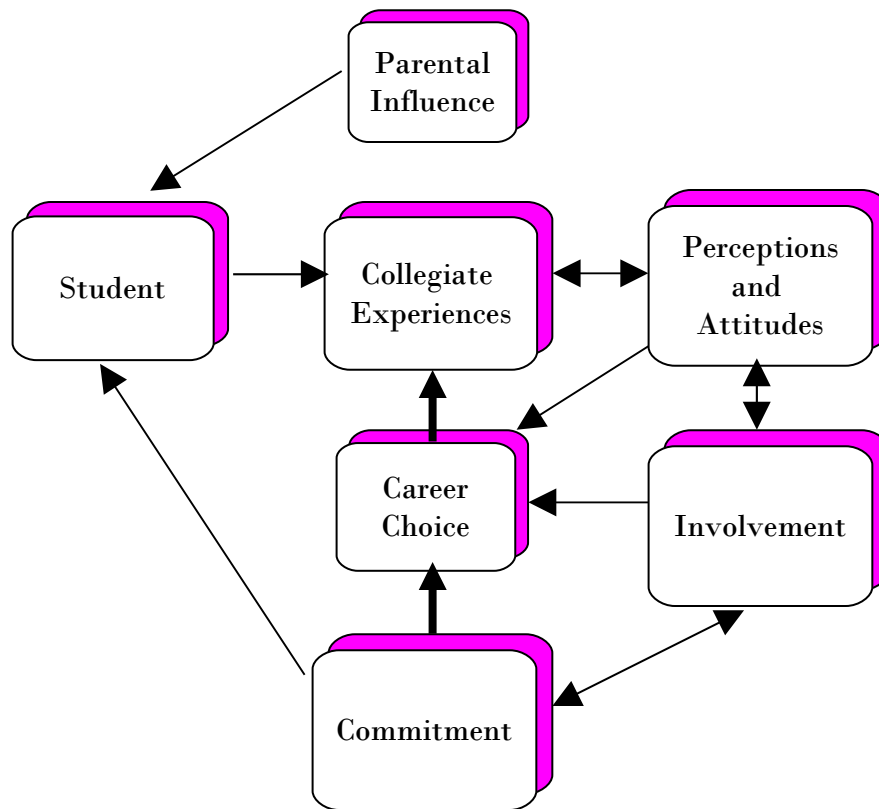
When career choice and involvement are viewed through the student career motivation lens, the student is the starting point. The model also includes elements of Astin's (1997) Involvement Theory, noting that student experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom has an affect on one's perceptions and attitudes toward a career. Agbor-Baiyee's (1997) model shows the impact of positive experiences on student perceptions and attitudes, identifying aptitude for a particular career or program as tied to the perception that the involvement is congruent with one's career

aspirations. The student is impacted by his/her experiences both positive and negative. What happens in one career and/or involvement setting affects the next. Therefore, when studying student government participants and their perceived influence this involvement had on their career/vocational choice, outside contributors individual to each participant impacted their overall experiences. In my initial research about this topic, the role of outside influences were discussed and major field of study as well as parental influence, were cited as the more impactful factors.

The research results informed the revisions to the conceptual framework. The student is still the focus and entry point of the framework. The first three components of the framework remain unchanged. However, I have added additional two areas; one with direct feedback to the student: parental influence and one that has some influence on career choice: involvement. This revised model emphasizes while career choice is influenced by collegiate experiences, ones choice of career drives both the choice and types of involvement. This model also eliminates the varying levels of motivation. In this study, student intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were not readily apparent. Extrinsic motivators such as student government did not exert the expected influence on career choice.

Figure 3 presents the findings of this study in a visual diagrammatic format.

Figure 3: Revised Conceptual Framework



The level and choice of involvement served only to further hone and clarify the participants desire to work in a particular occupation. This was all borne out in the results found in this study. However, student government was not determined to have the same level of influence as major field of study or desired future occupation on study participants.

### *Reflections on the Research Process*

Now that this research journey has ended, it is easy to look back and think about all the alternate approaches that could have been taken. For example, the findings for this study would probably have been significantly different if the researcher was able to replicate the original Downey, Bosco, and Silver (1984) study, the “Long-Term Outcomes of Participation in Student Government”, as well as revisiting the question posed by Kuh and Lund (1994) regarding what students gain from participating in student government.

A majority of the respondents in this study were pursuing professions in law, business or government, and was entirely coincidental. Or perhaps as noted in the research presented by Pascerella & Terenzini (2005), study participants were involved in student organizations and groups that reaffirmed their career choice. Most notably, an election to student office reinforced the choice of a career in areas related to government. While there is little question that the data contributed to this study was significant, it seems to indicate that students of a particular major and mindset may just be attracted to student government as their primary form of campus involvement. Also because student government at HBCUs run somewhat differently than their White counterparts, an opportunity to compare and contrast the experiences of student government at both HBCUs and PWIs, would have been beneficial.

Despite the fact that 65% of African-Americans in college are female, this group of student leaders was almost exclusively male. Because the selected timeframe of the study included a limited number of female participants, it was difficult to locate a large population of female student leaders to interview. To put this into context, Akili just got its first female university president in its over 100 year history and the SGA has had only three female presidents in its entire history, which spans over 50 years. While there has been some progress in this area, the movement is slow.

Finally, I originally determined a case study approach was the best method for this study. After some time to reflect, I believe it would have positively affected my results had I utilized a phenomenological approach. According to Creswell (1998), research that utilizes phenomenology to focuses on describing “lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51), which may have allowed more of the comments of study participants to be included. Phenomenology also allows for more subjective interpretation of results, allowing for multiple interpretations of experience as explained by Bogan and Biklen (1998). This would have been valuable to me as a researcher and may have altered the interpretation of my results.

### **Limitations**

The researcher recognizes the limitations inherent in this study (Creswell, 2003). The focus of studying alumni who were involved in student governance at an HBCU allowed for a fairly in-depth analysis of a much smaller subset of particular population.

However, since there was no baseline data (i.e. pre-test and post-test format), it serves only as a "snapshot in time," and it is not possible to state unequivocally a "cause and effect" relationship between student government participation and career choice.

The researcher recognizes that students who are attracted to student government join for a variety of reasons. Because any apparent postgraduate benefits of participation in student government may be attributable directly to the participation, lack of a non-SGA related control group is a limitation. Conceivably, students who are predisposed to involvement in student governance may differ from their uninvolved peers and therefore are already more apt to perceive a relationship.

Another limitation of the study was that only two participants were female. This was due to the limited amount of female executive board participants in student government during the selected timeframe.

This study focused on former students who were involved in formal student government activities. It did not account for other types of involvement (specifically full-time employed students, RAs, or other involvement) and as a result, the sample of alumni in the study may be skewed towards students who had the ability and wherewithal to participate in such activities, in lieu of working while in college.

As is clearly discussed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), and others (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999; Love, 1995; Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006) it is virtually impossible to separate the effects of the involvement in a group like student government from the informal effects of student's interaction with both their peers and student affairs personnel (i.e. SGA Advisor, Director of Student Activities, Dean of



Students, VP for Student Affairs, etc.). The study forces the researcher to wonder aloud, is student participation in student government and its effects on career choice attributable to the actual experiences and/or activities of student government or is it simply a reinforcement of frequent and ongoing interactions with similarly-minded peers and mentoring adults? This study seems to indicate that it may be a little of both.

Due to my degree in Higher Education and my experience in student affairs, I am influenced by my personal biases and desire to “quantify and qualify” the anecdotal evidence we purport and affirm in student affairs. Thus my interpretation and analysis of the findings is influenced by my experience. This bias has been extensively addressed in the methodology section. My commitment to recognizing and acknowledging this bias has been maintained. My desire for a connection between the influence of student government involvement and career choice was not borne out in these case studies.

Finally, while this study may not be directly applied to other institutions, nevertheless, the underlying theoretical assumptions and methodology of this study, as well as the findings of this study should be of assistance to others who use the results as a benchmark or starting point for future related research. The study may add to the literature on the history and contributions of student government as well as the long-term outcomes and impact of involvement on career choice.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

A review of the findings of this study has identified the following recommendations for further study.

1. Replication of this study using former students with differing majors and fields of study. The resulting data could provide answers to questions related to the impact of collegiate major (hard vs. soft disciplines) and career aspirations on ones ability to generalize students who participate in student governance.
2. This study examined student government from the lens of past involvement, however future studies may examine the effects of involvement in student government in a multi-institutional study including PWIs, private HBCUs, and minority-majority serving institutions. This type of study will expand on what is known about the affect of student government participation on career choice and may identify a group of students to track over time. Such a longitudinal study may give practitioners more information on the value of student government participation long-term. This study could also be repeated at a predominately white institution (PWI), or other groups of institutions to determine if there are any noticeable changes when race is a measured factor. However, future studies should first be conducted at other HBCUs to provide a much larger sample size and perhaps yield different and more varied results.
3. The addition of a quantitative measure could be beneficial to place additional figures behind the data presented in this study.

### *Implications*

The findings from this study suggest some important implications for the theory and practice of higher education. First of all, the literature conveys that there is a lack of current research on African American student government participation. Therefore, because there are no other studies available that directly examine the impact of student involvement on the career choice of African American students at a public HBCU, the results from this study can add to the limited knowledge base of African American student involvement research at historically Black institutions.

Second, most career choice studies that support Holland's (1959, 1997) career selection theory were most consistent when conducted at on Caucasian students, putting into question the validity of its use for research on African-Americans at HBCUs (Trusty, Ng, and Ray, 2000). According to Holland (1997), career-related choices are based on personality; and personality develops within a broad context of biology/ heredity, psychology, and environment. Environments (e.g., family, school, peers) offer reinforcement of particular activities as students learn and grow. The results of this study support, at least in part, Holland's theory by reiterating that career choice is often reinforced by types of involvement and student government participation may have been influenced by previous career choice selection.

Third, as stated in the introduction of this study, Downey, Bosco, and Silver's (1984) study, had not been replicated or given further examination in over 25 years. It

was thought that the study had not been duplicated due to its unclear findings; the data did not support claims of either positive or negative long-term outcomes of participation in student government. Furthermore, the study substantiated the earlier study conducted by Schuh and Laverty (1983) on the perceived long-term influence of holding a significant student leadership position. This study revealed that students' leadership experiences had little impact on their career choice but did impact the development of their career skills of leadership, decision making, planning, organizing, and teamwork. Participants noted the value and significance of their involvement but identified their increased workplace competency as a benefit of participation. This study echoed many of the findings found both original studies as well as but included an unexplored dimension, specifically, HBCU alumni. The opportunity to test the original findings against a differing population was my original aspiration for this study. The unavailability of the original survey instrument from the authors is what changed the scope.

### *Conclusion*

This purpose of this chapter was to present the findings that emerged from the case study data collection of former student government participants at a historically black college. The purpose of this chapter was also to provide recommendations and conclusions for future research and study. This current study reaffirms the work of Downey, Bosco, and Silver's (1984) as well as Schuh and Laverty (1983) regarding the affects of student government involvement. While the findings of these two studies

were surprising; this current study data echoed their findings, and did not further claims that the impact of student government involvement would reflect itself in participant's career choice. As with the Downey, Bosco, and Silver (1984) study and the Schuh and Laverty (1983) work, study participants did show impact in the development of their skills in leadership, decision making, planning, organizing, and teamwork.

It was disappointing that among the participants, there was no overwhelming majority that directly attributed their involvement in student government as instrumental to the development and/or as a major impact on their career choice. The inconclusive nature of the data collected, makes clear that the benefits of student government participation on individual students' career choice appears to be subjective. But what these students shared as the benefits of their participation was still valuable and worth the consideration.

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## APPENDIX A:

### Letter of Introduction and Invitation to Prospective Participants

#### **Dear Former Student Government Leader:**

Due to your involvement in student government, I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study, which will explore how participation in student influences vocational choice. This survey is being sent out to known student government participants at [Akili State University] from 1991 – 2006.

I am conducting this research at the University of New Orleans to complete the requirements for my doctoral degree in educational administration. Although your participation is completely voluntary, your participation is vital to exploring the issues of student government and its relationship (if any) to vocational choice. There are no foreseeable risks involved, only time on your part to participate in an interview and any possible follow-up questions. The indirect benefit to you may be a better understanding of your personal gains through your participation in student government.

The interview will include some basic demographic questions, along with a 15 item questionnaire on your student government experience, and ends with some open ended questions for you to share reflective comments about your personal experience. It should take no more than 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete. If you agree to participate, I will contact you within 1-2 days to schedule the interview at your convenience.

Please be assured that your response to this questionnaire and other data collected is confidential. Data will be properly stored, codified and reported through qualitative narrative and case studies. I would be happy to share the results on this study with you at your request.

Thank you for giving your time and attention to this matter. Feel free to contact my advisor, Dr. Andre Perry at (504) 280-6450 or [aperry@uno.edu](mailto:aperry@uno.edu), or me directly at (850) 222-0703 or [mloaseb1@uno.edu](mailto:mloaseb1@uno.edu), if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laké Laosebikan-Buggs  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of New Orleans

## APPENDIX B:

### Participant Telephone Script/Demographic Information Request

[Follow-Up Telephone Contact to Initial Letter]

Dissertation: Qualitative Research Study

**MLB** = Morolaké O. Laosebikan-Buggs, Candidate, PhD

**FSGL** = Former Student Government Leader

**MLB:** Hi, this is Laké Laosebikan-Buggs. I am calling to see if you received a letter or e-mail from me? (If no, confirm the e-mail/ mailing address and advise the FSGL that another letter or e-mail will be sent to their attention.) If yes, Great! I am calling to follow-up with you – as was mentioned in my letter – to determine if you are interested in participating in my research study and to clarify any information in the letter you received.

I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk to with me. As I mentioned in the e-mail/letter, you have been identified as a former student government leader at (HBCU) and I would love the opportunity to sit down with you to reflect on your involvement and its possible effects on your career choice. The meeting should last no longer than 30 minutes to an hour and can be scheduled at your convenience in person or via phone. Your participation is totally voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time. You are also entitled to full, accurate, and honest responses to your questions regarding any aspect of the study. Do you have questions about the study?

Are you willing to participate in the study?

**FSGL:** Yes!

or

**FSGL:**

NO.

**MLB:** Your willingness to discuss your experiences is most appreciated.

**MLB:** Thank you for your time.

At this time, I would like to schedule an interview date and time as well as collect some basic demographic data from you. This should only take about 5 minutes. First, when are you available to be interviewed?

Date:\_\_\_\_\_Time:\_\_\_\_\_Location:\_\_\_\_\_

**(Fill out Demographic Information Form)**

### Demographic Information:

Sex/Gender: M / F Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Years In College: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Degree In: Major: Minor:

Graduating GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Highest Level of Education and Current Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Less than 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- ☐ High School Graduate
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ College Graduate/Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Certificate, Diploma, or Associate
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Ph.D. or Professional Degree (M.D., J.D. D.D.S, etc)

Father's Highest Level of Education and Current Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Less than 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- ☐ High School Graduate
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ College Graduate/Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Certificate, Diploma, or Associate
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Ph.D. or Professional Degree (M.D., J.D. D.D.S, etc)

Did you receive any Financial Aid while in school?

No. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, If so what kind?

Did you work while in school? On or Off Campus

Campus Involvement:

Well this is all the information I need from you today, prior to our meeting you will receive a confirmation letter and a consent form. Please bring the consent form with you when we meet. If you forget it don't worry, I will have extra copies with me at that time. I look forward to spending time with you on \_\_\_\_\_(Date and Time). Thank you!

## APPENDIX C:

### Confirmation Letter of Agreement to Participate and Scheduled Interview

I would like to thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. As a participant in this study, your contributions will assist me in answering the research questions that I have established for this study pertaining to the experiences of former student government leaders on the affects of their experiences on their vocational choice.

Your interview is scheduled:

<b>Interview Date:</b>	<<Date of Interview>>
<b>Location:</b>	<<Location of Interview>>
<b>Time:</b>	<<Time of Interview>>

I will contact you approximately two days before the interview to confirm our appointment.

Also included with this letter is a consent form for your review. The consent form outlines the purpose of the study, explains any risks associated with participation in the study and emphasizes the voluntary and confidential nature of the research study. Prior to the beginning of the interview, we will review the consent form and I will address any questions you may have. Once all of your questions have been answered both and I will sign two copies of the consent form, one for your records and one for my records. Should you have any questions concerning this research study or in the event that you need to reschedule the interview please contact me at your convenience at either of the methods listed below:

Researcher: Morolaké Laosebikan-Buggs  
Telephone (850) 222-0703 or (504) 931-0858 (cell phone)  
E-mail: mlaoseb1@uno.edu

You may also contact my major professor, Dr. André Perry at (504) 280-6450 or aperry@uno.edu, if there are questions. Thank you for assisting me in completing this research study.

Sincerely,

Laké Laosebikan-Buggs  
Doctoral Candidate

## APPENDIX D:

### Consent Form

#### **1. Title of Research Study**

An Investigation of the Relationship of Student Government Involvement at a Public Historically Black University on the Vocational Choice of African American Student Participants

#### **2. Project Director**

Laké Laosebikan-Buggs, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. (850) 222-0703 or (504) 931-0858 (cell). Email: mlaoseb1@uno.edu

This research project is in partial fulfillment of course requirements, and under the supervision of Dr. André Perry, associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. Office (504) 280-6450 E-mail: [aperry@uno.edu](mailto:aperry@uno.edu).

#### **3. Purpose of the Research Study**

The purpose of this dissertation research project is to explore and investigate the experiences of former student government leaders at a Historically Black Colleges/University, the factors of that involvement that influence career/vocational choice for African-American participants, and enlighten educators about role and value of student government participation and the affects of student government involvement on their vocational choice.

#### **4. Procedures for this Research**

The Project Director will interview 10-15 former student government officers who have graduated within the last fifteen years one historically black institution. Each participant will complete the interview alone and the interview should last about 45 minutes to 1 hour. Participants will be audio taped in order to collect verbatim their experiences regarding their experiences in learning the norms and values of student government participation.

#### **5. Potential Risks or Discomforts**

There may be some potential loss of personal time being given up in order to participate in this study. There is also the possibility that participants may become fatigued during the interview. Participants will be allowed to take breaks if needed and will be offered an opportunity to debrief issues brought up over the course of interviewing. All aspects of participation are voluntary and the participant may choose to conclude the interview at any time or to decline to answer any question without penalty. Participants who would like to discuss these or other potential discomforts may contact the Project Director listed in #2 of this form.

#### **6. Potential Benefits to You or Others**

Participants may benefit from the opportunity to express and discuss how they perceived their student government involvement/experience. Additionally, participation in this study may benefit future student leaders and student affairs professionals creating leadership programs at historically black institutions. Even more so, your participation will benefit this study as it will contribute to generalizable knowledge about experiences as a student leader at a historically black institution.



Furthermore, this study could provide additional insight for you, as an opportunity for self-reflection and a better understanding of what and you're your involvement affected your final career choice. The data might also allow current student government leaders to assess their status as leaders and identify goals they aspire to achieve with respect to future vocational aspirations.

## **7. Alternative Procedures**

There are no alternative procedures for this study. Participation for this research project is entirely voluntary. Each participant may withdraw his/her consent and terminate participation at any time without consequences.

## **8. Protection of Confidentiality**

Your name, current employment, and any other identifying information will be kept confidential at all times. You and your profession will be identified with pseudonyms in this project. The interview tapes will be transcribed by the Project Director. The signed consent forms, audiotapes, interview transcripts, and any other materials related to this project will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner by the Project Director. None of the personal information you provide will be revealed in any written report and no report will be provided to your employer or your alma mater. Only the Project Directors identified in #2 will have access to this data. The data collected for this research study will be destroyed in three years through shredding or a magnetic erasing device.

## **9. Financial Compensation**

You will not be paid for your participation.

## **10. Your Rights as a Participant**

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Administrator, Candace Thorn, at the University of New Orleans at [cthorn@uno.edu](mailto:cthorn@uno.edu).

## **9. Signatures and Consent to Participate**

Federal and University of New Orleans guidelines require that we obtain signed consent for the conduct of social research and for participation in research projects, which involve human subjects. After this study's purpose, procedures, potential risks/discomforts, and benefits have been explained to you, please indicate your consent by reading and signing the statement below. I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks, and I have given my permission to participate in this study.

---

Signature of Participant      Name of Participant    (print)    Date

---

Signature of Project Director    Name of Project Director (print)    Date

## APPENDIX E:

### Reminder Telephone Call Script

**Researcher:** Good (Morning, Afternoon) this is Laké Laosebikan-Buggs, I'm calling you to ensure that the interview that we have arranged for <<Date>> at<<Time>> in <<Location>> is still okay for you?

Confirmation:

**Participant:**

No it is not okay.

**Participant:**

Yes, I am okay with the scheduled interview.

**Researcher:** Great. We will plan to meet in (your office, front of your department). I look forward to seeing you on <<Day>> at <<Time>>.

**Researcher:** Thank you and have a wonderful day.

Reschedule:

**Participant:** I'm sorry, I will not be able to participate.

**Researcher:** That's fine. What date and time would you like to reschedule?

**Participant:** If possible, I would like to meet on <<date>> at <<Time>>.

**Researcher:** Great. We will plan to meet in (your office, front of your department). I look forward to seeing you on <<Day>> at <<Time>>.

**Researcher:** Thank you and have a wonderful day.

APPENDIX F:

Interview Guide  
(Structured Open-Ended Interview Protocol)  
**Individual Interview**

**Research Question:** Does student government participation affect the career choice selection of African-American students attending HBCUs?

**1. Introduction**

- Doctoral student at UNO
- Interested in former student government leader participation at HBCUs and the affects of participation/involvement on vocational choice

**2. Consent**

- Review consent form
- Voluntary participation
- Anonymous participants and institutions
- Subjects may conclude participation with no repercussions
- May bypass any question

**3. Interview Questions**

Interview Pathology

Section I – Personal Data – Background Information

1. During what time frame did you participate in student government?
2. What leadership position(s) did you hold while in student government?
3. How many hours a week did you average participating in your position(s)?
4. What was your major when you joined SG?
5. Did you change majors at anytime during your undergraduate career? If so, from what to what?
6. Can you describe how you first became involved in student government (SG) on campus?
7. What attracted you to student government?
8. What is your current occupation?

9. Did student government influence your current vocational choice? If so, how much? If not, what factors would you attribute to your vocational choice?

## **Section 2- Involvement and Vocational Choice**

1. What did you hope to learn or gain from your participation in student government?
2. What did you actually learn from participating in student government?
3. Do you view your participation as a positive experience? Why or why not?
4. Do you believe that your participation in student government has made you a better person? How so?
5. In what ways are the things you learned from your participation in student government, valuable to your personal and professional experiences today? Please elaborate.
6. Are you in a different profession or pursuing graduate/professional study in another field due to your participation in student government? Please elaborate.
7. Do you think you would be in your current field/profession if you had not participated in student government? Please elaborate.
8. Did your participation in SG cause you to reflect differently on your future career choice/vocation?
9. Can you describe, how, if any, affect SG had on your vocational choice? Or What about student government caused you to make your vocational change?
10. How do you view the future of student government and the affects of participation on current student leaders at your alma mater?
11. Do you have anything else you would like to share that I failed to ask?

**Thank you for your participation!**

## APPENDIX G:

### Human Subjects Completion Certificate



#### Completion Certificate

---

This is to certify that

**Morolake Laosebikan-Buggs**

has completed the **Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams** online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 09/18/2006.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
- the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
- a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
- a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
- a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

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APPENDIX H:

IRB Approval Letter

***University Committee for the Protection  
of Human Subjects in Research  
University of New Orleans***

---

*Campus Correspondence*

Principal Investigator: Andre Perry

Co-Investigator: Morolake O. Laosebikan-Buggs

Date: June 24, 2009

Protocol Title: "An Investigation of the Relationship of Student Government Involvement at one Public Historically Black University on the Career Choice of African American Student Participants"

IRB#: 04Jul09

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that the information obtained is not recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.  
Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Chair  
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

# APPENDIX I:

## Copyright Approval



October 11, 2009

William Agbor-Baiyee, Ph.D.  
Indiana University School of Medicine  
Medical Science Bldg., Office MS 265  
635 Barnhill Drive  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
[wabaiyee@iupui.edu](mailto:wabaiyee@iupui.edu)

Dear Dr. Agbor-Baiyee:

I am completing a doctoral dissertation at the University of New Orleans entitled "An Investigation of the Relationship of Student Government Involvement at one Public Historically Black University on the Career Choice of African American Student Participants". I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:

Agbor-Baiyee, W. (1997). A cyclical model of student career motivation. *College Student Journal*, 31(4), 476-471. Retrieved Wednesday, February 1, 2007 from the Academic Search Premier database.

The excerpts to be reproduced are: Figure 1 and Figure 2 (see attached)

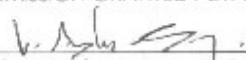
The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of my dissertation by UMI Company. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own (or your company owns) the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me in the enclosed return envelope.

Thank you very much.  
Sincerely,

Marolake D. Laosebikan-Buggs, Doctoral Candidate

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
William Agbor-Baiyee, Ph.D.

Date: 10-13-09

## VITA

Morolake “Laké” Laosebikan-Buggs was born in Chicago, IL and is the daughter of Funmilayo (Logan) Laosebikan and Olasupo Laosebikan. After graduating from Florida International University with a bachelor’s degree in English and Sociology, she went to Florida State University and completed a Master of Science in Higher Education. She has been a student affairs professional for over fifteen years and has worked in various positions in the area of student activities/union administration including: student development counselor, director of student governance, director of new student orientation, judicial officer and as a director of student activities. She has also worked in higher education as an adjunct college professor.

Laké is a frequent presenter at regional and national conferences on issues of student government, diversity issues in education, and union administration. In 2004, she was awarded the Frank C. Harris Outstanding Student Government Advisor Award from the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA). She has served on the NACA Commission for Multicultural Education (CME) and as a Student Government Workshop Faculty Presenter, as well as the Association for College Unions-International (ACUI) Conference Planning Team. Laké’s research interests include the influence of student organizations on overall student development, student government participation, as well as historically black colleges and universities. She currently lives in Tallahassee, Florida with her husband Julian and her children, Julianne and Logan.