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JUNIOR OR SENIOR STUDENTS AT A MIDWESTERN
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DARRELL EMANUEL KING

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of the requirements for the

PH.D.

degree in

Community, Agriculture,
Recreation and Resource
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**PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BUSINESS JUNIOR OR SENIOR
STUDENTS AT A MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY**

By

Darrell Emanuel King

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies

2010

ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BUSINESS JUNIOR OR SENIOR STUDENTS AT A MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

By

Darrell E. King

This study is based on 16 in-depth interviews with African American business students at a Midwestern University. It examines how they are achieving success as business majors. Findings indicate that very supportive families and others (counselors, teachers,) had an impact on their decision to attend this Midwestern University. Most of the interviewed students perceived the campus as very segregated, they had both positive and negative perceptions of the classroom experience as well as professors. Many also had mixed feelings about their perceptions of academic advising. Finally, active involvement in campus organizations had a positive impact on students.

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Dedication

**This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Carmellia, my children Emanuel & Victoria, my mother Ruby, my father Willie and all my brothers and sisters.
I cannot thank you all enough for the impact you all have had on my life.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Eddie Moore for his guidance and support as my chairperson. You challenged me and helped me grow as a scholar. I would also like to thank Dr. Ernest Betts for his mentorship, motivation and for pushing me to complete this journey. I also want to thank Dr. Lee June for his insistence that I pursue an academic discipline that would provide major opportunities down the road. I would also like to thank Dr. George Rowan for his continuous role modeling and support and for being source of strength and empowerment. I want to thank Ms. Harriett Singleton who was my “Grand Valley Mom”. She made it possible for me to truly begin my journey in higher education with your words of wisdom and support. She was determined to see me walk across that stage and I thank her from the bottom of my heart.

I want to especially thank my wife Carmellia who supported me and made it possible for me to focus on this PH.D., she raised our family. She earned this degree as much as I did. Thank you for raising such beautiful, smart and intelligent kids in Emanuel and Victoria. They were the reason why I decided to pursue this degree. May you both live up to the expectations we set forth for you. I want to thank my sister Sheila for being there for me during my times of need. She found a way when no way was possible for me. I want to thank my father Willie for having the strength to let me go. I want to thank the staff at Multicultural Business Programs for supporting me during this process, Anne & Kevin, you rock! Finally, I want to also thank all the students who participated in my research and provided rich honest data.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

African American College Readiness

Although more African American students are going to college, they are still less likely to attend and complete college in six years than Caucasian high school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). One explanation is the notion of college readiness. In its broadest sense college readiness refers to high school graduates who are prepared for college. Traditional measures of college readiness include factors such as the high school grade point average, courses completed, rigor of the high school curriculum and college admissions tests such as the ACT or SAT (Robbins, Davenport, Anderson, Kliewer, Ingram, & Smith, 2003; Tinto, 1997).

According to Greene & Winters (2005), in this country the requirements to graduate from high school are set lower than the requirements to apply to a four year college. Thus, many high school graduates are ineligible to enroll in college because they are underprepared. Greene & Winters (2005) also found that in 2002, 34% of high school graduates were college ready, up from 25% in 1991. In the class of 2002, about 40% of White students graduated college ready compared to only 23% of Black students.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities considers college readiness to be one of the top policy issues for higher education in 2009. More than a quarter of entering college freshmen take at least one remedial course in college and even more at the less selective four-year institutions and community colleges. These same students often struggle and may not even complete their degrees. This has a direct impact on whether or not the United States will remain competitive in a global economy.

In terms of African American students, college readiness warrants closer examination. Several factors contribute to the college readiness for African American students. College readiness is often measured by traditional standards such as high school GPA and standardized test scores. Placement in remedial courses is also a factor that is used as a standard to evaluate college readiness. But where does this trend of lower GPAs, lower standardized test scores, and remedial placement for African Americans begin? It begins as early as preschool and kindergarten. Because of family circumstances, many Black children begin school at a disadvantage compared to their White and middle class counterparts. Farkas (2003) found that on average, African American, Latino and American Indian children arrive at kindergarten or first grade with lower levels of school readiness than do White and Asian children. They begin school with lower oral language, pre-reading and pre-mathematics skills, and lower general knowledge and behavior issues.

This school readiness gap across racial and ethnic groups is well documented in numerous studies including those by West, Denton, and Reaney (2001); Denton and West (2002); and Lee and Burkkam (2002). A key finding is that the school-readiness gap disappears after controlling for social class background. In other words, if students come from poor, urban, and uneducated households they are more likely to start school at a disadvantage. Phillips, Crouse, and Ralph (1998) found that African American children begin school approximately one year behind White students but complete twelfth grade about four years behind. Based on data from eight different surveys and measuring years of progress, they estimate that at least half (and probably more) of the Black-White

school performance gap in twelfth grade would be eliminated if we could eliminate the Black-White performance gap at school entry.

Another factor is minority schools that have lower incomes and have a less demanding curriculum negatively impacts learning outcomes as well (Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 1997). Also, lower-skilled teachers tend to be found in these schools with administrators who also tend to have lower expectations of students, resulting in weaker academic preparation for college-level work.

When compared to White students, Black students tend to have less access to college preparatory courses and other support services, less parental support, and parents with lower levels of education (Nettles & Gosman, 1986). They also have lower self-expectations, lower socioeconomic statuses, and are less able to pay for college than White students (Nettles & Gosman, 1986). The good news is that once African American students arrive on college campuses, the best predictors of academic success are academic self-concept, integration into the campus, and a commitment to graduating with a degree. These are some of the most important non-cognitive variables for African American college students (House, 1992).

In summary, college readiness for African Americans begins as early as pre-school and kindergarten. If schools can eliminate some of the deficits that African American children begin school with, educators will have a better chance of preparing them for college and beyond. This is especially true as schools and parents prepare them to compete at predominately White institutions of higher education.

African Americans and Business Degrees

In higher education, a business degree has often been seen as the gold standard for students who want to work in the business world. In the last 30 years the business degree has gained popularity among undergraduate students. From 1970–1971, 115,000 business degrees were awarded. That number more than doubled in 2003–04 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This growth shows the continuous popularity of business as a field of study. In fact of the 1,400,000 bachelor degrees conferred from 2003–2004, the largest number was conferred in the field of business (307,000); more than double that of the second closest fields of social science and history (150,000). Finally, each year between 1999–2004, more bachelor's degrees were awarded in business than any other field (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Today, a bachelor's degree in business is the most popular degree for African Americans. From 1999–2000 more African Americans earned bachelor's degrees in business than any other major at 22% (compared to the national average of 21% of the top ten most popular majors). In the year 2000, 22,478 bachelor's degrees were awarded to African Americans in the field of business management—21.6 % of all bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans that year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

One would assume that the majority of African American students earn degrees at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU); however, the opposite is true. In 1995, HBCUs matriculated 26% of all African American students in four-year colleges and awarded 27% of all baccalaureate degrees earned by African Americans nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). From 1999–2000, of the 107,891

bachelor's degrees conferred to Blacks, only 25,508 or 23.6% were from HBCUs. The rest were from predominately White institutions. With less than 27% of all Black students enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities, the majority of the Black students in college attend predominately White institutions. Currently, the majority of Black students in U.S. colleges and universities attend predominately White institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Predominately White institutions like Midwestern University present an interesting set of challenges for Black college students. Major research findings reveal that African-American undergraduate students experience higher attrition rates, lower cumulative grade point averages, and less persistence toward graduation than do majority students (Mow & Nettles, 1990; Allen, 1992). Weak academic preparation, limited campus role models, feelings of isolation and helplessness, and a lack of an understanding of how to negotiate campus academic and social systems often have an impact on these students' success (Parker & Scott, 1985).

Although graduating from college should remain a high priority, graduating with one's chosen major is critical to achieving one's hopes and dreams. Business remains the most popular major for Black undergraduate college students, educators at institutions of higher education know very little about the concerns, thoughts, and experiences of Black undergraduate students at predominately White institutions of higher education.

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Statement of the Problem

This study sought to explore the perceptions of African American business students at Midwestern University (a pseudonym) on how they are achieving success as business majors. According to a report by the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives at Midwestern University (2007), from 1998–2007, enrollment of African American business students dropped from 519 students to 417 students in the College of Business; a definite downward trend. However, very little is known about the perceptions of African American undergraduate business students pursuing their degrees. The driving force behind this study was to explore the undergraduate experience of these students, their perceived barriers to success, their academic and social relationships, and the effects that stereotypes may have on their lives. Sixteen undergraduate African American students enrolled in the College of Business at Midwestern University participated in this study. By better understanding how these students perceived their undergraduate experiences in relation to their major of business, it is hoped that this study will add to the scarce available literature and create meaningful insights and new knowledge.

Purpose of the Study

What perceptions do African American undergraduate students enrolled in the College of Business at Midwestern University have? Understanding how these students perceived their undergraduate experiences in relation to their major of business, and how they perceived the campus experience, this new knowledge could have a positive impact on other current and future students. This study also explored the role of racism and its

impact on this student population, as well as the impact of retention efforts by the institution.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do Black undergraduate business students characterize their experiences on campus at Midwestern University, a predominately White institution of higher education?
2. How do Black undergraduate business students describe their experiences as business majors on campus at Midwestern University, a predominately White institution of higher education?

Research Objectives

The research was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine what factors prepared the students for college
2. To ascertain what the students' perceptions were regarding campus climate
3. To learn about the students' perceptions regarding classroom climate and the instructional faculty and staff
4. To find out about the students' perceptions of academic advising
5. To collect information on the students' perceptions regarding getting involved in student organizations

The Interview Guide lists the questions that were used in the qualitative interviews with subjects. See Appendix I.

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Significance of the Study

Exploring the perceptions of African American undergraduate business students is important for several reasons. First, gaining first-hand knowledge from these students could provide key information that can be useful for educators, researchers, and theorists as they seek to develop strategies and models to aid in the success of this distinct population. Second, over 75% of Black students earn their bachelor degrees from predominately White institutions of higher education. More importantly, African Americans choose business as a field of study at the undergraduate level more than any other field and at a higher rate than the national average. The case study method used in this study is useful for helping African American undergraduate business students make meaning out of their experiences. This is also useful for understanding the impact of campus resources on their perceptions of their undergraduate experiences.

Recruitment and retention of Black students has long been at the forefront of many diversity plans at predominately White institutions, and this study provides insight as to what makes colleges of business appealing, what makes them less attractive to African Americans, and what barriers can hinder the successful completion of degrees in business.

The results can serve as a tool for advisers, administrators and policymakers who have the responsibility to ensure that African Americans are not only recruited but retained and graduated in a reasonable time frame and that their experiences make them proud alumni. This could lead to more donors giving to their alma maters and the creation of more funding sources for future African American undergraduate business students. Finally, it is hoped that this study can serve as a resource tool for African

American undergraduates and contribute to filling the void of limited research on African American undergraduate business students. Ideally, this study will contribute to the limited knowledge of the perceptions of African American undergraduate business students at Midwestern University.

Benefits of the Study

One benefit of this research study is that the information will be used to compile data that can help African American college students make better and informed decisions about college majors and decisions about career development regarding business. Study participants benefitted from this study by exploring new ways of conceptualizing their experiences as related to their career goals. The participants had the opportunity to anonymously discuss their experiences at a predominately White institution and a college where very few Black students are admitted into the upper college of business, and the impact this may have had on their perceptions and successes. Again, college personnel can use this study as they seek ways to offer more academic and non-cognitive measures to evaluate the potential for success for African Americans, thereby affecting greater recruitment, retention, and graduation of African Americans from the college of business.

Definitions of Terms

African American: an American of African and especially of black African descent

Black: of or relating to the African-American people or their culture <*black* literature> <a *Black* college> <*Black* pride> <*Black* studies> (3): typical or representative of the most readily perceived characteristics of Black culture <trying to sound *Black*> <tried to play *blacker* jazz>

Business Administration: a program of studies in a college or university providing general knowledge of business principles and practices

Climate: the prevailing influence or environmental conditions characterizing a group or period; atmosphere <a *climate* of fear>

Perception: quick, acute, and intuitive cognition; **appreciation b:** a capacity for comprehension

Stereotype: something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; *especially:* a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment

Undergraduate: a student at a college or university who has not received a first and especially a bachelor's degree

Excerpted from the Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary. ©Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2006

Conceptual Framework

Several research theories provided the theoretical framework for this study. First, Tinto's (1975, 1993) Retention Model postulated that students need to become academically and socially integrated into the college community to increase their chances of being retained. Second, Hurtado's (1992) conceptual framework on racial climate was useful. Hurtado argued that campus racial conflicts are connected to elements in an institutions' racial climate that sustain the relationship between Black students and their White peers, faculty, and administration. Finally, the Cross (1971, 1994) Model of Black Identity Development also framed this study because it examines what it means to be Black. This stage model argues that students go through various stages in an effort to find their Black Identity. (See Figures 1, 2, and 3) Several other major influences impact the African American business student. These elements will be discussed in greater detail later.

- Tinto (1975,1993)
- Hurtado (2000)
- Cross (1971, 1993)
- Guiffrida (2003)
- Retention
- Campus Climate
- Racial Identity Dev.
- Involvement (Culture)

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for African American Business Students.

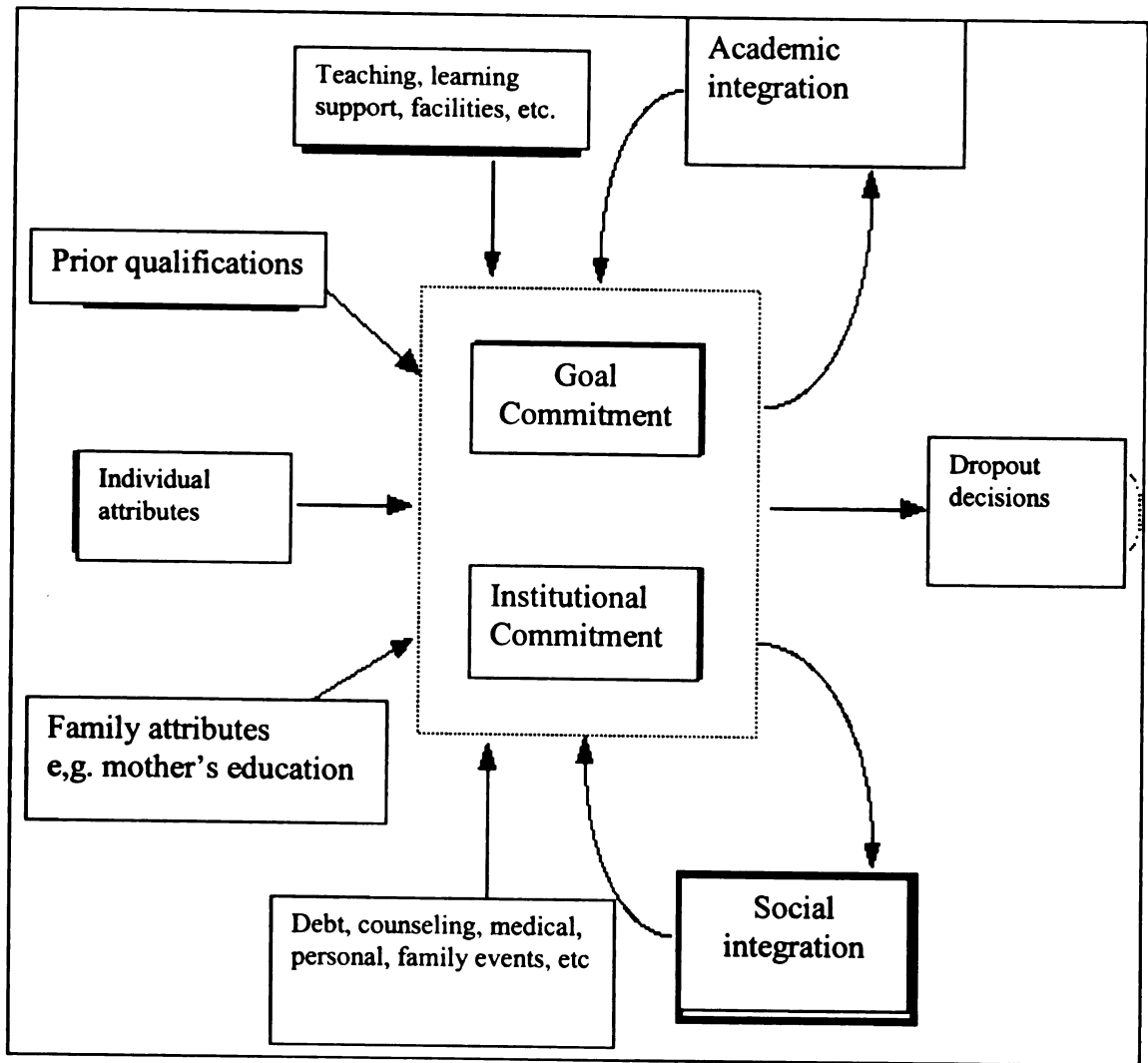


Figure 2. A model of Tinto on retention.

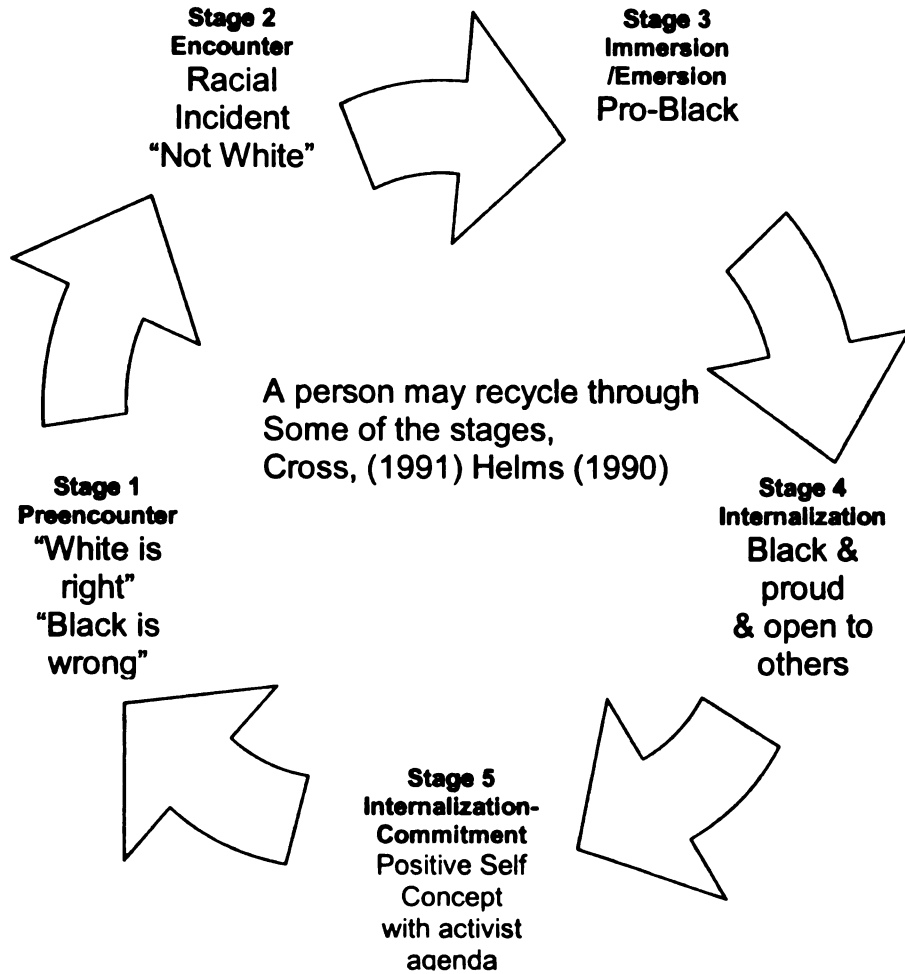


Figure 3. Black Racial Identity Model. Adapted from Cross, W. *Shades of Black, Diversity in African American Identity.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press (2001).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Participants were limited to African American undergraduate students currently enrolled in the College of Business at Midwestern University.

This study represents the philosophies and missions of neither the College of Business nor those of Midwestern University. This study did not represent the realities of all African American undergraduate business students at Midwestern University.

Undergraduate business was the only focus of this study. This study confined itself to Midwestern University. The findings of this study may not be reflective of other types of undergraduate institutions or the experiences of other undergraduate students at similar institutions.

Summary

In summary, colleges and universities need to examine African American students' perceptions of their experiences on campus to help them find a sense of purpose and propel them toward graduation. Since Black undergraduate business students have unique needs, educators need to be informed about their perceptions in order to help them to be successful at predominately White institutions of higher education like Midwestern University.

As a brief overview of the study, this chapter introduced the current significance of a business degree in higher education. An overview of African American undergraduate students in higher education was discussed; specifically, the fact that more Black undergraduates pursue business degrees at predominately White institutions than at historically Black colleges and universities is important. Additionally, this chapter defined the lack of qualitative research and lack of the student voice in the process of

assessing the perceptions held by African American business students about their campus experiences. Chapter 2 will review the relevant literature; Chapter 3 will outline the specific methodologies employed in the study; and Chapter 4 will provide the data analysis and other results. Chapter 5 will provide a brief summary of the study, and will include a review of the study's purpose and methodology. It will also draw conclusions from the data, discuss the implications for practice and research, and suggest opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RELEVANT RESEARCH

Contemporary Research of African Americans in Higher Education

Over the last four decades, several scholars have studied African American college students from the perspectives of integration and adaptation as a result of desegregation and the civil rights movement (Willie & McCord, 1972, Fleming 1984). These studies largely took on an assimilationist perspective in that they did not get at the heart of what is important and necessary for successful Black students to graduate from predominately White institutions in numbers comparable to their White counterparts. It wasn't until the late eighties that Tinto (1987) first shared his theory of student departure, which proposes that a student's persistence in higher education is related to the degree to which a student is integrated into the college's social and academic communities. Johnson (2001) believed that many of these college adjustment theories regarding African American are very Eurocentric in nature and do not offer a community-centered approach to building togetherness.

A systematic review of the literature summarizes research that focused on successful African American students and business college students in particular. The main body of knowledge drawn upon is in the field of student affairs research on Black undergraduate students at predominately White institutions. Very little is known specifically about Black undergraduate business students and nationally the majority of Black students in U.S. colleges and universities who attend predominately White institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Educators need to be knowledgeable about the unique needs and perceptions of this population. Finally, from a racial identity and career perspective, Parham and Austin (1994) stated that, "People's

view of themselves and the world of work are projected onto occupational titles, and in that manner who and what they are affects their career choice” (p. 143). A significant part of what African American young people are about may be found in their perceptions and thoughts concerning their careers. Therefore, this researcher focused on the voices of African American undergraduate business students at Midwestern University of higher education for the purpose of this study.

Retention

Much of the early research that addressed retention as a measure of success was based on Tinto's (1975,1993) model of withdrawal, which considers the degree of fit between individual students and the college environment as mediated by academic and social involvement. Tinto developed a theoretical model of student retention that is still one of the most popular conceptualizations of the attrition phenomena in higher education.

According to Lee (1999), Tinto viewed colleges and universities as organizations composed of two interacting systems: an academic system and a social system. Student retention results from a combination of students' entering characteristics, their commitment to the institution, and their commitment to goals and their academic and social experiences in college (integration into the campus environment). The core of the model is the process of students' academic and social integration into the campus environment (p. 27).

Several studies have pointed to the importance of academically and socially integrating students into the institutional environment (Allen and Wallace, 1988; Nettles, Thoeny, Gosman, & Dandridge, 1985; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986; Terenzini &

Wright, 1986). Tinto (1987) stressed the importance of academic integration (academic performance) and social integration (participation in college life) in predicting retention in a university setting.

According to Tinto (1987; 2005), the absence of integration into the college or university community arises from two sources: incongruence and isolation. He defined incongruence as a state in which individuals feel that they are at odds with the institution, and isolation as a state in which students find themselves disconnected from the institution. Tinto concluded that incongruence and isolation are key factors that may lead students to drop out of their undergraduate programs. Adding to the reasons behind why students drop out, Kalsner (1991) found four recurring themes as to why students leave without completing their degrees: (a) uncertainty of what to expect from college, (b) adjustment issues, (c) financial constraints, and (d) academic under-preparation.

Retention and African Americans

There is very little doubt that African Americans are significantly under-represented in our colleges and universities. Many African Americans who do attend college do not graduate in six years at four-year institutions. Black students are less likely to persist in degree completion than White students (Cross & Slater, 2000). Some researchers have studied whether high school grades and test scores correlate with retention. Recent research shows inconclusive results about the relationship between high school grades/test scores and college retention for African Americans. Astin, Tsui, and Avalos (1996) found that students with stronger high school GPAs and higher test scores are more likely to graduate. However, other studies found only the influence of

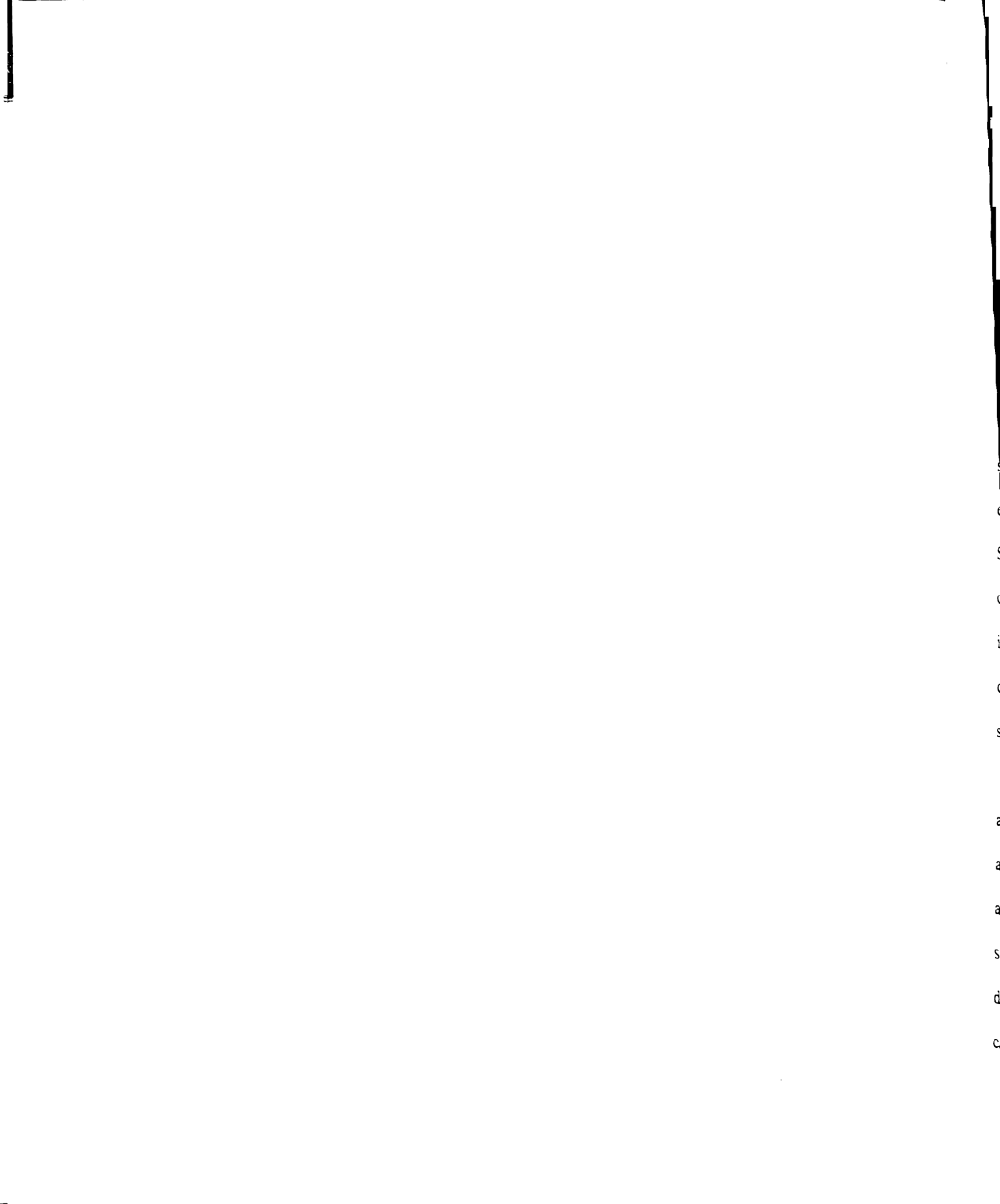
high school GPA to be statistically significant (Hoffman, 2002; Waugh, Micceri, & Takalkar, 1994).

Black student retention on predominately White campuses remains one of the most difficult challenges for many college and universities. Furthermore research shows no clear-cut answer to the question of why Black students' attrition at these universities far exceeds that of White students.

Some challenges that many Black students encounter at predominately White institutions are hostile campuses, culturally ignorant students and staff, limited and decreasing economic assistance, lack of Black faculty, and cultural alienation and isolation (Easley, 1993; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Taylor, 1989). Black students who feel alienated at predominately White institutions are less likely to be retained (Suen, 1983). Tinto (1993) emphasized the student-institutional fit approach in trying to explain African American student attrition. This approach views discrimination on the college campus as interfering with a students' integration into his or her social and academic settings.

Intolerance is another important factor as well. A climate that seems unwelcoming to minority students can play a major role in student departure. The existing literature on social adjustment has emphasized individual factors as well; for instance, the lack of academic preparation is viewed as one of the main reasons why Africans are not successful in college. It has not considered structural factors such as how welcoming a campus is toward African Americans (Tinto, 1993, 2005).

How involved and connected Black students feel in their living environments, classroom experiences, with academic advising, extracurricular activities, financial



support, and faculty involvement all have an impact on their retention at predominately White institutions (Tinto, 2005). Taken collectively, these factors include environmental issues, financial barriers, social and academic integration, and the racial climate of a university. These factors deserve a closer examination.

Environmental Factors

Of the environmental factors that can play a role in the retention of African American students, one major factor is poverty. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at greater risk of not being retained (Cross and Slater, 2000). In fact, students with above average-grades from low income families, no matter what their ethnic group, are still more likely to leave college without earning a bachelor's degree. Some other key factors have to do with the home life of African American students and can also have an impact on retention. DeFrancesco and Gropper (1996) found that living in an urban environment, being raised by a single parent, and being a first-generation college student are all major factors that can affect the retention of African American students.

Coming from schools where students are traditionally underprepared to compete academically is another factor that can lead to underachievement in college, thus affecting the retention of African American students. Levin and Levin (1991) found that academic underpreparedness, a lack of commitment to educational goals, and a lack of self confidence can impact retention. Helping African Americans to make up academic deficits, set realistic educational goals, improve their self confidence, and connect with campus resources can improve their chance for success in college. Also, helping students

understand their reasons for pursuing a college degree can have a positive impact on retention.

Financial Barriers

With the cost of higher education steadily rising, many African Americans are finding that they cannot afford college. Loans have become a major source of financial aid and many African Americans are reluctant to borrow money for college. Mounting debt puts even more pressure on students to work to help offset the cost of college. Having to work takes away from study time for some African Americans, and many students find that their grades suffer because of the mounting debt and pressure from home to contribute to the cost of their educations. Ryland, Riordan, and Brack (1994) reported that more non-persisting students have been found to be employed than persisting students, which may be another factor in retention.

Wilds (2000) suggested that parents are also concerned about having to take out loans in order for students to take the remedial courses necessary to do college-level work. Students who have to worry about whether they can afford to stay in college once they get there are at greater risk of leaving. Those that do stay have to make some major adjustments on campus to survive. Taylor and Olswang (1997) concluded that those Black students who tend to be successful at predominantly White institutions tend to have adequate financial support, which correlates with sufficient time to study, and they are involved in campus activities. They also found that the Black students who are successful at predominately White institutions also convey a sense of confidence, are amicable and cordial, and can adapt to a racially homogenous mix.

Social Integration

How students spend their time once they get to campus is one of the major factors often identified as critical in the retention of African American students. One critical element in the retention and success of Black students at predominately White institutions is the individual's experience of the campus social environment (Mackay & Kuh, 1994; Sedlacek 1996). Tinto (1993) found that students who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to remain at the university. Involvement in academic-related activities has been proven to be more important for the academic and personal development of Black students than for White students (MacKay & Kuh, 1994). In addition, connecting both socially and academically are critical factors in the retention of African American students. Mayo, Murguia, and Padilla (1995) found that African American students who reported that they enjoyed the social life on campus reported higher GPAs than students who did not report this. These and other studies demonstrate that the institutional setting, social environment, and quality of student-faculty interactions all combine to affect the outcomes for African American college students.

Academic Integration

Levin and Levin (1991) found that African Americans who fall into the category of "at-risk students" have difficulty recognizing that a problem exists, asking for help when they do realize they have a problem, and asking for help in time for the help to be of assistance. African American students need to feel valued and appreciated inside and outside of the classroom. Tinto (1987) suggested that students who leave because of academic failure represent only 10–15% of all institutional departures. Faculty is also important as well. In a study of factors related to college students' socialization, Nettles

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and Johnson (1987) found that the best predictor of positive student socialization is contact with faculty members. They concluded that institutions focusing on stronger student-faculty relationships will positively influence student socialization.

A willingness to ask for help is critical for success in college. Mayo, Murguia and Padilla (1995) found that African American students who met with instructors outside of class were more successful academically than African American students who did not meet with instructors outside of class. Fleming (1984) ascertained that

The task for black students on White campuses is to direct frustration into, not away from, academic activities; to challenge rather than retreat from unfairness into the classroom; to find constructive means of encouraging cheerful peer contact rather than mutual avoidance. (p. 156)

Higher education institutions have the ability to help African American students adapt to university environments by offering workshops on coping skills, time management skills, study skills, and assist students with shaping their academic and career goals (Kerka, 1989).

Research studies reveal that Black students often feel isolated and alienated in predominately White institutions and do not feel included in the college environment and community. This can result in many of these African Americans having problems adjusting successfully. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds often look to one another for support rather than to the larger campus community because they perceive negative feelings from White students and faculty, consequently moving further from the larger campus community.

When African Americans are able to be a part of an institution that is supportive and promotes institutional warmth, they achieve at higher levels and successfully move through their programs of study. Swchwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) along with Taylor and Olswang (1997) have identified several traits as essential for Black students to persist through predominately White institutions. These traits were: (a) strong sense of confidence, cultural pride, and determination; (b) adequate academic preparation and study skills; and (c) tolerance, friendliness, adaptability, and courage.

Campus Racial Climate

As colleges and universities are becoming more racially diverse (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002), many college students experience their first substantial interracial contact when they arrive on college campuses. The climate in which these interactions occur influence the learning and social outcomes students will derive (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), which makes campus climate an important area of understanding for higher education administrators, policy makers, and researchers.

For African Americans, a key notion to consider is the link between the students' perception of campus racial climate and students' academic achievement. Hurtado (1992) argued that campus racial conflicts are connected to elements in an institution's racial climate that sustain the relationship between Black students and their White peers, faculty, and administration. Whether considered to be a positive or a negative influence, perceptions of campus climate that include race relations are critical for understanding educational experiences and subsequent outcomes of African American students (Hughes, 1987, Oliver, Smith & Wilson, 1989, Sedlacek, 1987). When a campus's climate is viewed as including perceptions of race relations along with other indicators of

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traditional institutional support, its impacts on students' experiences becomes even more consequential, especially for African Americans.

“The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict” (Hurtado, 1992) is the most widely cited study on the topic of racial campus climate. The most salient finding of this study was that one in four respondents in the study perceived considerable racial conflict on their campuses, especially at four-year public or selective institutions. Hurtado also concluded that racial tension is probable in environments where the institution shows little concern for individual students, something that tends to be symptomatic of many large, predominately White institutions that enroll several thousand undergraduates.

The Hurtado study has been reprinted in books and frequently cited by scholars who have written about racial realities on college campuses over the past 15 years. Harper and Hurtado have looked at campus racial climate since 1992, and more recently (2007) retrieved and analyzed empirical research studies that have since been published in education and social sciences journals to determine how campus racial climates have evolved since the early 1990s. They reviewed only journal articles that focused on the racialized experiences of college students and campus racial climates. For the purposes of this study, their analysis seems to fit the focus of this research.

Findings from studies that have been published since 1992 fit into three categories: (1) differential perceptions of campus climate by race, (2) racial/ethnic minority student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments, and (3) benefits associated with campus climates that facilitate cross-racial engagement. The last category concerning benefits associated with campus climates will be considered in a later section.

With regard to differential perceptions of campus climate by race, the most salient finding is that Black students and other minorities view their campuses as more racist than their White counterparts do (Rankin & Reason, 2005; D'Augelli & Hersberger, 1993; Radloff and Evans, 2003). With regard to racial/ethnic minority student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments, Black students in particular often report feeling isolated, alienated, and stereotyped on predominately White campuses (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Rankin and Reason (2005) found that Black students experience harassment—defined as any offensive, hostile, or intimidating behavior that interferes with learning—at higher rates than White students. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) described how Black students' confidence in their academic abilities is often eroded by stereotypes regarding their intellectual inferiority and presumed entry to universities because of affirmative action.

In addition to synthesizing the last 15 years of research on campus racial climates, Harper and Hurtado (2007) conducted a major study at five predominately White universities. The salient findings from their qualitative study are summarized below.

To begin with, the participants in their study who were both students and staff believed that these universities promoted the idea of diversity and racial interaction but were negligent in providing the educational processes that lead to racial understanding both inside and outside of the classroom. They also thought that race was a taboo topic and that, like the students in Antonio's study (2004), participants were well aware of the segregation on their campuses.

Another key finding is that at every university, African American students expressed the highest degrees of dissatisfaction with the social environment. Many of

these predominately White universities had reputational legacies for racism that have persisted in the Black communities. This finding agrees with Feagin, Vera, and Imani's study (1996), in which African American undergraduates described how negatively their institutions were viewed within Black communities across the state because of historical exclusionary admissions practices.

Another interesting note is that White students in this study truly believed that Black students and other minorities loved their campus experiences as much as they had. However, Black students mainly saw the campuses as a place for Whites. Outside of ethnic and multicultural centers on the five campuses, African Americans found it difficult to identify other spaces on campus in which they felt shared cultural ownership.

Many racial/ethnic minorities viewed this as inconsistent with institutional claims of inclusiveness. This is consistent with previous research that indicates that African American undergraduates perceive and experience significantly more racism on campus than do their counterparts who are not African American (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; Sedlacek, 1987).

Finally, nearly 88% of the staff persons interviewed were racial/ethnic minorities. They were fully aware of the degree to which minority students were disadvantaged and dissatisfied on the five campuses. Fear of being seen as troublemakers who were always calling attention to racism compelled many to remain silent. Harper & Hurtado (2007) concluded by noting that all of their research groups indicated that it was the first time anyone had ever asked them about the qualitative realities of their racialized experiences.

The Benefits of a Positive Campus Climate

Earlier the researcher alluded to the benefits associated with campus climates that facilitate cross-racial engagement. In the synthesis of the last 15 years of research on campus racial climates, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that researchers have recently furnished a large body of empirical evidence to confirm the educational merit of deliberately creating racially diverse college campuses. These studies verify that students who attend racially diverse institutions and are engaged in educationally purposeful activities that involve interactions with peers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds come to enjoy cognitive, psychosocial, and interpersonal gains that are useful during and after college (Antonio, Chang, Hakuta, Kenny, Levin, & Milem, 2004; Chang, 1999, 2001; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Pike & Kuh, 2006).

Other findings suggest that students who do better academically report that they are on better terms with faculty members and find the institution to be generally supportive of their educational needs. Consequently, they appear to make a greater effort to interact with their professors and peers of other racial and ethnic groups (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). Allen (1985) posited that a mutual attraction cycle exists between African American students and university faculty and administration. In essence, students who perceive a supportive campus climate are less likely to avoid informal contact with faculty and administrators than students who do not perceive a positive climate.

Consequently, faculty and administrators respond more actively to African American students who foster informal contact with them, and this relationship affects

academic performance both directly and indirectly. Black students have heterogeneous backgrounds and personalities, and therefore not all Black students at predominately White institutions experience their new surroundings uniformly (Swchwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas 1999). Several authors have suggested that Black students who are comfortable interacting with Whites will have an advantage during the college adjustment process (Adan & Feiner, 1995; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Fordham, 1988). When African American students are able to be a part of an institution, one that feels open and supportive, they achieve at higher levels and successfully advance through their programs of study (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). The notion that campus environments influence the educational experiences of college students is a consistent thread throughout research on African Americans in higher education.

Racial Identity Development

Rotheram and Phinney (1987) defined self-identification as the accurate and consistent use of an ethnic label based on the perception and conception of belonging to an ethnic group. For many African Americans, this could have a profound impact on how they see themselves and their place in society. Racial identity is focused on the extent to which people of color are aware of, understand, and value their racial background and heritage. Smith (1989) argued that race creates a bond and feelings of community, meaning that individuals often define themselves in terms of racial membership in a particular group. She also believes that a healthy regard for one's racial status is psychologically important for racially diverse groups. Thus, for African American students, an important variable worthy of investigation is racial identity. Smith

(1989) maintained that racial identity development is a process of coming to terms with one's racial group as a salient reference group.

A Theory of Black Racial Identity Development

For African American college students, having a clear sense of who they are and how they see themselves can have a significant impact on their ability to be successful in college. Researchers have looked for many ways to help African Americans define themselves and what it means to be "Black." In his most recently revised model, entitled Nigrescence Theory (Cross & Vandiver, 2001), Cross's 1971 Black Identity Development Model provided one of the most researched theories of Black identity development in the last 30 years. Cross and Vandiver (2001) present eight identity types clustered into three major stages: (a) pre-encounter, (b) immersion-emersion, and (c) internalization. (See Figure 3.)

Pre-encounter assimilation describes the Black person whose social identity is organized around his/her sense of being an American and an individual. This person places little emphasis on racial group identity and affiliation. He or she is not engaged in the Black community and culture. *Pre-encounter miseducation* depicts a Black person who accepts without question the negative images, stereotypes, and historical misinformation about Black people. This person does not care about resolving issues in the Black community. This person often holds the attitude that "That's the way *they* act, but *I* am different." The final pre-encounter type is called *pre-encounter racial self-hatred*. This individual experiences profoundly negative feelings and severe self-loathing because of being Black. Cross and Vandiver (2001) contended that this type of dysfunctionality and group hatred limits the person's positive engagement in solving

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Black problems and with Black culture. For the Black college student, this stage can be particularly confusing when he/she arrives on a predominately White campus. The individual may experience being confronted with their race as a serious issue of contention for the first time. In this stage, the person may be looking for acceptance from the standpoint of wanting to be seen as having “arrived” and thus see one’s self as different from the other African American students. As this person seeks acceptance in the White community, he or she may feel alienated from the Black community. At this stage such a person is more likely to be viewed by other Blacks as a “sellout” or to be “acting White.”

The next stage of identity, *immersion-emersion*, is characterized by two identity types. In *immersion-emersion anti-White*, the person is nearly consumed by the hatred of White people and society and all that it represents. He or she engages in Black problems and culture, and is often seen as an angry Black person. In *immersion-emersion intense Black involvement*, the person is often pro-Black everything and dedicated to all things Black. He or she engages in Blackness in nearly a cult-like fashion and is subject to “blacker-than-thou” social interactions with other Blacks. A student in this stage can be further alienated from both communities first by being seen as a racist by Whites and second by being seen as too militant by other Black persons to the point of being a troublemaker. Ultimately this leads to isolation. The person’s energy may become devoted only to seeking and securing social acceptance and less devoted to their academic purpose for being in college. Individuals in the middle stages of racial identity appear so consumed with finding their identity that academic achievement may have low significance in their lives.

The final racial identity stage, *internalization*, is comprised of three identity types. In *internalization nationalist*, the individual stresses an Afrocentric perspective about him/herself, other African Americans, and the world. Without question, this individual engages in the Black community and its many problems. *Internalization biculturalist* is an African American who gives equal importance to being an African American and being an American. He or she is able to celebrate being both Black and an American and is able to engage in both cultures without identity conflicts, doubt, and self-questioning. Finally, the *internalization multiculturalist* is an exemplar of a Black person whose identity fuses between two or more social categories or frames of reference. This person is interested in resolving issues that address multiple oppressions and is confident and comfortable in multiple groups. The Black college student in this stage is able to function and thrive on predominately White campuses and is sometimes seen as a leader of their community and also a campus leader who has integrated successfully on campus. These students can identify with being Black, but they also identify with being American and often direct their energies toward being successful college students. It is important to note that a person's racial identity may be directly or indirectly related to his or her academic achievement (Ford, 1996; Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993).

Black identity development is very important in understanding where a student's mindset is because it will give faculty and staff better tools with which to support that student's academic development. Attention to racial identity development in educational settings is critical. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) asserted that identity conflict is largely responsible for a significant number of early departures from the college campus. Harper & Quaye (2007) stated that:

Though Cross's model provides a backdrop for making sense of the complex developmental challenges facing African American college students on predominantly White campuses, its stage-wise progression is limited in that it indicates one must advance in order to reach the higher levels of racial identity development. (p. 129)

Cokley (1999) pointed out the difference between racial awareness and racial ideology and highlighted the necessity of not focusing exclusively on stage-like theories of racial identity development:

Racial awareness can be thought of as how often one appreciates, values, and is aware of one's racial and cultural heritage, whereas racial ideology has more to do with a set of beliefs one has about how members of one's racial group should act. (p. 237)

Unlike Cross's theory, Robinson and Howard-Hamilton's (1994) Africentric Resistance Modality Model includes seven non-hierarchical principles in which an African American person can engage independently or simultaneously as a means of fostering a positive, secure sense of racial identity. Robinson and Howard-Hamilton developed programs and strategies based on Robinson and Ward's Resistance Modality Model and the Nguzo Saba value system introduced by Dr. Karenga (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Among the principles are Ujima, which stands for a unity with other Black people that transcends gender, sexual orientation, and other socially constructed differences, as well as value placed on collective work in the quest to eradicate social inequities that put African Americans at a disadvantage.

In summary, many African American students feel the need to identify with their cultural and racial heritage, which is shaped from within and by outside influences. A healthy regard for one's racial status is a key factor that can help or hinder a Black student's success on predominately White campuses. As part of their coping strategy to deal with racism and perceived prejudice, students often connect with other students who are just like them. They also get involved in organizations that tend to promote a healthy sense of racial identity and can at times be seen as identity based organizations that promote student activism.

African Americans and Identity-Based Groups

Campuses perceived as hostile and create an environment where identity-based groups and race-based groups in particular are needed to help students cope and thrive at predominately White institutions. Many Black students attending predominately White institutions find the campuses to be alienating or unwelcoming. Confronted with real or perceived racial discrimination, overt racism, and a lack of mentors on campus, they seek a place to ground them that gives a voice to their struggles. Identity-based groups can offer a refuge for these students and also promote political activism. As these students begin to see inequities in policies and practices on our campuses, many African Americans for example tend to want to stand up and be counted. Many inequities cross racial lines, and Gilliard (1996) found that identity-based groups engaging in activism actually promote cultural awareness and a commitment toward racial understanding. They connect with student activism in an effort to cope with these conditions and address issues internal and external to university communities (Patton, 2006).

Previous studies have documented the benefits of being active in student organizations and out-of-class activities related to identity development and retention for African American college students (Cokley, 2001; Flowers, 2004; Fries-Britt, 2000; Harper, 2004, 2006; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Involvement in student organizations is one of the best tools for connecting students to the university. However, many African Americans are torn about the organizations with which to align themselves. Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) contended that “many racial/ethnic minority students find themselves either subverting their identity and becoming involved in the mainstream campus or assimilating as they struggle to maintain a strong cultural connection” (p. 330).

On the other hand, White (1998) described the pressures that are often placed on African American students by their same-race peers to participate in Black student organizations. She found that some participants in her study joined these organizations merely to keep their Black identities unquestioned. Often the typical African American does not want to be labeled a “sellout” or as “acting White” which is sometimes associated with mainstream campus organizations. This could explain why many African Americans are not highly involved in mainstream organizations (Fries-Britt, 2000; Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995).

Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) conducted focus groups with 34 Black undergraduates who attended three predominately White institutions about their experiences with racial discrimination and the racial climate for African American students on their college campuses. The authors examined instances of racial discrimination in academic and non-academic spaces. Subjects described instances of

racial discrimination in academic and non academic spaces. In response to repeated incidents of racial discrimination, the subjects in the study turned to counter-spaces. Examples of counter-spaces included African American student organizations, sororities and fraternities, and multicultural student centers. These African American undergraduates created counter-spaces to help them deal with a negative racial climate and to lessen the impact of these incidents on their efforts to persist in college.

Many African American students' first connection with student organizations usually happens in the form of Black student unions or Black Greek fraternities and sororities. According to Midwestern University's Black Student Alliance, an identity-based group, this organization serves many purposes:

BSA promotes academic achievement and cultural awareness by providing enlightening workshops, speakers and cultural activities. The organization is committed to fostering collegiality and building a strong sense of community among Black students and Black faculty and staff.

In fact, in a study conducted by Sutton and Kimbrough (2001), it was found that 79% of Black students were involved in the Black Student Alliance or NAACP at predominately White institutions.

According to Ross (2000), the first Black Greek organization was founded in 1906 at Cornell University. Nine national Black Greek Organizations are now under the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and have over 1.5 million members. When these groups were founded on both historically Black campuses and predominately White campuses, the goal was to enhance Black students' college experiences but also help them to deal with the political and social issues facing the Black community. Sutton and

Kimbrough (2001) also found that Black students who are Greek maintain higher grade point averages than non-Greek students. In a recent study, Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) noted that African American men who participate in Greek letter organizations embrace a stronger sense of Africentric self-consciousness and racial identity compared to those not in Greek letter organizations.

The importance of involvement in cultural student organizations, particularly in regard to minority student retention, has been supported in the literature (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987; McClung, 1988). Getting involved in minority-based organizations allows students of color to connect to the campus and makes it feel smaller; this helps them prepare to interact successfully on a larger campus. Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, and Trevino (1997) concluded that involvement in ethnic student organizations assists students of color in bridging the gap between their home communities and predominately White institutions. Guiffida (2003) found that not only is involvement in ethnic based student organizations good for students, but it also helps them connect and build relationships with Black faculty outside the classroom.

Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, and Gurin (2003) found that students—particularly African Americans—join race-based student organizations because they are identity enhancing; such increased identity comfort may lead to a greater interest in both cultural and cross-cultural activities. Many students have found that by joining an identity-based group on campus, they find a sense of place, a new strength in numbers, and a political voice with which to address challenges and feelings of oppression on campus. Gilliard (1996) found that participation in racially focused cultural activities and organizations for African Americans is correlated with African Americans' higher social involvement, informal

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social interaction with faculty, and higher use of general support services. This has been shown to benefit students academically and to enhance retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The notion of critical mass is also important with regard to identity-based groups. Antonio (2001) found that the more students of similar background that are on our campuses, the more likely they are to graduate. Identity-based groups seem to help with retention and these students provide support for one another and are more likely to persist when there is a critical mass. Antonio (2001) also pointed out that a reasonable number of same-race peers such as African Americans provides role models and academic, social, and cultural support for these students—a critical ingredient for a successful college experience.

Guiffrida (2003) also found that these groups help African Americans to give back to the Black community, feel comfortable among their peers, promote a sense of unity, and empower them to want to make changes on campus. However, Blacks who were not raised in predominately Black communities may feel alienated from other Blacks who see them as turning their backs on their own. Yet Tatum (1999) found that involvement in these ethnic groups was beneficial after the initial shock, and the involvement helps to integrate Black students into the Black community for the first time.

King and Howard-Hamilton (2000) made clear the significance of constructing learning opportunities outside of the classroom that facilitate identity development among racial/ ethnic minority students. Many Black students at predominately White institutions choose to develop their leadership skills within Black identity-based groups instead of the

larger mainstream campus organizations. Suttons & Terrell (1997) found that many African Americans are overlooked as leaders on campus by administrators and faculty.

CHAPTER III: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology that was used in this study. This chapter explains the paradigm, the method, and the type of data analysis used in the study. Each section will include a rationale for why each was appropriate for framing the research questions and collecting and presenting the results in this study.

To better understand the phenomena of the perceptions African American business students, the qualitative research method was used in this study. Specifically, a key research strategy that governed this study is that of the case study process. Rubin and Rubin (2005) believed that elaborated case studies are an excellent tool to find out what happened, why and what it means more broadly. They also believed that case studies help us to understand and explain phenomena. Peshkin (1988) suggested that qualitative research is most commonly encountered when conducting exploratory research. The overall goal of this type of research is to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, which is particularly useful when little is known about a problem.

Qualitative research is descriptive and incorporates expressive language and the "presence of voice in the text" (Eisner, 1991, p. 36). According to Gruber (1993), ontology is a systematic account of existence. Gruber also believed that ontology is a description of the concepts and relationships that can exist for an agent or a community of agents. From an ontological qualitative research perspective, the Critical Theory paradigm described by Lincoln and Guba (2000), which posits that reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values

guided this study. Patton (2002) believed that when studying individuals, the primary focus of data collection should be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how those individuals are affected by that setting.

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), a case study is a particular method of qualitative research; a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information and reporting the results. The researcher who uses this method may gain a sharpened understanding of why the instance happened as it did and which things might become important to look at more extensively in future research.

This study examined the perceptions of African American undergraduate business students at Midwestern University, a fictitious name used to further protect the identities of the participants. In-depth interviews were the source of data collection in this study. The researcher used in-depth interviews which were designed to accomplish the research goal of generating depth of understanding. According to Rubin & Rubin (2005), a key characteristic of in-depth interviews, also known as responsive interviews, is that they focus on obtaining the interviewees' interpretation of their experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live and work.

The college of business was chosen because more African Americans major in business at the undergraduate level than any other field. This study focused on Black undergraduate business students in the college of business in one predominately White university. The researcher posed a series of questions to African American undergraduate business students in order to determine their perceptions regarding their experiences as undergraduate business students.

Design of the Study

After reviewing many studies, the researcher chose the qualitative, naturalistic paradigm for this study for several reasons. First, it allowed the researcher to study people in the settings where they live, work, and play and to analyze what they have heard and then convey to others, in rich and realistic detail, the experiences and perspectives of those who were being studied (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Second, a paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). This disciplined inquiry focused on perceptions of African American undergraduate business students who, by the very nature of being African American, bring a unique set of perspectives to the research. Because of their histories and experiences with oppression, racial and ethnic minorities have unique perspectives on race and racism and a "unique voice" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9) unavailable to White people. Finally, the naturalistic paradigm has been embraced in educational practice, including higher education and student affairs.

Location

The study took place on the main campus of Midwestern University at a location that was convenient for the participants. Participants could have met off campus but all chose to meet on campus. The researcher used private office space in the College of Business, centrally located on campus. The following background information on the College of Business and Multicultural Business Programs is important to contextualize the nature of the experiences of the participants in this study.

Of all of the Midwestern University colleges, the business college has one of the largest undergraduate student enrollments with approximately 4,500 students per semester, out of which approximately 800 are from traditionally underrepresented ethnic backgrounds. Of the 330 African Americans in the College of Business, both upper level and lower level, 98 were juniors and seniors.

Multicultural Business Program (MBP), located in the College of Business, was created to foster an inclusive vision of diversity. This program, which grew out of the need to expand Minority Business Programs, was established in 1986. The overriding goal of MBP is to develop opportunities for students from all backgrounds to work effectively together to enhance their educational experiences. A major goal is to increase student retention and graduation rates, facilitate both academic and career development, and build partnerships for professional career placement opportunities.

The primary services provided by Multicultural Business Programs are academic guidance, tutorial services, career development, and summer programs. Stewart, Russell & Wright (1997) believed that student affairs personnel and professionals concerned with the matriculation and retention of multicultural students must be aware of the need to create an accepting and supportive atmosphere for multicultural students on predominately White campuses. MBP fosters a supportive environment and has done so for the last 21 years.

Aside from academics, MBP is actively involved with student organizations. The four student organizations that continue to operate under the umbrella of MBP are Multicultural Business Students (MBS), National Association of Black

Accountants (NABA), Native American and Hispanic Business Students (NAHBS) and Women in Business Students Association (WBSA). According to the MBP annual report for 2008–2009, out of a combined total number of 225 members 57% are African American, 28% are Caucasian, 14% are Hispanic & Native American and 1% are from other ethnic backgrounds. Every two weeks, each student organization invites corporate representatives to speak to their memberships on a variety of topics related to career and professional development.

Data Collection Procedures

The multiple case study approach was chosen as the research method for this study. The researcher chose the case study method because it is an excellent way to study the complex experiences of African American undergraduate business students at Midwestern University. Creswell (1994) stated that the case study method is appropriate because reality is socially constructed through individual and collective definitions of the situation. The perceptions of African American undergraduate business students who share the same situation of being business students helped shed light on the experience by freely illuminating what it is like for them individually at Midwestern University.

The researcher had one face-to-face, tape-recorded intensive interview with each student. The interviews lasted one to two hours. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to query the student. The researcher tape-recorded each session and took limited notes during the session. Appendix I provides the original semi-structured interview schedule. The schedule was supplemented with follow-up questions that reflected the emergent data. As the interviews progressed, the

participants were prompted to explore the meanings and perceptions of their experiences at Midwestern University in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree.

Each student in this study is the primary unit of analysis. All cases were included in this multiple case study. Yin (1994) believed that case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases. Yin also pointed out that the generalization of results, from either single or multiple designs, is constructed in regard to theory and not to populations. Therefore, in an open-ended interview, key respondents are asked to comment about certain events. They may also corroborate evidence obtained from other sources. As Yin (1994) and Stake (1995) pointed out, the researcher must avoid becoming dependent on a single informant, and seek the same data from other sources to verify its authenticity.

Data Analysis Procedures

Coding was used as a system for organizing and managing the data. Rubin & Rubin (2005) defined a code as a brief label to designate each concept and theme generated from the synthesis of ideas from individual interviews. They also defined coding as the systematic labeling of concepts, themes, events, and topical markers so that the researcher can readily retrieve and examine all of the data units that refer to the same subject across all interviews.

Each transcript was read several times before coding. Then, the researcher used line-by-line coding by which every line of text was studied to determine meanings, both implied and explicit. The researcher used the codes to sort and break down the large amount of data by studying and comparing the initial codes. Themes were identified that cut across multiple interviews. The constant comparative method

(Strauss & Corbin, 1994) was used throughout the data analysis to compare responses between and among participants about similar information and ideas after every interview.

Notebooks were used by the researcher to analyze the data during and after the interviews. The notebooks served as a journal to record reflections, attitudes, and any new questions that came up. The notebooks were helpful in tracking new developments and insights that came up during the reflection process.

Methods of Verification

Construct validity, an important aspect of qualitative research, is defined broadly as the extent to which an operationalization measures the concept it is supposed to measure (Cook and Campbell, 1979). Guba and Lincoln (1989) believed that each piece of data should be expanded at least once by another source or by a second method. In order to increase construct validity, the researchers' notebooks were used for more document analysis. Verbatim thick descriptions were also used to enhance the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the findings. The researcher also used his adviser as an external check of the research process as well as the analysis of data. The adviser acted as an external auditor in order to assess the rigor of the process and the product.

Qualitative researchers address validity throughout the data collection and analysis processes. As qualitative researchers review more cases, seeking common themes and patterns, they are in essence working to ensure validity (Maxwell, 1992).

Selection of Participants

The initial sample of participants was selected from all self-identified African American students enrolled in the college of business who were classified as juniors and seniors. The criteria for participation included the following factors: African American, undergraduate business juniors or seniors, attendance at Midwestern University for a minimum of two years, and currently attending Midwestern University. Of the 98 students who met the criteria (all 98 students had an opportunity to participate), 16 students volunteered. The researcher interviewed 16 undergraduate African American students in person: 10 females and 6 males. There were 14 more females in the eligible pool for the college of business.

Using a semi-structured interview schedule, the researcher guided the interviews by asking probing questions relevant to each participant's responses. The researcher audio-taped each interview and transcribed the tapes verbatim after each session. The study also included some demographic information about the subjects. This information was useful as part of the ongoing process of data collection and analysis.

Table 1 depicts the demographics of the African American participants, (identified by pseudonyms). Although all of the students identified themselves as African American, two of the students, Carlos and Marlowe, were born in Africa and became citizens of the United States. Lisa C. identified her mother as East Indian and her father as African American. All students were enrolled full-time at Midwestern University at the time of their interview. Table 2 depicts the academic

profile of the students, and Table 3 depicts the parental backgrounds and hometowns of the students.

The participants ranged in age from 20 to 22 years. Six students had established the class rank of junior and ten participants were seniors at the time of their interviews. The participants represented the following majors in the college of business at Midwestern University: Accounting (n=6); Finance (n=5); Supply Chain Management (n=3); Hospitality Business (n=1) and Marketing (n=1).

The college grade point averages for the group of 16 ranged from 2.76 to 3.94 with an average of 3.33. Their high school grade point averages ranged from 3.0 to 3.93 with an average of 3.52. Their ACT scores ranged from 17 to 27 with an average of 22 rounded up.

Thirteen of the participants considered their communities of origin as urban (n=13), three participants said suburban (n=3). No one said rural. Nine participants had married parents (n=9); six had single parent mothers (n=6); and one had a foster mother (n=1). The data revealed the level of education completed by participants' parents by sex. The categories that emerged were: (a) completion of high school, (b) associate degree, (c) some college, (d) bachelor's degree and (e) graduate or professional degree. The educational completion levels of the mothers were high school (n=2), associate degree (n=3), bachelor's degree (n=6), and graduate or professional degree (n=5). The educational completion levels of the fathers were high school (n=5), associate degree (n=3), some college (n=1), bachelor's degree (n=4), and graduate or professional degree (n=3).

Table 1*College Profile of Students in the Study*

Gender	Major	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Class
F	Accounting	Sarah J.	22	A.A	Senior
F	Supply Chain	Mya	20	A.A	Senior
M	Marketing	James J.	22	A.A	Senior
F	Accounting	Ashley H.	22	A.A	Senior
F	Accounting	Tiny W.	20	A.A	Junior
M	Supply Chain	Joseph	21	Black	Senior
F	Accounting Hos.	Hanna J.	22	A.A	Junior
F	Business	Mary G.	20	A.A	Junior
F	Finance	Danielle O.	20	A.A	Junior
M	Finance	Bill B.	21	A.A	Senior
M	Accounting	Meech	20	A.A	Junior
M	Finance	Marlowe	20	A.A	Senior
F	Finance	Elizabeth	21	A.A	Senior
F	Finance	Lisa C.	22	E. Ind./ A.A	SEnior
F	Accounting	Christina G.	21	A.A	Senior
M	Supply Chain	Carlos	20	A.A	Junior

Table 2*Academic Profile: College and High School GPAs & Test Scores*

Cum Grade Pt. Avg.	Pseudonym	ACT Score	HS GPA
3.2812	Sarah J.	21	3.67
3.4464	Mya	18	3.4
3.0505	James J.	23	3.9
3.3584	Ashley H.	24	3
3.6851	Tiny W.	23	3.6
3.3406	Joseph	21	3.4
3.3879	Hanna J.	25	3.5
2.7692	Mary G.	17	3.3
3.279	Danielle O.	17	3.5
3.0303	Bill B.	21	3.03
3.6122	Meech	20	3.7
2.9423	Marlowe	23	3.2
3.94	Elizabeth	27	3.93
3.5817	Lisa C.	25	3.6
3.3597	Christina G.	20	3.8
3.2547	Carlos	22	3.8
Avg. College GPA 3.33245		Avg. ACT Score 21.6875	Avg. GPA 3.52062

Table 3*Parental Background Information: Educational Level and Family Hometown*

Pseudonym	Mom's Education	Dad's Education	Family Hometown	Single Parent
Sarah J.	Assoc. Degree	High School Diploma	Detroit, MI	No
Mya	Assoc. Degree	High School Diploma	Detroit, MI	Yes
James J.	Assoc. Degree	Bachelor	Detroit, MI	Yes
Ashley H.	Bachelor	Ph.D.	Detroit, MI	No
Tiny W.	Bachelor	Associate Degree	Detroit, MI	No
Joseph	Bachelor	Associate Degree	Flint, MI	No
Hanna J.	Bachelor	Graduate Degree	Lansing/Okemos, MI	No
Mary G.	Bachelor	3 Years of College	Southfield, MI	No
Danielle O.	Bachelor	Associate Degree	Pontiac, MI	Yes
Bill B.	Graduate Degree	Bloomfield Hills, MI	MI	No
Meech	Graduate Degree	Graduate Degree	Detroit/Taylor, MI	No
Marlowe	Graduate Degree	High School Diploma	Africa/Detroit, MI	Yes
Elizabeth	Graduate Degree	Bachelor	Farmington Hills, MI	Yes
Lisa C.	Ph.D.	High School Diploma	Lansing/Haslett, MI	Yes
Christina G.	High School Diploma	High School Diploma	MI	Foster Care
Carlos	High School Diploma	Bachelor	Detroit, MI Africa/Grand Rapids, MI	No

The Role of the Researcher

This researcher used a qualitative ontological perspective for this study. This researcher believes in the definition of constructionism put forth by Crotty (1998):

The view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (p. 42).

In the constructionist paradigm, also called the naturalistic paradigm, Lincoln & Guba (1989) believed that qualitative research is inherently an interpretive process; therefore, it is important for a researcher's perspective to be articulated. Any personal connections the researcher has with the topic or participants should be identified.

This researcher is an African American who attended a predominately White undergraduate institution; although it was another university, the experience has influenced the researcher's perspective on the research topic.

The researcher has also worked in predominantly White colleges and universities as an administrator for the last 20 years in roles focused on the recruitment, retention, and graduation of underrepresented populations. He currently serves as an administrator for a retention program where he has come in contact with some of the study participants. His interest in investigating the students' perceptions comes from his professional experience. All participants understood that the researcher was pursuing this study as a doctoral student.

Human Participant Considerations

The participants' rights were protected in several ways. Prior to the interviews, the participants completed a consent form (See Appendix IV). The consent form contained the following significant information and sections: (a) the purpose of the study; (b) data collection procedures; (c) the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time; (d) the strategy to protect the participant's confidentiality; (e) a statement indicating that there are no known risks associated with the study; (f) a statement regarding the taping and transcribed document process; (g) the expected benefits of the study; and (h) the signature and date line. All participants signed the consent form and the originals are on file with the researcher. Pseudonyms were used on the data collection materials, in the data analysis, and in reporting findings, therefore protecting the participants' confidentiality. The tapes, transcripts, and data were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. The audiotapes will be retained for two years and will be destroyed two years from the original collection date.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Data Analysis and Results

This chapter describes the data that was collected and an analysis of that data. The first section provides some background information on the African American students in this study; where the students were born, childhood memories, where they grew up, and the family households they grew up in and the educational background of their parents.

The following sections describe the five major themes that emerged from the analysis of the 16 interview transcripts. The major themes are as follows: (a) Standing on Their Shoulders—Getting Ready for College; (b) Perceptions of Segregation on Campus; (c) Perceptions of the Classroom & Professors; (d) Perceptions of Academic Advising; and (e) Getting Involved Pays Off.

The African American students' perceptions are presented here using their voices. The direct quotes that support each theme are excerpts from the participants' transcribed interviews. Germain and Gitterman's (1996) Person-in-Environment (PE) paradigm allows for a greater understanding of factors that contribute to a students' perception of their environment from a Systems Perspective. The PE paradigm suggests that the person, in interaction with his/her environment, creates a personal perception of that experience; in this case, their perception of being an African American business student. Thus, the rich quotes add to the wholeness of the collective perspectives of the students and provide supporting documentation.

Background of Students

An understanding of the backgrounds of the students who participated this study is essential to knowing who they are. To begin with, seven of the students were from Detroit, one student was born in Cameroon, Africa then grew up in Detroit, and another student was born in Ethiopia, Africa but grew up in Grand Rapids, MI. Two students were born in Lansing; one grew up in Okemos, MI, an upper-class suburb of Lansing, and the other resides in Haslett, MI, another suburb of Lansing. One student grew up in Bloomfield Hills, another Farmington Hills and another in Southfield. All three cities are considered suburbs of Detroit, with Bloomfield and Farmington being considered the more wealthy suburbs with considerably better educational systems. Finally, two students were from Flint and Pontiac, MI; both cities are considered urban industrial towns that once thrived because of the automobile industry.

The communities and neighborhoods that these students came from is another important factor that describes this group of African American business students. The majority of these students described their childhoods as fun and remembered growing up in very family and community oriented neighborhoods. Hanna stated:

My earliest memories were growing up in Lansing on a street called Narragansett. And it was a really great community to grow up in, I think. We had a park across the street and there were lots of kids in my neighborhood. I had a brother around my age and the elementary school that we attended was also in the neighborhood, so I think it was good that we had a lot of autonomy to, like, walk to school and walk back within our neighborhood... there was a lot of, like a strong community and it was a pretty safe place.

Bill stated:

Okay, I was from a small suburb, Bloomfield Hills; I just remember it was not a lot of kids in my neighborhood that were around my same age, so we didn't do a lot of playing outside. That wasn't what we did, my cousins from Detroit and stuff they always played outside... We traveled a little bit outside; they wanted to just show us a lot of stuff that they didn't have when they were growing up, so they did a really good job on that and kind of just showed, they were always big on right and wrong and family was big too. So it was a good childhood, it's a lot of love and support, a lot of good experiences, lessons I was younger, no more than a handful, though. So that was about it, I'd say that's about it.

Some students had a different experience of community and neighborhood.

Urban cities offer a unique set of challenges for African American families.

Combined with the poverty levels in the city, the school systems tend to be very underfunded and dilapidated. Solórzano and Solórzano (1995) asserted that the cumulative effects of poverty have a direct relationship on the low numbers of under-represented college ready students who actually go on to college. James stated:

I grew up in Detroit, Michigan, southeast side. My mom was a single mother, but I still knew my—know my father and I was really close to my grandparents on my father's side.

Christina stated:

I lived in Detroit, it was Retlen off of Joy Road and the freeway, so it was a really bad neighborhood I would say. It was a two-bedroom house; it had

seven kids, two adults, so you can only imagine the living conditions... I don't know if you heard of Herman Garden project-type buildings. So my grandma lived there, so we were back and forth through there.

Nine of the students came from two-parent households; six came from single-parent homes (moms), and one student grew up in the foster care system. Eleven of the students' mothers earned at least a bachelor's degree; of those, five also earned graduate degrees with one holding a Ph.D. Three moms earned only high school educations and the other three moms earned associate's degrees. Of the reported education levels for the fathers seven earned at least a bachelor's degree and of the seven, two held graduate degrees and one held a Ph.D. Three fathers held at least an associate's degree while three held at least a high school diploma. One had three years toward a bachelor's degree but never completed his degree because of financial reasons.

Theme One: Standing on Their Shoulders—Getting Ready for College

Though the education level of parents was an important factor in terms of the background of these students, another important factor related to aspirations—the hopes and dreams that these parents had for their children in terms of going to college and graduating. Although some of the students' parents did not go to college, they still had aspirations that they passed on to their children who then wanted to go to college. But still there were some obstacles to overcome.

In more poverty-stricken communities and school districts, the goal of graduation is pushed more than going to college. Very little college preparation information is provided at all (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998).

Though parental encouragement and support is the most important indicator of a child developing college aspirations, parents who have not attended college may be ill-equipped to prepare their children for the rigorous process of getting ready for college (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

Although some of these students' parents did not attend college, many of them had expectations that their children would go to college and make better lives for themselves. They still had this expectation even if they could not serve as examples. Many first-generation college students attested to the fact that their parents pushed them. Christina stated:

You had to make sure you were on your game as far as school, as far as education. My dad and mom, although they didn't graduate from college, they didn't even go, they were pretty smart individuals—because of their circumstances they weren't able to pursue higher-level education, so it was still held as a high goal.

Meech stated:

My father always stressed the importance of education because he finished high school but that was the furthest education he ever went to and he always wanted his children to be better than him, so he always stressed the importance of going to college and different things like that. But the only thing was, there was no example to take of—okay, how do you go through this process? Even though he always stressed the importance of college it was kind of hard being that he wasn't in the shoes, he never been to college, he never experienced that.

However, Meech's mom did go to college, and she provided a more non-traditional example of the importance of higher education:

But my mother went to college, and she went to community college and she went to some grad school after, maybe, when I was in high school so she just finished up with her masters and things like that. So that was a good example of how to go through things like that.

Sarah's mom also went to college and her father did not:

And as far as their aspirations for me, in my, with my education my mother she went to college so she always pushed to say, "Hey, you're going to go to college," my father, he didn't, but he had those aspirations for us to excel.

And just he pushed us to learn as much as we can even though my father didn't go to college.

Kim and Schneider (2005) found that parents with lower levels of educational attainment benefit the most from active participation with school counselors and other school personnel regarding their children's college goals. They also found that if parents and students have the same goal of attending college, their chances of doing so are increased. Anderson and Hearn (1992) found that when socioeconomic background is held constant, Black students have higher aspirations to participate in higher education than Whites. Research also indicates that high school counselors are more likely to influence the college plans of low-income students and students of color, specifically African American students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Trusty & Niles, 2003). When asked who had the greatest influence on her college plans,

Christina stated:

My counselor, I did not know how I was going to, what I was going to do. Like, I just felt like, do I even want to go to college? Like, I knew I wanted to go to college but I didn't really care about where, really, at first. Until I talked to my counselor and she was saying like, you really need to consider what you want to do in life and, you know, she knew my situation so she really thought about, okay, well, your sister's up there—that would be good for you, because if you go somewhere else you won't have as much support and you probably really do need it just because you've never had really that much support in your life so that will really help. Her and my sister, those two people were the main, like, influences.

Danielle talked about the impact that Dr. Bergner, a university official who worked closely with school counselors, had on her decision to go to college:

I would say it would be Dr. Bergner. He was a recruiter for Midwestern and he came down to Pontiac Central, and I really, by that time I'm like okay, I really want to learn more, I wonder—can I get in, and he was the person I met with and after meeting with him one time he remembered my face. So that was like a plus right there and he knew of my first ACT scores that I didn't score high at all. And, but I scored a 12, and he said, "Oh well, try again.", I tried it again, I met him again, I told him I had a 17. He was like "That's amazing and it's pretty much you have a good chance of getting in, but if you take the ACT again try even harder to go higher. I believe that if you can go

from a 12 to a 17 you can jump to a 22.” So he was really encouraging to me as far as coming to this institution.

The perspectives of the students in this study whose parents or even grandparents did graduate from college provided some interesting insights that were consistent with the literature. African American parents of second- or third-generation college students provide someone to turn to in order to help them navigate the system. They are more likely to graduate from college than first-generation college students (Choy, 2001). Students who attend private and suburban schools are more likely to attend college than students from inner-city schools and have all the supporting resources to make it happen (Carnevale & Rose, 2003).

Bill and Lisa both attended suburban schools with very strong college preparatory curricula. Both spoke of the value of higher education instilled in them by their parents, who were college graduates. They gave detailed depictions of how important education was in their families. Bill stated:

It was huge; everybody's supposed to go to school. My father, he went to high school, undergrad, put himself through undergrad, put himself through graduate school, and he, eventually they were, my mother had got pregnant with my sister when he was still in grad school, so she was in a hospital delivering, he was still reading a book and stuff. So and she was the same where she got her high school, undergrad, and then she later went on to get her teaching certification and got her graduate degree as well.

Lisa stated:

My mom just recently got her Ph.D. in higher education. And my father finished just one degree here at Midwestern; both of them went to Typical College. My mom did all three of her degrees here, but he only finished one degree here....So they always wanted the best education for me, they always wanted me to go to the best schools; they wanted me to go to Midwestern or a big university....I mean it's something that's absolutely necessary and it's been instilled in me like I must do well in school. So I've carried that with me.

Greatest Influence on College Choice

Trusty (2002) found that students are influenced by their perceptions of what parents, close relatives, and significant others think about their educational aspirations for them. The students were asked about which person had the greatest influence on their decisions to attend this university; the majority of them chose one of their parents or a counselor, teacher or university staff member. Joseph said:

Probably, I would say my parents, but my dad because he was a little bit more vocal than my mother. But it was pretty much him pushing me to say that you know you can't stay in my house anymore so you're going to have to go out in the world and make it yourself, and he said this would be the best opportunity for you. And yeah, that was pretty much.

Lisa also supported the fact that a parent was a major influence in her decision to attend this university. She stated:

I would probably say my mom. I mean definitely, like, and not because you know she went here and this is, and you know she really enjoyed it so she knew that I would enjoy it, but I mean more so just, you know she wanted me to go to a really good college. And when we got to talking about it, I was like you know why should I rule this school out because it's in my backyard?

That's not fair, you know what I mean. How many kids do we have on this campus, people who come from all over the world just to come to this university and I'm lucky enough to have grown up in the city where it is. So, you know, I just consider myself very lucky that she helped me to see that this is a great university and that you know, even though it's right, you know sometimes the best things are right under your nose. So yeah.

Finally, Elizabeth gave a very compelling account of the influence of her mother in making the decision to attend this university:

Individual? I mean I guess my mom. She's always kind of been the focal point of my life, she kind of made it that way whether I wanted her to be or not. But so I guess my mom was the underlying factor of it. I think she—and I guess it was a combination of the two of us because I fell in love with Midwestern even before I came up to talk to you guys and the rest of the business college people. I had already kind of come on campus when I was going into my senior year for this program called New Detroit and it was like a business program, and you did entrepreneurship, and you made a business plan for a group. So just being on campus, even though the program really had nothing to do with Midwestern, just being on campus for the first time

made me want to come here to begin with. So I guess my mom was the driving force to get me to not just think about how good the school was, but to also think about where I would fit in the best. And so she, even though she wanted me to go to U of M after talking to the woman and getting just kind of the vibes of people that were there, where I'm not knocking the school. You know I am a Midwestern, I bleed Midwestern, I'm not knocking U of M; it's just kind of the vibes of the people and the, you know, "I go to U of M" like "I'm a wolverine, hail." That was just an attitude that I wasn't used to nor that I ever wanted to embody. And my mother, and that's because of how I was raised and how my mother was, so us getting that same vibe we both were kind of like, "Midwestern University."

Major, Motivation, and Career Selection

Studies suggest that African American students value the importance of earning high incomes and contributing to society (Hwang, Echols, & Vrongistinos, 2002; Lewis & Collins, 2001). Students who aspire to majors that lead to high occupational status—such as business—could be more motivated to persist than students who had lower aspirations (Thomas, 1985). Thomas also found that this helps these students persist toward graduation more so than students who do not pursue more prestigious majors such as business. When asked why he chose to major in business, Joseph stated:

I'd probably say the job opportunities that I seen when I actually started to learn about it, became very interested.... Money, yes, money is the main issue...From a future potential aspect. I have other interests that I'm

interested in such as theology and world history, but I guess the main thing between that is world history and theology. They don't pay the bills like being a business major would.

Hanna stated:

I think it was job security, honestly. I knew I wanted to do something in business and I really didn't know much about the other majors besides accounting and I knew that, you know, no matter what I wanted to do in business accounting would never hurt me as a degree. So I think that's it.

Lisa stated:

Yeah, I mean, it's a great major, I mean it is very prestigious. When I tell people I'm a finance major, they're like wait wow, you're a what? I mean it's a tough major, it's tough, if you don't like math, no, I would not recommend you this major....I mean it's tough, not easy, it's very prestigious and a lot of good jobs, a lot of good internships come out of this major. I mean it's very; you can go a lot of places with a finance degree.

When it comes to factors that influence career choice, family members—particularly parents—are the most influential determinant of career plans, occupational aspirations, and occupational expectations (Hines, 1997; Parham & Austin, 1994). Otto (1989) believed that no one has greater influence over a child's career plans than parents. Research supporting the influential role of parents, particularly for African Americans, is highlighted by Kimbrough and Salomone (1993), Parham and Austin (1994), and Leong (1995). When asked who had the biggest influence on their major and career decision, Mary stated:

My parents' Pita-Mex business. After that I kind of fell in love with the restaurant. And I just knew, for the longest I wanted to be opening the same restaurant, my dad was like "No, don't, don't do that." (laughing). It was my mom and dad.

Elizabeth stated:

Probably my interest in how much money was in it. Coming in I wanted to be, coming in I was a GBA, General Business Administration Pre-Law major. And after talking with advisers I realized that I didn't need pre-law to be at the end of my major in order to go to law school. And then after a lot of convincing from my mother I decided law school wasn't the way to go, which is kind of ironic that she's a lawyer convincing me not to go to law school. So, then from there it was a question of where my interests were, and even since I was in elementary school I always loved math, so I wanted a math-based major if possible. So it was accounting or finance. And then I chose finance because I didn't want to do public accounting and I didn't want to be a CPA. I actually wanted to work in a corporation, so finance.

Joseph stated,

My mom actually went here in the '80s, and she graduated with materials management. So it's like an earlier form of what I did, supply chain, and the job opportunities that I had, so I just looked at everything holistically and kind of made a choice.

Theme Two: Perceptions of Segregation on Campus

Chang (1999) concluded that having large numbers of students of color on a predominantly White campus means nothing if that campus does not foster any opportunities for cross-racial interaction. Predominantly White institutions have a legacy of segregation and exclusion towards students of color (Braddock, 1980; Hardin, 1997). Even though Black students may attend the same university as White students, their experiences tend to be totally different given the tendency of both groups to self-segregate (D'Souza, 1991; Sidanius, Larr, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004). Finally, Antonio (2001) found that students at a highly racially diverse campus thought that self-segregation was pervasive at their institution. Students in this study confirmed the above research. When asked to describe how they perceived the racial climate on this campus, Meech stated:

It's not that bad because the Blacks that are on campus are pretty close, it's kind of like our own historically Black college and university (HBCU) within a White university. So it, even though we're very much the minority and we're pretty much about to be behind the Asians, like it's not that bad because I mean we surround our self by Black people, we just that's just how it works, you go to class you sit next to a Black person. That's just how it is, and it's kind of sad it's to that, because for all the years that everyone fought for no segregation and different things like that it still feels somewhat segregated. But its okay, it doesn't bother me.... In campus, on campus, off campus, it's just some of the things that our forefathers fought for is something that we're still struggling with today.

Marlow also talked about the perception that there is an “(HBCU) within this campus”:

Socially it’s basically separated. There’s like, like people say there’s a Black Midwestern University and then there’s Midwestern University, you know because I mean all the Black people like know each other and hang out together, and it’s like a school within a school, it’s like an HBCU within Midwestern University. So, socially then outside it’s totally separated. Like during my first and second year we sometimes went to like frat parties and you know I mean that’s the extent of it, like, I have experience that they like the White people have it easier when it comes to social events than minorities do.

Elizabeth went on to say:

Um, I mean it’s really segregated if you think about it. This campus has all the races here, but we don’t really interact with each other, you know.... But there’s a whole I guess Black culture or Black Midwestern University that people don’t know about unless they’re Black or they got Black friends. So to me it’s kind of going back to the races not being able, it being, not being free to interact; to now where it’s more acceptable than before it’s still interesting to see like how people just group themselves with where they are comfortable. Although all students have the right to choose who they associate with, it is this visible self-segregation that African Americans are often condemned for.

Barnett (1995) stated:

It is often discussed that Black students have a tendency to separate themselves from the rest of the campus community. Often this is pointed out simply because it is the Black students who are readily visible and identifiable. Although White students sit together in dining commons, live together, and enjoy membership in all White student organizations, it is often perceived that the Black students, who behave in a similar manner, are the primary hindrance in achieving a unified campus. (p. 114)

A major perception that seemed to be unique to this population and this university is that administrators deliberately separate students by ethnicity in the residence hall system.

The Dorm Dilemma

According to the 2009–2010 housing contract for the university in this study, there is a non-discrimination policy that states: “Campus Living Services does not discriminate in room or hall assignment on the basis of race, color, age, gender, gender identity, disability, height, marital status, national origin, political persuasion, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status or weight.” There is no documentation that states that students can choose their housing assignment, however a student can select a roommate to be paired with. Note that the housing process will change in Fall of 2010. Currently the Housing Assignments Office makes all housing assignments according to their policy of nondiscrimination. With this being the case, some students assume that the housing office is responsible for the segregation of students in the residence hall system on campus. Continuing with the questioning of students’ perceptions of the racial climate of this campus, Joseph stated:

Yeah, just, it's just a lot that I see that goes on for as even the placement of students in dorms sometimes, you see that they group a lot of the Black kids in one or two dorms, Hubbard, Brody, which can be good and can be bad. Good for the fact of you feel a sense of community possibly, but then also bad that you're still trying to segregate or shelter other people. I wonder is it for our benefit as Black people, or is it to you know keep us from intermingling with some of the White kids that maybe went to an all White school, that don't know anything about Black people, or fear, or don't feel comfortable being around them? Because we have no choice but to be accepting even though a lot of the Black kids went to majority Black high schools but we have no choice but to intermingle, interact, where I think sometimes they can shelter some of the White kids. So I don't know if that's on purpose, but it seems like a trend.

Joseph went on to clarify even further his perception of the housing situation on another part of campus:

I mean yeah, like I said, the majority of the Black people stay in either Brody or Hubbard, you'd be hard pressed to go to West Circle and find a Black person with descent from Africa, or someone from Africa....Well, I think that it still just keeps some people ignorant, but you know, in the day that we live in where everyone's politically correct, like I said, no one actually comes out and says it but I still think that some people do have attitudes, negative attitudes, toward people that don't look like them because of the lack of intermingling in certain areas.

Danielle also talked about the perception that Hubbard Hall is the minority hall:

From a racial perspective you feel like you're the minority, but it depends where you live too. Because if you stay in Hubbard you really don't feel like you're a minority because there's a lot of African Americans and Asians there, you feel like you live with the minorities. But if you were to live like in Yakley you would definitely feel like the only minority.

Christina provided her insight regarding the residence halls on campus. She felt that there is definitely a problem:

Oh yeah, Hubbard Hall, you know I guess they group, I don't know how it happens, but the majority of the African Americans that are in the dorms are placed into Hubbard Hall, so when you look at it, or a lot of Caucasian students look at it as the "hood" of Midwestern University. Like, so if you're stationed at Hubbard then you're "hood." It's weird, but yeah it's perceived that that's the "hood" part of campus because all the African Americans are there. The thing is, we don't even make up half of Hubbard, just the majority of African Americans live in Hubbard, but the Caucasians still outnumber us so I don't see what the issue is.

Bill also referred to the residence halls on this campus and could not understand why the residence halls seem so segregated:

I don't know how it happens, but it seems like even though diversity's supposed to be a huge thing here it seems like every minority race is sector off. I mean you've got Hubbard Hall—has all Black people in it. And you got Holden Hall— has all Asian people in it. And it's just; it's something I

don't understand how that keeps happening every year. And it's so well-known and it's just I mean, but on top of that it's just like, Holden Hall is predominantly White and Wonders hall is predominantly White, it's never mixed anywhere, I mean I just don't understand why it's such hugely, hugely sectored here, and sectored there, sectored there. So for the climate I'd say there are races all over the place but they're still segregated in a sense to me.

But the most compelling account of the perception of the racial climate on this campus came from Maya. Maya became really agitated and her voice rose as she began to passionately speak on this topic:

Not only that, I don't want to get off topic, I really can I just say this? This is something I just do not—I don't understand why; the only thing about this university is how the living situation is. You have the Blacks on the east side of campus in Hubbard, which is like the so-called ghetto part or the "hood" part of campus. And it's like—I feel like somebody told me that there's like another race or like, Asians or somebody in another part, I don't know exactly where that is, but that's the only thing. I just wish the university would kind of mix people up a little more, I kind of feel like Blacks do not have to stay in Hubbard, I feel like they could rearrange something. I don't know, I feel like something else could be done, I know I got off topic but I was just thinking about that. When I'm walking on campus it's just, like, I don't see a lot of Blacks, but at night especially, or even during the day I could just go over to Hubbard and that's where our small percentage is, and it may seem like a lot once you go over there, but I don't like that at all, so I wish the university

would kind of change that. Especially that stereotype of having the east side of campus being like the “hood” part and where all the Blacks are, so. I don’t know, we’re not all— I mean I didn’t stay in Hubbard, I stayed in Shaw my freshman year because I was in a business program, but that also played a role, I know I’m getting so off topic, but staying in Shaw was kind of difficult too because it was not a lot of African Americans in there so I felt separated from “my people,” so-called. A lot of my friends were in Hubbard, so I guess I didn’t experience a lot of what my friends, which are African Americans, experienced, so I felt like that’s the only thing that I didn’t really experience the dorm life, even though I stayed in a dorm. I kind of, you know, I said hi to people but I didn’t make my best friends, like I didn’t feel like I, I didn’t make a lot of best friends here at Midwestern University because I was so far away from, like, my friends and it’s just, I don’t know, that was the only thing I just didn’t experience that part of campus, so I just or like the university so, I didn’t mean to get off topic....Yeah, I just really, I wish something could be done. So if somebody’s hearing me, let’s change that!

Maya went on to say that she lost a lot of her Black friends because they lived in Hubbard and she lived in Shaw as a business student. She also said she felt isolated, and when asked if she felt the university contributed to her feelings of isolation, she said:

Yeah, I do, I mean I know on the application how people put their, you know they may select Hubbard, but for one I feel like they select Hubbard because it’s a stereotype already there that’s where all the Blacks are going to be so

let's just be over there in Hubbard, that's where the hype spot is. So I mean, I don't know. So I just wish that stereotype would be broke, like it just would be thrown away. Like my cousin, he graduated probably in '04 from Midwestern; I remember he told me to make sure I put Hubbard. He told me to make sure I put Hubbard because that's where all the people is, so if they go back that far, not that '04 is long, but this [shit] is lasting for too long so, I just wish that would change. And it's not like those are the best dorms neither, so I just find that weird that that's where the Black people are, but, you know, in my opinion [laughing].

In a study by Loo and Rolison (1986) the researchers found that White students interpret ethnic group clustering as racial segregation, while minority students view this behavior as cultural support within a larger unsupportive environment. This refers to self-segregation as a conscious act on the student's part. However, the findings in this study seemed to contradict research that found that some students feel unhappy with the perceived institutional practice of segregating African Americans into one region of the campus. Rankin & Reason (2005) confirmed that students of color tend to have less favorable perceptions of campus race relations and the climate on campus. Finally, Allen (1992) stated that, "on predominately White campuses, Black students emphasize feelings of alienation, sensed hostility, racial discrimination, and lack of integration" (p. 39). Allen mentioned the need for Black students to commune and connect in order to combat real or perceived acts of racism or discrimination.

Theme Three: Perceptions of the Classroom and Professors

Several research studies have documented many situations in which academically talented African American students were often questioned about their intelligence, and some academically talented African Americans have reported feeling like they are always being watched and judged by both peers and faculty (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997; Fries-Britt, 1998). When asked to explain what was like in the classrooms of the business college, Joseph answered:

Sometimes you get into a group and I guess you would feel that at least I felt personally, I can't speak for others, but that you had to prove yourself to the group because a lot of their perceptions was that you were some uneducated or you know Black kid that got into the class through some affirmative action or you're not necessarily qualified, or you don't actually know what's going on you're just there, so before you get the group to embrace you, you have to I guess somewhat prove yourself. That you're on the same intellectual level as them, which I always found quite funny.... Yes, and sometimes where they just looked at you, and you could just see that from interactions and even them giving out work, you know like divvying out work they wouldn't try to give you anything that was meaningful, because they thought that you didn't know what you were doing, or that you would mess up, or that you would hurt the group. I guess they just wanted you to sit back and smile.

Danielle also added:

As far as business courses, well all my classes it could be kind of intimidating. Especially when you are the only minority at times, especially

for my business courses I have been the only minority in my accounting class. And it's kind of hard to approach people for help because when you have someone that's your same ethnicity it's easy to approach them because you know that you guys have something in common. But when it comes to approaching someone who is not of your ethnicity you really don't know what to expect, and sometimes you come off with the notion, and it's all, it could be all in your head. It's probably all in my head, but you automatically think that they think that you're not smart enough. And then, so for me that could be a little bit stressful as far as my business courses and I would say my business courses, the class setting, it's challenging but yet rewarding.

Ashley said that her being an African American had a lot to do with how she felt in the classroom and how she had to prove herself over and over again:

A lot of times it did, and at first I didn't believe people like if they said you know if you're African American you go into a group with all White people or Asians or whatever they're expecting you not to know things. But it's true, like they really are, so just kind of trying to prove yourself, I think it wasn't difficult for me but it was like, what's the word I'm looking for, um, it was like really apparent like, I had to prove myself. Or like my ideas or my thoughts about what we were supposed to do didn't necessarily believe it, someone else could say the same thing and they'll go with it, so I mean it's fine, I'm used to it now...Yeah, especially with guys. Girls were, like you know like, girls of other races. they weren't as bad, but for some reason most of my classes I am the only girl in my group, like not only the only Black

person but the only girl so I think it was more difficult with me and like five White guys, they're not going to listen unless I like be like a lot more assertive.

These comments were consistent with research (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002) that has detailed the experiences of African American students who said that they had to prove themselves in the academic environment and that respect was not forthcoming until they were able to measure up to the dominant culture's unwritten standards, both in and outside of the classroom. Finally, when talking about what it was like to be one of a few African American students in the college of business, Lisa provided a compelling statement:

I don't really think that it's an experience that anybody can understand unless they physically go through it, because if you try to explain it to somebody who, for instance if I'm sitting in the classroom and there's 600 people and I can count how many Black people are in the classroom and I'm trying to explain this to maybe one of my White coworkers or peers and they don't understand, like, what's the issue? They can't really understand it. So I don't really think that, you know, yeah, I don't think that anybody can really understand it unless they're in that situation. And being outside I mean being in that situation sometimes I feel as if you know it's sad. It's sad to me that you know that you know that there are races that are really underrepresented, but not even necessarily so because there's so many of them here. But in terms of the general population to how many people, how many people even make it to these higher up levels in your college courses, it's sad you know.

And it's kind of, you feel somewhat alone, and I mean it's weird and especially when you take these courses where teachers want to talk about race issues and you may be outnumbered, it's awkward. I mean it can be an uncomfortable feeling....if you could be sitting in a classroom with 600 people and there are only 10 Black people, those 10 Black people will be in the same row. They will all find each other and they will all sit together, it's very interesting honestly when you are in the college classroom and you're watching this or experiencing this, I don't know it's unlike; it's even hard to put into words. It's unlike any feeling really that I can explain it's just different, it's awkward, and it's life, so I don't know.

Professors

The classroom experience is more than how well African Americans relate to other students in the classroom or the experience of being only one of very few African American students in the classroom. The classroom experience also has to do with the interactions and relationships African American business students have with their professors. Nettles and Johnson (1987) found that the best predictor of positive student adjustment on campus is contact with faculty members. They concluded that if institutions focus on stronger student-faculty relationships, students will be positively impacted. Their conclusions are consistent with Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure, which states that students' satisfaction with faculty members and positive student-faculty interactions can play a role in determining which students will persist and which will drop out. When asked if he visited with any of his professors during their office hours, Joseph stated:

Yeah, yeah some, pretty much from the first semester I got here I guess I had a leg up. My mother went here and she was a college graduate, so she told me, you know, if you're having trouble or even if you're not just get to know your professors because you never know what kind of insights they'll have, and just help that they can provide for you, so always make sure to at least establish some sort of relationship so the professors can see me as not just a number in a classroom, or not just some Black kid that sits in the back and you know never says anything....yes, I continued to establish a relationship because as you get up in years the classes get harder so you definitely want to work with them to get a better understanding, and especially for your major classes, because you really want to understand what you plan on going into for your career....Oh yes, you know they'd be like in this class I plan on doing this, they would ask what your interests are about the class, I can say that they were, I guess, surprisingly pleasant that someone actually stopped by because a lot of comments I heard from a lot of professors is not a lot of people use their office hours. They say I normally just sit up here and grade papers or read a book or search the internet.

Tina also added that her interactions with professors were positive:

I made sure my professors knew me on a personal level, because my sister told me make sure your professors know you on a personal level and then actually it made things easier for me because it was like I made it a smaller setting for myself than most people because I had bigger classrooms so I was

like I'm going to make my professor know me and that way make the classroom seem like 20 kids instead of 400 kids, so.

Getting to know professors on a more personal level definitely helps with successful academic integration. This is consistent with the literature on academic integration. According to Nettles (1991) academic integration includes students' satisfaction with faculty relationships; their belief that the faculty of the university is sensitive to the interest, needs, and aspirations of students; the ease with which students believe they can develop close personal relationships with faculty members on campus; the perception of students that their faculty are good teachers; and the student's satisfaction with the quality of instruction of their university. (pp. 90-91)

Maya described one of her professors:

He was such a nice guy, for my accounting 201 class. I found him to be extremely nice, he was actually the most confident teacher I have ever had, he knew his material very well, and I felt like he was actually there for me, he wanted me to succeed in his class, and I think that was another reason that had me—I wasn't ashamed to go to him and ask all my questions because I really felt like none of my questions were dumb to him. And he was really there for me, so I really liked him as a teacher. So even though I didn't do as good as I wanted to in the class I don't go back and talk about that teacher because I feel like he was a great teacher.

Finally, James described his strategies for working with his professors:

I did and most of the time office hours don't really go with your schedule, so I would do the thing where I would stay after class for five extra minutes and

just chat it up. If I had to, if I just needed that extra time to put that personal aspect into it I thought that was always beneficial and I always did this thing since actually freshman year where at the end of the semester I would send like a thank you letter to them, or thank you email actually saying I appreciate that. And it could be classified as sucking up, but I had a lot of people say I appreciate that, you're the only person who said these nice things and yeah, they said like—on a few occasions they'd say "I was going to give you this grade but I'll bump it up a little bit because you showed that you actually learned something and that you actually cared for the information," which I did, because I only sent them to the professors that I appreciated,

In conclusion, students are positively impacted when they have good relationships and out of class contact with faculty members. Faculty members who are perceived as welcoming and concerned with student success have the greatest impact on students. Successful academic integration is a major competent of retention for African American business students. Fries-Britt (1995) concluded that Black students attending predominately White Institutions valued relationships with White faculties who were "sincere and interested" (p. 12). Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) concluded that it is in the best interests of institutions to find ways to positively promote positive student-faculty contact.

The Negative View of Professors

Some African American students purposely avoid any real interaction and contact with professors because of the perception that they do not care for them or have any confidence in their abilities. This may come across as what students may

perceive as negative faculty attitudes toward them. In a study by Peterson, Blackburn, Gamson, Arce, Davenport, and Mingle (1978), the researchers found that key university faculty who taught Black undergraduate students “appeared to be frustrated and pessimistic about the impact of their efforts” (p. 276).

It may be appealing to believe that faculty attitudes have significantly changed since 1978. However, research has proven that these faculty expectations still exist. Katz (1991) found in his interviews with White university faculty that they think the grade performances of their Black students are lower than their White students. Also Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) found that Black students perceived that White faculty often stereotyped them as less capable than White students. One can imagine what it could be like for African Americans to approach such faculty for assistance. When asked if he visited with faculty during office hours, Meech stated:

Yes. And one professor, it was okay, but another it was a waste of time because some of the professors here are arrogant and if you come and talk to them they might think you're questioning can they teach? Or something like that. And that was just my experience that, I can't speak for all my teachers. But one of the experiences I had was he's very arrogant, and I got that from the classroom as well. So I haven't spoken to many of my teachers because fortunately enough I haven't had that many problems in my classes where I had to go talk to my TA or my professor about anything.

When asked if she had any real connection to professors in particular business professors, Hanna stated:

No, no, not at all. In fact I just, I can't stand one of them at all, but I had to go into his office hours and I was just like I'll just send you an email.... I just think that a lot of the things that he says in class I find offensive and are very narrow minded and I think that a lot of things that he prints in the textbook that he wrote are just simply untrue. And I think I'm very frustrated with the fact that he's getting paid you know my money to teach me things that I don't find are useful, I don't think are true, and I think that all ties into his ego basically, and he's the one who prints, you know, he prints his own book, makes people buy them each semester and I feel kind of exploited to be honest.

When asked if she felt that she had been exploited, Hanna stated:

I do, I do, I really do and I don't feel like I'm like on the defense usually, I feel like I'm go into situations with an open mind and I try to like him and I did, but it's just every day going to that class was like, oh my gosh.

When asked to describe one of his visits with a professor, Bill stated:

I remember I had one, I forget what class it was, but it was last year, wanted to go see him and he just didn't want to help, he didn't want to help me. Like he would show me, oh no, this isn't what you got to do, this is what you got to do, but he wouldn't help me understand it, he would just kind of show me what to do but I needed help understanding it but it was just like wham bam get out of here, I mean not to say he said get out. But it was just that he threw this information at me again like in lecture and then sent me on my way. And it was very quick, and it was really stern, and I remember I talked to some

other students who went to go see him too and before I went to go see him, and they just said he's really rude so I'd be cautious about going to see him period, but I was still going to go see him anyway. I mean it was true, he was rude.

Lisa summed up the negative experiences that some of these students have had as African American students dealing with White faculty members in the college of business. When asked if her experiences have been positive, she stated:

No, actually it hasn't, because I feel like a lot of professors— no, the office hours I've been to I've been fairly disappointed at the way that I've been treated. And I must, I mean I, I'm not even trying to throw the race thing in there but I that's kind of where your dissertation is structured anyway, but it's been all White professors, a mixture of male and female. And every single time honestly I've been fairly unhappy because I feel like they don't listen, they think I just want to slack off like I don't really want to do the work, they're not concerned, they put on a good show like they're concerned in class maybe, but once you go there you see that they may not really be concerned. I don't know, I often even feel like they don't even really make that much time for you. I don't, you know a lot of professors cancel their office hours, they try to slack off and hold office hours one day a week when they know it's supposed to be two and I mean I just, no it really hasn't been a pleasant experience. So I haven't felt the need to talk to anyone on a mentor level because those aren't the people that I want to be my mentors, I've gotten to where I am based on the real people that I've met, the real connections that

I've met. Frankly a lot of, my mentors are you know, Kevin, Anne, Doc, those are my mentors. My mentors aren't the professors, that's not what's shaped my college career, that's not what's shaped my experiences and that's not what has— I've never asked a professor for advice, I would come up here. I'd come up here and then I would ask a wall and then I'd ask a professor. So I mean, I just, no, no. You know?

Given the fact that the majority of faculty members in the college of business are White, this is consistent with the results of research that indicated that students of color are more apt to seek academic help from family, friends, or academic counselors who were minorities than from White faculty (Braddock, 1981; Guiffrida, 2005). Finally, when probed about whether her experiences with faculty had been positive, Lisa fervently responded:

No, I don't, I, no, nope. I feel like they're more accommodating to certain students, I mean I feel like just being the color you are when you walk in there they think oh she just wants a free ride, nobody wants a free ride. I just need to talk to you about a real issue, but no, none of, looking back. And that's funny because I never realized until now but I'm trying to think of a positive experience and I really haven't had any. None of the experiences, especially in the business college, now maybe professors that are not necessarily related to, like elective professors, maybe that might be a little different, but even then, just even this semester I went up after class, not an office hour but after class and asked my teacher a question and I mean she got real snippy with me, and I'm like it was a question you know that actually involved a yes or no

answer. And she said something like well did it not say this, then what do you think? I'm like excuse me who, who are you talking to? I pay your salary, [beeotch] (bitch). Like you know, I don't know the lack of respect between professors and students I don't ever agree with. So no, those aren't my mentors, they really haven't shaped my college experience, and no they haven't. No professor has done that for me, so.

Nettles (1991) concluded that Black students attending predominately White institutions have less contact with faculty outside the classroom and are less academically integrated into campus life than White students. Additionally, Fleming (1984) and Arnold (1993) both found that Black students at predominately White institutions experience difficulty developing positive relationships with White faculty.

Where are the African American Professors?

The majority of students in this study indicated that they have never or rarely had an African American professor at the university or the college of business. In fact according to the university's Diversity Office, in the fall of 2009, 159 tenured and non-tenured African American professors in the entire university out of 3,081 total professors. That was only 5% of the total faculty population. The college of business currently has only three full-time African American professors, one part-time African American adjunct professor whose full-time job is assistant dean, and no African American female professors.

According to a recent survey by the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, in 2005, just over 5% of all full-time faculty members at colleges and universities in the United States were African American. The importance of having African American

faculty members as role models and mentors cannot be overstated. Tinto (1993) concluded that while mentor programs are generally effective in increasing college retention for all students, the availability of "like-person role models" is especially important to the success of students of color (p. 186).

When asked if she ever thought about the fact that she had never had any African American professors, Ashley stated:

Yeah, definitely thought about it, especially when in high school all my teachers were Black, so coming to college at first like freshman year I didn't really think about it, it's just they're White. But the more classes you have and none of them are ever Black, it's just like you start thinking about it and honestly I don't think there are any Black professors in the business college or is there?

Meech had not had an African American professor in the college of business either, and he described this fact as terrible:

It's actually terrible, it's terrible and it's something that I would like to change but I know being a teacher's not for me. It's something that I would tell others to do, it's definitely something great to pursue but I know it's not for me being a teacher, and I feel like I could help people other ways. So it's something that should be changed, and I don't know if it's because they just don't hire Blacks or it's not enough Blacks in the profession to be many Black professors is it, or just, that's just how it is. And I'm not sure if it's the same, I'm not sure it's the same way at other colleges....Yeah, all this money and no

Black professors. Like I said, I don't know if it's because there are not Black professors out there or it's just the university's not hiring Black professors.

For James, an African American professor in the college of business seemed like a myth. He stated:

Nope. And I know there's one, I don't know if I'm taking him this year, this semester. I've heard about him but I haven't had him. Everybody comes up to me like, yeah, you probably have him right? I'm like no. I think it's Marketing 327, haven't had him. I want to, yeah. But I'm really mad that I haven't, but no.

Maya explained:

I don't know if there are any in the college of business, I never heard of one, I don't want to quote and say there are none, I have never seen none, I have never heard about none, so I don't want to say that— because I don't know, I'm just entering into the business college so it may be probably a couple out there, if they are I haven't seen them.

Finally, in describing the fact that she had never thought about the lack of African American professors in the college of business, Maya talked about the fact that this provided no visible role models to turn to for inspiration:

Wow, I've never really thought about it. Because it kind of got expected, you know. It's sad, it's sad to me. And it gives you that somewhat of a sense that there's, there might not have been someone who's traveled the same pathway as you and came back to give back to this community, or at this school to teach or what not. So if it wasn't already done by now, can you really do it?

But yeah that's what I would say on that. There's, there needs to be motivation and our, whatever African Americans we do have are our motivation that I know from some individuals that they get better grades because of their Black professor because they said that they understand them a little better compared to someone of another ethnicity. And I think that is needed, at least one, so.

Theme Four: Perceptions of Academic Advising

According to the National Academic Advising Association (2006):

Academic advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes.

Academic advising permeates all aspects of a college student's experience.

Some universities use faculty members exclusively as advisers for students while others, such as Midwestern University, use staff members as professional academic advisers. In the college of business, Undergraduate Academic Services is the central advising office for declared business majors. They provide assistance to students based on their major preference and last name. With over 4,000 students in the college of business, it is virtually impossible to establish any meaningful relationships with students. With regard to academic advising and retention, Tinto (2005) believed that institutions of higher education have not yet been able translate what we know

about student retention into forms of action that lead to substantial gains in student persistence and graduation.

As previously mentioned, Midwestern University's Multicultural Business Program, a retention-based program focusing on increasing the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of multicultural students, also provides academic advising for all business students. Multicultural Business Programs provides academic advising to students from the freshman year through graduation with a primary goal of providing career development in addition to academic advising.

Dungy (2003) believed that advisers should have a major interest in the career development of students they serve with the goal of helping them find satisfying and rewarding employment after graduation. Perry, Cabrera, and Vogt (1999) found that when career development is at the root of quality academic advising for students, it leads to an increased sense of academic integration. Nauta and Kahn (2000) suggested that academic advisers should be focused on helping to shape the perception in students that earning a college degree will have positive, life-changing outcomes for them.

Multicultural Business Program encourages students to meet with their adviser at least three times a semester. This is consistent with the research of Mohr, Eiche and Sedlacek (1998), who found that frequent contact and involvement with academic advisers in a student's college increases the likelihood of establishing long-term relationships and also increases retention. The most frequently cited academic advising program by the students in this study was Multicultural Business Programs.

The Professional Development Advising Advantage

When students were asked about where they received their academic advising, they discussed the advising they received from the Multicultural Business Program.

Elizabeth stated:

Okay. So in terms of academic advising I didn't use the undergraduate academic services which is the general advisers that most people in the college used, I used the Multicultural Business Programs which is an organization within the business college that helps not only minority students but any student that's willing to do the work. And I used the Multicultural Business Programs because I was first oriented to them before I even came to the university. Some of the advisers were the people to encourage me to come here and the ones that made me feel welcome, and so you know continuing that experience through the Summer Business Institute feeling even more welcome and more like family. The advisers became more of you know my counselors in terms of life and where I wanted to go and what I needed to do instead of just telling me you know take this class, take this class, take this class this is how you graduate in May of 2010. So, the advising experience I had here I would say is more of a total advising experience, it's kind of a one-stop shop to get my classes in order, to get my work and job experience in order, and to make sure my life I guess was in order all at once.

Like Elizabeth, Joseph used MBP advising for all four years, and when asked if he had used other advising services on campus he said, "No, no I have not, I just

pretty much stuck, I found a niche, they were helpful, never steered me wrong so no sense in jumping ship.”

Once Joseph got admitted, his advising sessions stayed the same with the exception of the career focus. He said,

Pretty much the same, it became a little bit more shifted toward internships, full-time positions, grad school, some more about life rather than just strictly coursework because you’re pretty much to the end, so that’s kind of where it’s shifted to you know life after college.

Christina also spoke about the nature of her MBP advising sessions with Multicultural Business Programs with a chuckle:

Okay, the advising is good. Not only are we getting help with our classes, we’re getting help with personal/professional development, trying to obtain internships and things like that, and it’s on a personal level because I’ve had conversations with my advisers as far as what’s going on in your personal life? How’s the car? Do you need help getting your car fixed? I’m pretty sure they wouldn’t offer you that up on the third floor, so I think the advising like hit all areas as far as personal, professional, academic, everything. So really well-rounded academic advising I would say.

It also became clear that one of the main focuses of MBP advising was admission into the college of business. Meech stated:

I feel like my adviser really put me in a position to get into the college, and that’s a problem that a lot of minority students have just actually getting into the college. A lot of students come here as business majors, but once it comes



time to declare their major after 56 credits they don't have the grades to make it, so I was put in a position where I had a nice schedule that put classes together that worked together to help me, enabled me to achieve great grades so I can get into the college of business.

Danielle also talked about her admission:

The same, really good, my advisers are really great because they helped me get into the business college. They really care outside of your classes and everything, they care about your classes but they care about your overall success and I think that's really important when you're trying to advise people. It's not just about grades, it's A, B, C, or nothing at all. It's like okay do well in freshman year. And then during my sophomore year, I went three or four times, so about maybe two times each semester. And my advising experience was, I believe, really helpful because I talked to my adviser about everything, I talked to my adviser about my classes, he gave me advice on my classes, as far as my career, just about life, and just being and growing into an adult. And it was just really helpful I believe in guiding me through my college experience which I don't believe I would be where I'm at if I didn't have advising....And I believe after getting into the business college my advising appointments started to occur more just because I needed more advice and just an outlet to express how I feel about my classes and my career and about just my life. And so, I believe I started to have more advising appointments, but at the same time it's still, they still help me with making major career choices and using integrity and just about my classes and

graduating on time and things of that nature, so it was just really important that I met with my a honors college who cancelled appointments on me, didn't show up, stood me up, and just seemed like did not know what's going on when I did meet with her. She seemed a little off putting. But it's required for me to meet with her at least once a semester so that was kind of my interaction with her. And then there was also a faculty member in my major that I was assigned to meet with and in the first two years I really looked up to him. He was kind of just one size fits all, go down the CPA track to everyone, and I really bought into that. And he's a really accomplished professor it seems like, very personable, but I don't think that he really gave me a lot of specific advice to me. So I don't really see him much anymore. I also had an adviser through the University Undergraduate Division Office that I was assigned by the university. I really only talked to him when I ended up having to withdraw from a semester.

Mary reluctantly stated that she went to see an adviser in the college of business. "I went one time I guess, so technically I know that is a yes, but she just wrote this paper down said class you should take and sent me on my way. I didn't like it; I can do that at home..." James also added to the notion that advising can be a challenge:

My first two years I was a College Academic Achievement Program student, so we were required to go to that adviser, and I really enjoyed that. I didn't want to bounce around to different advisers, I think, I want to say they assign you to one person, so I had one individual— no I didn't. Because I spoke

with somebody else and I really didn't like him. And he was just rude, that was the guy that told me that I probably wouldn't make it out of math 103 and I didn't go back to him ever. But I went back to that one person and I stuck with her until she left the university.

Interestingly enough, the advising is not seen as a total failure for students, in fact James has some advice for all students. James would recommend academic advising for everyone:

Definitely, I recommend that to everybody. There's no way you shouldn't go. Now that's one thing I did every year, twice, two times per semester. I always went to an adviser because I didn't want to apply for a class; I didn't want to do anything unless I had somebody else saying, you know yeah that's good.

Lisa described getting some good advice but lamented:

I've had some good advice, I mean the one thing and I don't think it's necessarily only my career but the one thing that a lot of advisers, maybe fail to tell freshmen and sophomores is if you do not take summer classes or if you are not taking more than 12 credits per semester you will not graduate on time and I don't think that's really stressed enough, because if I would have known that, I mean because look at me now, I have 12 credits left, 2 are elective, I have 6 elective credits that I'm doing right now and 6 real credits that I'm doing right now. I could have found a way to get all of those done in and graduate on time...And I mean I didn't know. I have mixed feelings about it because right now I'm happy that you know my friends are out in the real world. Oh I started off I guess it was the 3rd floor at the time, the general

business academic advising, 3rd floor. And I thought it was okay, I didn't really have anything to compare it to so at the time I thought it was okay, I was doing pretty well in my classes. They didn't really give you opportunities for like personal and professional development, it was strictly limited to this is what need to take as far your academics, boom, bam that's it. So I thought it was okay but looking back at it I don't think they did enough as far as your personal/professional development.

Theme Five: Getting Involved Pays Off

Leadership experiences and involvement on campus provide students with the opportunity to practice skills that they will need to succeed academically and in the future. Astin (1984), who is widely considered the expert on student involvement, defined it as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (1984, p. 297). Astin also stressed that a highly involved students spends a lot of time on campus, studies a lot, and actively participates in student organizations. As a result of this involvement, Astin concluded, the pay-off for these students is greater academic success, lower dropouts, and the development and enhancement of leadership skills.

Previous studies have documented the benefits of involvement in student organizations for the identity development and retention of African American college students (Cokley, 2001; Flowers, 2004, and Fries-Britt, 2000). To get an idea of how involved the students in this study were, the students were asked to describe the organizations they were involved in. These descriptions provided greater insight into these students' perceptions of leadership and involvement on campus as African

American business students. The majority of the students in this study were heavily involved in some form of business-related student organization. Meech shared his background on the groups that he was involved in and the leadership role he held:

President of the National Association of Black Accountants, which is an association geared toward the advancement and the professional development of minority business majors, and it's geared toward accounting and finance students. So it's open to everyone on campus that's a business major, or if you just want professional development period and that's pretty much my, the one I have, that's my first organization I have commitment to....I'm also, this year I'm just starting to get heavily involved in (NAHBS), Native Hispanic Business Student Association I believe is the name of it. And that's just because I can't surround myself by just African Americans, that's something I've learned through the years that I have to diversify myself, I have to get involved in other student orgs, or I have to become friends with other different people. It's not like I'm doing it just to meet a quota or just to put something on my résumé, I believe it's important to learn other cultures, it's important to meet other people because like I said in the workforce you're going to be surrounded by a lot of different people.

Conversely, Tiny stated: "Every activity I'm involved in has something to do with Black people, so it's kind of sad." When probed further as to what she meant, she stated:

I said all the activities I'm involved with are pretty much dealing with African Americans which is kind of funny. But I'm involved in NABA, that's the one

thing I'm really, really involved in. But I do others, like Black Student Alliance things. I do Black Successful Women things, like everything has to deal with African Americans and I'm trying to find other things that doesn't have to deal with that, but it's just – it's like a time constraint problem, everything happens on the same day so it's kind of hard to find something else that.

When asked why everything she was involved with had to do with African Americans, Tiny stated:

I don't know. I have no idea, I guess it's like a sense of unity because it feels like I have to be connected to them in a way to make myself be more powerful because like if like I'm with a group of Black people who are doing good then I feel good about myself. So like I would feel like if I was in another organization I wouldn't feel as good because it's like I'm the only one or I'm one of the only ones and I always feel like, okay. But it's like I'm part of NABA because it's a group of professionals that are doing something, it's a great feeling to see a group of Black people doing something and not hurting the society or something that's positive. I think that's why I do it more so than like joining another organization that has anything to do with race, it's just like I guess it's just a sense of we're doing something I want to be a part of change.

These contrasting viewpoints both coincided with research findings that first recognized collective action and collaboration with other African American students organization because if you look at Multicultural Business Students as a whole it's

still majority White with Black people sprinkled in as well as Asians and other ethnic groups. So, I don't think they necessarily catered to me, I mean it's still majority White, but I'm not going to say anyone's catered to, I think it is a place that fosters all business students no matter what color or ethnic group you belong to. It's a group of learning and development. Mary also talked about the same group and how it was more open to everyone. She revealed:

I would say Multicultural Business Students, they are. They encourage anyone and everyone to join, as long as you're—even if you're not a business major, come on to the family. So yeah they were always there and in case I had a problem with class, more than willing to tutor, didn't hold anything against me, didn't express that they had any negative thoughts of my background. So it was very welcoming, I think they do encourage other individuals to come and join.

The other most important perception that these students had in terms of their involvement in their particular business-related student organizations was that they were beneficial for their professional development. Meech stated clearly:

They really helped me with my professional development, they helped me when I go into these internships or these jobs my experiences as an executive board member can really much supported me by giving me an open outlet to recruiters and things of that nature giving me other business students that were in my classes, giving me a way to interact with them that wasn't the 700-person class, you know, now we're at a student organization meeting. So I know, or I think I know that your goals at least semi-match up with mine so

you're probably a good person that I can interact with. So I guess, most of my activities have been business related and have been about getting me where I need to go.

Finally, Christina talked about how her organization helped her grow as a person:

I think accounting has supported my growth because you have a chance to master you know your field of study that really helps with upper level classes because you have that foundation and that really helps with my upper level classes. National Association of Black Accountants really helps with my growth because not only am I growing in my classes, it helps with the personal and professional development, and ultimately you want to get a job and that is a resource for that. So they really help with the growth as far as personal and professional, and academic.

Involvement is critical to the successful social integration of students on campus. Retention efforts that are designed to integrate students into the university to improve academic performance and retention are established with the understanding that academic achievement is as much a social process as it is a knowledge- and skill-building process. Also, helping students identify with school and having a place to call home and a safe space is positively linked to academic achievement (Trusty & Dooley-Dickey, 1993). Finally, drawing on Tinto's (1993) notions of academic and social integration, both aspects are important for students to successfully transition and thrive in the university setting.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

On today's predominately White campuses, Black students need to feel connected and invested in the university experience. For African American business students, this need for academic as well as social integration is even more important as they pursue one of the most prestigious degrees on college campuses today. As today's college campuses become more and more diverse, many campus policies and procedures as well as attitudes have not been adjusted to reflect this diversity.

Chapter 4 presents the individual interview data regarding the perceptions held by undergraduate African American business students about their experiences at a predominately White institution. As patterns began to emerge, five themes became apparent. The final chapter provides a brief summary of the study and includes a review of the study purpose and methodology. It also draws conclusions from the data, discusses the implications that this study has for practice and research, and suggests opportunities for further research.

Summary of the Study

This study sought to explore the perceptions of African American undergraduate students enrolled in the college of business at Midwestern University. By understanding how these students perceived their undergraduate experience in relation to their major in business, this research adds to the scarce literature by creating meaningful insights and new knowledge. This study also reports on the role of racism and its impact on this student population and the impact of retention efforts by the institution on the success of these undergraduate students.

Two research questions guided the study:

1. How do Black undergraduate business students characterize their experiences on campus at Midwestern University, a predominately White institution of higher education?
2. How do Black undergraduate business students describe their experiences as business majors on campus at Midwestern University, a predominately White institution of higher education?

Several research theories provided the theoretical framework for this study.

First Tinto's (1975, 1993) Retention Model postulates that students need to become academically and socially integrated into the college community to increase their chances of persisting to graduation. Second, Hurtado's (1992) conceptual framework on racial climate argues that campus racial conflicts are connected to elements in an institutions' racial climate that sustain the relationship between African American students and their White peers, faculty, and administration. Finally, Cross's (1971, 1994) Model of Black Identity Development examines what it means to be Black and the various stages students go through in an effort to find their Black identity.

The voices of undergraduate African American business students are rarely shared in the research literature. As a result of using the qualitative case study approach, readers can ponder students' voices through descriptions of their thoughts and feelings. The students gave rich descriptions with a focus on specific situations, events, programs, or phenomenon, with "the end product of the case study [being] a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 2001, p. 29).

The following sections summarize the five major themes that emerged from the analysis of the 16 interview transcripts. The major themes were as follows:

(a) Standing on Their Shoulders—Getting Ready for College; (b) Perceptions of Segregation on Campus; (c) Perceptions of the Classroom and Professors (d) Perceptions of Academic Advising; and (e) Getting Involved Pays Off. Each theme will be discussed to get a deeper understanding of the meaning of the findings.

Standing on Their Shoulders—Getting Ready for College

The hopes and dreams of the parents of the students in this study were apparent. Inspired by their parents, these students were prepared to overcome any obstacles put in front of them. In some cases poverty was a factor as well as a lack of experience with college for some parents. However, even if their parents did not go to college, important significant others in their lives picked up the slack. People like counselors or other relatives filled the void and instilled a sense of purpose when it came to college preparation and motivation.

Some of the students were second- and third-generation college students whose parents could help them avoid the pitfalls of college. Students who were from the suburbs also seemed to also have a leg up with regard to studying a college-bound curriculum. No matter what, parents had the greatest influence on which school they chose and what they chose to study. Even though money was a driving force for some of these students to study business, oftentimes it was their parents who motivated them to study business.

The average high school grade point average for this group was a 3.5, and that translated well in college because the average grade point in college was a 3.3 with an

average ACT score of 22. This group of students was well-prepared for the rigors of college. All of them were succeeding in the business college and were on track to graduate. On average, most students had a parent who at least attended college if only to attain an associate's degree at minimum. What seemed to matter most was being academically talented with supportive parents and having people in one's life who could inspire a person to do great things.

Perceptions of Segregation on Campus

Some perception is reality, and the perceived reality does not seem good. Not long ago Black students could not attend White universities. These institutions have a legacy of segregation and exclusion toward people of color (Hardin, 1997). Although laws supporting segregation are no longer in place, many of our predominately White campuses continue to be socially segregated. Some African Americans described the university in this study in terms of two campuses, one Black and one White. Some even described it as having a historically Black college within a predominately White university. Is this because African Americans tend to isolate themselves and self-segregate? Or is it that visibly they are easy targets for this assumption?

Some students even presumed that the university's official policy is to segregate students in residence halls by ethnicity. When it comes to African American students, the perception is that the majority who live on campus primarily stay in Hubbard Hall. Although the university has no official policy for placing students in residence hall by ethnicity, this is an unintended consequence of honoring African American students' requests to live in Hubbard, thereby creating the perception that the majority of African Americans live in Hubbard Hall. Black

students are still outnumbered by the White students who also live there. Many people use words like the “ghetto” the “hood” and the “Black” side of campus to describe the phenomenon of the perception that the majority of African American live in Hubbard Hall. Consequently, another perception is that no African Americans live in West Circle, which has a reputation of being the predominately White side of campus. Regardless of whether there is any truth to these perceptions, they can have a chilling effect on the racial climate of this campus.

Also, might this possible effort to create a safe space for African Americans—whether it is their own doing or not—have other unintended consequences? As Lisa lamented, she lost a lot of her African American friends because she lived in the hall for business students. This hall is predominantly White, and she also discussed how she felt like she did not get the true dorm experience because she did not connect with the White students and she lost her Black friends because it became too much of a burden to continue to go over to Hubbard Hall.

Perceptions of the Classroom and Professors

A central tenet of retention is predicated on efforts that help students connect to the university both inside and outside of the classroom. If Black students fail to connect academically in the classroom with White peers and faculty, there is a strong chance that they will not be retained at predominately White universities. One of the drawbacks of being one of very few African Americans in the college of business is that the further you advance in your program, the fewer African Americans you see in the classrooms.

Black students in this study reported believing that they always had to prove themselves worthy to their White peers in the classroom, especially during group work. This alienation was constant and tended to make some students feel stigmatized and marginalized. Some perceived being judged as products of affirmative action, while others were made to feel inferior to their White peers. One can imagine how it might feel in business college classrooms when not even the professor has a high opinion of African American business students. It is no wonder, as Lisa commented that all the Black people tend to sit next to each other for some moral support.

Some students did have favorable interactions with faculty in the college of business and some even liked their teaching styles and their ability to connect with all students. Getting to know professors on a more personal level can help with successful academic integration. James even commented on his method of connecting with faculty by sending them thank-you notes at the end of the semester and how that has resulted in him getting a more favorable grade at times. Not everyone in this study had positive things to say about faculty members.

Students labeled some professors as arrogant, offensive, and exploitive. In fact, one student said she would rather talk to a wall than to talk with her professors. That same student implied that she found some professors are more accommodating to certain students. Black students at predominately White institutions sometimes have more difficulty connecting and establishing positive relationships with White faculty. Although it can be a challenge, many students seemed to be doing well

academically in the classrooms. An interesting fact is that many of the students never had an African American professor—ever—at Midwestern University.

Many students did not know that there were any African American professors in the college of business. Some had never thought about it, either. The business college has only three African American full-time faculty males in the college and no female African American faculty. Having so few African American professors left Maya feeling like there were no role models in the college for her.

Perceptions of Academic Advising

The most frequently mentioned advising experiences that students in this study referred to were their experiences with the Multicultural Business Program (MBP). Professional development is essential to helping students solidify and achieve their career aspirations and supports the advising philosophy of MBP advisers. Winston (1994) found that career planning and placement advisers could assist multicultural students by exposing them to successful multicultural business and professional people on a regular basis. MBP potentially exposes over 200 students to corporate representatives twice a month for the duration of an academic year, in addition to the 60 students who take part in the MBP Summer Business Institute and get to interact with eight different Fortune 500 corporate representatives over a one-week period. Through the combined efforts of MBP and the active participation of student leaders, outreach efforts have a definite impact on student success.

Like the Black Cultural Centers that emerged out of the Black Power Movement in the sixties and seventies (Hefner, 2002), programs like the Multicultural Business Program, originally founded as the Minority Business Program, were

designed to provide a safe haven for Blacks and other students of color to thrive at predominately White institutions. It can be argued that Multicultural Business Programs represents the modern day Black Cultural Centers of the past but has evolved to incorporate all students. As Pittman (1994) asserted, programs like this facilitate the identity development process, enhance the campus climate for Black students, lead to higher retention, and offer academic and social opportunities for growth with students who have similar experiences, interests, and goals.

Astin (1993) found that peer groups are formed around sex, race, and social class, and these groups have a major impact on academic and personal development in college. When students enter college, they try to reconstruct relationships like those they had at home (Serpe & Stryker, 1987). Group identity is important, and a relational sense of family is critical for students. According to Braxton and Lien (2000) when students are involved in their learning process, they are more apt to form groups that are related to that learning, and also extend this involvement to groups and activities that are unrelated to specific classroom exercises. The end result is increased academic integration and a greater likelihood of graduating.

Commitment to activities that foster an identity as a business student is critical for a student to be successful in the business college domain. Programs that are sensitive to cultural differences and are more sophisticated in incorporating those into retention efforts are likely to increase success of minority and nontraditional students (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Multicultural Business Program helps African American students in particular to identify with the activities that are necessary for them to be successful as business majors.

Getting Involved Pays Off

One of the most powerful ways that African American students can become socially integrated into the campus is by getting involved in student organizations. The majority of the students in this study were involved in business-related student organizations. Although these organizations were tied to business, many of them were also tied to their ethnicity. For example, the National Association of Black Accountants was frequently mentioned as providing leadership as a sense of community. Ironically, several students talked about their involvement in these student organizations because of the potential pay that they bring in the form of networks and professional contacts for their future.

With regard to ethnicity, Tiny described every organization that she was involved in as having something to do with Black people. She said that she felt more powerful when she was connected to her Black organizations. She was the only one who specifically spoke about being involved in all Black organizations and how it made her feel. Ironically, almost no data spoke to identity development. The majority of the students' involvement had to do with professional development, and getting involved pays off in future rewards.

Implications for Practice

This study explores the perceptions of African American undergraduate students enrolled in the college of business at Midwestern University. By researching how these students perceived their undergraduate experience in relation to majoring in business, the goal is to add to the scarce available literature by providing meaningful insights and new knowledge. These factors could be instrumental for

higher education, practitioners, and policy makers in helping more African American business students to persist and attain their bachelor degrees in business.

This study is consistent with Otto (1989) and Trusty (2002) in that it confirms that the African American business students at Midwestern University are highly influenced by their family's aspirations and occupational expectations for them. Universities need to create programs that welcome families and encourage them to participate in the academic lives of students by focusing on their success.

This study confirms Antonio's (2001) finding that students on highly diverse campuses believed that self-segregation is pervasive at their institution. This is consistent with previous research and indicates that African American undergraduates perceive and experience significantly more racism on campus than do their non-African American counterparts (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado, 1992; Sedlacek, 1987). Every effort should be made to reverse the tendency for all students to self-segregate. Programming efforts should focus on bringing all students from different backgrounds together to interact on a regular basis, not just in the classroom.

This study confirms Fries-Britt & Turner's (2002) findings that students perceived that they have to prove themselves in the academic environment and that respect is not forthcoming until they are able to measure up to the dominant culture's unwritten standards both in and outside of the classroom. Also, this study confirms Nettles and Johnson's (1989) findings that the best predictor of positive student adjustment on campus is contact with faculty. Universities need to find ways hire a more diverse staff but also find ways to increase faculty interaction with African American students outside of the classroom so that a sense of belonging is

established. Faculty can find ways to serve as mentors and advisers to clubs and organizations that they normally would not interact with.

The major findings of this study, which are consistent with Tinto (1993), concluded that persistence is most likely to occur when students are able to adjust socially and academically to college. Connecting with faculty and getting involved could help these students make those social and academic adjustments.

This study confirms Dungy's (2003) finding that advisers should have a major interest in the career development of students they serve with the goal of helping them find satisfying and rewarding employment after graduation. This data is also consistent with the findings of Perry, Cabrera and Vogt's (1999) finding that career development should be at the root of quality academic advising and this leads to increasing students' sense of academic integration. Retention efforts such as the Multicultural Business Program should be expanded to increase the academic integration of students.

Finally, this study confirms Astin's (1984) and Fries-Britt's (2000) findings that involvement in students organizations increases the likelihood for greater academic success, improves leadership skills, and supports greater retention for African American students. More financial resources should be dedicated to student organizations that provide consistent leadership and programming efforts for a diverse student population. Institutions could find ways to institute mandatory leadership academies during the freshman year with career mentors from the professional world involved in every aspect of the classes. Also, faculty could

develop integrated learning projects around issues of diversity that are integrated into the curriculum.

Implications for Further Research

An interesting component of this study would have been to include African American students who attempted to gain admission to the upper school but were denied admission. Examining their perceptions would have been a great addition to this study. Though the possibility of including this population may have detracted from focusing on what successful African American business students' perceptions are, a future study would complement this research. After learning from both populations, situational interventions could be put in place to increase the number of African American business students who do get into the upper school.

Another future study could focus on freshmen and sophomores to assess the types of strategies they employ in preparation for admission to the upper school of business. An assessment of their study skills and time management skills could be used to produce meaningful interventions. In addition, an assessment for whether or not they consistently use free tutorial services should be assessed.

The subjects in this study were mainly involved in business focused organizations. A study examining the impact of these organizations could serve as a great complement to this study. This type of study could be useful in capturing leadership traits that could enhance the professional development of all students. Finally, a study of the overall impact of academic advising on African Americans would be useful to evaluate whether or not it makes a differences for students who do gain upper college admission and those who do not.

A Reflection on the “Enhancing the Student Experience” Task Force:

Recommendations

At Midwestern University, there is a taskforce charged with “Enhancing the Student Experience.” Of their seven recommendations, there are four that I feel are relevant to African American students. They are as follows:

- Enhance the first year experience; assist students in making a strong academic and social transition and in creating appropriate expectations about their undergraduate education.
- Promote the improvement of and rewards for successful college teaching.
- Articulate, target, and expand opportunities for undergraduate students to develop cultural competencies.
- Promote and integrate more active and applied learning in undergraduate education.

I do support the notion of enhancing the first-year experience for freshmen.

However, when it comes to African American students, I believe a more tailored approach is necessary. Academic and social transitions are often sighted as the keys to student success (Tinto, 1975, 2005); however, for this population I would suggest that we really take the “boldness by design” mantra literally. We need a mandatory Freshman Seminar course specifically designed for Black students that focuses on the Black student at a predominately White institution. The curriculum could include academic expectations, the role of family as a support system and a distraction, the

impact of identity on self perception, strategies to combat racism on campus, and the importance of getting involved to enhance leadership and career development.

This class must be team taught by at least one committed, expert, Black tenured faculty member and one White junior faculty member who, as part of their tenure and review process, must show evidence of enhancing the climate for diversity. This addresses the second recommendation that calls for promoting the improvement of and rewards for successful college teaching. By adding a cultural component to the tenure and review process, it give credence to the importance of this issue. In addition, an expert on cultural diversity must be appointed to every tenure and review committee to evaluate every professor in the areas of enhancing the climate for diversity, efforts to improve their curriculum to enhance diversity, and innovative strategies that promote classroom interactions and that promote cultural competencies for all students.

This addresses recommendations three and four, which call for expanding opportunities to develop cultural competencies and integrating active and applied learning focused on the above targeted areas. I realize it may seem narrow in focus and scope, but that is on purpose. It seems that we in higher education have allowed the needs of Black students on predominately White campuses to be diluted and white-washed under the guise of multiculturalism and globalism. In our efforts to include everyone, we have excluded a primary group— African Americans. Unless there is a true commitment of financial resources and expert faculty and evaluators combined with a top-down approach to enhancing the student experience for African

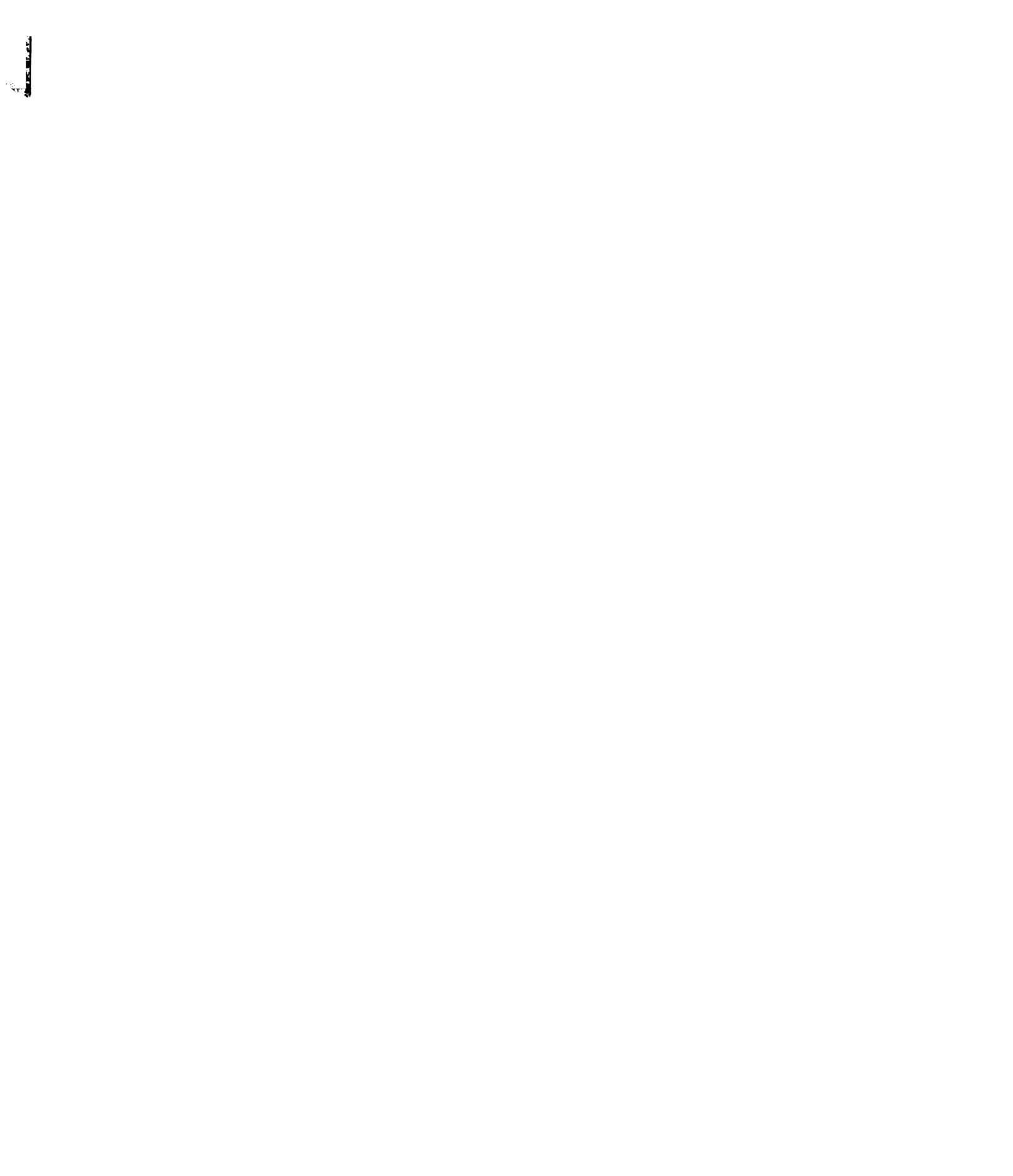
American students, Midwestern University is never going to truly help all African American students reach their full potential.

Appendix I

The interview Guide

1. Background Information

- Can you please describe your earliest memories of growing up as a child, where did you live? Was it an industrial area? Was it rural?
- How was the notion of intelligence viewed in your family? Were you considered on of the smart ones in your family? If so why? Do you remember if you were breastfed as a baby? Would you describe your household as upper class, middle class or lower class? Why.
- Tell me about your family (number of brothers and sisters (if any), aspirations your parent(s) and other relatives have for you, educational level of parent(s), where you grew up and other general information.
- Where you attended H.S., number of students in the graduating senior class, your ranking in the senior class, GPA and ACT/SAT scores, and did you complete any Advanced Placement classes?
- Did you participate in any extra-curricular activities while in high school? If so, please explain some of the types of activities you participated in.
- Explain your reasons for deciding this university and this particular college?
- What were your preconceived notions about attending this university and pursuing a degree in this college?
- Since attending this university and pursuing a degree in this college, have your experiences been what you had anticipated? Please explain in more detail.
- What individual had the greatest amount of influence in helping you to decide to attend this university?



- Was this university your first choice? If not, please explain.
- Would you recommend this university to other high school and college students? If not, please explain.

2. Remedial Opportunities to Address Under-Preparedness

- Do you feel you were adequately prepared to attend this university and pursue a degree in this college? Please explain.
- Did you have the opportunity to enroll in any remedial courses? Please elaborate.
- If you had the choice, what remedial courses would you have taken? Please explain.

3. Classroom Settings

- Describe your academic experiences in classroom settings specially related to business courses during your first two years here at the university (teaching personnel, student interactions in and outside of classrooms, course requirements, size of classes, location of classes, etc.)
- After you were admitted to the College of Business, describe your academic experiences in classroom settings especially during your third and/or fourth year(s) here at the university (teaching personnel, student interactions in and outside of classrooms, course requirements, size of classes, location of classes, etc.)
- In general, reflecting on your high school years and your years here at the university, have you made any adjustments from an academic perspective? Please explain?

4. Office Hours of Teaching Personnel

- During your first and second year of enrollment here at the university, did you visit with any teaching personnel during their office hours? If not, please explain. If so, please describe the visit.
- After being admitted to the College of Business and during your junior and/or senior year(s), did you visit with any teaching personnel during their office hours? If so, please describe the visit.

5. Curriculum and Majors

- What was the most significant factor used in deciding to select your major? Please explain.
- What individual influenced you the most in selecting your major? Please explain.
- If you had a choice, would you select the same major? Please explain.
- Would you recommend your major to other high school and college students? If not, please explain.

6. Academic Advising

- Please describe the academic advising experiences you received during your first two years here at the university.
 - After being admitted to the college of business and/or during your junior and senior years, please describe the academic advising experiences you have received.
7. During your first and second year here at the university, identify and describe the top three most favorable experiences you encountered while attending the university and how these experiences assisted you from an academic and personal growth perspective?
 8. During your first and second year here at the university, identify and describe the top three most challenging experiences you encountered while attending the university and how these experiences affected you from an academic and personal growth perspective?
 9. During your junior and/or senior year(s) here at the university, identify and describe the top three most favorable experiences you encountered while attending the university and how these experiences assisted you from an academic and personal growth perspective?
 10. During your junior and/or senior years(s) here at the university, identify and describe the top three most challenging experiences you encountered while attending the university and how these experiences affected you from an academic and personal growth perspective?
 11. Please share with me any other positive and/or challenging experiences you encountered while pursuing your undergraduate degree here at the university.

7. Racial Climate, Identity and Identity Based Groups

12. How would you describe your racial identity?
13. What role has race played in your life? College? Career?
14. How would you describe the racial climate of this campus?
15. Do you believe that race played a role in your decision to pursue business if so please explain?
16. How have you dealt with race on this campus, and in the business college?
17. Please describe any activities that you are involved in on this campus?
18. Were you attracted to any of these activities because of your racial background?
19. Can you tell me if these organizations are supportive of you because of your ethnic background?
20. How have these organizations supported your experience as a business major?
21. Is there anything else you would like to share with other African American Business students who will be following in your footsteps?

Appendix II

Demographic Information

Please provide the following information about yourself. This information will only be used to describe the general background of the participants and will in no way allow individuals to be identified. Please respond to every item below.

1. Please circle your gender

(1) Male (2) Female

2. Indicate your current age: _____

What is your Ethnic Identity? _____

3. Circle your academic year level:

(1) Junior (56 – 87 credits) (2) Senior (more than 87 credits)

What is your Current College G.P.A. _____?

4. Did you transfer from another institution?

(1) No (2) Yes

5. Indicate your score on Standardized Test (ACT) before entering college:

(1) 0-15 (2) 16-20 (3) 21-25 (4) 26- 30 (5) 31-36

6. Indicate SAT score before coming entering college **If Applicable**

(1) 400 – 500 (3) 601 – 700 (5) 801 - 900 (7) 1001 – 1100

(2) 501 – 600 (4) 701 – 800 (6) 901 – 1000 (8) 1101 – 1200

(9) More than 1201

7. Please indicate your High School GPA _____

Please Note any Advanced Placement Classes in High School and if college credit was earned

Please indicate size (Number) of High School Graduating Class and Rank in Class.

Please indicate any offices held in high school and Extra –curricular activities

7. What is the educational level of both of your parents?

(1) Mom

HS Graduate **Assoc. Degree** **Bachelors** **Graduate degree**

(2) Dad

HS Graduate **Assoc. Degree** **Bachelors** **Graduate degree**

Please describe any amount of financial aid you receive

Please describe any general support from parents

Work experiences you had while in high school

Indicate anyone who has had an influence on your academic success? (Circle all that apply)

(1) Professor (2) Administrator (3) Other student (4) Family (5) Community
(6) Self (7) Pastor (8) Counselor (9) Teacher

Appendix III

EMAIL SOLICITATION

The Perceptions of African American Undergraduate Business Students

Hello Business Scholar,

My name is Darrell King and I am working on my PH.D in Extension Education

I am writing to ask you to participate in my research dissertation. This study seeks to explore the perceptions of African American undergraduate students enrolled in the upper college of business at Michigan State University. I will ask you a series of questions designed to get your feedback and opinions related to this topic.

There will be approximately fifteen to twenty subjects participating in this research project. You will be interviewed separately. The interviews will be audio taped for later analysis. A total analysis will be done as part of the research process. By understanding how you perceive your undergraduate experience in relation to your major of business, it is hoped that you along with other subjects in the study will add to the scarce literature to create meaningful insights and new knowledge. The possible foreseeable risks are minimal and if you feel uncomfortable talking about your related experiences regarding this topic you can stop.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The interview will last for about 1 and half hours.

The benefits of your participation in this research is that the information will be used to compile data that can help college students make better and informed decisions about becoming a business major. You have the potential of benefiting from this project by exploring new ways of conceptualizing your experiences related to your own college experience as an African American business student.

As a participant, you will have the ability to anonymously discuss your experiences at a predominately white institution and a field where there are very few African Americans admitted into the upper college of business. You will also be able to explore what impact this may have on your perceptions of success.

Your confidentiality will be protected by the use of alias name and altered background information to protect your identity. The information will be collected and used for the researcher's dissertation purposes.

If you are willing to participate in my research study please respond to this e-mail with the best times that you are available to meet. We can meet in a conference room in the library, or my office. I am available to meet during the week or on the weekends anytime from 9AM to 9pm. I would like to conduct the interviews from October 26, 2009 to November 13, 2009

I can also be reached at 517-974-2885.

Sincerely,
Darrell King
PH.D Candidate

Appendix IV

The Perceptions of African American Undergraduate Business Students

Statement of Informed Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research dissertation. This study seeks to explore the perceptions of African American undergraduate students enrolled in the college of business at Michigan State University. I will ask you a series of questions designed to get your feedback and opinions related to this topic. There will be approximately fifteen to thirty subjects participating in this research project. You will be interviewed separately. The interviews will be audio taped for later analysis. You will be given a copy of your interview to check for accuracy and omissions. A total analysis will be done as part of the research process. By understanding how you perceive your undergraduate experience in relation to your major of business, it is hoped that you along with other subjects in the study will add to the scarce literature to create meaningful insights and new knowledge. The possible foreseeable risks are minimal and if you feel uncomfortable talking about your related experiences regarding this topic you can stop.

The total duration of your participation is ninety minutes.

You understand that your participation is voluntary and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You understand that at any moment you have the right to terminate the interview and refuse to answer any more questions. Your participation is voluntary, you may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence.

The benefits of your participation in this research is that the information will be used to compile data that can help college students make better and informed decisions about becoming a business major. You have the potential of benefiting from this project by exploring new ways of conceptualizing your experiences related to your own college experience as an African American business student. As a participant, you will have the ability to anonymously discuss your experiences at a predominately white institution and a field where there are very few African Americans admitted into the upper college of business. You will also be able to explore what impact this may have on your perceptions of success.

Your confidentiality will be protected by the use of alias name and altered background information to protect your identity. The information will be collected and used for the researcher's dissertation purposes. In reporting research study results, only pseudonyms will be used, no one will be able to link the results to the individual responses of subject participants. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All data will be stored in a private secure computer in password protected files. All written materials will be stored in a private file cabinet under lock and key for 5 years after the research project is completed. After five years all data will be destroyed.

If you have questions about the study, contact Dr. Eddie Moore, 310A Natural Resources East Lansing, MI 48824, Phone: 517-432-7733 or email: mooreee@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

By signing below you have read and understand the contents of this informed consent statement. You also agree voluntarily to participate in this research project.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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