5-14-2010

Factors That Influence the Persistence Rates of White Undergraduate Students Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

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Factors That Influence the Persistence Rates of White Undergraduate Students
Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

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
Higher Education Concentration

by

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May, 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank GOD for blessing me in order to accomplish and complete this task. Without Him, nothing is possible, but with Him, all things are possible. This journey was not accomplished without prayer by me as well as prayers from others.

Secondly, I want to thank my immediate family. My wife, Sharmaine, who has and continues to stand by her man, has been and is my rock. She is the glue that holds our family together. She continues to be an inspiration to me. To my daughters, Bonita and Raven, thank you for understanding the time commitment that this process involved. Daddy is finished now. I truly am blessed to have all three of you in my life.

To my mother (Flora), a retired educator, thanks for the drive and dedication you instilled in my brother and I as we were growing up. I am still using those lessons and passing them on to my kids. I know you are proud of me but more importantly, I am proud of you.

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Andre Perry, for providing me with wisdom and insight throughout this entire process. Dr. Perry you are a great individual scholar who truly values education on all levels. Now all we have to do is get you to value the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and understand that the South rules in major college football. Additionally, I would like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. April Bedford and Dr. Marietta Del Favero, all of whom were extremely helpful throughout my graduate studies at the University of New Orleans. Dr. Del Favero, you were very instrumental in providing the roadmap (my first doctoral class) for a young man who did not know which way to go.

To my friend and colleague, Eric Summers, thanks for the encouragement. We were able to encourage each other through this process. To my church family, Greater North Shore Full Gospel Church, thanks for keeping me lifted up in prayer, it was and is greatly appreciated.

Most of all, I want to thank the 6 students whose stories are told in this study. They gave me hours of their precious time and allowed me to enter into their private lives. They were so polite and courteous toward me and very open to what I was researching. I will always remember the sacrifice you made on my behalf.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively describe the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs from the students' perspectives. Applying Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975, 1993) as a lens for persistence, the overall aim in this study was to focus on the students' social and academic integration at the institution as well as their institutional experiences at the HBCU as it relates to their decision to persist or depart the HBCU. Through the participants "lived experiences", themes emerged relative to their decision to persist at the institution. The themes were: the influences on relationships with faculty, quality of academic programs, lack of racism from faculty, staff, and peers, involvement in campus activities and organizations, and affordability.

The reasons associated with White students' persistence can assist faculty members and administrators at HBCUs in developing and cultivating a culture that is conducive for a positive matriculation and progression process all the way until graduation. Persistence leads to degree completion and no matter the institutional type, all administrators want to increase the number of students graduating from their institutions.

Key words: persistence rates, retention rates, Black colleges, social integration, academic integration, and involvement

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an introduction to the study of persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending historically Black colleges and universities. Background information is presented. The problem and purpose of the study are stated. The rationale for the study and the significance of the study are stated. The research questions are stated. An overview of the methodology is presented in this chapter. Also, definition of terms relevant to this study is presented in this chapter.

Background

According to the United States Department of Education (2006), historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have been designated as institutions that were established prior to 1964 whose main mission was to educate African Americans. The unique history and commitment of HBCUs to African Americans has been ongoing for decades. The role played by HBCUs in the United States has had a profound impact on the education of African Americans as far back as the 19th century. Historically Black colleges and universities have a strong reputation for educating African American Students. HBCUs have a long history of serving African American communities long before many predominately White institutions (PWIs) would admit African American students. These institutions have made major contributions to civic development in our society (Willie, 1991).

Recently, a court ruling (*United States v. Fordice*, 1992) has impacted state systems of higher education focused on remedying lingering racial discrimination and oppression in the forms of segregated enrollments and disparate institutional funding patterns. The Supreme Court declared that Mississippi had not done enough to end segregation and ruled that several specific

aspects of higher education must be scrutinized for vestiges of segregation, including admissions standards, educational program duplication, institutional mission assignments, and the continued operation of all eight Mississippi state universities (Mixon et al., 1995). As a result, public universities including HBCUs have subsequently undertaken desegregation initiatives aimed at achieving transdemographic goals, or shifts in the racial composition of enrolled students that mark an institution as desegregated (Brown, 2002). Brown discussed relevant implications for HBCUs, noting that transdemography "offers HBCUs the opportunity to both enrich the student campus context and encourage intercultural communication within the academic environment" (p. 264).

Since the *United States v. Fordice* (1992) decision, HBCUs have recruited white students. The court's decision rested on the position that adoption and implementation of race neutral policies alone are not sufficient to demonstrate that a state has fulfilled its obligation to dismantle its prior dual system (Drewry & Doermann, 2001; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Brown & Davis, 2001). This court decision held that state institutions could not be content with *de jure* segregation that results when those of one race naturally gravitate toward each other (Scott, 2004). The court said that HBCUs had to make an effort to integrate Black schools in the same manner White schools were forced to accept Blacks.

Rationale for Study

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have a responsibility to try and retain all students who matriculate to their campuses. W. C. Brown (1978) asserted that:

> Black institutions must meet the demands of black students and also must provide
> programs and services for white students in their enrollment. Black students expect to be
> prepared to live and serve in the larger society and to compete as equals with graduates

from all other colleges and universities. It is only logical to conclude that the white

student attending black institutions expect the same quality of education (p. 1)

A critical theme found in undergraduate studies related to social adjustment is the campus

social environment (Furr & Elling, 2002; Schwitzer, Ancis, & Griffin, 1998; Schwitzer &

Thomas, 1998; Watson & Kuh, 1996). Schwitzer et al. suggest that social adjustment and

interpersonal climate are essential to providing effective student services (p. 81). Other studies

have focused on the social adjustment of African American students on predominately White

campuses (Austin, 1990; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Hart 1984). Factors associated with

higher retention and graduation rates include faculty relationships, supportive environments, and

the absence of racism (Hall & Clossen, 2005). Conrad, Brier, and Braxton (1997) focused on

factors that supported the matriculation of White graduate students at historically Black

campuses.

Only recently, studies (e.g. Hall & Clossen, 2005; Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997) have

examined the factors associated with white students attending historically Black colleges and

universities but very few have focused on the factors that influence White students to persist at

HBCUs from the students' perspectives. In order to maintain current enrollments, HBCUs will

have to recruit and retain students who will have many diverse needs as a student population

(Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1980). Maintaining current

enrollments and recruiting diverse students are important for many reasons. When students

depart from an institution, there is a cost to the institution, the student, and society. Robbins

(2003) describes costs of attrition in terms of bad public relations about the institution (which

can affect the supply side of the argument) and internal morale issues (students understand that

high-attrition institutions are not upper tier, and begin to view themselves that way). In terms of

costs to the student, if a partial education fails to get students further in life, both socially and economically, then the time spent in these activities can be calculated in lost investment in terms of tuition, fees, plus the opportunity costs of lost wages (Education Policy Institute, 2004). The cost to society is the greatest of all. For example, students who do not complete a college education are more likely to require social services—welfare, incarceration—than other students. This is not to say that individuals who leave postsecondary education face these challenges, but on average, the data support the conclusion that public funding is used to support those who either never goes to college or fail to complete college (Education Policy Institute, 2004).

The limited amount of information regarding white undergraduate student persistence at HBCUs is crippling administrators, professors, and student affairs staffs of HBCUs because it is not giving these individuals the proper information necessary to alter the campus climate and environment to persuade white students to persist at HBCUs. Studies (Austin, 1990; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993) show evidence to suggest that, in general, HBCUs have been more effective in retaining and graduating African American students than predominately White institutions but studies on White undergraduate student retention and persistence at HBCUs are almost nonexistent.

<div align="center">**Statement of Problem**</div>

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have seen an enormous growth in white undergraduate students matriculating to their campuses. Many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have attracted significant numbers of other-race students (Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997). Enrollment data from the National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) (2004) indicated a 65% increase in the enrollment of white students at HBCUs since 1976. Several factors are apparent in the selection of HBCUs among white students. Factors

such as tuition costs, location, size, and special academic programs attracted white students to HBCUs (Conrad, Brier, & Braxton).

Although HBCUs have successfully attracted and recruited white undergraduate students to their campuses, very few have been able to retain these white students. According to Tinto (1987), students depart higher educational systems during the first two years of college, the greatest proportion occurring in the first year of college. Enrollment data from the Louisiana Board of Regents (2006) indicated a significant decrease in undergraduate white student retention rates at the three public HBCUs, Grambling State University, Southern University of Baton Rouge, and Southern University of New Orleans. The data revealed that the public HBCUs in Louisiana are attracting first-year white students but are not retaining these students beyond the first year. The tension between the attraction of undergraduate white students to HBCUs and their decreasing persistence rates may be caused by the lack of white students' academic and social integration at a HBCU and their institutional experiences at a HBCU.

Academic integration is seen as academic achievement and interaction with the faculty, while social integration refers to extracurricular activities and contact with peers (Tinto, 1993). These white students may not be integrated into the institution due to extreme pressures caused by stress. Failure to have a positive experience is likely to add stress to their lives, which in turn is likely to adversely affect the potential for persistence. Bean, Eaton, and Braxton (2000) believe that stress is related to leaving college.

> Students who cope well with the difficulties of college are those who successfully reduce stress with positive outcomes. Such students are more likely to gain attitudinal perspectives of successful academic and social integration. As a result, they are less likely to leave college before graduating. (Bean et al, 2000, p. 51).

Tinto's model (1975, 1993) suggests a socialization process whereby students who become successfully socialized into the campus academic and social systems are more likely to persist.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively describe the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs from the students' perspectives. Applying Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975, 1993) as a lens for persistence, the overall aim in this study was to focus on the students' social and academic integration at the institution as well as their institutional experiences at the HBCU as it relates to their decision to persist or depart the HBCU.

Research Questions

The primary research question of this study was: What factors influence White undergraduate students to persist at HBCUs? The secondary research questions were as follows:

1. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their academic integration into the institution?

2. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their social integration into the institution?

Significance of Study

Research on HBCUs, in general, is limited and is thus in need of further exploration. HBCUs are caught in a dilemma of maintaining their distinctive features while also addressing financial strains and diversification of enrollment (Hall & Closson, 2005). Hall and Closson stated that HBCUs have an opportunity to offer a unique and valuable experience to White students who become temporary minorities and African American students who become temporary majorities to learn about race, identity, civic responsibility, and community. Conrad

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and colleagues (Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997) focused on the factors that contributed to the matriculation of white students to public HBCUs but further research needs to be conducted to explore White students' experiences on HBCU campuses. This study was needed due to the gap in research regarding the persistence rates of White undergraduate students at HBCUs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs.

My overall aim in this study was to explore the critical factors associated with the persistence of White undergraduate students at HBCUs. Few studies have focused on the persistence rates of White undergraduate students at HBCUs. Consequently, this study was significant because it allowed White students to express their opinions which are rarely heard on HBCU campuses. This study also provided the reader with sustainable knowledge on retention and persistence of White undergraduate students at HBCUs.

This study may also prompt other researchers to explore persistence rates of other minority populations at HBCUs. By applying the findings of this work, HBCUs, as well as other minority serving institutions, could use this information in recruiting White undergraduate students to their institutions and understand the important factors necessary for White students to persist at their institutions. This study can provide administrators, faculty, and student affairs staff with pertinent information on how they can successfully help transition minority students to persist on a majority campus. This study can also provide HBCUs with extremely important data to help institutions understand the attitudes, behaviors, and needs of white undergraduate students with special interests in higher education.

Overview of Methodology

A state-supported HBCU was selected as the locale for this study. Characteristics for the participants in this study included the following: a) White descent, b) attending as a full-time student at the HBCU, c) sophomore or higher academic standing at the HBCU.

Creswell (2003) defines qualitative research as one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. Qualitative research methods were used to collect data on factors influencing the persistence rates of White undergraduate students at HBCUs. Participants were interviewed at the HBCU in person. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Based on the limited number of potential participants, the researcher perceived qualitative research as the best possible method to answer the research questions.

Definition of Terms

This section identifies the definitions of key terms used in this research project. Unless otherwise noted, the information below represents the author's definition of the terms listed.

Academic integration

Academic integration includes a number of factors that influence students' ability to become a part of a scholastic college environment. Some examples of these factors are GPA, students' satisfaction with faculty, and academic advising (TGSLC, 1999).

Academic system

The academic system is defined as the faculty/staff interactions a student encounters and the academic performance of a student.

Attrition rates

Attrition rate is defined as the percentage of students that are departing the institution on a semester or yearly basis.

Completer

A completer is a student who finishes a program (TGSLC, 1999).

Graduation rates

Graduation rates are the percentage of students who graduate from a program (TGSLC, 1999).

Matriculation

Matriculation is enrolling as a student at a school (TGSLC, 1999).

Persistence

Persistence refers to students continuing their education at an institution of higher learning.

Retention rates

Retention rate is defined as the percentage of students that are persisting at the institution on a semester or yearly basis.

Social integration

Social integration includes a number of factors that contribute to students' ability to develop relationships with other students and student groups outside an academic setting (TGSLC, 1999).

Social system

The social system is defined as the social integration and extracurricular activities of a student on a college campus.

White students

        White students are individuals of the white or Caucasian race exclusively from the United

States

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that contribute to the persistence rates of White undergraduate students who matriculate to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) from the students' perspectives. This study also attempted to expose the barriers that may hinder the retention and persistence process for White undergraduate students attending HBCUs. This chapter presents a review of relevant literature that examines the history of HBCUs. In addition, pertinent models of persistence as it relates to academic and social integration associated will be discussed. Also, persistence and retention data related to minority students (i.e. African Americans, Hispanics) attending predominately White institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) will be discussed. A summary of the literature is presented in the final section.

History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

The history of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is important because it will reveal the true intentions of these institutions, equal educational opportunities for all, not just Black students. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. (1968) posited that "the reality of equality will require extensive adjustments in the way of life" (p. 95). According to Willie (1994), Whites attending HBCUs will facilitate the achievement of some of these required adjustments.

The role played by historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the United States has had a profound impact on the education of African Americans as far back as the 19th century. Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are black academic institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal mission was, and still is, the education of black Americans (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). HBCUs have a long history of serving African American

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communities long before many predominately white institutions (PWIs) would admit African American students. Drewry and Doermann (2001) suggest that in order to demystify the complexity surrounding black colleges, it is necessary to understand their historic roots. African Americans generally were restricted from attending post-secondary institutions prior to the Civil War. Therefore, most HBCUs were created as a result of racism (Evans, 2002). Racism played a significant role in prohibiting African Americans from pursuing any kind of education. The first three historically black colleges were founded prior to the Civil War: the Institute for Colored Youth (now known as Cheney University), established in Pennsylvania in 1837; Lincoln College (now known as Lincoln University), established in Pennsylvania in 1854 by the Presbyterian Church, and Wilberforce College (now known as Wilberforce University), established in Ohio in 1856 by the Methodist Episcopal church (Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Brown & Yates, 2005; Drewry & Doermann, 2001). All of these universities served secondary and postsecondary students (Roebuck & Murty). Several HBCUs, with a focus on religious education, were established by White philanthropists (Redd, 1998). Several researchers (Drewry & Doermann; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Kujovich, 1993; Brown & Yates, 2005; Halpern, 1995) have chronicled the history of HBCUs.

HBCUs: The Early Years, 1837-1865

From the outset, HBCUs were faced with outright opposition to their existence. Prior to the Civil War, the combination of slavery and segregation restricted educational access and opportunity for black Americans and during this time, the majority of the black population was located in the South, where laws prohibited blacks from being able to read and write (Brown & Yates, 2005). Halpern (1995) stated that historically, whites denied blacks education in order to maintain white dominance. The lack of access to formal education for blacks allowed whites to

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maintain an edge over black Americans. African American students were denied entry and access to institutions of higher learning. The rationale for not educating blacks rested on two contradictory tenets: 1) blacks are basically intellectually inferior; and 2) educated blacks will "get out of their place" and inevitably compete with whites in the economic, political, and sexual spheres (Goodenow, 1989). As an attempt to amend this injustice, the American Missionary Association, along with northern abolitionists, worked to establish institutions that would indoctrinate and educate former enslaved individuals and their progeny (Brown & Yates). This was the evolution of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

The Morrill Act of 1862 laid the foundation for land grant colleges. This piece of legislation was instrumental for the development of several colleges, with a few being HBCUs. Lee (1963) describes the three components of the Act as:

> The first Morrill Act had three central, basic provisions. The first of these was the creation of an endowment in public lands for the support of higher education. The second prime component of the Act was the definition of the enterprise to be supported, the designation of the particular sort of higher education the federal government was disposed to sponsor. The third basic provision obligated the states to maintain the endowment intact and to replace any reduction in the amount of that fund. Moreover, they were required to furnish the money for building and capital outlay; only ten percent of the land-grant proceeds could be applied to such purpose (pp. 26-27).

Thus, by accepting the conditions of the Morrill Act land-grants, the states obligated themselves to go far beyond those grants; it is unmistakably clear that the Morrill Act and its successors were deliberately designed, not simply to encourage, but to force the states to significant increases in their efforts on behalf of higher education (Lee, 1963). The first Morrill Act did not

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make any reference to race in the division of land-grant funds; therefore, these new colleges, especially in the Southern and border states, were free to grow and develop on a strictly segregated basis (Neyland, 1990). Although no direct provisions were made for blacks in the original Morrill Act of 1862, four black land-grant schools eventually received funds under the Act: Alcorn State University in Mississippi, Claflin University in South Carolina, Hampton University in Virginia, and Kentucky State University (Neyland, 1990). The impact of 1862 Morrill Act funds upon black education in the South was almost negligible; thus, a second Morrill Act was necessary to bring blacks from a position of virtual exclusion to inclusion in the receipt of these federal funds (Neyland, 1990).

In the years following the American Civil War, African Americans, no longer constrained by the bonds of slavery seized every opportunity to formalize and expand upon the clandestine educational practices that had functioned in slavery (Allen & Jewell, 2002). During the period immediately following the Civil War, there was a dramatic increase in the number of educational institutions geared toward blacks. Roebuck and Murty (1993) added that the initiative for black schooling was primarily with blacks themselves via informal and formal church organizations, despite white hostility in the southern states.

Higher education for African Americans was initiated in the Northern states because of the divide between the United States of America. Southern states did not want to educate African Americans in order to maintain its dominance against these individuals (Brown & Yates, 2005). The federal government stepped in to provide funds to states to enhance their development of institutions of higher learning. Even with this help and the end to the Civil War, southern states still had a very difficult time with the idea of African Americans being educated

in higher education institutions (Brown & Yates, 2005); therefore the need for segregated institutions became apparent in order to move forward in educating African Americans.

HBCUs: The booming years, 1865-1896

Between 1865 and 1890, over two hundred private black institutions were founded in the South with very few of these early institutions awarding bachelor's degrees (Anderson, 1988). While a minority of these institutions (most notably those founded by the AME church) were operated and controlled by Blacks themselves, the vast majority were governed by White philanthropic agencies and missionary societies (e.g., the American Missionary Association, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church) (Allen & Jewell, 2002). When the First Morrill Act provided a federal endowment for land grant colleges in 1862, only Mississippi, Virginia, and South Carolina shared their endowment with colleges educating black citizens (Kujovich, 1993). Although the Morrill Act of 1862 disregarded all distinctions of race, creed, and sex in its pragmatic venture to democratize higher education, Southern customs, traditions, and laws prevented blacks from becoming full partners in pursuit of the new education (Neyland, 1990). Free Southern Blacks now wanted the opportunity to be educated.

Southern states were not eager to educate Blacks. In a social and political framework where the worth of Blacks was increasingly being denied, where disfranchisement was making Blacks a powerless group, and where white leaders were openly questioning the need for higher education for Blacks while supporting the development of white institutions, federal intervention was essential to provide land-grant education to Black people (Neyland, 1990). The Second Morrill Act, passed by Congress on August 30, 1890, stated that funds should be equitably divided between white and black colleges. Kujovich (1993) explained in great detail the

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congressional process of endorsing black higher education in Congress during the 1890s. He

stated that the Second Morrill Act of 1890 succeeded in providing some assurance that blacks

would not be denied the benefits of land grant colleges. Lee (1963) also examined the effects of

the Act. He stated:

> One critical result of the second Morrill Act was its impact upon the business of
>
> providing college-level training for Negroes. The 1890 Act, however, required that states
>
> maintaining separate institutions for the two races must provide for 'a just and equitable
>
> division of the fund to be received under this act between one college for white students
>
> and one institution for colored students'. This federal action stimulated the states of the
>
> South to take the first significant steps toward providing some college work for Negroes
>
> other than teacher-training, and in all seventeen of those states Negro land- grant colleges
>
> were eventually established (Lee, 1963).

The Act provided that no money shall be paid for the support of a college where a distinction of

race or color is made in the admission of students (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Neyland (1990)

posits it in these terms:

> A brief analysis of the 1890 Morrill Act shows that its designers tried to be all things to
>
> all people—to walk a political tightrope between the national conscience for greater
>
> inclusion of blacks in land-grant education and the fait accompli of segregation in
>
> educational practices in Southern and border states. So while there was a definite
>
> injunction against discrimination in the allocation and use of federal funds, there was
>
> also a provision which enabled the states to freely establish separate land-grant
>
> institutions for white and black citizens. Thus, in this case, "separate-but-equal"
>
> patterns of education had legal sanction at the federal level (p. 21).

The Second Morrill Act allowed for the creation of a two-tier system of land grant universities, with southern and border states creating historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) principally to gain access to federal funds to develop white land grant colleges (Neyland, 1990). The southern states did not want to lose federal funds to improve White institutions at the expense of educating Blacks. These HBCUs were largely limited to vocational training; well-known agricultural, mechanical, and technical institutions such as North Carolina A & T and Florida A & M (Murty & Roebuck, 1992). Actually, some believe that public HBCUs were created by the southern state governments for three reasons: to get millions of dollars in federal funds for the development of White land-grant universities, to limit black education to vocational training, and to prevent blacks from attending White land-grant colleges (Browning & Williams, 1979; Baker, 1989). Although southern states opted to establish "separate but equal" agricultural and industrial schools for Blacks, their facilities were never equal, and, consequently, public HBCUs "have never come close to their White counterparts financially or academically" (Jencks & Reisman, 1968). The "separate but equal" policy made its way to the United States Supreme Court.

During this time frame, many historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were established based on intervention from many organizations such as the federal government and philanthropic organizations. This was an extremely important time for the development of HBCUs, especially in Southern states. The two Morrill Acts (1862, 1890) generated and then highlighted the need to create HBCUs in order to secure a balance of federal support for African American and White students in public higher educational institutions. Although these acts permitted segregation, they at least supported the precept that higher educational opportunities should be available to all.

While HBCUs met with a great deal of success, their effectiveness was also limited by the realities of segregation. In June 1892, Homer Plessy purchased a one-way ticket aboard the East Louisiana Railway, departing New Orleans and bound for Covington, Louisiana (Golub, 2005). Mr. Plessy was arrested for violating the Louisiana Separate Car Act and his case was argued before the U. S. Supreme Court (Golub). In the 1896 Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U. S. 537 (1896), the two-tier system of higher education, based on the incentive structure in the Second Morrill Act became more freely set. Roebuck and Murty (1993) argued that it was apparent that the majority of the nation supported the doctrine of "separate but equal". This is clearly explained by the majority opinion of the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*:

> We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason anything found in this act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put construction upon it.

As a result of this decision, HBCUs began to become institutions that primarily trained teachers to teach in segregated public schools (Goodenow, 1989).

The rapid expansion of black high schools in southern urban areas set in motion a supply-demand chain in which availability of teaching positions drew more black students into HBCUs to qualify themselves for teaching positions (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). HBCUs were compelled to function as multilevel institutions including students at the secondary, college preparatory, and college levels, thereby serving the varied educational needs of the African American community (Allen & Jewell, 2002). HBCUs and the public school system became interdependent on each

other. This interdependence between the public high schools and the HBCUs ensured a viable

system that survived the meager and unequal resources allotted to it by the southern states

(Roebuck & Murty). Unlike the private HBCUs, however, the public HBCUs were dependent

on the white state governments for support; therefore complete control was in the hands of

"stingy and discriminating" state governments (Kujovich, 1993). To compensate for the lack of

state funding, African American communities—with vital assistance from these missions and

foundations—were called on to establish and maintain quality schools, provide teachers, and

fund building construction (Allen & Jewell, 2002). In summary, the black public school system,

the private HBCUs, and the public HBCUs (founded between 1890 and 1899 under the Morrill

Act of 1890) were a closed, segregated educational world (Law & Clift, 1981). In the 1930s,

lawsuits filed in Southern states challenged the "separate but equal" concept in higher education

in attempts to break the glass ceiling imposed on Black education for the past 70 to 75 years

(Allen & Jewell, 2002). Change really did not happen until the famous *1954 Brown v. Board of

Education* decision. After another decade marked by Southern resistance to integration, African

Americans began to gain access to previously segregated colleges and universities (Jewell,

1999).

HBCUs were truly a part of the African American community. During this era, HBCUs

were the training grounds for educating African American teachers. These institutions provided

both secondary and postsecondary education for African Americans. However, during this era,

segregation became a way of life endorsed by the federal government. The problem with

"separate but equal" is that it was not separate but equal. It was separate and unequal. Funding

public education and higher education for African Americans was extremely disproportionate to

those of White institutions. Although there were many challenges faced by HBCUs during this

time period, these institutions represented a chance for African Americans to receive a quality education. There was a great need for HBCUs in the South and other areas where discrimination and segregation against Blacks were prevalent.

Change: Integration or Desegregation, 1955-1978

The "separate but equal" was challenged in the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education,* 349 U. S. 294 (1954) which stated that this practice of "separate but equal" was unconstitutional. Colleges and universities were not the specific focus of the Brown decision; however, arguments in favor of equitable access to publicly funded educational venues by inference and extension included all aspects of higher educational policy (Richardson & Harris, 2004). Significant progress in post-secondary education was made for African Americans when the decision of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* ended segregation in public education. This court decision authorized institutions other than HBCUs to open their doors to African Americans. Despite this groundbreaking decision, HBCUs have continued to play a major role in educating African Americans. HBCUs evolved into postsecondary institutions that, unlike traditionally White institutions, welcomed students of all races while creating intellectual havens esteeming the African American experience (Richardson, 2003b).

Roebuck and Murty (1993) presented major political events that shaped the direction of higher education for African American students. These events included the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965. Several studies (Roebuck & Murty; West, 1972) contended that although these government actions were necessary, integration would mean lower enrollments for HBCUs. Other studies (Drewry & Doermann, 2001; Samuels, 2004) concluded the desegregation in general has been much more successful in white colleges and universities than it has been in HBCUs because of the proportion of black students enrolled in white

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institutions is much higher than that of white students enrolled in HBCUs. Smith and Barich (1981) theorized that integration in higher education has been marred by: 1) high attrition rates, which make white institutions revolving doors for many black students; 2) the serious cultural damage that has been done to black students in the name of the best interests of all students; and 3) the increased psychological and physical endangerment to black students. HBCUs were still the place where African American students matriculated to receive postsecondary education training in various fields. Enrollments of HBCUs were still increasing and baccalaureate degrees awarded to African Americans came from HBCUs (Allen & Jewell, 2002). However, storm clouds loomed just beyond this period of phenomenal success in the form of a less sympathetic political climate, a declining economy, and court challenges to race-based admissions programs (Allen & Jewell).

This era was the most significant for HBCUs than any other because it played both a positive and negative role. Many scholars argue that integration was not good for HBCUs. During this time period, many African American students, who would have probably been forced to attend HBCUs, matriculated to predominately White institutions (PWIs). The Civil Rights Movement was instrumental in providing African Americans with equal opportunity and choice. However, many would argue that the dream of integrated education had given way to the bitter reality of desegregated education.

De Jure Segregation, 1978-Present

The landscape of HBCUs was starting to change during this era. Webster, Stockard, Henson (1981) noted that the 1970s saw a sharp decline in the already small percentage of high-achieving and affluent students enrolling at HBCUs, a trend that continued into the 1980s. This enrollment trend, coupled with the steady decline of American public schools, which according

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to census data, educated roughly 80% of African American school-age children, has led to a corresponding change in the academic environments of many HBCUs (Allen & Jewell, 2002). With no record of exclusionary practices and substantiated success relative to educating students in general and African Americans in particular, HBCUs have recently found themselves attacked as redundant in view of a supposedly inclusive desegregation (Richardson & Harris, 2004). Court rulings also played a major role in the landscape. The court rulings, meanwhile, appear to confirm the erosion of protection for HBCUs and their historic mission under the guise of enforcing the spirit of unilateral desegregation in all postsecondary institutions (Richardson & Harris, 2004). Richardson and Hall (2004) analyzed the court rulings in this manner:

> While the case most often discussed relative to the insecure future of HBCUs is *U.S. v. Fordice*, the *Bakke* decision in 1978 more clearly signaled weakening of support for HBCUs. *Bakke* indicated that while race could be considered positively in admissions decisions, official quotas were unconstitutional. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the *Adams v. Richardson* decisions had all supported the mission and inherent value of HBCUs by focusing on the reduction of various forms of educational disparity. By admitting that historical disadvantage based primarily in race existed, the courts more or less supported the idea that value inhered in preferential treatment designed to enhance universal participation in higher education (p. 373).

The role of HBCUs in this context had been secure in that for many students, they represented the only door to higher education and the preferred door for others.

Another important judicial decision regarding HBCUs was the Supreme Court's majority ruling in the *United States v. Fordice* 112 S.Ct.2727 (1992). *Fordice* presented the most direct assault upon HBCUs. The court's decision rested on the position that adoption and

implementation of race neutral policies alone are not sufficient to demonstrate that a state has fulfilled its obligation to dismantle its prior dual system (Drewry & Doermann, 2001; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Brown & Davis, 2001). The Court ruled program duplication in Mississippi on HBCU and traditionally White campuses to be wasteful, and culturally sensitive campuses attained through purposeful admissions practices were no longer acceptable (Richardson & Harris, 2004). The *United States v. Fordice* decision held that state institutions could not be content with *de jure* segregation that results when those of one race naturally gravitate toward each other. The court said that HBCUs had to make an effort to integrate Black schools in the same way White schools were forced to accept Blacks. This has led many white students to seek admission into HBCUs.

The history of HBCUs is well documented by scholars. Research shows that historically Black colleges and universities have been the primary educators of African Americans and continue to play a significant function in the educational pipeline for African Americans (Brown, 2002; Brown & Davis, 2001). Not only do HBCUs accept and nurture black students who might not be admitted to other four-year colleges, HBCUs also promote their graduation, with graduation rates higher than those for black students at predominantly white colleges (Bennett & Xie, 2003).

<center>**Persistence Models**</center>

Attention to college student persistence and attrition has become vital in post-secondary education and is especially critical with African American students (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). College student retention has been viewed as one of the most salient issues in higher education, and nationwide, higher education institutions are focusing on increasing student retention (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000). Recent findings (Barr, 2000; Graham & Gisi, 2000) on college

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persistence stress the integral role of an institution's specifying and adhering to its mission statement as well as indicating responsibilities that are to be undertaken by different components of the institution. At the start of the twenty-first century, graduation rates and college student persistence became an increasingly relevant issue (Titus, 2006). Persistence in college is a function of social and academic integration according to Tinto (1975). Tinto asserts that high levels of integration in both spheres are more likely to lead to commitment, and commitment is more likely to lead to persistence (Tinto, 1975).

That student persists from one semester to the next and continues their education through graduation is very important for several reasons. First, more students leave college before completing their degrees than remain in college (Tinto, 1993). Second, college student persistence affects enrollment, university budgets, graduation rates, and the college student. According to DeBerard, Spielmans, and Julka (2004), colleges and universities lose thousands of dollars in tuition, fees, and contributions when students withdraw before degree completion. Many variables can affect whether or not a student will persist toward graduation.

Studies investigating persistence comprise one of the most widely reported areas of research in higher education. Studies on retention have focused on student retention as a function of a complex series of interactions between a student and the institutional environment (Tinto, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; McDaniel & Graham, 2001). These interactions are based on the student's social and academic integration into the institution. This section will detail three models of student persistence: 1) Tinto's Model of Student Persistence, 2) Austin's Theory of Student Involvement, and 3) Bean's Model o Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition. Of all recent models of student persistence behavior, perhaps none is more influential than the model first proposed in 1975 by Vincent Tinto.

Tinto's Model of Student Persistence

Drawing heavily on the work of Durkheim (1951) and his theory of suicide, Spady (1970) observed that the behaviors of students who drop out are analogous to the behaviors of those who contemplate suicide. That is, individuals considering suicide choose to withdraw from society because they lack shared values and normative support. Similarly, students persist or withdraw from college depending on their social and intellectual experiences within the college community (Eimers & Pike, 1996). Tinto (1975) enhanced the work of Spady by introducing a longitudinal, predictive model that explained more specifically the process that students go through before dropping out of college (Pascarella & Terenzina, 1980). Tinto's model of student departure (1993) has been the theoretical framework used most often in examining the predictors of attainment and persistence. Tinto (1975) produced a theoretical model of attrition and persistence that included the following components: (a) pre-entry attributes (prior schooling and family background); (b) goals/commitment (student aspirations and institutional goals); (c) institutional experiences (academics, faculty interaction, co-curricular involvement, and peer group interaction); (d) integration (academic and social); (e) goals/commitment (intentions and external commitments); and (f) outcome (departure decision—graduate, transfer, dropout). Tinto (1975, 1993) emphasizes the importance of interaction with both faculty and student peers. This model (Tinto, 1975, 1993) suggests a socialization process whereby students who become successfully socialized into the campus academic and social systems are more likely to persist. The extent to which the individual becomes academically and socially integrated into the academic and social systems of an institution determines the individual's departure decision. Or in other words, the extent to which a student is integrated into the formal and informal academic and social systems of a college

determines leaving behavior. In order for a student to persist, students must thrive in both

systems. Tinto's research also supports that the social system is most important during the

student's first year. Tinto's model requires both the academic system and social system to work

together to ensure student persistence.

Tinto elaborates on this topic in *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Curses of*

Student Attrition as he discusses the College as an Interactive System. In this model, student

retention is a function of a complex series of interactions between a student and the institutional

environment (McDaniel & Graham, 2001). Tinto's theory suggested that students arrive at

college with certain expectations and aspirations. Tinto states that students who are satisfied

with the formal and informal academic and social systems in a college or university tend to stay

in school. According to Tinto (1987), students depart higher educational systems during the first

two years of college, the greatest proportion occurring in the first year of college. While

influenced by pre-college characteristics, a student's choice to persist at an institution is heavily

predicated upon his or her experiences on campus with various social and institutional actors

(Tinto, 1993). Positive experiences and interventions will reinforce persistence through the

heightening of individual intentions and commitments, whereas negative experiences will

weaken intentions and commitments (Seidman, 2005). Intentions can include wanting to earn a

degree in a particular field of study, while commitment is the student's desire to complete that

degree and willingness to spend the time and energy necessary to obtain it. Thus the greater the

student's level of integration into the social and academic systems of the college, the greater is

his or her subsequent commitment to the college and the more positive the retention rate

(Baumgart & Johnston, 1977; Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981; Pascarella, Smart, &

Ethington, 1986). Tinto (1987), in his explanation of the model, states the following:

Persistence requires that individuals make the transition to college and become

incorporated into the ongoing social and intellectual life of the college. A sizable

proportion of very early institutional departures mirror the inability of new students to

make the adjustment to the new world of the college. Beyond the transition to college,

persistence entails the incorporation, which is integration, of the individual as a

competent member in the social and intellectual communities of the college (p. 126).

He continues:

Student institutional departure is as much a reflection of the attributes of those

communities, and therefore of the institution, as it is of the attributes of the students who

enter that institution. It is the daily interaction of the person with other members of the

college in both the formal and informal academic and social domains of the college and

the person's perception or evaluation of the character of those interactions that in large

measure determine decisions as to staying or leaving (p. 127).

According to Terenzini and Wright (1987), building on the Tinto findings, states began

asking colleges to examine the influences they exert on students and to document the validity of

their claims about student learning and development. The study they conducted focused on the

influence of students' academic and social integration levels on reported academic skills

development over a four-year period. This study was conducted at a large public research

university in the Northeast. The findings showed that "the results of this study offer reasonably

strong support for the construct validity of the main components of Tinto's (1975) model of

college student attrition and for its utility in the study of other student outcomes. . . . The results

obtained in this study were consistent with theoretical expectations"

(p. 175).

The findings of the study relating to academic and social integration indicate that academic integration in one year was consistently, positively and reliably related to academic integration in succeeding years, and social integration levels in one year were similarly and consistently related to subsequent levels of social integration (Seidman, 2005).

Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) further tested the Tinto model in a nonresidential university setting. These authors also found a positive influence concerning the central concept of the model, in particular, as it related to academic integration. Regardless of the type of postsecondary institution attended, then, it seems evident that persistence is predicated to a significant extent on the individual's attaining sufficient levels of structural integration (the extrinsic reward of grades) and normative integration (the intrinsic reward of intellectual development) in the institution's academic system (p.96). The key retention component, then, appears to be the introduction of positive influences and the succinct removal of negative influences (Seidman, 2005).

Originally developed based upon studies of traditional college students (white, middle-class, 18 to 22-year-olds) attending Midwestern residential universities, Tinto's model has come under fire for its apparent failure to account for persistence behavior among contemporary college students who can no longer be neatly classified in the aggregate (Tierney, 1992). Tierney suggested Tinto's mode relied on information only about traditional age students. Tierney also noted that Tinto's theory is too broad in its treatment of social integration and does not give specific examples that could be related to non-traditional elements within higher education. Tierney used Native Americans as an example of students who undergo their own form of a rite of passage into higher education. Tierney stated that these students experience a "disruptive cultural experience not because college is a rite of passage, but because the

institution is culturally distinct" (p. 608). Elements of the Tinto model have been demonstrated

to be particularly appropriate for explaining student retention and attrition for the typical student

at a residential institution (Munro, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). White students at

historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) would not fall into the typical student

category. However, Tinto's model is appropriate for this study based on the major components

of his study related to social and academic integration.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

Astin (1985) further asserts that student involvement, both academically and socially, is a

key determinant of student persistence. Astin's Theory of Student Involvement is based on

several different kinds of experiences which promote student success. Astin (1975) identified six

factors in the college environment that significantly affected persistence in college.

1. Effects of Place of Residence. Astin (1977) stated that attending a small, often single

gender private college was found to provide the greatest opportunities for student involvement

and participation. Astin (1993) reported a high positive correlation between on-campus housing

and satisfaction with faculty, attainment of the bachelor's degree, and willingness to re-enroll in

the same institution for advance study.

2. Effects of Academic Pursuits. Astin (1985) reported that students who were heavily

involved in academics were less likely than average students to show changes in personality and

behavior that normally result from college attendance. Also, being academically involved was

strongly related to satisfaction with all aspects of college life except friendship with others.

Also, Astin pointed out that more than any other institutional characteristic, frequent interaction

with faculty was related to student satisfaction with college.

3. <u>Effects of Employment</u>. Astin (1975, 1993) reported that a student's chances of graduating from college were significantly influenced by the type and extent of involvement in employment. He stated that students with off-campus jobs were more likely to drop out of school if their work was related to career goals. He also stated that work had a negative effect on other outcomes as well including grade point average, college satisfaction, willingness to re-enroll in college, and growth in cultural awareness. Astin also pointed out that holding a job on campus was positively associated with persistence and degree completion. He stated that students who were employed on campus had the possibility of more contact with other students, faculty, and staff as well as a greater degree of immersion in the college environment.

4. <u>Effects of Financial Aid</u>. In his earlier works, Astin (1975) supported the argument that student retention was enhanced by scholarships and work-study programs. In general, any form of aid appeared to be most effective when it was not combined with other kinds of assistance. However, Astin's most recent study (1993) does not support his earlier findings. He reported that "State assistance and practically every form of federal aid (Pell grants, Perkins loans, work-study, SEOGs, and Stafford Guaranteed Student Loans) have no discernible effect on student development" (p. 368).

5. <u>Effects of Interactions with Student Peers</u>. In reviewing Astin's work as it related to interactions with student peers, items such as discussion on class content with other students, working on class projects, tutoring other students, student clubs, organizations, social fraternities and sororities were the major categories of involvement. Among the self-reported changes correlated with student-student interaction was growth in the following areas: leadership abilities, interpersonal skills, cultural awareness, critical thinking, and general knowledge (Astin, 1985, 1993).

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6. Effects of Counseling. Astin (1993) concluded that student involvement with counseling was measured in two categories: career counseling and psychological counseling. Career counseling was positively associated with self-reported student growth and high satisfaction. However, psychological counseling was not associated with satisfaction. Astin (1993) stated that "psychological counseling has a significant effect on feeling overwhelmed and a substantial negative effect on self-rated emotional health" (p. 392).

Other models

Numerous studies have examined a wide range of variables, including such things as demographics, aspirations, motivation, personality, values, and institutional characteristics (Bean 1982). Bean's (1980) model suggested that dropout from college is analogous to employee turnover in the workplace and that students leave college for the same kinds of reasons that employees leave their jobs. Bean's model built upon the work of Price (1977) and incorporated four categories of variables: (1) drop out (dependent variable), (2) satisfaction and institutional commitment (intervening variables), (3) organizational determinants, and (4) background variables. Bean and Metzner (1985) stated that the most important (retention) variables are likely to differ for subgroups such as older students, part-time students, ethnic minorities, women, or academically under-prepared students at different types of institutions. Bean (1980) and Bean and Metzner (1985) discussed how academic, environmental, and psychological variables interact to cause students to remain in college or to leave school. These variables include factors such as finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, satisfaction, goal commitment, and stress. The framework developed by Bean and Metzner is well suited for developing models for nontraditional undergraduate student attrition (McDaniel & Graham, 2001).

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Several studies have been done as it relates to commuter and residential institutions. Commuter institutions often provide fewer opportunities for social involvement and integration than residential institutions, thus commuter students can be less integrated socially and academically into the campus than are their residential peers (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Tinto, 1987).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) noted the exclusion from the research of two-year colleges was missing. Both Pascarella and Terenzini suggested research should focus on non-residential colleges to ascertain those factors that influence degree completion and persistence at two-year colleges, no matter the size. "There remains insufficient evidence to conclude that factors that influence educational attainment are the same for two year institutions as for four-year institutions" (Pascarella & Terenzina, p. 414). Terenzini and Pascarella (1978) stated that the academic and social correlates of attrition may be different for different kinds of students. Tinto (1982) indicated that commonly identified retention variables had different effects on minority students than on white students.

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) found four domains in which a person feels that he or she matters: attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence. Attention--"one commands the interest or notice of another person" (Rosenberg & McCullough, p. 164). Importance--"to believe that other person cares about what we want, think, and do, or is concerned with our fate" (Rosenberg & McCullough, p.164). Ego-extension--"the feeling that other people will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures" (Rosenberg & McCullough, p. 164). "Dependence--our behavior is influenced by our dependence on other people ... What is ... more mysterious is why our actions are equally governed by their dependence on us"(Rosenberg &

McCullough, p. 164). Scholessberg (1989) added a fifth to the domain: appreciation, the feeling that an individual's efforts are valued.

Other revisions to the traditional retention models have been suggested. Weidman (1989) proposed an improvement of Tinto's models which more heavily accounts for influences of normative groups (parents, peers, community members) outside the college environment. Stage (1989) stated that the relationship between academic and social integration may be reciprocal. Pritchard and Wilson (2003) studied student attrition from a psychological standpoint. Psychological models emphasize the role of personal characteristics in the persistence process.

Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) combined Tinto's (1993) integration model with Bean's (1980) attrition model to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of the factors involved. They concluded that in addition to shaping student commitments, environmental factors "exert an influence in the socialization and academic experiences of the students." For example, if students do not have sufficient resources, they may take fewer courses or find work off campus. Thus, students' perceptions of their financial situations can lead to more limited social and academic integration.

Braxton (2000) reported that multi-institutional tests provide strong support for the influence of academic integration on persistence, while single-institutional tests provide only modest backing. Braxton's recommendations include replications of studies in different types of institutions and with different types of students. He suggests that different theories may be needed to explain the departure behavior of specific subgroups of students from specific categories of schools.

Minority Student Persistence

Only within the past fifteen years have researchers, many of them nonwhite, begun to study minority students (Credle & Dean, 1991; Love, 1993; McDaniel & Graham, 2001; Nettles, 1990; Nora & Rendon, 1988,1990; Sherman & Giles, 1994; Smitherman & Carr, 1981). Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora and Hengler (1992) focused specifically on Hispanic student persistence. Their findings suggested that Tinto's model was reliable for persistence among not only traditional college students but also for groups of minority students. White students at HBCUs are considered as being temporary minorities (Hall & Clossen, 2005). Using Tinto's model is sufficient in this study because White undergraduate students are considered as minorities in this case.

African-American students

African-American college students have been difficult to research. The problems related to researching retention rates of any cohort of African-American college students are, to a significant degree, complicated by the various kinds of institutions in which these students are enrolled (Mow & Nettles, 1990). These institutions are classified as either public or private; 2-year or 4-year; sectarian or non-sectarian; and PWIs or HBCUs as well as sub-categories within several divisions such as 2-year public HBCUs and 4-year private HBCUs (Hutto & Fenwick, 2002).

A few studies have addressed the social adjustment of African American students on predominately White campuses (Astin, 1990; D'Augelli & Harshberger, 1993; Hart, 1984). It is known that African-American students do not fare as well at historically White institutions (Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984). In fact, African-American students have developed social systems and cultural connections to survive on these campuses (Allen, 1992). Allen suggested that

African-American students' outcomes are determined by their immediate environment. Allen concluded: "Students who attended historically Black universities reported better academic performance, greater social involvement, and higher occupational aspirations than students who attended predominately White institutions. In short, the college experience was most successful (measured by these outcomes) for African-American students with Black majority student populations" (p. 39).

Similar studies have compared Blacks and Whites on a range of student persistence concerns. Galicki and McEwen (1989) conducted a study of persistence rates of Black and White undergraduate students at one large institution, the University of Maryland at College Park. The study measured persistence for eight consecutive fall-spring semesters. This study supported Tinto's theory that residential students have higher rates of persistence.

Researchers have analyzed the retention of African American students at predominately White institutions (PWIs). Many of these studies have focused on the experiences of African-American students at PWIs. Students of color experience feelings of loneliness because of the lack of connection within these environments (Loo, & Rolison, 1986). Researchers have found that Black students at PWIs face issues of socialization, isolation, and marginalization (Chang, 2000; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). African American students experience exclusion, racial discrimination, and alienation on predominantly white campuses (Allen, 1992; Turner, 1994). Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) detailed some of the negative experiences African Americans have at PWIs. African American students felt that white faculty, students, and staff did not view them as "full human beings with distinctive talents, virtues, interests, and problems (p. 14). Other studies have shown the lack of role models for African American students based on discrimination and prejudice. Because of incidents of racism,

perceived treatment of White teachers, and the history of discrimination and oppression of

Blacks at PWIs, Black students who attend PWIs may not trust Whites as mentors (Bowman,

Kile. Branscombe, & Williams. 1999). African American students often lack role models,

students of similar cultural backgrounds, and experience feelings of racism as a result of

matriculating to PWIs (Nettles, 1990). Credle and Dean (1991) stated that PWIs do a disservice

to African American students if it cannot or will not try to understand their backgrounds.

Further, Chavous (2000) suggests African-American students are more apt to reporting a

gap when it comes to feeling a connection with their culture and the social and academic areas

on a predominantly White campus. In a similar study, Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas

(1999) found that African-American students openly admitted not feeling welcome on their

predominantly White campus. Black students at PWIs often feel anxiety and fear at being the

only one or one of a few African Americans in a particular environment (Smedley, Myers, &

Harrell, 1993). In a previous study, Schwitzer, Ancis, and Griffin (1998) constructed a model of

social adjustment for African American students at PWIs. Within this model, the authors stated

that four distinct features affect social adjustment: sense of being underrepresented, direct

perceptions of racism, hurdle of approaching faculty, and the effects of faculty familiarity (Hall

& Closson, 2005).

Several years ago, Thomas (1981) identified some key issues for increasing African

American student access and retention in college. Thomas concluded that high schools needed

to identify earlier and properly support a greater number of college-bound African American

students and employ "constructive and earlier use of competency-based testing" (p. 382). Lavin

and Crook (1991) examined ethnic differences in long-term educational attainment and found

that minority students demonstrated less academic success all along the way and were far more

likely than whites to leave college without any degree. They found that the majority of minority students attending community colleges never received their degree. The authors also found that it typically took minority students longer to earn an undergraduate degree.

Other studies focused on African American students living on campus. A three-year longitudinal study of 172 African American students (Flowers & Pascarella, 1999) pointed to the positive effects of living in on-campus housing. Their findings concluded that irrespective of individual background differentials, college racial composition, and student body's academic ability, living on campus greatly improved third year students' critical thinking and reading comprehension.

Hispanic students

Researchers also began to study the impact of retention and persistence on Hispanic students. Nora (1990) investigated campus-based aid programs as a determinant of student persistence and retention for Hispanics at two-year colleges. He noted that all types of financial aid awarded (work-study, institutional grants and loans, supplemental federal grants) were found to be an important influence on Hispanic student persistence. Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengler (1992) also focused specifically on Hispanic student persistence. The Nora (1990), the Attinasi and Nora (1992) and the Cabrera et al. (1992) studies were three of the first persistence research on minorities in higher education, specifically Hispanics.

White students as minorities

The majority of the previous research does deal with retention and persistence with different populations such as minority students (i.e. African Americans, Hispanics, etc.) and possible reasons for retention and persistence by students. However, few have dealt with the factors that influence retention and persistence rates of White students or White students'

experiences while attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Standley

(1978) interviewed over 1,000 white students attending 20 predominantly black colleges to

assess their attitudes and experiences relative to the college experience. The findings showed

that a majority of white students questioned whether campus activities represented their interests.

Willie (1981) reanalyzed Standley's data collection and found that seven out of ten students

stated that the presence of white faculty members and other white students fostered a sense of

belonging.

Also, Nettles (1988) posited that white students on black campuses reported higher

ratings on feelings of discrimination than whites on white campuses. Contrary to those findings,

Brown (1973) suggested that White students on Black campuses follow distinctive patterns and

may experience social acceptance and academic success. Pascarella and his colleagues studied

the influence of college on self-concept and found that attending a Black institution had a

positive direct effect on self-concept, particularly for White men (Pascarella, Smart, Ethington &

Nettles, 1987). Hall and Closson (2005) studied White graduate students' social adjustment at a

historically Black university. Their findings concluded that white student expectations about

entering a historically Black environment affect their perceptions about social climate.

Link between African American and White students' experiences

While the majority of the literature review on minority persistence focuses on African

American students, it has a direct link to white students attending historically Black colleges and

universities (HBCUs). As white students matriculate to HBCUs, they become minorities

similarly to African American students matriculating to predominately white institutions (PWIs)

(Hall & Closson, 2005). In essence, a majority of the concerns African American students have

entering college at a PWI will be some of the same concerns for white students entering HBCUs.

Researchers (Chang, 2000; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993) have found that African American students attending PWIs face issues of socialization, isolation, and marginalization. Essentially, white students attending HBCUs could and can find the same issues because of their new minority status. A few studies (Astin, 1990; D'Augelli & Harshberger, 1993; Hart, 1984) focused on the social adjustment of African American students attending PWIs. Therefore, the literature on African American students as it relates to persistence paints a picture as to what similar experiences or barriers white students may encounter as minorities at HBCUs.

Integration Theory

As researchers study academic progress and persistence, each study needs to start by evaluating literature as it pertains to Integration Theories. Literature by Spady (1970), Tinto (1988), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) have focused on the academic progress and student persistence. Integration refers to the extent of shared normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in the community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Understanding the student's perceptions is extremely important. Tinto (1987) pointed out that investigating student perceptions is essential:

> The mere occurrence of interactions between the individual and others within the institution need not ensure that integration occurs—that depends on the character of those interactions and the manner in which the individual comes to perceive them as rewarding. Thus the term membership may be taken as connoting the perception on the part of the individual of having become a competent member of an academic or social community within the college. Therefore, no study of the roots of student departure is complete without reference to student perceptions (p. 27).

Students enter college with varying backgrounds, dispositions, intentions, and goals which in turn are modified and reformulated on a continuing basis through a longitudinal series of interactions between the individual and institutional structures and members of the academic and social systems of the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). According to Tinto (1993), most student integration models feature the concepts of social integration and academic integration. Tinto (1993) built on the ideas developed by Durkheim, who spoke of social and intellectual integration:

> The former refers to that form of integration which results from personal affiliations and from the day-to-day interactions among different members of society. The latter comes from the sharing of values, which are held in common by other members of society (Tinto, 1993, p. 101).

Tinto considers the educational institution to consist of an academic system and a social system, and therefore makes a distinction between academic and social integration (Beekhoven, De Jong, & Van Hout, 2002). Tinto (1993) defines academic integration as academic achievement and interaction with the faculty while social integration refers to extracurricular activities and contact with peers. However, some authors (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000) define faculty interaction with students as social integration. Other authors (Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1982) have made a distinction between the kinds of faculty contacts: on the one hand, contacts with faculty that involve discussion and advice are seen as academic integration; on the other hand, nonclassroom interaction with faculty and informal social contacts with faculty are seen as social integration (Beekhoven, De Jong, & Von Hout, 2002).

Tinto (1987) asserts that if a student does not establish sufficient social ties within the institution—that is, if the student feels isolated—then he or she will more likely drop out than

will less isolated students. Although Tinto (1975) theorized many factors that attribute to a

student departing or persisting at an institution, for the purpose of this study, the researcher will

focus only on academic and social integration aspects of his theory.

Academic Integration

According to Beekhoven, De Jong, and Von Hout (2002), academic integration is only

measured by objective measures, such as obtained grades or amount of credits earned at a certain

time in many previous studies. Cabrera, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) measured academic

integration in two questionnaire items concerning academic experiences and performance.

Faculty relationships are extremely important to a student becoming academically

integrated into the institution. The establishment of peer relations during college is also

extremely important and supports a student's academic integration into the university. Capella,

Hetzler, and MacKenzie (1983) found that a positive peer influence favorably influenced the

study habits of college students. Several studies, including a 1983 study of exemplary precollege

science, engineering, mathematics, and computer science intervention programs for female and

minority students, concluded that peer relationships were important in keeping students

interested in the sciences (Matyas, 1991; Malcom, 1983). Roles models also play an important

role in academic integration as well as social integration. A positive role model provides

students with a number of equally positive experiences (Tinto, 1987).

On the college campus, faculty members are often role models. The interaction between

faculty and students has been identified as a major factor in the ability of students to persist in

college while also increasing their level of satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Beal & Noel, 1980;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Positive role models provide guidance, direction, and most

importantly, a good example for students to learn from (Tinto, 1987). Interaction between

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faculty and students outside class is even more beneficial to students. Informal contact between students and faculty members has been found to increase the persistence of the student (Ugbah & Williams, 1989; Griffen, 1992; Astin, 1982). Endo and Harpel (1982) concluded that informal contact with faculty was a foundation for the development of friendly relationships between students and faculty that had a positive influence on students in terms of their personal, social, and intellectual development. Fleming (1984) studied measures of faculty-student interactions. Fleming surveyed over 3000 freshmen and seniors to test adjustment to academic life, academic performance, vocational interest, social adjustment, stress levels, and self-concept. The researcher found that lack of informal contact with faculty and the inability of Black students to develop strong relationships with faculty members hindered their academic performance, which then hindered their persistence (Wood, 2002). In another study, Kuh (1995) found that Black students identified contact with faculty as most important to gains in knowledge acquisition leading to the goal of graduation. According to Wood (2002), other research (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991) has shown faculty/student relations as strong predictors of satisfaction with campus life, socially and academically, leading to persistence at both black and white campuses.

Other researchers have tested Tinto's (1975) theory on commuter students. Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) posited that academic integration had a significant and direct impact on student persistence. Thus, it seems that in non-residential institutions, commitment to the institution at the end of the year is largely defined by satisfying experiences within the academic systems (Wood, 2002).

Reviewing the literature supports the research idea that academic integration is a factor of student persistence. Research has looked at various populations, institutional types, and living

arrangements to conclude that academic integration is an integral part of the decision for students to persist or depart an institution.

Social Integration

Social integration for college students is just as important as their becoming academically integrated into the climate. Tinto (1993) states that the development of new friendships and peer interaction is perhaps the most recognized method of social integration. Several studies, including those conducted by Tinto (1975), Pantages and Creedon (1978), and Austin (1977), have found that friendship support is directly related to persistence in college and that college dropouts perceive themselves as having less social interaction than those students who persist in college. For African American students, students who engage in social activities become a part of the social environment and are more likely to persist (Griffen, 1992).

Student peer group constitute the core of the social groups at colleges and universities (Wood, 2002). Tinto (1993) suggests that these groups function as mechanisms of social integration. Tinto posits that multiple peer groups and communities exist that allow membership. Social integration, then, reflects a student's experiences with the social communities that shape the student's perceptions of the degree of interaction (Wood, 2002).

Researchers have theorized that the process of becoming socially integrated into the fabric of the university has been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process. Terenzini and Wright (1987) suggested that the level of social integration during a given year of study is part of a cumulative experience that continues to build throughout one's college experience. They further state that the experiences that a student encounters in his or her freshman year will influence and support integration in subsequent years.

Other studies have shown that on-campus living has a positive effects on persistence. Successful academic and social integration is more likely for students who live on campus (Pascarella, 1984; Chickering, 1974; Astin, 1977; Pantages & Creedon, 1978). Pascarella (1984) found that even when background traits and institutional controls were held constant, on-campus living was positively correlated with higher student interaction.

After reviewing the literature on social integration, it is clear that social integration is also a major factor in the persistence of students at institutions. Studies have focused on several institutional types and populations as well to determine the magnitude social integration has on persistence or departure. Academic and social integration can change for students during their undergraduate years as evident by a study done by Mannan (2007). He concluded that:

> The level of academic and social integration varies during the undergraduate career due to the varying degrees of influence by the measures of integration variables, which in turn contribute at varying degrees to the persistence and dropout. Thus, it is important to identify the differences of perception of students at various stages of their undergraduate studies with respect to their academic and social integration for developing effective attrition policies. (p. 150).

Based on the research, I conclude that both social and academic integration are the most important factors of whether a student persist or departs once that student is enrolled at an institution.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is concerned with the persistence of White undergraduate students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The framework takes into account White undergraduate students' experiences related to the student's

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social and academic integration at the institution as well as how the institution interacts with the student. Based on these factors (institutional, academic, and social), the student makes a decision to either persist or depart from the institution.

The conceptual framework for this study, as seen in Figure 1, was constructed using Tinto's Model of Student Persistence (1975). This depiction of Tinto's model includes academic integration, social integration and institutional experiences. Other aspects of Tinto's model have been shaded because the researcher is focusing on the student's decision to persist or depart based upon factors within the institution.

FIGURE 1--White Undergraduate Student Persistence at HBCUs (Tinto, 1993)
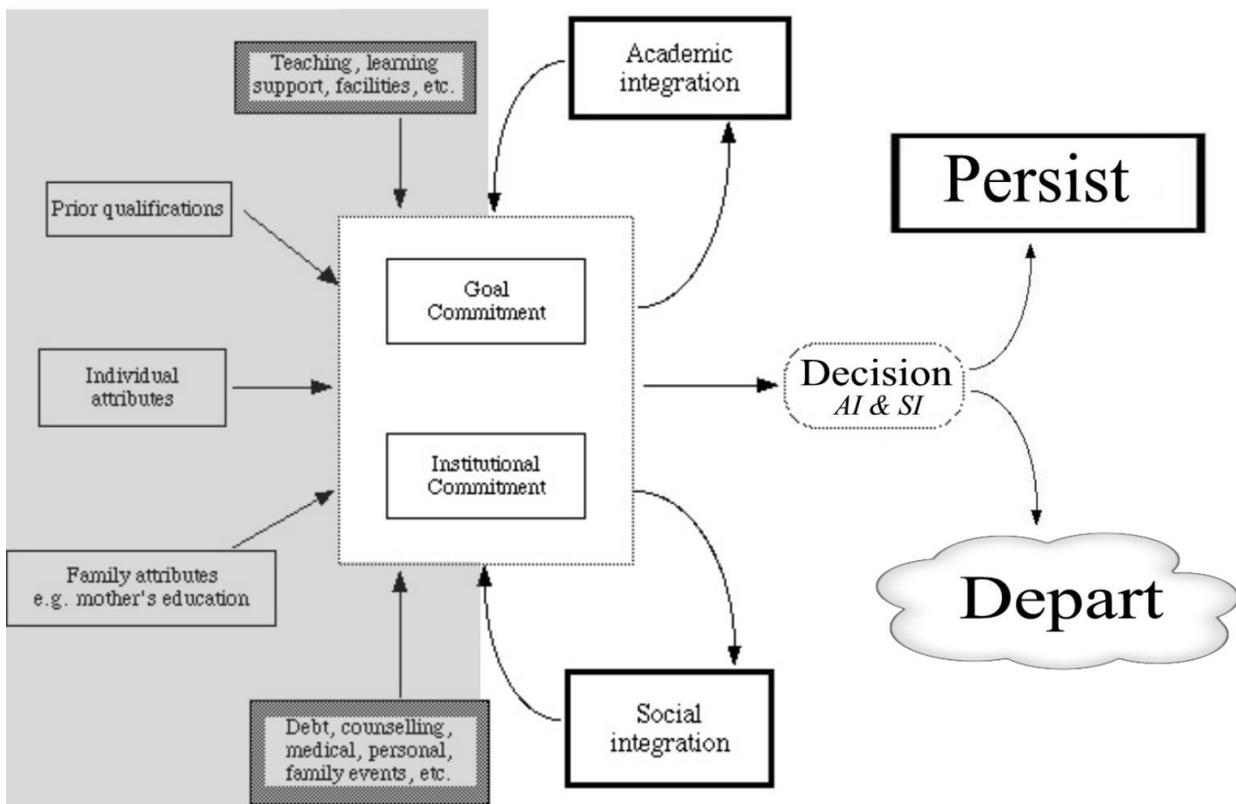
After students matriculate to institutions of higher learning, Tinto (1987) states that students go through a process in which they become integrated into the institution. The student becomes integrated both academically and socially. This conceptual framework depicts White

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students' experiences as it relates to becoming integrated in three areas: academic integration, social integration, and institutional experiences.

This conceptual framework suggests that the institution is the initial determinant for White students' experiences at the institution. It suggests that the institution impacts the White students' experiences by providing the initial "olive branch" to a majority student who now finds out that they are now the minority. Conrad, Brier, and Braxton (1997) stated that whites are attracted to HBCUs because of academic programs and cost. The institutional experiences has a direct impact on the White students' experiences in terms of faculty interaction and career development based on a student's chosen field of study.

As depicted in this conceptual framework, the initial impression that is made on the White student from his experience with the institution will now have an impact on the degree of integration, both socially and academically, for the student. The social and academic integration will simultaneously occur during the student's stay at the institution. Socially, the conceptual framework identifies whether a student is interacting with his peers as well as getting involved in extracurricular activities. Academically, the conceptual framework identifies whether a student is interacting with faculty members, peers in class, and is being challenged academically.

As the student experiences college through becoming socialized at a particular institution, he comes to a decision point of whether to persist at the institution or depart the institution. This socialization process embodies several factors for each individual student, particularly social and academic integration. As stated by Tinto (1975), this conceptual framework concludes that if White students become heavily integrated (both academically and socially), then they are likely to persist at the institution based on these experiences. However, if they do not become integrated, it is likely that the student will then depart.

Using this conceptual framework, participants will be asked to describe their experiences as it relates to becoming integrated into the institution from a social and academic standpoint. Also, participants will be asked to describe their interpretations of how the institution played a role in their integration into the institution or lack thereof.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

As White students matriculate to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), many face challenges and do not cope well with being the minority. Research shows that they matriculate based on several factors including special academic programs, tuition costs, academic reputation, and location (Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997). Consequently, this study examined the factors that influenced the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs.

To target and collect this research data, a qualitative approach that focuses on the content and richness of individual students' lived experiences seemed most appropriate. The data was obtained through personal interviews that created narrative accounts reported by the participants in the investigation. Gergen (1986) asserts that the narrative is particularly well suited to the generation of an understanding of human action because it replicates linguistically the process by which understanding is achieved. Therefore, this study undertook with the goal of ascertaining what the "lived experiences" were for 6 White undergraduate students enrolled in a four-year public HBCU by allowing them to "tell their stories". To accomplish the research objective, a qualitative research design was employed utilizing phenomenology and interpretative phenomenological analysis as the modes of data collection and analysis.

This chapter provides the reader with an understanding of the methods implemented in this study to address the research questions. This chapter also reviews the rationale for qualitative methodology to explore the phenomenon. In addition, the process involved in the collection and analysis of the data is discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion on the trustworthiness and limitations of the study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively describe the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs from the students' perspectives. Applying Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975, 1993) as a lens for persistence, the overall aim in this study was to focus on the students' social and academic integration at the institution as well as their institutional experiences at the HBCU as it relates to their decision to persist or depart the HBCU.

Research Questions

The primary research question of this study was: What factors influence White undergraduate students to persist at HBCUs? The secondary research questions were as follows:

1. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their academic integration into the institution?

2. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their social integration into the institution?

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

The researcher attempted to answer the research questions for this study through a qualitative research approach. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that qualitative data is a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. Creswell (2003) defines qualitative research as one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. Qualitative studies usually provide fuller,

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more detailed descriptions that are more exactly reflective of an individual's experience (Miles & Huberman).   Qualitative methods will be used to get an exact understanding of students' individual experiences.

Words, especially when organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners than pages of summarized numbers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As I embarked on gathering data for this project, I was very interested in hearing the participants' stories. I sought to hear each individual's perceptions of the factors that influenced their decision to persist toward degree completion at a HBCU. Qualitative data also focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that qualitative data places emphasis on people's "lived experiences," and may be well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives. Qualitative methodologies, such as face-to-face interviews and focus groups, allow participants the freedom to choose aspects of student life on which to comment so that it is possible to collect anticipated as well as unanticipated information about their experiences (Manning, 1992). Because of the richness of qualitative data, the stories that were told of actual experiences of participants provided useful information qualitatively in understanding the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Phenomenology

For this investigation, the qualitative method of inquiry chosen was phenomenology, with at least a 37-year track record as an accepted methodology in psychological research (e.g., Becker, 1997; Giorgi, Fisher, & van Echartsbertg, 1971; Giorgi, 1985; Smith, 1996).

Phenomenology as a methodology arose from philosophical phenomenology (Ashworth, 2000;

Robinson, 1985). As a branch of philosophy, phenomenology may trace its origin and initiation

to Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century. The goal of phenomenology as

espoused by Husserl was to study human phenomena without considering questions of their

causes, their objective reality, or even their appearances. In effect, Husserl agreed with aspects

of James' radical empiricism (1977) that all human experience should be examined for their own

value (Robinson, 1985).

The thrust of phenomenology as a method of inquiry lies in its ability to study how

human phenomena are experienced in a system of interrelated meanings (Ashworth, 2000;

Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning with

others through the interactions with others, thereby recognizing that whatever meaning is created

has its roots in human actions (Robinson, 1985; Ross, 1992). Consequently, phenomenology is

attractive to researchers because the emphasis is on understanding a person's experience by

allowing that person to tell their story from their own point of view in order to preserve the

veracity of the phenomenon as it is lived.

Another important figure in the field of phenomenology was Alfred Schutz, a career

banker who chose to pursue his interest in phenomenological philosophy at the New York

School for Social Research (Schutz, 1967). Edmund Husserl made note that it was perhaps

Schutz's everyday direct contact with the work world in banking that made most of the work that

he did readable and his ideas accessible outside of academia. Schutz stated that:

> "The ordinary person, acting in the world, is in a biographically-determined situation
>
> doing what he or she does according to the system of relevancies that enables them to

select from the environment and from interactions with others, those elements that make sense for the purpose at hand" (p. 67).

From a methodological perspective, phenomenology takes the philosophical beliefs of Husserl and Schutz regarding the constructed and interpretive quality of lived experience as the basis of knowledge so that the focus is on those individuals who have lived through an experience; this lived experience becomes a worthy target of inquiry. The goal of phenomenology is to investigate objective phenomenon as it has been "lived through" and interpreted by individuals in everyday life. The focus is on the first-hand experiences of individuals in order to "discern the psychological essence of the phenomenon (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; p. 26). Clearly, this method of inquiry complemented this study in that its focus was to understand the experiences in lived context of the participants being studied.

Focusing on what the phenomenologist calls the "lifeworld" of these participants, the world and the events of interest in it are investigated through the experienced participants' interpretive lens (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2005). Utilizing narrative accounts attained through interviews was how the data in this investigation was grounded and collected from the perspectives of the participants.

Role of Researcher

Particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study (Creswell, 2003). Glesne (1999) suggested that researchers clearly define their roles. For the last four years, I have been the Coordinator of Special Projects for a predominately white institution (PWI) in southeast Louisiana. In my role, I work closely with the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs on matters of retention and persistence efforts

at our institution. Although these efforts are mainly related to the retention and persistence of

African American students and faculty, I feel that this knowledge had an impact on the proposed

study. Every attempt was made to ensure objectivity.

The definition of a researcher is determined, depending on the context, the identities of

others, and the researcher's own personality and values (Glesne, 1999). I, as the researcher, felt

very comfortable in this role. My role was to ask pertinent questions to the participants in order

to reveal, from their stories, the factors that influence their persistence at HBCUs. In order for

the participants to tell their stories, I needed to build rapport with the participants. I believe

maintaining good rapport with participants was essential. Glesne (1999) described the term

rapport as the character of effective field relationships. In qualitative inquiry, the nature of

relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of the researcher's interactions to

support the research (rapport), and the quality of the researcher's self-awareness of the potential

effects of self on the research (subjectivity). Good rapport can be the single factor that enables

participants to be honest in an interview. It was extremely important that I showed a genuine

interest in their stories and revealed to them how important each story was. It was important that

I revealed to each participant that what they had to say will help other students in similar

situations value the participants' experiences in helping them persist at HBCUs.

Research Design

Site Selection

According to Creswell (1998), part of the data collection process involves the location of

sites and individuals participating in the study. Creswell (1998) asserts that "in a

phenomenological study, the participants may be located at a single site, although they need not

be" (p. 111). The site selected for this study, Sims State University was chosen primarily for its

characteristics and close proximity to the researcher for convenience. This site was chosen because of a historic settlement (United States v. Fordice, 1992) that mandated this institution to increase its non-black enrollment. It was also chosen because of administrative changes within the Academic Affairs area which included a newly hired minority recruiter. Sims State also provides diversity scholarships as a means to attract non African American students.

Based on convenience, other institutions located within the researcher's locale did not have a sufficient pool of participants to choose from. According to the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (MIHL) (2008), enrollment data at the other institutions being looked at did not provide the researcher with an adequate number of potential participants for the study. For instance, at Valley University, the potential number of participants was only 107. Of that 107 total, 73 students were classified as freshman, which means that this researcher would have a very limited number of potential participants. Also, according to MILH (2008), Valley University has seen a decrease of 7.8% in White student enrollment since 1998. Based on these findings, the researcher chose to focus entirely on Sims State University.

In order to ensure that a wide range of perspectives was incorporated into the study in terms of identifying factors that influence persistence rates of White students at HBCUs, it was necessary to ascertain the classification of Sims State University. Sims State University is an urban institution that is classified as a Doctorate-granting University with high research activity (The Carnegie Foundation, 2007). The institution offers various numbers of baccalaureate programs, as well as graduate education through their master's and doctoral degree programs. Accordingly, the enrollment profile of Sims State University is deemed high undergraduate (The Carnegie Foundation, 2007). Therefore, in choosing this site, I believed that I would be able to attract a very diverse group of White undergraduate students for this research project. Also, with

Sims State University having an office devoted entirely to the recruitment of White students, I felt that I would find students with varied backgrounds and experiences that would lead to rich detailed descriptions of their persistence at Sims State University. Since the inception of the minority recruiter, Sims State University has seen an increase in White undergraduate student matriculation. According to the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (MIHL) (2008), Sims State University's White undergraduate student enrollment during the Fall 2007 semester increased to 468 students which was an increase of 27% from the Fall 2006 semester.

Sims State University is a four-year, public, historically Black university that offers bachelor's and master's, as well as doctoral degrees. Located in an urban community, Sims State University offers 47 degree programs. The University is composed of ten different colleges and divisions: the College of Education and Human Development; the College of Business; the College of Public Service; the College of Science, Engineering, and Technical Arts; the College of Liberal Arts; the College of Lifelong Learning; and the Divisions of Graduate Studies, International Studies, and Undergraduate Studies. There are seven undergraduate schools within the Colleges. Bachelor's degrees are awarded in the schools of allied health sciences, business, education, engineering, liberal arts, science and technology, and social work. There is also an Honors College. Degrees are offered in fields pertaining to particular areas of culture (such as African-American studies), wildlife, recreation, agriculture, or other related fields. Graduate degrees are awarded in allied health, business, education, eleven liberal arts areas (including public policy and administration and urban and regional planning) science and technology, and social work. The school awards doctoral degrees in nine areas. The education specialist (Ed.S.) degree is also awarded. Total enrollment at Sims State University is just over 8,200 students; 64 percent of whom are female and 36 percent are male. In terms of the racial

make-up of the student body, 93 percent are African American and 5.8 percent are White. The

data shows an increase every year since 2002 in the number of White undergraduate students

who have matriculated to Sims State University (MIHL, 2008). The student to faculty ratio at

Sims State University is 18:1.

Gaining access

Creswell (2003) asserts that in order to gain access into an institution, the researcher must

establish a relationship with administrators of the institution who are in a position to provide

access to the researcher. A colleague that works at my institution afforded me the opportunity to

meet a friend of his that worked at Sims State University. After meeting my colleague's friend

and informing her of my research intentions, she introduced me to the Associate Vice President

for Student Life. He was very interested in my proposal and wanted Sims State University

students to participate as a means of understanding what factors help white students persist at

their institution. He viewed it as a win-win situation for the university and the researcher. After

gaining his approval, he introduced me to the Minority Recruiter for Sims State University. I

believe that by the Associate Vice President formally walking me over to the recruiter's office

gave credence to my study. The minority recruiter listened intently as I explained my reason and

purpose for being on the Sims State campus. The recruiter, being a white male and a recent hire,

welcomed such a study because as he said, "This could be very beneficial in my recruitment

efforts if I could offer some explicit reasons on why Sims State is an institution for all students.

Basically, I'm just trying to get our name and information to the prospective students." Because

of his access to all the White students at Sims State University, he said that he would be willing

to make sure that I would have a diverse selection of participants for my study. He provided a

list of 40 potential participants for the study. These potential participants were students that he

had come into contact with since his arrival at the institution.

Selection of Participants

Although White students only made up 5.8 percent of the overall student body at Sims

State University, I believed that I would have a large enough pool of participants with the help of

the minority recruiter. I developed two main criteria for the selection process of participants: 1)

White (Anglo-Saxon) descent being born in the United States and 2) full-time student at a

sophomore or higher academic standing. The minority director emailed all White students

enrolled at Sims State University that met the criteria about my proposed project and asked them

to contact me if they were interested in participating. He also provided me with a list of 40

students that he knew personally.

Upon receiving initial contacts via email from prospective participants, I began to

determine if these potential participants met the criteria for this study. The goal was to interview

6 participants for the study. After verifying that the potential participants met the criteria, I sent

a letter via U. S. mail to all potential participants. The letter invited potential participants to take

part in the study (Appendix B). The letter (Appendix B) also included information on the topic

being studied as well as a request for their participation in the study. A week after mailing the

invitation letter to potential participants, I emailed each potential participant to see if they had

received my letter via U. S. mail. Potential participants responded via email by agreeing to

participate or declining to participate. As I received confirmation from potential participants

accepting my invitation to participate in the study, I sent a confirmation letter (Appendix C)

thanking them for agreeing to participate. This confirmation letter (Appendix C) also included

the date, time and possible location for the interview. The consent form (Appendix D) was also

sent via U. S. mail to each participant prior to the interview. The consent form (Appendix D)

explained the purpose of the study, the risks involved, and the rights of the participant. The

consent form also provided information regarding the disposal of the data following the end of

this study. Approximately two to three days before the scheduled interview, I sent each

participant an email to remind them of our interview (Appendix E). The interviews were

conducted on the campus of Sims State University.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2003), the idea behind qualitative research is to *purposefully*

select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher

understand the problem and the research questions. Weiss (1994) stated that through

interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in

which we have not lived. According to Creswell (1998), researchers conducting

phenomenological studies usually collect data primarily through "in-depth interviews" (p. 122).

We can learn through interviewing about people's interior experiences. For this research project,

data collection will consist of individual interviews.

Individual Interviews

Interviewing brings together different persons and personalities (Glesne, 1999). I wanted

to make sure that the interviews that I conducted would yield pertinent information in order for

me to understand the phenomenon being studied. Creswell (2003) states that interviews involve

unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit

views and opinions from the participants. He also states the following advantages for using

interviews as a means for data collection: 1) useful when participants cannot be observed

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directly; 2) participants can provide historical information; and 3) allows researcher "control" over the line of questioning.

It was extremely important for me to build rapport with the participants during the interview session. As I opened, I introduced myself as a doctoral student conducting research on the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). I informed each participant that their participation was strictly voluntary and I asked each participant for their verbal consent to participate in the project. Each participant was asked if they had any questions or concerns about the project prior to the beginning of the interview. During the individual interviews, I wanted to learn about the interviewees, their parents, their siblings, and their beliefs toward higher education. I also hope to learn about their paths to matriculating to a historically Black college and university (HBCU).

Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to explore topics in an in-depth manner. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), for semi-structured interviews the investigator creates a general set of questions as an interview schedule but the interview is jointly guided by the schedule and the participant responses. That is, the interview schedule serves as a guide and does not dictate what questions are going to be asked and in what order. This allows the participant and interviewer to create a great rapport. As stated by Smith and Osborn (2003), the advantages of the semi-structured interview are adapted here in defense of this method of collection:

1. Semi-structured interviews will entail a set of questions; however those questions will be guided by the schedule not dictated by it.

2. Semi-structured interviews facilitate rapport with the participants.

3. These interviews allow for greater flexibility of coverage; the interviewer is free to probe areas of interest as they arise.

4. The interest of the participant can also lead the direction of the interview.

5. Finally, semi-structured interviews produce rich data sets that are appropriate for phenomenological research.

As the primary data source for this study, the interviews were conducted with the goal of having participants reveal what their experiences have been like at this particular HBCU. The guidelines for developing and conducting effective semi-structured interviews under the phenomenological tradition were based on the work done by Smith and Osborn (2003). The following general questions served as the initial interview schedule:

Background Information

- Tell me a little bit about yourself.

- Tell me about your family.

- Tell me about the role of education in your life.

- Tell me about your high school experience.

- Tell me about your college choice process?

- What were the factors that contributed to your decision to attend this institution?

Academic Integration

- Tell me about your goals in terms of your major.

- How do you feel about your courses?

- How much time do you spend studying?

- Do you enjoy what you and studying and why?

- How much do you feel you are learning in your courses?

- How do you feel about understanding the material being covered in your courses?

- What types of grades do you have in your courses?

- Tell me about the academic organizations you are a member.

- Tell me about your interactions with faculty (in and outside of class).

- What are your reasons for your persistence at this institution from an academic perspective?

Social Integration

- Tell me about the campus life here at this institution?

- Tell me about your extracurricular activities on or off campus.

- Describe your social involvements on campus and off campus.

- Describe the friendships you have developed while attending this institution.

- Describe how you view the opportunities you have to socialize with other students on the campus.

- Tell about your interactions with staff members.

- What are reasons for your persistence at this institution from a social perspective?

Combination of Social and Academic Integration

- Describe your typical college day. What do you do from the time you get up in the morning to the time that you go to bed?

Each participant was interviewed for at least one hour and the sessions were audio taped per the permission of the participant and completely transcribed at a later date.

In addition to the creation of the general interview schedule and in keeping with the nature of the semi-structured interview process, the following general interviewing techniques were employed during the interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

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- There was an attempt not to rush into the participant's dialogue too quickly. Rather, time was given for the points to be developed

- During the interview, minimal probes and "back-channeling" were used to encourage expansion of the discussion and descriptions. Questions were kept to a minimum and used only when needed for definite verification or when a discussion thread had run out and another point or topic needed to be introduced.

- When questions were asked, they were limited to single questions that were fairly open-ended. The only time the questions were more directive was when clarification was needed.

- As the participants were engaged in the semi-structured interview, the researcher attempted to monitor their affective reactions to the course of the interview to determine when the participants were less comfortable with the topic. In these instances, the participants were allowed to let the specific topic drop but the interviewer might return to the topic at a later stage (and in another way) if deemed relevant during the rest of the interview.

Each participant was interviewed for at least 45 minutes to one hour, and the sessions were audio taped per the permission of the participant and completely transcribed at a later date. The interviews were conducted in a conference room provided by the gatekeeper at the institution. This setting was very convenient for the participants. Only the researcher and the one participant being interviewed were allowed in the interview session.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data

into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather, it is custom-built, revised, and choreographed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative methodologies incorporate data collection instruments and analysis procedures that are flexible and capable of allowing analysis to take place at several levels. For this investigation, I used the data analysis process called interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA seeks to reveal how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds through detailed scrutiny of their "lifeworlds" (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Transcript Analysis

Researchers employing IPA recognize that there is a recurring process of data collection, data analysis and data interpretation under the qualitative paradigm. Complimenting this process is the two-stage interpretation process of IPA, the empathetic stage and the critical questioning stage (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The totality of these processes leads to an end product that has been refined through this cyclical research process (Simmons-Mackie & Damico, 1999). This refinement also allowed the researcher to report how the social actions under investigation work in the real world for these 6 White undergraduate college students.

Each transcript was transcribed thoroughly and followed Smith and Osborn's phenomenological approach to data analysis (2003). Smith and Osborn's analysis is best described as a set of stages to achieve an understanding of each participant's lived experiences attending a historically Black college and university (HBCU).

Transcripts were read numerous times so that the researcher could become familiar with the contents of each transcript. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to simply become familiar with the data. Reflecting and recording things that seemed significant in regards to what

participants said was relevant during this analysis of the data. Explanatory notes and comments were made during the initial phase of analyzing the data. These notes and comments were then transformed into more concise statements. At this point, the researcher seeks to make initial notes of any emerging themes. Connections were noted between transformed statements and these became the actual emergent themes for this study.

As the themes started to emerge, connections were documented in a sequential order and analyzed further to insure that the connections made by the researcher worked with the actual dialogue from the participants. Finally, the emerging themes from the data analysis were then translated into a narrative accounting so that the data could be effectively reported (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This translation seeks to find verbatim excerpts to support this accounting. This data analysis and interpretative approach is essential to any study that recognizes the complexity of social actions and seeks to "find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53).

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility in qualitative research is equivalent to internal validity in traditional research; transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings; dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs; and confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Lincoln & Guba. 1985).

To ensure internal validity, the researcher used member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants felt that they were accurate (Creswell, 2003). Secondly, to ensure internal validity, at the outset of this study, the researcher's bias was articulated in writing under the heading, "The Researcher's Role." The primary strategy utilized in this project to ensure external validity was the provision of rich, thick, detailed descriptions so that anyone interested in transferability would have a solid framework for comparison (Merriam, 1998). To ensure reliability, the researcher provided a detailed account of the study, the researcher's role. Also, the researcher reported in detail the data collection and data analysis strategies in order to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used in this study (Merriam, 1998). All phases of this project were subject to scrutiny by an external auditor who is experienced in qualitative research methods.

Limitations

Qualitative results are accepted to be general to others outside the study when sampling is appropriately done and when the results are credibly drawn from the data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). While this investigation sought to examine the lived experiences of White undergraduate students, this study does have one identified limitation. This study was limited to those White students attending only one HBCU located in the southern portion of the United States. More HBCUs from various geographic locations are needed to enhance the understanding of social adjustment and persistent factors on the HBCU campuses. Therefore, the results of this study are unique to a geographical location and it answers these questions for an identified group.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively describe the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs from the students' perspectives. The primary research question of this study was: What factors influence White undergraduate students to persist at HBCUs? The secondary research questions were as follows:

1. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their academic integration into the institution?

2. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their social integration into the institution?

As described in Chapter three, data were collected to address the primary research question as well as the secondary questions pertaining to the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section provided detailed information about the participants interviewed in this study. The second sections details the themes related to the experiences of White undergraduate students who have persisted at this particular HBCU.

Participants

According to Smith and Osborn (2003), phenomenological studies are conducted on small sample sizes that are well defined and homogeneous. The goal for the study was to interview each participant for at least one hour; therefore the interviews were conducted within that time limit. For this study, six participants were interviewed on the campus of Sims State University.

Six participants chose to participate in this study. Four of the participants were males and two were females. Each participant had been on the Sims State campus for at least four consecutive semesters and had declared a major to study at the institution. Table 1 provides demographics for each of the participants of this study.

TABLE 1--Participants' Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Classification	Major	Birthplace
Joe	25	Senior	Computer engineering	Indiana
Diane	22	Junior	Social work	Florida
Boss	20	Sophomore	Business management	Mississippi
Tammy	21	Junior	Elementary education	Mississippi
Jonah	22	Junior	Sociology	Mississippi
Hank	22	Senior	Psychology	Mississippi

Participant #1: Joe

Joe was the first participant that I interviewed for this study. As I waited for Joe to arrive, I felt very anxious and nervous because I had not met him in person. We had only talked on the phone on three previous occasions. During our phone conversations, Joe seemed very eager to tell his story about his experiences at Sims State University. As Joe arrived at our meeting location, he was small in stature in terms of weight and height. He is 25 years old and married to a young woman from Kenya who also attends Sims State University. Joe is majoring in computer engineering. He is originally from Indiana but has lived in several states including Georgia, South Dakota, Louisiana and Mississippi. Joe stated that the reason he lived in so many different states growing up was because of abuse. He stated:

I grew up in a very abusive home, where my stepdad was very abusive, always fighting

and arguing, whatnot. It was real rough in that sense. That's really essentially why we

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moved around so much because, we moved to Georgia to get away from him. But he

found us, and then we move around here and there and bounced back and forth.

Joe attended high school in South Dakota during his freshman and sophomore years. During that

time period, Joe stated that he was a "stoner or pothead". He said that he got "high" all the time.

He stated:

My aspiration was to get "high" in the morning and as soon as my "buzz" went down to

get "high" again. I was fed up with my living situation at home so I stop caring so much.

Getting high was an outlet for me because of all the things that were going on around me

and I did not know how to handle it.

This type of behavior would prove to be very detrimental to Joe. He had been to jail on

numerous occasions because of his previous habit. He had different felonies for burglary and

other crimes in which he did not want to mention what those other crimes were.

Participant #2: Diane

When Diane arrived, she appeared calm and relaxed, appearing not to know what to

expect. Diane is 22 years of age and she is from Florida. She lived with both parents as a child

with her mother attending and graduating from the local community college while her father did

not attend a postsecondary education institution. After completing high school, Diane wanted to

leave home to attend a four-year institution but her parents wanted her to attend the local

community college. She stated:

I wanted to go away for college but my parents wouldn't let me. You know how you

have to have your parents do your FASFA for you for their taxes. Well, my parents like

refuse to do that for me, they said I had to go to community college for two years before

they would let me go anywhere else. And I did not want to go to community college

because it would be like high school all over again. I just wanted to get away from it.

All my friends went away for school.

So Diane took a different route in matriculating to a four-year institution. After working at the high school she attended as a dance instructor, she decided to join the Navy Reserve to become an independent person. She stated:

I had to find a way around using my parents for my FASFA because I was not eligible for grant money, so I would still owe money for school. Because according to the government, you are not considered an independent person until you're 24 years old or a veteran of the United States Navy, military.

Diane attended a high school that was majority African American so she stated that most of her friends were African Americans. She also stated that her dating preference was black guys. So in deciding which postsecondary education institution, she only considered HBCUs. She felt that her chances of finding a suitable mate would increase dramatically at a historically Black college and university (HBCU). Diane's major is social work.

Participant #3: Boss

Boss is a tall thin guy that was dressed in slacks with a shirt and tie. He looked like he was on his way to a job interview. He was clean shaven and walked into the conference room with a smile on his face. As soon as I saw him enter the room with that smile, I felt very comfortable. Boss was 20 years old from a small town in Mississippi. None of his parents attended college but felt that it would be his only way to achieve success in today's society. Boss had two other siblings that were much younger than him. He stated that he was a star basketball player at his high school and he wanted to play basketball in college. However, when

no one offered him a scholarship, he thought that he would attend a HBCU because they could use a shooter. He stated:

> I can really shoot the rock. I felt that if I went to a black school, they could use my shooting abilities. If and when I would make the team, by the next year I would be on scholarship because of my talent. So I decided to send game tapes of myself to all of the HBCUs in the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas.

He stated that only the coaches at Sims State University called him and offered him an opportunity to walk-on the team once he enrolled at the institution. He quickly jumped at that opportunity and decided to matriculate to Sims State University. He is majoring in business management.

Participant #4: Tammy

Tammy seemed to be very shy as she entered the room. She spoke softly as we exchanged pleasantries. However, as the interview continued that shyness quickly converted into boldness. Tammy is a 21 year old junior from Mississippi. She is majoring in elementary education. She wants to teach African American students in the inner city. She feels that attending Sims State University would give her the necessary tools necessary in order to prepare her for this endeavor. She stated:

> I have always wanted to be a teacher. I want to help schools and children that are less fortunate and provide them with the same type of education that other children receive at white, well-funded schools. What better place to receive the training to do this but at Sims State University.

Tammy has 3 other siblings who may also follow in her footsteps and attend Sims State University according to her.

Jonah is an individual from a large city in Mississippi. He graduated from a predominant

African American high school. Jonah was the oldest of three children from a single parent

household. According to him, he does not have a relationship with his father and he wants to

teach his younger siblings what a man should inspire to be. Jonah stated:

My father does not have anything do to with us. He has never been there for my mom

and us. I don't care. I just want to show my brothers how to be a man. My mom didn't

go to college. I'm the first. I want to prove I can be somebody.

Jonah describes his relationship with his mother and siblings as being great no matter the

circumstances. According to him, his mother is his hero because of the sacrifices she has made

that has encouraged him to continue his education. Because of their financial situation, Jonah

did not believe he could afford the cost of attending college. He stated:

We don't have no money. I was thinking, how will I pay for school. I was really worried

about that. Then one of my friends was saying he was going to go here. I said how much

will it cost. He said, "Man, it will be free. I'm getting grants." I had never heard about

grants.

Jonah felt that this could be his ticket into college. His friend helped him fill out the necessary

paperwork and he applied for financial aid. He decided to attend Sims State University because

of the cost to attend and the proximity of the campus to his home. He wanted to continue to help

his mother raise his brothers.

I chose this school because I wanted to stay close to my house. Help my mom out. Plus,

I went to a black school for high school, so I fit in. No problem, I know I can handle it.

It was important for me to help my brothers see me going to college, so coming here,

they can see me on the regular, maybe studying, loving college, they may want to go to. I

want them to see me going to school so they think that they have to go. So I wanted to be

close to them.

He is majoring in sociology because he wants to work with kids who came from single parent

households.

Participant #6: Hank

Hank is another resident of Mississippi. He has two sisters and one brother. He always

knew he wanted to go to college. However, he never thought he would be attending a

historically Black college or university (HBCU). He replied:

I was going to college. My parents went to college. My older sister went to college. I

knew I was going to college. Did I think I would be here? Hell, no. A black school. I

didn't think I would be at a black school, but I am glad that I am here. When I was trying

to figure out which school to go to, my parents were trying to help me decide. See, they

went to white schools. So they were saying the white schools. But I have a black friend

and he asked me to come with him and visit Sims. I had a great time and decided to give

it a try.

Hank's decision was made based on a weekend visit to Sims State University. He did not have

any idea of the academic reputation of the institution or the culture of the campus toward white

students. He just felt it was the right place for him.

I didn't know if they had what I wanted to major in. But I thought that most schools have

a Psychology degree. This place just felt like I could spend four years and have a good

time and get a degree. The people were so nice. Really, really nice to me on that

weekend. My parents didn't know what to think. But they supported my decision.

Data Analysis

The goal of this study was to provide a rich descriptive accounting of the lived experiences of white undergraduate students attending a particular HBCU (Gertz, 1973). This was accomplished by using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to provide a means to describe these narrative accounts. This approach is in accordance with a theoretical commitment that stresses language is a fundamental aspect of human communication, interpretation, and understanding (Smith & Osborn, 2003). As discussed in Chapter Three, qualitative research and phenomenology in particular allows the researcher to emphasize the value of analytic strategies that recognize that language is also integral to sense-making. The individual in a phenomenological study, therefore, is a conscious agent whose experience must be studied from the "first person" perspective (Ashworth, 2000; Giorgi, 1997).

The emphasis of IPA seeks to show the connection between meaning and how it impacts the psychological world of individuals. In attempting to understand the "lifeworld" of the participants through IPA, a thematic analysis was used. According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis allows the researcher using a qualitative method to more easily communicate his or her observations, findings, and interpretation of meaning to others, thereby permitting a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. These emergent themes and patterns were connected to specific comments made by the participants to ensure that what the researcher was finding represented the facts that the participant had given.

Also, Boyatzis (1998) describes four distinct stages for thematic analysis:

1. The first stage of thematic analysis involves "sensing themes". The researchers must be open to all information.

2. The second stage requires that the researcher must hone his or her ability to "see" and

to "see as". This requires a form of disciplined subjectivity if the themes are to then be used to tell the stories from the participants' viewpoint.

3. The researcher must develop a way to process and analyze the essence of the observations being made from the data.

4. In the final stage, the researcher uses the information to contribute to the development of knowledge either through theory development or as a conceptual framework.

Through this critical perusal of the data, the significant themes and patterns that were found across data sets provided a wealth of information that led to a rich and thick description of the lives of these white students attending Sims State University. The themes that emerged from the analysis of the data from all six students consisted of four major themes (Influences on Relationship with Faculty, Quality of Academic Programs, Lack of Racism from Faculty, Staff, and Peers and Involvement in Campus Activities and Organizations). Based on these themes, a portrait of White undergraduate student persistence at Sims State University is presented.

Influences on Relationships with Departmental Faculty

Influences on Relationships with Departmental Faculty were a major factor for all six participants in this study. In Schwitzer et al. (1999), the authors described that students feel more comfortable when interacting with faculty who are perceived to be more similar to them— on the basis of race, gender, academic department, or field of study. The authors used the phrase, "effects of faculty familiarity," to describe this variable (Schwitzer et al., 1999). According to this study, students interactions with faculty increased when "their interests or area of study were similar or familiar" (p. 194). All of the participants told stories of how different faculty members within their respective academic departments embraced them and made them

feel welcomed. The participants described these relationships in both an academic and social setting.

Academic Setting

The participants interviewed for this study viewed their respective faculty mentors as scholars in their particular fields. Each of them discussed the positive impact that these faculty members have on students, not just themselves. The students interviewed said they felt very comfortable discussing academic material inside and outside of class with their professors, especially those in their academic departments. Jonah compared his experience at Sims State versus his high school experience. He noted:

> At my high school we didn't have academics. Teachers were just there making a paycheck. Man, I didn't learn anything in high school. I just slid by. Here, the teachers care about your academics. They challenge you. You have to be ready to answers questions in class. In my major classes, I love how my professors make us think about a situation, real world stuff. I don't have any problems asking my teachers questions in class. I stop by their offices if I can't get them right after class. It helps me to understand the material much better if I can meet with them one-on-one. It's cool that they make time for you. It has made a huge difference for me.

Sabrina also made similar statements about the professors in her department. She noted that:

> They are very good teachers who care about how you are doing in all of your classes not just their class. I meet with my social work professor once a week just to make sure I am understanding the material. She and I look forward to those meetings. We talk about the material and how it relates to everyday living. She makes it seem so simple once we discussed it in her office. She does a great job in class but I really like the attention I get

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from going to her office. Most times there is a line outside her office because a lot of

them know she is willing to help, so they go see her. She is cool about us coming to her

after class and in her office. You know, a lot of people don't want to ask questions in

class so they wait to ask her one-on-one.

Diane also noted that "some of my others teachers, not in my department, are also willing to help

you outside of class."

Hank learned about interacting with faculty members from his peers in the classes he was

enrolled in. During his high school days, he noted that "I really didn't talk to my teachers. I just

did my work and turned it in." However, this changed as he began to notice that his friends were

spending time outside of class with their professors. He wondered why they were doing this

activity. He stated:

I would go hang out with my friends during the day and they would say, "I have to go see

my professor." I would say, "Go see them for what?" Finally, during my fifth semester,

a friend and I took the same class. He would go and see the professor after class during

office hours. We would study together and he tell me things that I didn't have written in

my notes. He said that he would get these from talking to the teacher. So I said I may

have to try this out. Man, it was like a new world to me. As I began talking to my

teachers, they began to remember who I was and they would be disappointed if I did not

come to see them about our class discussions. Best thing I ever did since being here.

According to Tammy, she has always been an individual who took advantage of engaging

faculty in and out of the classroom. She posited:

I talked to my teachers, all the time. Always have and always will. You learn so much

out of the classroom if you develop a relationship. My mom taught me that. It has

worked for me. The teachers here look forward to you visiting them. I think it makes

them feel good to have us come to them for answers about what they are teaching. It

makes it a whole lot easier for me when I am studying if I have gone to the teacher and

asked for an explanation of something I didn't understand.

Boss also made a similar reference:

Man, I like talking to my teachers. They like talking to me too. If I have any questions

about my school work, I just go to their office. They sit down with me and explain it to

me. It reinforces what they did in the classroom. At first, I was scared to ask questions

during class, but now since I go to their offices all the time, I don't have a problem asking

a question during class. No matter if it may seem stupid, I still ask it and they take their

time to answer those questions. I don't think I would be asking those questions if I didn't

go talk to them in their offices. They get to know you better that way.

Joe describes an incident that enticed him to start developing a relationship with a particular

professor outside of his department. Joe stated:

During my sophomore year, a Math teacher accused me of cheating on an exam. She

thought I was looking on my friend's paper. I was not but she accused me. So I had to

go to her office and retake the test. Of course, I did good on it. I was a little pissed off

but after taking the test we started talking about academic goals. She gave me some

damn good advice. I decided to continue going to her office as a mask for getting help

with math but she continued to give great advice on careers besides the math tutoring. So

what started off as a shaky relationship turned into a good one. I still go to her for

advice and she has never ever turned me down. I recommend her to all of my

friends. She's a cool lady.

Social Setting

The majority of the students participating in this study have a social relationship with faculty members within their academic departments. Each of them described their relationship in terms of more than just a student-faculty relationship. They view the faculty member as a mentor to them. Joe describes his relationship with his engineering professor in this manner:

I painted this guy's house who teaches at Sims State University. He lived two hours from Sims State University. He was the one who persuaded me to come here. I did not know what a HBCU was. He and his family were very welcoming to me. Probably the most welcomed I ever felt by any black people. I would ride to school with him each day. He would drive in the morning and I would drive at night.

Joe also described his relationship with other faculty members in the engineering department:

The faculty in the engineering department treats me with the upmost respect. I can have coffee and bullshit with the Dean or the Associate Dean or the Chair of my department. I mean really. I can hang out with any of them. I mean there are times when I had the Chair came to my house and ate catfish with me, you know. Once I was painting a lady's house about two doors down from where my Chair lived. He was having a get together at his house. I went over there and ate food with them while my varnish was drying. So I am welcomed amongst the faculty here at Sims. I have not met any computer engineering faculty that does not like me.

Diane also has found a professor at Sims State University that has taken an interest in her success at the institution. She visits this professor's office on a daily basis and confides her feelings to this professor on any issue that may be distracting her from studying. She said:

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Professor Jackson has helped me so much since I've been here. My boyfriend goes to school here and sometimes we argue and fight but I can always talk to her about my problems. I'm not sure what I would do without her. She also helps me understand the lay of the land here. Where to go and where not to go. She is truly like a mother-figure to me. We often chit-chat. Actually, I love her.

Boss sees faculty members interacting with students socially all the time. He states:

I play basketball every day in the rec. center. I see professors playing with the students all the time. I can shoot pretty good and this professor always picks me on his team. We have become pretty cool. Every time he sees me, he asks me, "How is my jump shot?" We have had lunch a few times, he paid. He can play for an old man. I think he is forty or so. I like him because he always passes me the ball. I see other students hanging out with teachers. Sometimes I think the teachers are dating the students. I don't know. It could just be in my mind.

Participants expressed how important interacting with faculty socially helped them to continuing be enrolled at Sims State University. The participants felt that an engaging faculty made campus life extremely gratifying as expressed by Tammy. She stated:

Although I don't think we are equals, the faculty here makes you think you are. They don't have an attitude like they are better than us. They treat us as adults inside and outside of the classroom. They buy us drinks at the clubs if we are old enough. They know if we are because they have excess to our personal stuff. I see many professors eating lunch with students like it is a mentoring session. I guess, probably at least once a week, I may be eating with one of the faculty members from the Education department. That's pretty cool to me. Makes me wonder is it like that everywhere.

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Jonah stated that his behavior has been influence by how faculty interact with students on the campus socially. As a result, Jonah's decision was influenced by a particular faculty member. Jonah said:

> I wanted to be an example to my brothers so I wanted a role model. I wanted to be everything my father was not. I wanted positive examples of how men should be like. Dr. Johnson provided that mentoring to me that I was looking for. He showed me how to be a man, take responsibility for my actions and how to correct my mistakes once they were made. He influenced me. He changed my life. We would go bowling together. Bowling, I had never bowled in my life. He tried to show me the finer things in life. We talked about how to treat girls. He was very honest with me. He talked about how he used drugs in his younger days. He told me not to use them. All of the issues that I was dealing with, he had some form of advice for me. I listened and took to heart what he was saying.

Every participant that I interviewed offered some view on the faculty involvement in their decision to persist at Sims State University. What I found interesting was that these faculty members were from their particular major. Very few of them mentioned faculty outside of their respective majors. Tammy said, "I had a child psychology course with Professor Longhair. I just loved the way she interacted with her students. She really treated me like I was her child. I learned so much from her. She and I developed a wonderful relationship and I take every class she teaches."

Participants felt that departmental faculty mentorship, both academically and socially, was a key factor in their persistence at the institution. They believed that without this student-faculty relationship, they may have felt isolated from an academic standpoint. Participants also

believed that these relationships would be ongoing even after degree completion. The

participants did not feel they would be receiving this type of attention at predominately White

institutions (PWIs).

Quality of Academic Programs

Participants in this study emphasized the importance that faculty involvement had on

their decision to persist. Equally important to participants was the academic programs each

participant was majoring in. The second major theme that emerged from the interpreted "lived

experiences" of the participants was the academic programs of the participants. As I read my

field notes, I realized that this was a very key ingredient for the participants' persistence at Sims

State University. While finances played and do play a major role in persistence, participants

showed much more emotion as the participants discussed the quality of their academic programs.

Joe concluded:

> If it was not for this department, I may not still be here Sims State. In the engineering
>
> department, it is great. The courses are not that hard. The courses require work, some
>
> more than others, but none the less they require some work. Because I love this
>
> department so much, other students have labeled me as the "test key". I got that name
>
> because I would always be the first to finish my engineering exams and as I would bring
>
> my paper to the teacher, I would tell them not to bother having a test key just use my
>
> answers. So students starting calling me "test key". It's a badge of honor.

Tammy also expressed her loyalty and devotion to her academic college. She believed that the

department had the students' best interests at heart and were providing students with relevant

experiences in their chosen academic field. Tammy stated:

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I am being prepared to be a teacher. All of my education professors are making sure that

I am prepared to go into a classroom setting on the first day and succeed. I think that this

is the best department at Sims. I'm not sure how other departments treat students here,

but the education department, I really think they care about us. They want us to be good,

no great teachers.

Diane echoed similar sentiments about her department. She felt that her department, although

not as large as some other departments on the campus, had a sense of togetherness. She felt that

because her department was not as large as others, it provided an opportunity for everyone to

really get to know each other, from the faculty to the students. She stated:

I love my department. We are a close knit group. The teachers know me by name and I

can walk into the office of my department head without an appointment. I'm not sure

you could do that at other schools. Maybe you could, I don't know. I love helping

people and I believe that this degree will help me do that. They are teaching me what I

need to know to be successful.

Boss wants to become an entrepreneur and believes that his degree will afford him that

opportunity. He believes that the business department at Sims State University will equip him

with the necessary tools in order to be a successful businessman. He shared:

I want to own my own business after I graduate. I believe that this business department is

teaching me how to do that. I love my initial business classes and they are what I think I

will need when I decide to start a business. The classes deal with what is happening in

the world right now. How to do things and get things done in the business sense is what

they are teaching me now.

Jonah wants to own his own facility to help people and he believes this academic program will help him reach that goal. He believes that the Sociology department is the best in the state and his degree could compare to anyone in America. He stated:

> This program is one of the best in the state. As I said earlier, I wanted to stay close to home and I feel very lucky to be majoring in a field that this school is well known for in my opinion. This degree will prepare me for graduate school and then own my own place one day. The department believes in research and I have done some projects with them. I didn't know if I was ready for that but it worked out well. I like researching. It is like reading something and then seeing it happen right before your eyes. That's interesting to me.

Jonah also stated that one of his professors think he should pursue a terminal degree in his major. He stated, "I'm not sure about that but I may consider it. But I know based on this experience, I could probably do it. Get an education and become a better person is my goal."

Hank praised his department and the program he is associated with at Sims State University. He will attend graduate school upon his graduation from the institution. He has not decided which graduate program to attend but feels prepared for any program based on his experiences at Sims State. He added:

> The time has flown and I'm about to graduate with a piece of paper. This piece of paper will give me what I need to get to the next level. This program has prepared me for almost anything in the field. I have enjoyed being a part of this department. I know I'm ready.

Hank also discussed that it was one of his factors in staying at Sims State. He stated, "So I decide to stay, year after year, moving through trying to finish this degree and eager to see what I

will become." He stated that the Psychology department has played a major role in his persistence.

Lack of Racism from Faculty, Staff, and Peers

The third theme that emerged from the narrative analyses was lack of racism from faculty, staff, and peers. When participants were asked about their feelings toward their courses, interactions with faculty, and their friendships on campus, each participant mentioned the word racism. Each participant made a point to emphasize the fact that they didn't see any blatant racism on their campus. Participants did not feel any hatred toward them by being the minority on a majority campus. Many felt the same way about Sims State University's faculty and staff. The participants felt that faculty and staff treated them just like any other student on the campus. Participants did not feel like other African American students treated them disrespectful or were racist towards them.

Faculty and Staff

Most participants did not feel as though faculty treated them differently than African American students. They felt that the professors were fair in grading their work with no indication of bias toward them as being White. Each participant gave examples of how the faculty treated them with respect and dignity regardless of their skin color.

Diane discussed how the faculty did not view her as a white student but as a student. She stated:

> My teachers never mentioned the fact that I am White. They just look at me as another student attending Sims. I do feel uncomfortable sometimes in class but not because of the teacher. Sometimes we have discussions about race but they never make me feel as though I am an expert on being White.

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Boss also concluded that his skin color was not emphasized in the classroom. Boss stated:

> I'm just another student to these guys. I think they care about me as a student but not
> because I am a White student. I think it is different for me as a White person. I think
> African Americans are much more tolerant than other races. I think they can cope with
> various situations. As a White person, I can only imagine how it is for African
> Americans to be the only one in a class of Whites. I am thankful for the faculty here
> because it really has not been an issue from a teacher's perspective.

Tammy felt that faculty and staff members at Sims State University were not racist and really
cared about the entire student body, not just African American students. She concluded:

> I have not come across any faculty or staff that has been prejudice toward me or any
> other White student I know. Look, I'm not saying it is not occurring, but it has not
> happen to me or any of my friends. They are very reassuring with me. They are
> always asking me if everything is okay. Do I need anything? I don't think people who
> are racist would be asking you stuff like that. Students, on the other hand, sometimes
> it's undercover.

Joe was a bit more forceful in terms of discussing racism among faculty and staff members. He
concluded:

> Look, racism is everywhere. However, I don't see it as blatant here. If you know how to
> do deal with people and treat them respectfully, they will treat you well too. My teachers
> here have been very respectful of me as a person, not a White person, as a person. Some
> students may feel like they are being discriminated against, not me. I have no problems
> here at Sims. I don't think we have faculty members failing students because they are
> White. Any student fails, in my opinion, because of a lack of effort or understanding.

Jonah described one incident in which he felt as though a faculty member may have discriminated against him. Once he concluded the story, he decided it probably was not discrimination but a misunderstanding. He stated:

I had a friend, Black friend and we took the same course together. We would study together and everything. Well, one day we took a test in this class. I'm not proud of this, but my friend looked on my paper for the answers to the test. We had the exact same score on the test with the exact same answers being wrong. I think my friend cheated but he said he didn't. Well the professor accused me of cheating and not my friend. I was pissed. Well, after meeting with the professor, I concluded that because my friend had scored higher on the previous tests than I did, a lot higher, the professor assumed that I had cheated. Now as I look back at this, I don't think color really mattered in this. If I was Black, he probably would have accused me as well.

Overall, participants believed that faculty and staff members were not biased toward them because of their race. They believed that the faculty and staff had their best interest at heart and wanted to see each of them succeed at the institution. The participants were not shy to voice their satisfaction with the way they were treated by the faculty and staff at Sims State University.

Peers (African American students)

Some participants did feel that African Americans would treat them differently because of their color but soon found out that these students were curious to know why they chose to attend Sims State University. Participants did have to answer questions from other students about their purpose for being at Sims State University. Tammy stated, "When I first arrived at Sims, black students would ask me which sport I played? They thought I was an athlete. Do I look like an athlete?"

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Some participants did feel that some Black students resented them because of the diversity scholarships. Diane explained:

Most Black students are like, "why did you come to Sims State, why did you come to an HBCU", but they say it in a different way. A lot of people think that I am scholarship, a full scholarship to come here because I am white. I am only on a diversity scholarship which just covers tuition, so I have to come up all the other fees all by myself. They don't understand that and like that kind of like makes me mad, whatever. So I have to explain to them that the diversity scholarship only covers some of the fees. Once I tell them that then they understand.

Other participants say that the Black students treat them just as students, not White students. Boss stated:

The black students treat me just like I'm black. Of course they know that I'm not but they don't treat me any differently than they would their black friends. They use the "N" word around me like its second nature to them. Of course, I don't have the courage to

use   it but I don't think it would matter to them if I used it in the same way they are using it. Maybe it would matter, so I don't chance it. They treat me like I was one of them.

Diane echoed similar sentiments. She said:

All of my friends are Black. I like dating Black guys so that is one of the reasons I decided to attend a HBCU. My Black girlfriend introduced me to the guy that I am dating now. Of course, some Black girls don't like Black guys dating White girls. I sometimes get a few stares from some of the Black girls when they see me with Black guys. But now that I have a boyfriend, most of them don't even look at me like that anymore. They be like, more power to you girl.

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Tammy has enjoyed her time at Sims State University because of the way other students have treated her. She stated:

> With me being the minority, I guess I kind of standout but the students treat me very kind. I have not made very many close friends but I do have some Black students that I hang out with from time to time. I have a White boyfriend but the Black guys always trying to talk to me. It's fun. Before I came here, I had never had a Black guy wanting to talk to me. It's exciting. But I am faithful to my boyfriend. He doesn't have to worry.

Jonah's eyes lights up when he speaks of how he is treated by the other students on campus. He believes that this would not be happening to him if he was attending a predominately White institution. Jonah responded:

> I love being on this campus. The girls outnumber the boys almost 4 to 1. The girls love me. Is it because I'm White? Maybe, but I don't care. Not having many White girls to choose from on this campus, I started dating Black girls. I love it. As a matter of fact, I have a date tonight with a Black girl. I'm looking forward to it because I have been trying to get a date with this one for a while. The guys don't seem to get mad at me when I go out with Black girls. Most of the time, we go out in groups. It be like 4 or 5 couples hanging out together. I feel very comfortable around my peeps.

Joe, on the other hand, is very serious about his relationships he has developed on the Sims State University. He married a young lady from Africa that he met at Sims State University. According to Joe, his friends at Sims State introduced his wife to him after a class the two of them were in together. Joe stated:

> My wife and I were in the same class and I had noticed her on the very first day. It took one of my friends to ask her what she thought about me before I had the courage to

say something to her. We started dating soon after officially meeting and the rest is history. These have been the best days of my life attending this institution. If students were racist, I don't think I would be able to say that. Have I been looked at funny? Of course, but that doesn't mean the person is a racist. I am sure Black students get funny looks all the time if they were only 2 to 5 percent of the population at a school. No big deal to me.

Hank did not have any specific incidents of racism, but he did define situations of exclusion from other African American students. He mentioned that sometimes when he approaches his African American friends, he believes the subject matter changes when he shows up. He stated:

I don't feel like I've seen racism at this school, but sometimes I feel excluded from the conversation. Sometimes, when I walk into the dorm room, my friends seem to change the subject. It makes me wonder if they were talking about me or a subject that they did not want to discuss in front of me. But other than that, all is well. It seems as though sometimes I feel like an outsider which I probably am. But overall, I am pretty comfortable on this campus.

Overall, participants felt that African American students had been fair with them and had not labeled them as the "minority students". Most participants felt safe and comfortable around their peers and were actively involved in developing relationships with those students.

Involvement in Campus Activities and Organizations

The process of becoming socially integrated into the fabric of the university has been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process (Tinto, 1993). Terenzini and Wright (1987) suggest that the level of social integration during a given year of study is part of a cumulative experience that continues to build throughout one's college experience. The

participants interviewed engaged in a variety campus activities and organizations. These

activities, included, but were not limited to, academic organizations, social organizations, and

social events on campus.

Academic Organizations

A few of the participants were members of academic organizations representing various

disciplines at Sims State University. Each participant talked about how these organizations were

important to their involvement on campus and interacting with other students. Joe belonged to

two academic organizations related to his major. Joe stated:

> I am a member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE). It's pretty
>
> much composed of Electrical Engineers, Electrical Technicians. It is both professional
>
> and academic. We have monthly meetings throughout the state. We go to different parts
>
> of the state and we might have dinner with another school, like Mississippi State and
>
> talked about their robotics or something. IEEE is a national organization and we have a
>
> chapter here at Sims State. We have national and regional meetings. We put together
>
> some papers and we hope to get an acceptance for a journal publication. If so, we will
>
> have our name out there and maybe we will be able to present at a regional conference.
>
> Being a part of an organization like this allows us to get our name out there. I was the
>
> President for this organization last year.

Joe also belongs to the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) which is similar to Institute

of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE). He stated:

> NSBE is pretty much the same thing as IEEE except for it being a HBCU, we pretty
>
> much target the development of Blacks engineers. So, it not saying that you have to be
>
> Black to be a part of the organization, but the goal is to improve the education among

Blacks. So we do like outreach programs for high school students and discussed

engineering as a possible field of study. We have done ACT prep classes to prepare

people for that. We also help our fellow students prepare for the GRE so we have study

sessions. I joined this organization because of the many opportunities that are offered

to students such as internships. This organization helps students be successful.

Joe also mentioned some other reasons for joining these organizations. He stated:

These organizations give me a chance to give back to the community. I can help my

fellow students. This helps me out. I was the biggest volunteer for a local high school

through this organization and help them develop a robot. I also tried to mentor these

students. I tell them that there is much more to life than selling drugs. I know, I been to

jail, I been on probation for two years. I know the street life. I tell them that they can be

anything they want to be. I think I am a good example, but if I was Black I think I could

reach them better.

Jonah and Hank are both a part of the Psychology and Sociology Club at Sims State University.

Each talked about the role that the club has played in meeting other students with similar

interests. Jonah stated:

I have been a member of the Psychology and Sociology Club since I was a freshman. I

have met so many other students with the same interest as I have. It was the first one I

became a part of early on. I have never held any positions in the club but I go to the

events such as our monthly meetings and social gatherings each semester. This will look

great on my resume. But it is a great organization. We do community service throughout

the city in helping low-income residents. I would recommend to any student that they

should get into an organization related to their major. It sure has helped me.

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Hank echoed same of the same sentiments that Jonah made. Hank responded:

> I like the people in my club. They are weird just like me. We talk about new things in
> our major. We also socialize with each other. We have an annual banquet where we give
> awards to students who write good papers and do a ton of community service. I won an
> award last year for my community service work. It's a good club for people with those
> majors to be a part of.

Not all of the participants were a part of an academic organization. Tammy said that although she was not officially a member of an academic organization, she felt like she did a ton of community service on her own by tutoring students at various elementary schools.

Social Organizations

The majority of the participants interviewed for the study were members of some social organization on campus. Those organizations ranged from Black Greek letter fraternities and sororities to campus organizations such as Student Government Association (SGA). Each participant described their role in the organization and the benefits associated with being a part of those organizations.

Diane is a part of a campus organization named after the mascot of the university. She said it was the first organization she sought membership into during her first semester. She continues to be a part of this organization. She stated:

> I am a member of the PRIDE Connection which is the largest organization on campus.
> We got 104 people to join this past semester. PRIDE stands for Positive Recruiting
> Individuals Deemed for Excellence. We basically do a ton of volunteer work around the
> community. Our organization is well known so a lot of people request us for things that
> they need like the Rickey Smiley concert we just had a couple weeks ago at our school.

We were requested to work the VIP section at the concert. So we get to do stuff like that and we get to meet him afterward and all that. We also handled crowd control at the Deuce McAllister's event at Walmart. We got to meet him afterward. We also give campus tours for students who may want to come to Sims State. It's a great organization.

Jonah mentioned that he was a part of the Student Government Association (SGA) during his sophomore year but did not get re-elected. He said that it was fun and he met a lot of students from other disciplines. He responded:

SGA was a very interesting organization. I learned so much about Sims State by being a senator from my college. I got to interact with department heads and deans because they wanted me to try and get money for the college. I felt very important. I'm not big on politics but I saw politics at its best. Promises were made by the SGA President about what he was going to do for students. Of course, none of his promises came true. So, I guess it's similar to real politicians. I guess I didn't do a good enough job for my college because I was gone the next year. But it was a great experience.

Tammy mentioned that one year she was a part of the Homecoming committee. She stated:

I was on the Homecoming committee made up of staff and students to discuss the upcoming homecoming events. I really liked being a part of that group. We came up with a theme which was "No Place Like Home". It was so much fun. I dressed up like Dorothy from the "Wizard of Oz" for the homecoming parade. My picture, along with the Scarecrow, Tiger, and Tin Man made the cover of the DSL (Division of Student Life) magazine. People still talk about that homecoming week and all the great activities that we had planned for the week. I'm looking forward to serving on that committee again if possible.

Boss is the treasurer of the Sophomore Class Council at Sims State University. He could not believe he was elected to the position. He decided to run for the position because he wanted to become involved with other members of his class. He pointed out that he thinks it is a very important position within in class. He stated:

> Being elected as Treasurer was very important to me. It really made me feel as though I belonged. We are responsible for providing programming for our class and the campus as a whole. We have had dances to raise money and picnics for us to get together and fellowship. It is a huge responsible to oversee the finances of this group because people look forward to our events and I don't want to mess up the money. So, I make sure we pump up our fundraisers so we have plenty money to have good events for our class. Everybody likes free food, so we will have a picnic this spring semester for our class. Hopefully, I will be elected for the Junior Class as well. We will see if it happens.

Only one participant interviewed was a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization. Hank is a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. He has recently "crossed over" into Greek Life. Hank believes that his fraternity brothers have become a huge part of his inner circle. He believes that fraternity life brings people from different walks of life together to serve humanity. He believes being a part of this organization accomplishes this task. He stated:

> Phi Beta Sigma is a great fraternity. Jerry Rice is my brother. Well known people have joined this organization. We believe in serving the community and helping out our fellow brothers. Some people ask me why did I pledge Sigma? I just tell them it just felt right to me. I really liked the guys who were Sigmas here at Sims. It was an easy transition for me because I had friends who are Sigmas.

He also engages in one of the well known traditions of Black Greek Letter Organizations: "stepping". According to Fine (2003), stepping is a form of percussive dance in which the participant's entire body is used as an instrument to produce complex rhythms and sounds through a mixture of footsteps, spoken word, and hand claps. Ross (2001) states that the tradition of African American stepping is rooted within the competition schoolyard song and dance rituals practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities, beginning in the 1900s. Hank describes his love for stepping:

To me stepping is a public representation of the Greek organization. Stepping is an expression of what a person feels and a way of showcasing your pride for your fraternity. It serves as fun and a positive outlet that allows us to show everyone our moves. I have a passion for stepping and I love to entertain people. I get crazy applause for being the White guy stepping. It is wild. It is fun and something different to do.

Other participants interviewed mentioned that they have a desire to join a fraternity or sorority but just have not done it yet. Both female participants and one male participant expressed an interest in joining one of these groups in the very near future. Tammy stated:

I have noticed these sororities on campus. They seem to be doing a lot of good on our campus. They are at every event and most times they are leading or in charge of the event. I like the AKAs. I like the colors pink and green. Now, I would not just join because I like the colors but I like most of the girls in that group. One of my girlfriends just "crossed over" with the AKAs. Now she trying to get me to join. I think it costs a good but of money but I may use some of my student loan money to pay for it. Those girls seem like they have their act together and I hear they look out for each other even after they leave school. You know, the networking thing.

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Diane expressed an interest in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She responded:

> I like the Deltas. We have so many on our campus. I believe last semester they had over
>
> 30 girls "cross". That's a lot of people at one time. I don't know if I will do it but I
>
> really want to. I see them doing community service on weekends and I think I would fit
>
> in real nice with them.

Joe also expressed an interest in maybe joining Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

> A good friend of mine has been trying to get me to "pledge" with him to be in Alpha Phi
>
> Alpha. If I decide to "pledge", it will be Alpha because I think Alpha is a good chapter.
>
> I have a lot of friends that I respect that are in that organization. I think of all the
>
> fraternities, those guys are more intellectual and professional than the other ones.

Social events

The social life on the campus of Sims State University is alive and well. According to the participants, many student organizations and the university sponsor events for the student body. These events range from educational activities, sporting events, Greek shows, seminars, and parties. Each participant discussed which events resonated with them. Some participants took advantage of all the events taking place on the campus.

Joe was very active in attending a majority of the events taking place at Sims State. He said he tried to go to as many events as possible because most of his friends were going. He stated:

> I always looked at the calendar of events that we used to get at the beginning of the
>
> semester. I would go to plays. You know, we have an acting department on campus
>
> that produces plays and such. I go to that stuff. One time, I won tickets to a comedy
>
> show we had for homecoming that BET (Black Entertainment Television) put on. I can't

lie though. I have only been to one football game since I have been here. I went to the

championship game. I went because my best friend said I had to go. So I went with him.

Joe also goes to the Greek shows and parties that occur on campus.

I like to party. I like balance. I study and get my work done but I need a release. I go to

the stepshows and the parties because I love to have fun. I rarely go to off campus parties

at the local clubs here because I am not as comfortable. Every Friday there is a DJ that

sits in the plaza and plays music and stuff. People just hang out and listen to music. You

got your fraternities and sororities that do their steps and whatnot. So I would say the

campus stays active for stuff like that and I don't want to miss any of it.

Diane enjoys attending sporting events. She really enjoys attending the home football games on

the campus.

I am friends with a lot of the football players at Sims. So I like going to watch them play.

My boyfriend plays football, so of course I have to go and watch him. But the football

games are so much more than just the game. We tailgate before the game. It is amazing

how many other people come to campus with their RVs on Friday and start cooking. I

don't have to go to the cafeteria on football weekends because there is so much food out

there. We always wait on halftime because we want to see our band and the other team's

band. They be going at it. Most times students leave after the halftime after the bands

finish. I stay, again, because of my boyfriend.

Jonah also enjoys other social events such as parties and Greek shows.

The step shows are my favorites. I like watching the groups put on their shows. It is

really interesting. The crowds are always big for that event. I have been to step shows at

other schools and I think we have the best in the state. Then after the step show is the

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"after parties". These are the best parties of the year. We get students from other schools

to come here and party with us. My friends and I don't miss any of these types of parties.

The regular parties are pretty cool too. Not just as much fun as the parties after the

step show.

Tammy also seems to have engaged in numerous social events that have taken place on the

campus.

There is a lot going on all the time like all kinds of events. Sometimes student

organizations slip cards under your door informing you of upcoming events like parties

and stuff. I've gone to a few parties since I've been here and really have enjoyed them.

Tammy also mentioned a gathering place for the events that take place at Sims.

There are a lot of events at the Plaza. It is like the meeting place for students. I have

been to several events there like step shows, comedy shows. One of the best shows that I

went to there was a gospel concert. It was different for me. I was raised Catholic and I

had never been to a gospel concert or a Black church. The concert was awesome. Since

that time, I have gone to several Black churches with my friends and most of the

churches here have good choirs.

Hank enjoys the social life and is actively involved socially on the campus, mostly through

activities with his fraternity brothers.

We enjoy doing things together. We spend a lot of time together. Practicing for step

shows and all so, we just go out together as well. We go to parties as a group. This

shows the brotherhood that we have for each other by hanging out. Most people when

they see us know that the rest of us are not too far away. We have gained respect from

the students because they always see us together. We attend football games and sit in the

same section of the stadium. Most Greek organizations do this as a sign of unity among

the members. There are several activities each week, from parties to plays that should

keep someone active if they want to be active. I have no problem with the social life

here.

Boss on the other hand enjoys playing sports through the Intramurals Department at Sims State

University. He has not yet made the varsity men's basketball team yet, so he decided to join up

with some of his friends to form an intramural team.

I like the intramurals here. We play sports. That's another thing I enjoy over here, the

intramurals. That's another socializing way. When you can get out, even though you are

not playing for the school, it is still somewhere to keep you involved with something you

enjoy doing. Now, although I enjoy playing basketball, I hate to lose. Our team is

horrible. That's why they say never choose your friends for your team. These guys are

bad. We only won one game last year. I think I will play with a different team this year

if I can. I want to win some games. But, it's all in fun. The games be packed. A lot of

people come to these games.

Affordability

One theme that may not be connected to the academic or social integration phenomena

being studied but rang loud throughout the interviews was the affordability of enrolling at this

particular HBCU. Participants wanted to tell me about their pursuit of a higher education degree

at an affordable price. For example, Boss responded, "I was just trying to find a school that I

could afford to go to without going into too much debt. Sims State University offered me the

best opportunity to do that. My ultimate goal is to get an athletic scholarship but I am on a

diversity scholarship which pays for my tuition. It's all good and I'm making it."

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Diane stated:

> I was just trying to find a school that I could afford to go to without going into too much
> debt. Sims State offered me the best opportunity to do that. My parents never paid
> anything for me. I supported myself like moneywise since I was 16. HBCUs are cheaper
> than the white schools. They really, really are. I know it may sound horrible but it is
> true. I have friends who go to white schools. Their schools cost so much more money
> than here. They pay $30,000 per year. I can't afford that.

Scholarships played a major role in these participants decision to attend and persist at

Sims State University. The institution offers undergraduate diversity scholarships to Caucasians.

According to the diversity scholarship application, "this scholarship is provided to foster and

achieve racial diversity in the undergraduate student population at Sims State University. The

scholarship is funded by an endowed trust fund by the state through it s Board of Trustees for the

Institutions of Higher Learning. These scholarships were very important to Joe and Tammy. Joe

responded, "I went with the professor to meet with the Associate Dean and after talking to him,

he said that he would give me a half scholarship for the ACT score that I got. I also applied for

the diversity scholarship and received money for that. Tammy also felt the same way about the

role scholarships played in her decision to matriculate and continue to persist at Sims State

University. She stated, "I love not having to pay for school. I have student loans but not because

I need them. I just have them because people say I can get money to live off of. Many of my

black friends here need that money to pay for school. Not me. I get scholarships that pay for my

tuition. I'm glad for those scholarships." While the participants that I interviewed are all

receiving some form of aid, not all of them have full scholarships that pay for room and board.

Diane explained, "The black students think that because I am white everything is paid. I have to

tell them that's not the case." Boss echoed the same sentiments, "I still receive a bill from Sims State University for food and dorm room. That's why I am hoping to get that athletic scholarship so I won't receive any bills from them." The participants that I interviewed are very gracious that Sims State University awards these types of scholarships that would not be available to them at PWIs.

Summary

Presented in this chapter are the findings from this study that examined the factors that influences White undergraduate students to persist at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The data from this study was gathered from participant interviews. The findings were presented in narrative form to provide the reader an opportunity to understand the "lived experiences" of the participants interviewed.

The size of the sample consisted of 6 White undergraduate students currently enrolled at a HBCU. The students sampled were sophomore level or higher. Table 1 supplied a demographic profile of the participants.

The participants provided information related their academic and social integration into the institution and their decision to persist at that institution. Many participants chose to persist at this particular HBCU for five main reasons: (1) influences on relationships with departmental faculty, (2) quality of academic programs, (3) lack of racism from faculty, staff, and peers, (4) involvement in campus activities and organizations, and (5) affordability. The affordability theme does not pertain to the research questions but was echoed throughout the interviews by all participants; therefore, I included it as an emerging theme.

This chapter also examined those emerging themes mentioned above. Experiences of the participants aided in identifying these themes. Participants discussed, in detail, their "lived

experiences" on that particular HBCU campus. Participants offered vital information to assist me in answering the research question. Several factors led to the persistence of White undergraduate students at this particular HBCU. Moreover, the participants provided information to conclude that those students who become integrated into the institution, both academically and socially, are more likely to persist.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study explored the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs from the students' perspectives.

Summary of findings

Six White undergraduate students participated in individual interviews
One seemed shy, but that changed quickly
One was quite eager to tell his story of where he was and where he is
One was a star in his mind who dreamed of shooting jumpers
One liked dating black guys, so where should I go but a black college
One liked "stepping" with his fraternity brothers
One wanted to be an example to his brothers

I just wanted to get away from home
Black school, What is a HBCU?
A school that I can go to much cheaper than most
Get an education and become a better person
I have always wanted to help children who are less fortunate
I'm just one of them, nothing special
I just want my brothers to know how to be a man

Talk to my professors, who me
Best thing I ever did since being here
The faculty and staff show me respect
I love the friendship with them all
I like my professors, we often chit-chat
Drink coffee, eat catfish, and bullshit
Not at a white school, I don't think

The engineering department is great
They call me the "test key" but it's cool
We are a close knit group in my department
They knew me by my name
I'm doing research with some professors
It's like reading something and then seeing it happen right before your eyes
I'm about to graduate with a piece of paper

Being the minority is different for me
People ask, are you an athlete, Do I look like an athlete?
My preference is dating black guys, so now you see
Some people look at me funny now and then

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It's not so bad because I can see
Look, racism is everywhere, I know it exists
But it seems to stay away from us all

Being a part of organization is great
These organizations give me a chance to give back
It was an easy transition for me to "cross over" into Greek life
I get crazy applause for being the White guy "stepping"
There is unity among the members
I have no problem with the social life here

I was just trying to find a school that I could afford
HBCUs are cheaper than White schools
My friend pays $30,000 year. I can't afford that
I have a diversity scholarship. I love not having to pay for school
I went to my professor looking for a scholarship
I have student loans but not because I need them.
I just have them because people say I can get money to live off

So I decide to stay, year after year
Moving through trying to finish this degree
Eager to see what I will become
Soon I will be a graduate finally
And yes I did it at a HBCU
No place like home

In this chapter, the findings are discussed as they relate to previous studies. The results of this study support prior research, as is discussed in this chapter. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the factors that participants identified as being vital in their reason for persisting at the institution. The second section provides implications for college administrators and policy makers. The third section discusses recommendations for future research and conclusion.

Overview of Study

White students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) find themselves in a setting in which they are no longer members of the majority population. As "temporary" minorities, these students must become integrated into the HBCU environment in order to

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succeed. Tinto (1993) posits that an individual's own perceptions of their social and academic integration are the predominant influences on their decision to stay or leave higher education. Hence, a focus of this study was to gain an understanding into the factors that influenced White students to persist at a HBCU. Particularly, this study wanted to gain an insight into the students' perceptions of how they integrated themselves, both academically and socially into the fabric of the university.

Previous research (Pascarella, et al. 1987; Standley, 1978; Willie, 1981) has assessed White students attitudes relative to their college experience at HBCUs.   Hall and Closson (2005) studied White graduate students' social adjustment at a historically Black university. Their findings concluded that White students as minorities have many of the same concerns as African American students have as they matriculate to predominately White institutions (PWIs). Nettles (1988) posited that white students on Black campuses reported higher ratings on feelings of discrimination than Whites on White campuses. Because there was very little empirical research on White undergraduate students' persistence at HBCUs, it was necessary to explore this phenomenon from the students' perspectives.

This research study explored the factors that influence the persistence rates of White students attending HBCUs. The primary research question guiding the study was: What factors influence White undergraduate students to persist at HBCUs? The secondary research questions were as follows:

1. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their academic integration into the institution?

2. How do White undergraduate students at a HBCU describe their social integration into the institution?

Six participants from one regional HBCU (Sims State University) were interviewed to gain an awareness of their individual views on being integrated into the university. All of the participants were: a) White (Anglo-Saxon) descent and b) a full-time student at a sophomore or higher academic standing. After carefully analyzing the participants' responses, positive themes emerged relative to what influenced their decision to persist from a academic and social integration aspect. The positive themes included: influences on relationships with faculty, quality of academic programs, lack of racism from faculty, staff, and peers, and involvement in campus activities and organizations. A fifth theme emerged as the participants echoed the cost of attending a HBCU was extremely affordable compared to other institutions. I came to the conclusion that White students that matriculate to HBCUs are no different than other minorities placed in the similar situations. The factors that led to their persistence are similar to those of African American students matriculating to predominately White institutions (PWIs). Therefore, many studies (Astin, 1990; D'Augelli & Harshberger, 1993; Hart, 1984) pertaining to persistence rates of African American students at PWIs can be linked to White students persistence at HBCUs.

Influences on Relationships with Departmental Faculty

Based on the information participants shared with me during the in-depth interviews, participants perceived their relationships with departmental faculty to be a major influence on their decision to persist at the institution. According to Tinto (1993), interaction with the faculty not only increases social integration and therefore institutional commitment but also increases the individual's academic integration. Participants believe that at least one or more faculty members directly influenced their decision based on the participant's relationship with that

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faculty member. They seemed very comfortable to speak openly about their relationship with the faculty member, both academically and socially.

Academic setting

On the college campus, faculty members are often role models. The participants felt that the faculty at this institution were definitely role models and thus relationships developed between the entities. Participants were satisfied with the amount of attention they received from faculty members. These findings correlate with Pascarella and Terenzini's (1979) conclusion that the interaction between faculty and students are a major factor in the ability of students to persist in college while also increasing their level of satisfaction. A study by Woodside, Wong, and Wiest (1999) suggests that positive student-faculty interactions are significantly linked to students' academically-related self-concept. Many of the participants reported that their professors were accessible to them after class to discuss any academic questions relating to the course being taught. The participants gave numerous examples to validate their perceptions. One participant told a story about visiting the professor's office to discuss academics only after his friends were doing so. The participant expressed that after he decided to visit the professor outside of class, he began to really grasp the material the professor was teaching.

Inasmuch as most of these White students were able to create and develop strong bonds with faculty members within their respective academic departments, they stated that those bonds were not as strong with faculty members outside of their academic departments. Several studies (Allen, 1995; Pascarella & Terezini, 1991; Woodside, Wong, & Fiest, 1999) suggest that developing bonds with teachers have proven to impact classroom performance, academic success, and retention. All of the participants in the study reported that they were able to develop these relationships with faculty if they so desired. Moreover, participants in this study

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described that faculty members were very engaging in the classroom and expected students to visit them during office hours for clarification of any material presented in the classroom. Participants described faculty in terms that exceeded supportive and bordered on nurturing. For example, one participant said, "They are very good teachers who care about how you are doing in all of your classes not just their class." In summary, participants had mostly positive comments regarding the faculty at this HBCU which supported the findings of a study (Hall & Closson, 2005) which explored the views and experiences of White graduate students social adjustment in attending a HBCU.

Social Setting

Informal contact between students and faculty members has been found to increase the persistence of the student (Astin, 1982). Other studies (Pascarella & Terenzina, 1991, Milem & Berger, 1997; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000;; Siedman, 2005) have concluded that informal student-faculty interaction has an important and positive relationship to student persistence. Participants in this study mentioned relationships that they developed and maintained with faculty members increased their desire to persist at this institution. Many of the participants had relationships with faculty members outside of the classroom. One participant had a very close relationship with his professor. For instance, the participant said, "I would ride to school with him each day. He would drive in the morning and I would drive at night." Participants mentioned that they would regularly meet faculty around the campus and engage in social activities such as drinking coffee, having lunch, or even playing sports with faculty members. Another participant commented on their social relationship with a faculty member, "My boyfriend goes to school here and sometimes we argue and fight but I can always talk to her about my problems. I don't know what I would do without her."

Participants in this study reported that factors that enhanced informal social contact between students and faculty members are: 1) instructors being accessible outside of class, 2) instructors being sincere in the well-being of students, 3) instructors being engaged and actively involved in student life, and 4) instructors advising student organizations. Participants who developed informal relationships with faculty members felt confident about themselves. These feelings support an earlier study that links informal relationships with faculty members stating that students develop increased feelings of affirmation, confidence, and self-worth (Kuh, 1995).

The findings of this study indicate that White undergraduate students believe that student-faculty interaction is paramount in their decision to persist at the institution. They believe that it is an essential ingredient for their success and comfort level at the institution. This study concludes that after establishing effective relationships with faculty members, the decision to persist for White students is much easier than without these relationships.

Quality of Academic Programs

Participants equated the quality of academic programs on their perceived belief that their particular program suited their aspirations for career development. This belief was perpetuated by the close relationships each participant shared with certain faculty members. This supports a study (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991) that revealed that faculty-student relations are strong predictors of satisfaction both academically and socially, leading to persistence at both black and white campuses. The authors of that study contrasted African American students' academic performance at HBCUs and PWIs. "While black students on black campuses have strong social support systems with peers, it seems as though they turn to their professors for social support on white campuses" (p. 156). Several participants commented on the loyalty to their particular academic program. Only one participant commented on their academic performance based on

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grades. The participant said, "I got the name of "test key" because I would always be the first to finish my engineering exams and as I would bring my paper to the teacher, I would tell them not to bother having a test key just use my answers.

Participants believed that they were receiving quality classroom instruction from faculty and they believed this instruction would prepare them for the workforce upon graduation. One participant mentioned the course material as a means of evaluating the quality of their particular program. One participant stated that "I want to own my own business after I graduate. I believe that this business department is teaching me how to do that." This supports a study whose findings determined that the quality classroom instruction may not only influence learning outcomes, but might also play a significant role in student decisions to persist at, or depart from, a particular college or university (Braxton & Lien, 2000). Participants, when asked about their academic grade point averages, did not find that it was important to discuss. Participants did make it clear to me that they all were progressing to degree completion on time. Overall, participants felt very proud about their respective academic departments and programs. They believed that the quality of their academic programs would prepare them for any future endeavors such as admission into prestigious graduate programs or qualified and adequate employment with employers.

Lack of Racism from Faculty, Staff, and Peers

Studies of discrimination and the perception of inequity are not uncommon phenomena as it relates to predominately White institutions and their treatment of black students (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Feagin, 1992; Hazzard, 1988). For example, numerous researchers (Astin, 1990; Chavous, 2001; Davis & Smith, 2004; Sedlacek, 1999) exploring the experiences of African American students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) suggest that African

American students have increased challenge with equity and condescension on these campuses stemming from prejudiced attitudes and behaviors on the part of other students, professors, and university staff. However studies of perceptions of white students on the campuses of historically Black colleges and universities have occurred much less frequently (Elam, 1978; Hall & Closson, 2005, Hazzard, 1988).

One study (Hazzard, 1988) found that over 50 percent of white students surveyed indicated that they have encountered racist attitudes from both faculty and students while attending a HBCU. However, the findings of this study do not support those findings in the Hazzard study. Participants in this study stated they did not feel any racist attitudes were geared toward them specifically. This correlates with the Closson and Henry study (2008) that concluded White students, for the most part, dwelled on the positive cross-racial relationships they experienced. As the researcher, I did not mention the word racism but each participant used that term when asked about their treatment on the campus. As a result of the participants addressing racism, I divided this issue into administrators and students, which is faculty/staff and peers.

Faculty and staff

As stated earlier, many studies deem the amount and quality of students' informal interactions with faculty inside and outside the classroom to be a consistent predictor of student persistence (Allen, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). In these studies, it can be assumed that racism could not play a role in order for these relationships to effective. Participants in this study described faculty and staff as engaging and race was not a factor in their relationship.

Participants did not feel as though faculty members singled them out in class because of their race. One participant noted, "I'm just another student to these guys. I think they care about me as a student but not because I am a White student." Overall, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are best characterized as "nurturing" institutions (Willie, 1991). According to the participants, the faculty member goes way beyond just providing instruction to their students. Participants also noted that professors always remembered their names. Some noted that maybe it was because of their race but it did not make them feel uncomfortable.

Participants also did not feel pressured into answering questions about their race when it arose during classroom discussions. Students of color have reported on experiences with being called on in class to articulate the minority viewpoint (Davis, et al. 2004). However, participants in this study did not express those same viewpoints. Participants felt that faculty members were honest and fair in terms of grading their academic work. These findings echo a study by Sedlacek (1983) in which he stated that minority students need faculty members to provide them with honest and realistic feedback about their performance to be successful academically. The participants believed that the grading practices were fair and accurate as they perceived them. Participants did not feel that racism was not a part of the campus culture at this particular HBCU but the majority of them felt that it was not blatant but rather hidden. However, they felt that the "hidden racism" was not embedded within the faculty ranks but more with their peers.

Peers (African American students)

Participants never really shared a racial experience that they deemed as negative. Most participants expressed that there is not a lot of racism on the campus although they believe that it does exist. One participant stated, "Look, racism is everywhere. However, I don't see it as blatant here." In a qualitative study by Closson and Henry (2008), the findings concluded that

although there were no direct incidents of racism shared by White students, they did express minimal acknowledgement that perhaps racist feelings might have existed towards them. As in the Closson and Henry study, White students expressed the same beliefs in this study; however their beliefs were related to African American students only.

Many of the participants described their experience at a HBCU as different for them because some of the students treated them different. Although a majority of the participants went to majority African American high schools, they deemed this experience different based on the type of student they encountered. Most participants grow up with the individuals they went to high school with. One participant in particular mentioned that sometimes he feels excluded because he is White. He said, "It seems as though sometimes I feel like an outsider." This is similar to what African American students encounter on predominately White institutions (PWIs). African American students experience exclusion and alienation on predominantly white campuses (Allen, 1992; Turner, 1994). Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) detailed some of the negative experiences African Americans have at PWIs. In their study, the African American students felt that White students did not view them as "full human beings with distinctive talents, virtues, interests, and problems" (p. 14). Participants in this study did not have those same feelings as the "temporary minorities" on the campus of this HBCU. Three of the participants were either married to or dating an individual of the opposite race. All of these relationships were established during their time at the institution. Overall, participants did not think African American students have a problem with interracial dating.

Participants developed several different types of relationships with African American students which included study partners, fraternity brothers, members of various organizations, and intimate relationships. According to the participants, these relationships did not develop

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overnight. Participants also mentioned that they realized that they could be treated differently based on having the status of a "temporary minority" but they were pleased that they did not have any significant issues on the campus dealing with their peers.

Involvement in Campus Activities and Organizations

Astin's (1984) concepts of "involvement" and Tinto's (1993) definitions of "integration" are key concepts in a integrated model of college student persistence developed by Milem and Berger (1997). Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the college experience (Astin, 1985). Astin believes that the highly involved student who devotes considerable energy to studying, participates in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members is more committed to the institution. Thus the more committed to the institution, the higher likelihood of success. Students getting involved in social activities on a college campus can increase the chances of their persistence at that institution. Tinto (1993) also supports the role of student involvement in promoting positive educational outcome for students. Tinto's (1993) revision of his initial conceptual model (1975) includes a more detailed discussion of the interaction between behavior and perception by students as they move toward greater integration with their social and academic environments (Berger & Milem, 1999). Research by Allen (1995) found that involvement in campus based-organizations provided valuable social contacts and interactions for Black students attending a PWI. All of the participants of this study were socially active on the Sims State campus.

In this study, social integration was achieved in three areas: academic organizations, social organizations, or social events. Despite being the minority on the campus, the participants felt that the availability of a variety of extracurricular activities was provided for them to choose

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from. Participants were actively involved in multiple organizations on the campus of Sims State University. Students participated in a variety of activities which could include all three categories mentioned above; therefore, I divided this section into those three categories for discussion.

Academic Organizations

Tinto (1993) believed that social integration among students of color at PWIs was influenced more by formal forms of associations, such as involvement in student organizations. This is also true for White students attending HBCUs. Three out of the six participants were members of academic organizations.   The findings support various studies that concluded the importance of student organizations to students of color (Allen, 1992; Kuh, 1995; McClung, 1988).

Participants joined professional organizations related to their particular academic field. Participants enjoyed interacting with African American students, who had like interests with them and faculty members. These findings coincided with a study that determined membership into these academic organizations provided students with the opportunity to connect with others who share similar interests (Guiffrida, 2003). One participant spoke of how he helped his fellow students study for graduate entrance exams.   "We also help our fellow students prepare for the GRE so we have study sessions." This mantra of giving back is also echoed in the Guiffrida study as well. Guiffrida concluded that African American students' involvement in student organizations facilitated social integration because it afforded these students an opportunity to give back to other Blacks on the campus. Participants in this study also felt that these organizations allowed for them to give back to other students on campus, high school students, and the community as a whole.

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Social Organizations

Participants discussed student organizations ranging from student government, Greek societies, and campus organizations. Although the purpose and mission of each type of organization is different, they all serve similar purposes in facilitating social integration into the university. Most participants valued organizations assisting them in establishing networking connections, opportunities to help others, and being able to feel comfortable around their peers. These social organizations help expose and connect the participants to African American culture. The results of this study are consistent with Tinto's (1993) theory regarding the important role that student organizations can play in socially integrating Black students at PWIs.

Several of the participants were interested in Greek life but only one had actually "crossed over" and became a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization (BLGO). According to Baker (2008), fraternities and sororities are among the most established and prominent student organizations on college campuses. One study (Heidenreich, 2006) wrongly criticized BLGOs for excluding individuals based on criteria such as skin color. Most BLGOs are integrated with Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated becoming integrated in 1945 (Ross, 2001). At Sims State, the presence of a traditional Greek Letter Organization is nonexistent; therefore students interested in Greek life must join one of the Black Greek Letter Organizations (BLGO). This participant was extremely proud of his association with his fraternity. "I really like the guys who are Sigmas here at Sims." Although he is the only White member of his fraternity at Sims, he feels very comfortable identifying with the values and traditions of this BLGO. This contradicts a study done by Tatum (1999) that stated without a shared identity with at least some subset of their racial group, students are "at risk for considerable social isolation" (p. 70). Other participants are eagerly awaiting the chance to "pledge" into these Greek letter organizations.

Participants also mentioned other student organizations that are offered on the Sims State campus. One of the participants was involved in student government. He was shocked and surprised that his fellow students within his department elected him to be a senator. Another participant became involved with the Homecoming committee. She played a huge role in developing the theme for Homecoming that particular year. Guiffrida (2003) concluded that student personnel who inform students of the various social, cultural, and academic organizations early on provide one way to establish important connections to the institution. Most of the participants joined these student organizations as a result of some other student inviting them to join or making them feel welcome if they were interesting in joining.

Social events

Finally, participants get involved on the campus of Sims State University through a variety of campus-sponsored events such as plays, concerts, sporting events and parties. The university provides students with a listing of all events with the exception of parties through various mediums. Student organizations, who use parties as fundraisers, inform students of these activities by sliding postcards under their dormitory room or passing out flyers around campus. Student organizations also use the social networking mediums to distribute information about upcoming events. Participants discussed the different types of events that they managed to enjoy. One participant enjoyed going to the football games on campus. Her boyfriend was a member of the team so that may have been an incentive to attend. However, she talked about the game as being an experience. Two of the participants interviewed mentioned plays and concerts sponsored by the institution. They were surprised at the level of quality entertainment being brought to campus by the institution.

Overall, participants were extremely satisfied with the extracurricular activities that were presented to them at Sims State University. A study by Fischer (2007) describes that there is a positive relationship between extracurricular involvement and grades for minority college students, whereas there is no significant relationship between extracurricular involvement and academic performance for White Students. However, this study was not concerned about the academic performance of White students but whether these students integrated themselves into the institution, both academically and socially.

Affordability

Although not related to the research question but discussed by participants was the affordability of Sims State. Sims State is unique in terms of HBCUs because it offers diversity scholarships for minority (White) students. All of the students interviewed for this study are receiving a diversity scholarship from the university which covers the tuition. Other participants receive academic scholarships as well making it extremely affordable for these students. A few participants did mention that they still received a bill from the institution for room and board. Only one of the participants did not have any fees associated with attending Sims State University. The only fees this student was responsible for was her textbooks. A study (Conrad et al. 1997) found that White students matriculated to HBCUs because of low tuition costs. That study indicated that price influenced White students' decision to attend an HBCU.   The Conrad study also stated that scholarships were important in attracting White students to HBCUs. This is also true in terms of keeping White students at HBCUs. The participants in this study emphasized the diversity scholarships as a means of being able to afford the cost of attending college. Most of the participants of this study were looking to get a quality education for a decent price. The findings in this study correlate to the findings of the study previously mention.

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Theoretical Implications

The findings drawn from this study support Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Persistence. For example, the results indicated that for White students attending this historically Black college and university (HBCU), academic integration and social integration were extremely important in their reasoning for persisting. The most important implication of this study is the advancement of theory in the field of "temporary" minorities attending HBCUs. The findings of this study support the work of Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993). Tinto's original model was tested with beginning freshman at a commuter university. The model looks at predictive ability of background characteristics and initial commitments, social and academic integration, and later commitments. The findings of this study reinforce Tinto's findings as it relates to social and academic integration. For example, this study revealed that key measures of academic integration—faculty-student interaction and quality of academic programs—were extremely important related to the persistence of White students. In addition, this study also revealed that key measures of social integration—involvement in student activities and organizations, faculty-student interactions outside of class, and peer-peer interactions—were also extremely important to the persistence of White students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have numerous implications related to policy and practice for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These implications may be beneficial to current and future HBCU administrators and faculty members in understanding White students' reasons for persisting at HBCUs. Many participants in this study indicated that positive relationships with faculty members, inside and outside of the classroom reaffirmed their decisions to persist at Sims State University. Tinto (1993) believes that the quality and quantity

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of positive in and out of class interactions with faculty are paramount to increased retention rates and are factors of academic and social integration. Therefore, administrators and faculty of HBCUs must recognize the importance of these interactions and develop programs to initiate and sustain such interactions throughout all academic programs. Developing mentoring programs whereby students feel very comfortable approaching faculty and initiated the relationship. Also, faculty at HBCUs must be receptive to also initiate the first contact with minority students at HBCUs. Faculty should support and encourage White students to engage with their classroom peers both inside and outside the classroom through collaborative group projects and peer mentoring or tutoring activities. It is also important for faculty members to be available to White students and to encourage contact with students outside of class. Higher education administrators should focus on maximizing the extent to which they interact with minority students and become a support system for these students to meet the challenges they will face on the campus.

In terms of involvement, fostering greater engagement by White students in campus life may lead to more opportunities to view themselves as situated members of the campus community rather than as temporary visitors to the campus. Student peer group constitute the core of the social groups at colleges and universities (Wood, 2002). Tinto (1993) suggests that these groups function as mechanisms of social integration. Student organizations have long provided venues that allow students to connect with peers from similar and different backgrounds. It seems appropriate to recommend that educators invest energies into introducing these students to student organizations. Student organizations should be marketed to White students as a means of contributing to the quality of life on campus for all students and the opportunity for White students to develop a set of cross-cultural communication skills that will

prove useful in their post-college endeavors. The findings of this study and earlier studies suggest that involvement in such organizations holds potential for greater benefits. Indeed, this study highlights the role that student organizations played in engaging students in activities that are educationally purposeful and productive. If administrators and staff at HBCUs are concerned about promoting educationally beneficial engagement that promotes development and fosters success among their students, they should consider the potential that student organizations have in helping promote such engagement. Thus, educators and administrators who are interested in increasing engagement and enhancing outcomes among White undergraduates must provide financial, advisory, and other forms of support for student organizations. The participants in this study reflected positively on the role of student organizations in their persistence at the university.

In terms of race relations, the findings of this study suggest the need among both White students and Black students at HBCUs to get an awareness and understanding of each other and their diverse environment. A finding in the Closson and Henry (2008) study stated that although White students attending HBCUs did not have any direct incidents of racism, they did express minimal acknowledgement that perhaps racist feelings might have existed towards them. It is important that faculty and staff at HBCUs capitalize upon the structural diversity of their White students as a means to enhance their personal growth. It is imperative that these professionals learn from the existing population of diverse students to prepare them for future students. Administrators at HBCUs cannot assume that interaction among different races on their campuses will alleviate the persistence of prejudiced attitudes and discrimination that many individuals encountered in our world. For example, as noted in Closson and Henry (2008), increased interracial contact between African Americans and Whites tend to enhance the

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acceptance of Blacks by Whites but with little effect on Whites' advocacy for change in unjust policies and practices (Dixon et al., 2005). HBCUs must continue to enhance these relationships to eliminate that trend.

Finally, in terms of affordability, HBCUs must continue to offer White student scholarships in order to attract and retain these students of their campuses. Other HBCUs should follow the lead of Sims State University and offer diversity scholarships that target White students to matriculate to their campuses. The administration must be willing and dedicated to increase the amount of these scholarships in order to attract large numbers of White students. In order to achieve this, HBCUs should dedicate personnel to actively recruit these White students for the enhanced scholarships. Sims State University has hired a minority recruiter whose role is to increase the minority presence on their campus.

Implications for Future Research

This study generated numerous implications for future research which are discussed within this section. While this study provided insight about the factors that influence White students to persist at one institution, there is a need to explore the experiences of other White students across all HBCUs in the United States. Hence, further qualitative and quantitative study of this population would provide empirical research on the persistence experience of White students at HBCUs.

Additional research on the role faculty play in students' adjustment to college may contribute to better understanding student success and persistence in higher education. Prior research in this area has found that frequent associations with faculty were positively related to integration and persistence (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

Future research might compare student versus faculty perception of the responsibility of faculty to fulfill the role of mentor.

Additional research should also be conducted on a larger population of White students' relationship with African American faculty at HBCUs. Also, research is needed regarding the attitudes and perceptions of faculty, administrators, and staff concerning the experiences of White students at HBCUs. Most studies (Closson & Henry, 2008; Hall & Closson, 2005) have looked at White students' attitudes; however, I did not come across a study that looked at the perceptions of faculty, administrators, and staff towards White students' persistence at HBCUs.

Also, additional research on the role student organizations plays on the persistence of White students attending HBCUs. While this study addressed this issue, a larger population of White students across several HBCUs is warranted. In addition, scholars might explore the impact of persistence on White students who are members of student organizations versus those students who chose not to participate in student organizations. Further research on this topic could prove invaluable in determining the effectiveness of student organizations.

Finally, a comparative in-depth study on persistence rates of White and African American students attending HBCUs is necessary. Are the factors for persistence different or the same for these groups? A study of this magnitude would provide some insight to the similarities and differences among the designated groups. This could be very beneficial in helping HBCUs develop effective programs of retention specifically tailored to those individual groups.

Conclusion

This study on the factors that influence persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provided some insight on the experiences of a selected number of students who had never voiced their opinion or had their

story heard. Participants, in their own words, discussed what influenced their reasons for persisting at the institution. Analysis of the findings suggests that White students persisted based on several reasons, namely their relationship with departmental faculty. The reasons associated with White students' persistence can assist faculty members and administrators at HBCUs in developing and cultivating a culture that is conducive for a positive matriculation and progression process all the way until graduation. Persistence leads to degree completion and no matter the institutional type, all administrators want to increase the number of students graduating from their institutions.

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INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Information

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

2. Tell me about your family.

3. Tell me about the role of education in your life.

4. Tell me about your high school experience.

5. Tell me about your college choice process?

6. What were the factors that contributed to your decision to attend this institution?

Academic Integration

1. Tell me about your goals in terms of your major.

2. How do you feel about your courses?

3. How much time do you spend studying?

4. Do you enjoy what you and studying and why?

5. How much do you feel you are learning in your courses?

6. How do you feel about understanding the material being covered in your courses?

7. What types of grades do you have in your courses?

8. Tell me about the academic organizations you are a member.

9. Tell me about your interactions with faculty (in and outside of class).

10. What are your reasons for your persistence at this institution from an academic perspective?

Social Integration

1. Tell me about the campus life here at this institution?

2. Tell me about your extracurricular activities on or off campus.

3. Describe your social involvements on campus and off campus.

4. Describe the friendships you have developed while attending this institution.

5. Describe how you view the opportunities you have to socialize with other students on the campus.

6. Tell about your interactions with staff members.

7. What are reasons for your persistence at this institution from a social perspective?

Combination of Social and Academic Integration

1. Describe your typical college day. What do you do from the time you get up in the morning to the

    to the time that you go to bed?

Invitation to Potential Study Candidates

Dear <<Participant Name>>,

My name is Duane Donald. I am graduate student at the University of New Orleans and I am exploring the White undergraduate student experience while attending HBCUs as my dissertation topic. Specifically, I am investigating the factors that determine whether a student will stay or depart an institution. I was referred to you by <<Gatekeeper's name>>. <<Gatekeeper's name>> has been assisting me with identifying potential participants for this study that are White undergraduate students at your institution that are sophomores or beyond. <<She/he>> thought you were the perfect candidate to assist me in the research.

Information collected for this study will be used to fulfill the requirements of completing an original research project and for completion of my educational requirements for doctoral study. Currently, there is little information regarding this topic which is why your participation will be extremely helpful in the development of literature pertaining to the persistence of White students at HBCUs.

I plan to conduct 45 to 60 minute individual in-person interviews with participants at mutually agreed upon locations. Each participant, as well as the collegiate institution serving as the site of study, will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their rights to privacy. Further, only the researcher and supervising faculty member will have access to participants' personal information and data relative to this study.

It is my hope that you would like to volunteer to share your experiences and are willing to participate in this important research study. <<Attached/Included>> is a Participant Profile Form. Please complete the form and <<mail/email>> back to <<address>> indicating your intentions to participate. I will contact you by phone within one week of the mailing of this letter to confirm receipt of this correspondence, respond to any questions you may have and/or to request your willingness to participate in this study. Should you have any question are concerns before my call or to learn more about the study please contact me at

Home Phone: (985) 863-8609
Mobile Phone: (985) 201-2296
Email: ddonald@uno.edu

In addition, you may also contact my major professor, Dr. Andre Perry with any questions or concerns at (504) 280-6443 or aperry@uno.edu.

Sincerely,

Duane A. Donald
Doctoral Candidate

Confirmation Letter/Email of Agreement to Participate and Scheduled Interview

Dear <<Participant Name>>,

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As a participant in this study, your contributions will assist me in answering the study's research questions relating to White students' experiences at HBCUs from an academic and social perspective.

Your interview is scheduled:
Interview Date: <<Date of Interview>>
Location: <<Location of Interview>>
Time: <<Time of Interview>>

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

<<Included/attached>> with this <<letter/email>> 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 you and I will sign two copies of the consent form, one for your records and one for my records.

Should you have any questions, concerns, or need to reschedule the interview for a more convenient time, please contact me at:

Home Phone: (985) 863-8609
Mobile Phone: (985) 201-2296
Email: ddonald@uno.edu

You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Andre Perry with any questions or concerns at (504) 280-6443 or aperry@uno.edu.

Thank you for assisting me in completing this research study.

Sincerely,

Duane A. Donald,
Doctoral Candidate

Research Consent Form
The University of New Orleans

RESEARCH TITLE
Factors that Influence the Persistence Rates of White Undergraduate Students Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

PROJECT DIRECTOR
Duane A. Donald, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. (985) 863-8609 or (985) 201-2296 (mobile). Email: ddonald@uno.edu.
This research project is in partial fulfillment of educational requirements, and under the supervision of Dr. Andre Perry, Associate Dean, College of Education and Human Development; University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana 70148. (504) 280-6443.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND
You are invited to participate in a research project titled, *Factors that Influence the Persistence Rates of White Undergraduate Students Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)*. This study is being conducted at the University of New Orleans as part of a doctoral dissertation by Duane A. Donald under the supervision of Dr. Andre Perry. You have been invited to participate in this project because you are a White undergraduate student attending a HBCU and are at a sophomore or higher academic standing. Your participation in this study is voluntary and should you decide to participate, you may forgo your participation at any point during the research project. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE & PROCEEDURE
The purpose of this proposed study is to qualitatively describe the factors that influence the persistence rates of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs from the students' perspectives. Your participation in this research project will be for a period of one semester. The procedure for this project involves one tape recorded interview which will last approximately one (1) hour. Follow-up sessions to assist in interpreting the interview may continue through the interview analysis phase which could go beyond one semester but are expected to conclude one month after the initial interview. Specifically, this research involves questioning regarding your experiences from social and academic perspectives as it relates to attending a HBCU. A maximum of 6 participants are expected to participate in this project. The duration of the study is one year from the first interview to reporting of the findings.

RISK DISCLOSURE
The possible risks and discomforts associated with your participation in this research project include potential loss of personal time, possibility of fatigued during the interview, potential discomfort discussing sensitive topics. 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. Other unforeseen risks may occur or be revealed as the research

progresses. In the event that the investigator(s) in this study find in the future that there is a potential risk to you unknown at the time of your participation in the study, and such risk might have some bearing on your well-being, you will be informed.

RESEARCH BENEFIT & USE
The research may or may not help you personally but the results may help the investigator learn about the persistence of White students at HBCUs. In all publications and presentations resulting from this research project, your anonymity will be protected to the maximum extent possible; although, authorized University of New Orleans personnel may have access to your research file in order to verify that your rights as a subject in this study have been safeguarded.

FINANCIAL COMPENSATION
You will not be paid for your participation.

PRIVACY PROTECTION
Any information we obtain about you during this study will be treated as strictly confidential. To ensure confidentiality, a pseudo name will be assigned to you and any of your potentially identifying information as well as your collegial institution. The interview tapes will be transcribed by the researcher. All forms, audiotapes, interview transcripts, and any other materials related to this project will be maintained in a secure and confidential manner and only the researcher and supervising faculty will have access. The personal information you provide will not be revealed in any written report and no report will be provided to your collegial institution. All the data collected for this research study will be destroyed when its intended educational interest no longer exist; or, no later than three years beyond the study's conclusion.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION
You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason. Any new findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate further will be explained to you.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT
Please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon (504-280-3990) at the University of New Orleans for answers to questions about this research, your rights as a human subject, and your concerns regarding a research-related injury.

CONSENT
Please check the appropriate box beside each statement:
1) |___| YES I agree to participate in this study and understand the statements provided above in relation to my participation.
2) |___| NO I do not agree to participate in this study.

PARTICIPANT

_____ _____
Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name

RESEARCHER

_____ _____
Signature   Date

_____
Printed Name

By signing this form you do not waive any of your legal rights. By signing this consent form means that you have heard or read the information about this study and that you agree to participate. If you have any questions regarding this research project, you may contact Duane Donald at (985) 201-2296 or ddonald@uno.edu; or, Dr. Andre Perry at (504) 280-6443 or aperry@uno.edu.

APPENDIX E

Email Reminder Confirmation of Individual Interview Appointment

Dear <<Participant Name>>,

Thank you again for your participation in this study. Your involvement in this study will provide valuable information into understanding factors the influence persistence rates among White students attending HBCUs.

The purpose for this email is to remind you of our mutually agreed upon interview schedule as listed below:

Interview Date: <<Date of Interview>>
Location: <<Location of interview>>
Time: <<Time of Interview, starting and ending>>

Should you have any questions, concerns, or need to reschedule the interview for a more convenient time, please contact me at:

Home Phone: (985) 863-8609
Mobile Phone: (985) 201-2296
Email: ddonald@uno.edu

You may also contact my major professor, Dr. Andre Perry with any questions or concerns at (504) 280-6443 or aperry@uno.edu.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Duane A. Donald
Doctoral Candidate

Human Subjects Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research

certifies that **Duane Donald** successfully completed the NIH Web-based

training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 03/11/2009

Certification Number: 200666

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

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Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Andre Perry
Co-Investigator: Duane Donald

Date: November 3, 2009

Protocol Title: **"Factors That Influence the Persistence Rates of White
Undergraduate Students Attending Historically Black Colleges and
Universities (HBCUs)"**

IRB#:   01Nov09

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the
University of Ne w Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human
subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under
45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7).

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the
procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to
implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence
regarding this proposal.

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

VITA

Duane Anthony Donald is a native of Vacherie, Louisiana. He is a 1990 graduate of Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond with a Bachelor of Arts degree in management. He is also a 1992 graduate of Southeastern with a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) degree. He completed his doctoral degree in Educational Administration—Higher Education Concentration from the University of New Orleans in May 2010.

Duane has been employed for the last nine years at Southeastern Louisiana University in various capacities. Since 2006, Duane has been in the position of Coordinator of Special Projects/TRiO programs. Duane is a member of the Southwest Association of Student Assistance Programs (SWASAP) and the Louisiana Association of Student Assistance Programs (LASAP).

Duane is actively involved in his community through several different ventures. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated (Pi Pi Lambda chapter), where he has participated as a volunteer for the American Cancer Society, the March of Dimes, and Habitat for Humanity. He is also actively involved with the Louisiana Special Olympics Organization and serves as the Assistant Competitions Director for the Summer Games.