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CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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ABSTRACT

CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERSISTENCE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

Velvie C. Green

Since the 1970s, doors of Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) have opened for African-American student enrollment; however, African-Americans enrolled in PWIs tend to be less successful than White students, as evidenced by the attrition disparity. African-American students receive fewer associate degrees, and their premature departure rate is significantly higher than their White counterparts.

The community college must begin to recognize the need to reflect the lives, experiences and ways of knowing of its entire student population and community. In this study, I examine the degree to which the marginalized African-American culture predicts the attrition rates of African-American community college students. In other words, how do specific cultural factors influence the persistence of African-American community college students?

A survey was mailed during the Winter 2003 semester to 399 African-American individuals who were first time college students and enrolled as full-time students at Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters with intent to earn an associate degree. The 43-question survey was designed to assess the experiences of the participants in an effort to determine which experiences contributed to their decisions to persist or to withdraw from the institution. Descriptive

statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, analysis of variance and comparison of means were techniques used to organize, summarize and analyze the data.

The results revealed that African-American students value an interactive and somewhat animated exchange with their learning facilitator. This suggests a positive relationship between student-faculty relationships and students' decision to persist or to depart. The data also revealed that those who have experienced positive student-faculty relationships are likely to believe positively in their ability to achieve their academic goals and are also likely to have little experience with prejudicial and discriminatory faculty and staff behaviors.

This study proved inconclusive with regard to whether cultural factors influence persistence. Nevertheless, this exploratory study brings to light the potential of a cultural disconnect; therefore, the topics warrant further investigation.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my family for their unconditional love and support throughout this learning journey. My husband since 1976, Herman Green, Jr., my daughters, Qiana Monet Green and Melissa Velvie Green and my mother, Shirley Ann Allen-Little truly inspired me to begin this work and continually encouraged me to persevere. With all my love, I dedicate this to you.

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Fourth, I would like to acknowledge several very special individuals who have blessed me with their support and encouragement:

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Chapter 1 – Background and Rationale

The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a set of laws barring discrimination in a wide variety of public and private settings, forced open the doors of predominantly White public institutions of higher education to individuals of color. Shortly thereafter, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Amendment abolished immigration preferences given to immigrants from Europe. "From 1965 to present America has absorbed more immigrants and aliens than all the other developed countries of the world" (Keller, 1999, p. 8). While the nation was struggling to adjust to major shifts in both civil rights practices and population demographics, it was also shifting from an industrial society to an information age society. Jobs requiring low skills were quickly being replaced by jobs requiring skills and knowledge beyond high school. The results were significantly more open doors and recruitment initiatives to attract individuals who were not previously encouraged toward post-secondary education.

Opened doors, new funding and recruitment efforts resulted in an increase in the number of community colleges and increased enrollments of a more diverse college student population. Although these efforts increased access, they have not resulted in equal student success. The attrition rates for African-American students exceed the attrition rates of White students (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Levin, 1993; Lorenzo & Banach, 1992; Lorenzo & LeCroy, 1994; Martens, Lara, Cordova, & Harris, 1995). Though there are many factors that contribute to this disparity, this study focused on the cultural mismatch between faculty/staff and students, an institutional barrier receiving

little attention in previous research. Faculty and professional staff remain predominantly White, middle class and culturally disconnected from their increasingly diverse students. Post-secondary institutions, particularly community colleges, must first acknowledge cultural disconnection as an institutional barrier, followed by a commitment to prepare their faculty and staff to work more effectively with all students—if they hope to positively impact African-American student persistence (i.e., perseverance to overcome obstacles and to goal attainment).

Shifting Student Demographics

Increasingly, African-Americans and other people of color began seeking higher education opportunities in the mid sixties. In 1976, students of color comprised 17% of post-secondary enrollment (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000). By 1999, the percentage of post-secondary students of color had increased to 28% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students contributed most of the growth, increasing from 5% in 1976 to 16.2% in 2001 while African-American student enrollment increased, from 9% in 1976 to 12.3% in 2001 (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2001;U.S. Department of Education, 2000). These students are part of the "new" college student population, and they bring new and different perspectives, cultures, values, behaviors, attitudes and challenges, most of which dramatically impact the college learning environment. "These demographic shifts have prompted a challenge to the largely unexamined practices of higher education" (Turner, Garcia, Nora, & Rendon, 1996, p. xx). How do we effectively communicate with each other? How do we cope with our differences? Why must we change practices

that have always worked? The community college is forced to grapple with these issues more urgently then other institutions of higher education.

The community college mission inherently places it in a unique and challenging position. Its mission emphasizes community access—access by all to a variety of higher education options. Thus, the community colleges' open door accepts a more diverse student body than the four-year institution. "Community colleges have indeed opened their doors to a broad range of populace, resulting in a student population that is more heavily working-class, minority and female than that of the four-year institutions" (Shaw, Valadez, & Rhoads, 1999, p. 2). From 1965 through 1999, enrollment at two-year colleges grew from 1,172,952 to 5,592,699 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The number of community colleges has increased steadily from 8 in 1901, to 436 in 1930, to 678 in 1960, to 1,664 by 1997 (Cohen, 1996; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2000). Cohen and Brawer (1996) offer a number of reasons for the increased community college enrollment, including geographic location, availability of financial aid, increasing number of part-time students, and maturation of baby boomers. Forecasters predict that community colleges will sustain their enrollment due to increased university tuition costs, continuing demand for post-secondary education less than a baccalaureate degree, open access and flexible scheduling (Cohen and Brawer, 1996). Increased college access and entry, however, does not guarantee an increase in college degrees.

Attrition

Though African-Americans entering two-year institutions receive the largest percent of certificates, data indicate that they are otherwise less successful than other

two-year college students. African-American students receive fewer associate degrees, and their premature departure rate is significantly higher than their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). It has become evident by conference topics and the literature that admission to college does not necessarily mean access to a college degree (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Levin, 1993; Lorenzo & Banach, 1992; Lorenzo & LeCroy, 1994; Martens, Lara, Cordova & Harris, 1995). Why are African-Americans leaving community colleges prior to achieving their goals? How might community colleges respond? Cohen (1996) suggests all barriers to individual development should be removed so all individuals are given the opportunity to rise to their greatest potential.

Rendon (1999) explains that a multiculturally inclusive community college begins with the recognition that the college needs to reflect the students' lives, experiences, ways of knowing, and history. Within its quest to provide access should also be a commitment to help students "build their stock of social and emotional capital, providing validating environments, emphasizing intellectualism, and helping students to see themselves as capable learners while creating a powerful image of their future" (p. 198). Academic success in community colleges is often determined by possession of the cultural capital with the greatest exchange value—academic cultural capital (Trujillo & Diaz, 1999). "Cultural capital" is a commodity that is used in place of currency and represents the required knowledge that is exchanged for academic returns or economic and social gains (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Individuals inherit linguistic and cultural competencies by virtue of their family's societal position. Dominant cultures award certain value and status to language forms, modes of thinking and qualities of style.

Therefore, dominant cultural capital holds the most value and status in the educational institution (Trujillo & Diaz, 1999).

African-Americans have often not been in the position to acquire the cultural capital necessary to make the exchange and are, therefore, left behind most of their dominant culture classmates who are cultural capital affluent. Faculty and staff appear to be unable or unwilling to convert the cultural capital offered by the African-American students to the dominant cultural capital held by most of the faculty, staff and non-African-American students.

Cultural Disconnect

The student demographics are changing at a significantly higher rate than that of the faculty and staff, creating a growing sociocultural gap between teachers and students. In Fall 1998, 85% of the full-time faculty and staff in public 2-year institutions were White, non-Hispanic and only 6% were Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). The majority of the faculty and staff share middle-class Eurocentric ideals (i.e., tendency to interpret the world in terms of western and especially European values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and language). Their experiences are based on those of the dominant (i.e., the group with the authority or ruling power) culture; therefore, they do not ordinarily question the biases implicit in their culture or the effects that these biases may have on students from a non-dominant culture. They also do not consider the relationship between these biases, the early departure of African-American students and cultural discontinuity i.e., the mismatch between the cultures of the students and the "Eurocentric" culture of the classroom (Allen and Boykin, 1992). They are either unable or unwilling to reconcile their traditional instructional strategies with the needs of these

"new" students, whose culture plays a significant role in the way they come to understand the world.

According to Guy (1999), African-Americans (as a group) are socially, politically and economically marginalized and are most affected by a cultural mismatch between the learning environment and their own cultural history. Such a mismatch leads to privileging some and subordinating others. "Difficulties in learning usually occur not because students lack ability or do not make the effort but because they lack experience with the type of task involved" (Brophy, 1998, p. 65). African-American students want to learn and to advance their economic position in life. To accomplish this, they must understand how to reconcile their experiences with those of the dominant culture.

African-American students must often navigate amidst many culturally related obstacles that are foreign to other students. For example, African-American students must negotiate the pressures from society to assimilate into an academic environment dominated by a Eurocentric culture. Assimilation pressures cause a disconnect between the cultures of African-American community college students and the college culture. Guy (1999) emphasizes that culture is the core of a group's life and a group's identity. It is so powerful that it shapes the essence of the individual and is, therefore, essential to human social life.

The dominant culture dictates the instructional standards of the classroom (e.g., literature selection, shared examples, and recognized experiences); however, many African-Americans bring different experiences that are often not valued. Further, individuals come to know in different ways. Some learn by experiential association, some by simply listening, some require authoritarian delivery, and others learn best by

practice. Sheared (1999) explains learning behaviors that are common to African-Americans permeate their family structure, religious institutions, culture and community life, and influence the way African-Americans come to know. Smitherman (1977) suggests that many African-American are active communicators, active listeners and active learners. They learn best through interaction with each other. She encourages teachers to use the principles of "each one teach one" through small group interaction in non-threatening learning environments. Understanding how individuals dialogue in their homes and in their churches may help faculty by providing alternative methods of dialogue in class (e.g., everybody talking at once, call and response) (Smitherman, 1977).

Construction of meaning for clear understanding takes time and interactive discourse during learning activities. Such activities allow students to process the newly acquired information by exploring its relationships to other already acquired knowledge and past experiences (Brophy, 1998). Caring, supportive, empathetic teachers can assist the students in these meaning making activities by giving clear explanations and by helping students connect the new information to established frames of reference. Unfortunately, "many teachers do not have frames of reference and points of view similar to their ethnically and culturally different students because they live in different existential worlds" (Gay, 1993, p.287).

Today's community college classroom is very likely to be composed of individuals of wide ranging ages, levels of abilities, ethnic groups, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Murray, 1999). Prospective community college faculty should have a breadth of preparation, including an understanding of the diverse student population, adult learning theory, multicultural communication and the community

college mission if they are to be effective in the classroom (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Unfortunately, however, few faculty/staff have such preparation. Until the 1960s, there were no higher education programs designed to prepare individuals for professions in community college teaching. Though there are now graduate schools that offer related programs, not enough individuals complete such programs to provide the pipeline with an adequate supply of candidates trained to assist today's community college students in persisting to goal attainment.

Culture exists in all aspects of our lives, establishes the parameters for social interaction and provides a framework for defining self in relation to others (Rhoads, 1999, p. 106). Institutions have not been pushed to make institutional changes that will ensure an inclusive, multicultural environment. Instead, the campus culture often threatens the social and psychological comfort of many African-American students, resulting in self-doubt about academic ability. Such environment is, therefore, non-conducive to their academic success.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this survey study was to discover how cultural factors influence the academic persistence of African-American students in a large, urban, non-residential community college. The analysis examined the community college learning environment from the perspective of the African-American student and, ultimately, its impact on their decision to persist to goal attainment. I chose this study because I hoped that it might directly impact future policy and program development at Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) and other community colleges across the nation. I also hoped that the results might invoke emotional commitments and responses of faculty and staff.

To accomplish this, I explored the answers to the following four research questions:

1. How do students rate the importance of cultural factors on their community college learning experience?
2. Do community college learning experiences correlate with African-American students' perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?
3. Is there a correlation between African-American community college students' decisions to persist to goal attainment and their perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?
4. Is there a correlation between cultural factors and persistence of full-time, degree-seeking African-American students who were first enrolled at GRCC during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters?

Though a focus of this paper is the African-American culture, it is important to clarify that I do not support the assumption that all African-Americans possess identical cultural attributes. There may be many commonalities among cultural groups, but there are also many differences within cultural groups. "African-Americans are drawn from a diverse range of cultures and countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America" (Rendon, Hope, & associates, 1996, p. 4). Each contributes diverse values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and languages.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

In my quest to discover factors influencing the academic persistence of African-American students in community colleges, I was surprised to discover very little written about this sector of post-secondary education. Of what I found, most was not written by community college faculty, whose primary responsibility is teaching, not research. However, I found considerable research on students in universities, covering a large variety of topics. This was helpful in shaping my research questions and in guiding my literature search on community colleges. I began to question the relationship of culture to student achievement as I read two research studies (Allen, Epp & Haniff, 1991; Wagener & Nettles, 1998), both of which pointed to the importance of a positive campus environment and a supportive, inclusive campus culture.

In the next section of this chapter, the phenomenon of the rapidly changing student demographics is discussed. Successful approaches of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are also discussed. In the third section of this chapter, I explore campus culture and its affect on how individuals perceive their fit within the campus community and resulting feelings about their ability to succeed in such an environment. Attrition is suggested as an outcome of one's inability to perceive him or herself fitting in the college environment. In the fourth section, I explore retention strategies. The fifth section explores the African-American culture and how culture manifests itself. My intent was to understand institutional barriers that contribute to the struggles of African-American learners.

Changing Demography

The community college—though existing since the early twentieth century—has only recently become a more popular topic of research (Boone, 1997; Levin, 1993; Lorenzo & Banach, 1992; Lorenzo & LeCroy, 1994; Rendon & Mathews, 1989; Taylor & Maas, 1995). In recent years, community colleges have been faced with the challenges of changing student demographics, increasing enrollment, increasing number of underprepared students, declining funding, and rising costs. Student demographics have shifted from one of predominantly White and of European ancestry to one that is more heterogeneous, with significant proportions of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American students (Keller, 1999; Rendon & Mathews, 1989; Wilds & Wilson, 1998). Higher attrition rates for African-American students add yet another challenge with which community colleges must grapple. Cohen and Brawer (1996) contribute faculty challenges as they describe an environment where faculty are (a) not prepared for the larger class sizes resulting from the increased enrollment, (b) not prepared for the large number of underprepared students, (c) not trained to teach, and (d) burned out.

At the same time, accrediting agencies, taxpayers, policy makers, general public, legislators, and business and industry all persist in their calls for accountability due to fiscal constraints, the influence of accrediting standards, and state and federal mandates (Gracie, 1998; Roueche, 1997; Sanchez, 1998). They demand evidence to demonstrate that the students, the community and the economy all benefit as a result of the community college (Carvell, 1998; Hurley, 2002; Sanchez, 1998). In other words, community colleges must document how well they are responding to mandates based on critical success factors and institutional performance standards. They must assess students'

access to learning opportunities and student goal attainment. Some of the research conducted on four-year institutions might serve as models for community colleges.

African-American Achievement in Universities. Almost every aspect of four-year colleges and universities has been probed and studied for decades. Much has been documented about African-American students attending four-year colleges and universities that have contributed helpful insights into several issues affecting the success of these students. Stikes (1984) analyzed 16 case studies and discovered that many of the Black students in his study did not possess the academic-achievement-oriented skills, interpersonal skills and individual assertiveness skills that he believed to be necessary for success in college. He suggests that colleges must play an active role in helping students develop the skills necessary for success. He further suggests that faculty and staff must be willing to invest the time and energy necessary to learn about the African-American culture in an effort to appreciate its richness as different, not deficient.

Allen (1991) analyzed data from the National Study of Black College Students (NSBCS), based at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor—data collected over three years, 1981-1983, from 4000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional African-American students enrolled in 16 public universities. This study is helpful in that it compares the success, retention and persistence of African-American students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to those at predominantly White colleges and universities. The data indicate that a higher percentage of African-Americans attending HBCUs persist in their studies to complete their academic goals than those who attend predominantly White colleges and universities. Wagener (1998)

provides evidence to support these findings and explains that HBCUs work hard to create environments in which many more students can succeed academically.

> Constituting only 3% of the more than 3,800 U.S. institutions of higher education, HBCUs enroll about 16% of the Black students in college. HBCUs produce approximately 27% of all BAs and of all bachelor's degrees in science and engineering awarded to African Americans annually. Of the African Americans who earn doctorates, approximately 35% have their baccalaureate origins in HBCUs. (Wagener, 1998, p. 1)

Although the focus of Wagener's research is on four-year institutions, the findings provide information about successful approaches used by HBCUs, such as early intervention, mentoring and monitoring, faculty/role model advising, small group discussions/support groups, and study groups, that are missing from non-HBCU institutions (Allen, Epp et al., 1991). Wagener focuses on three successful HBCUs—Hampton University, Xavier University and Spelman College. According to Wagener, Hampton University engages faculty in student achievement through its highly successful faculty development advisor program, resulting in a decrease of freshman on academic probation from 20% in 1994-95 to 15% in 1996-97. Xavier University of Louisana, the only Black Catholic college in the United States, graduates 45% of its student body; the national average is 34% for African-Americans. Xavier's success can be attributed to its highly committed faculty who each counsels and mentors 35 students in an effort to pinpoint academic difficulties and intervene quickly (Wagener, 1998). Spelman College "awards the second highest number of baccalaureate degrees granted to African-Americans in mathematics" (Wagener, 1998, p. 8). Wagener goes on to report that 72%

of Spelman women graduate in six years; the national average for African-American women is 37%. All three institutions share a commitment to strong support services, to early intervention, to retention, to faculty/student engagement, and to high expectations of both students and faculty.

At HBCUs, students are surrounded by a support group of other students and staff who validate their presence and share similar experiences and struggles. HBCU's large number of African-American staff members represents role models who are living testimonies of what is possible through perseverance. This helps students develop images of their ideal selves, motivating them to be open-minded and active learners (Brophy, 1998, p. 215). The faculty and staff are able to advise students using real and meaningful examples from personal experience, allowing students to make important connections through shared experiences. The supportive, caring HBCU campus culture provides an environment which fosters success. Predominantly White institutions, which strive to portray an inclusive, positive campus environment, might consider modeling their support systems after those of the HBCUs.

Campus Culture

It is important to consider cultural differences and similarities because people embody the culture, and our success in interacting with others relates in many ways to cultural factors (Ricard, 1996). The culture of an institution is reflected in its deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the ideologies that its members hold about the work of the institution. Institutional culture can be assessed through observation of its organizational sagas, its heroic figures, and its rituals (Peterson & Spencer, 2000, p. 171). Several variables in the college environment are impacted by

culture "including the organization of the university, delivery systems for services, administration, management and supervision, teaching methods, counseling approaches, small-group interactions, interpersonal relations, students' coping strategies, and students' learning styles" (Stikes, 1984, p. 121).

Turner (1996) presents a series of essays and studies by scholars studying the experiences of African-American students in higher education. All seem to converge on the same conclusion: African-American students are not comfortable on college campuses. Institutions of higher education across the country fail to provide welcoming environments for students, faculty and staff of color. In order to attract African-American students to campus, recruiting materials often paint rosy pictures of campus life by including pictures of African-American students. However, upon arrival to campus, many African-American freshmen are disappointed to discover that there are very few students or faculty of color and limited support. Daniels (1991) summarized it best by offering an analogy. She explains that people of color feel as if they are guests who must follow the rules of the homeowner and avoid certain rooms reserved for family. Guests have no history within the family and no pictures on the walls.

A study by Nettles (1996) concludes that the better the fit of the student in his or her institution, the more likely it is that the individual will succeed academically. Fit was measured by the students' feelings about nondiscriminatory practices, availability and attitudes of faculty, peer group relations, overall student satisfaction and problems encountered that directly interfere with academic efforts. The data indicate that White students fit better in the college environment than do African-American students.

Feagin (1995; 1996) examined the barriers faced by African-American students at predominantly White universities. African-Americans students must often cope with racist jokes, stereotypic beliefs, subtle discrimination, negation of Black history, and Eurocentric bias in courses and curricula. Many African-American students are not prepared for the negative interactions in an often hostile environment or the numerous hateful offenses resulting from bigotry and discrimination (Edney, 2002). The hostile undercurrents of still predominantly White campuses add constant stress to the academic lives of these students, causing many to stop short of their goal completion.

> LaToya Carson was assaulted with the *n*-word and had glass bottles thrown at her on Penn State University's campus because she would not respond to the catcalls of White students. At Auburn University in Alabama and the University of Mississippi, White students sported blackface and simulated a KKK lynching and a police shooting of a Black man picking cotton. At Stanford University, racist e-mails were sent to 25,000 computer users. Racist notes were affixed to dorm room doors of Black students at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. An employee at the University of Illinois at Chicago sent a poem with racial slurs to six faculty members and several students. A fraternity and a sorority at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire held a "ghetto party," where White Greeks were encouraged to dress as inner-city Blacks. At Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, four White students were expelled after a Black mannequin with a noose around its head was found hanging from a tree. (Edney, 2002)

These are examples of institutional barriers (i.e., barriers caused by the college that may discourage participation) that force African-American students to question their

academic ability and their institutional belongingness. Institutions often see these occurrences as isolated incidents; however, these incidents are added to a lifetime of accumulated experiences for African-American students.

Many African-American students also discover that they are not prepared for the level of required study, they are unfamiliar with higher education organizational systems or they do not know how to navigate the system to achieve their academic goals. They are quickly disillusioned with their decision to enroll because they mostly find themselves disadvantaged in navigating the dominant culture. "Though the painting of a rosy picture may, in the short run, increase enrollments, it is very likely, in the long run, to decrease retention by widening the gap between promise and delivery" (Tinto, 1993, p.155).

Through a comprehensive assessment of the K-16 educational system, with a specific focus on students of color, Rendon (1996) concludes that a transformation of higher education is essential.

> Traditional program planning, teaching, advising, and retention are based on theories derived by research based on middle- and upper-class, predominantly White, male student populations that have limited utility for students of color. It cannot be assumed that a new student majority can become involved in and socialized in a college environment that is vastly different from their home/community realities. (p.465)

Post-secondary Alternative. For the years 1992 through 1997, the African-American student percentage of total enrollment was consistently greater at community colleges than at four-year colleges and universities (Phillippe, 1999). This trend

continues today. The community college has provided an alternate route to a post-secondary education. Since their inception, community colleges have appealed to those individuals who have not traditionally had access to a post-secondary education. Community colleges' lower tuition rates, open admission, convenient location, and service orientation have resulted in their educating more than half of the nation's undergraduates. The low tuition rates are especially attractive to people with low incomes. The open admission gives a second chance to many individuals who might have had a previously less than successful academic experience. The location of community colleges has been especially helpful to women with children who schedule their classes around their spouses' work schedule, their children's school schedules, and babysitting availability.

In urban areas, community college enrollments often reflect the proportion of minorities in the local population (Phillippe, 1999). Community colleges are committed to active involvement in the local community. This community presence and approachability is attractive to family-centered cultures that like to keep family members close to home. Many African-Americans see this as a way to continue their education while at the same time retaining their family ties.

Community College Culture. A few researchers have chosen to examine the community college culture in an attempt to understand how these institutions address the broad challenges of diversity. Drawing from a large ethnographic case study that focused on first-year community college students of color, Laden (1999) describes efforts to enhance the academic and support services in order to motivate students of color and increase their commitment to transfer to four-year institutions. She concludes:

> Culturally sensitive academic and support programs and activities designed to provide a sense of belonging, to motivate and empower, and to make knowledge meaningful and accessible to students of color remain crucial in community colleges that enroll high numbers of these students (p. 190). It is only by understanding the culture of the students that the process of organizational and individual transformation can yield significant outcomes for these students or the community college as a whole. (p. 191)

Shaw (1999) examined the community college's organizational culture and its relationship to the student cultures, and found that "community college students consistently describe their identities as multifaceted, multisourced, and multilayered" (p. 169) while their colleges are more likely to define students in much more narrow terms. Narrow definitions "ignore or negate the lived experiences of students, and increase the chance that these students will maintain neither the desire nor the ability to persist" (p. 169).

Rhoads (1999) examined how students' experiences are shaped by the organizational structures and practices. Cultural complexities are argued and progressive practices are shared. "While community colleges preach diversity, they fail to provide for it. Behind the gloss of the rhetoric of access and diversity is the reality of monoculturalism that permeates the college culture of some, and perhaps too many, two-year colleges" (Rendon, 1999, p. 198). It is clear that community colleges have many issues and challenges due to their diverse constituents—community, government, students, business & industry, transfer institutions—all with diverse expectations.

Diminishing Self-Confidence. Over time and after a myriad of negative classroom and campus experiences, many students begin to approach tasks and learning experiences with low expectations of themselves. They begin to doubt their ability to achieve based on the circumstances, on their under-preparedness and on the interactions with their peers and the faculty and staff. Reeve (1998, p. 78) labels this state of mind low self-efficacy. When faced with difficult conditions, doubt can interfere with effective thinking, planning and decision-making causing much "anxiety, confusion, arousal, tension, and distressing anticipation that spiral performance toward disaster" (Reeve, 1998, p. 78). African-American students access post-secondary education through the community college anticipating opportunity—a ticket to a higher standard of living. Instead, they often encounter negative expectations, a hostile environment, and unfamiliar cultural norms. Their confidence wanes, and many retreat to the comfort and safety of their "village"—never to return.

Attrition Rates. Community college enrollment of African-Americans continues to increase and attrition of African-American students in community colleges continues to be disproportionate to that of White students. Fifty-three percent of African-American, Hispanic and Native American undergraduates attend two-year college (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996), and their experiences at those institutions often determine their academic future. Every year approximately 42% of the African-American students entering college enroll in Associate of Arts degree (see Table 1). However, attrition is highest at these institutions among non-White students. Of those African-Americans entering 2-year institutions during the 1989-90 academic year, 53.5% were no longer enrolled and had failed to complete their goal of earning a degree or certificate by 1994 (see Table 2).

Though African-Americans entering two-year institutions receive the largest percent of certificates, data indicate that they are otherwise less successful than other two-year students.

Table 1

Percentage of Student Enrollment in Two-Year Institutions

	(Number in Thousands)							
	1988	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Total Afr-Amer Student Enrollment in Higher Ed	1130	1393	1413	1449	1474	1506	1551	1585
Afr-Amer Enrollment in 2-yr Institutions	473	602	599	615	621	636	655	657
Percentage of Afr-Amer enrolled in 2-yr	42%	43%	42%	42%	42%	42%	42%	41%

Source: (Harvey, 2001)

Table 2

Percentage of Certificate and Degree Completed by 1994 for 1989-90 Entrants

	Certificate	Associate	Bachelor	No degree, still enrolled	No degree, not enrolled
White, non Hispanic	13.1	19.6	6.4	12.2	48.8
Black, non Hispanic	***17.8***	***14.1***	***3.2***	***11.3***	***53.5***
Hispanic	15.3	16.4	6.6	20.5	41.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	15.0	16.7	5.9	23.0	39.3

Source: (U.S. Department of Education, 2000, p. 342)

Throughout the 90s, the national college attrition rate for African-American students was 20 to 25% higher than that of White students. Society cannot afford to continue discarding this valuable human resource. Through equitable education and training, all able-minded individuals must be given the opportunity to improve their

standard of living and to prepare themselves to make a contribution to the well being of our society. Tinto (1993) synthesized research on student attrition in higher education and suggested that institutions must focus on the delivery of a quality, equitable education in order to retain students and reduce attrition.

Tinto (1998) further suggests that the more integrated students are into the institution and the more valued they are as members of the institution the more likely they are to persist. They must feel positive about their interactions (i.e., the social system) with their peers and with faculty. Since most community college students spend most of their time in classrooms and laboratories (rather than in residence halls), that is where their interactions are most likely to occur. Their experiences and involvement in these settings (especially during the first 10 weeks) are therefore more likely to have the greatest impact on their persistence decisions. Informal interaction between faculty and students and the frequency of that interaction is believed to greatly influence students' persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Tinto (1998) summarizes his research in this statement,

> Clearly, the academic and social systems of colleges overlay both classroom and college settings in such a way that experiences within and beyond the classroom both impact upon student persistence. (p. 169)

Several authors discuss the issues surrounding the retention of African-American students in higher education in general (Guy, 1999; Person & Christensen, 1996; Roueche, 1993; Stewart, Russell & Wright, 1997), while Rendon (1989) has drawn attention to the low retention rates of the community college's disproportionate number of minority students. Rhoads and Valadez (Allen, 1996) critically examine the roles of

community colleges and the challenges faced by multiculturalism, including the failure to provide social mobility to all students. However, I believe that a greater emphasis must be placed on specific cultural factors that relate to the persistence of African-American community college students. Culturally different students perform more poorly than their counterparts whose approach to the world and to learning resonates with that of the dominant culture (Chu-Richardson, 1989). How do these factors influence their decisions to persist to degree or goal completion? As stated earlier, the greatest percentage of African-Americans who attend college, attend community colleges, but they are not persisting at those institutions.

Support Systems

Although recruitment efforts appear to suggest that campuses value diverse campus environments, little attention has been given to what is required to retain a diverse student body. Some colleges have attempted through special events and support activities to ensure that the college climate and educational setting are positive and encouraging for these students. Several strategies have been initiated over the years, including sponsorship of diversity days with a variety of ethnic speakers, Black Studies course offerings, hiring of a small percentage of faculty and staff of color, racial ethnic celebratory activities and establishment of support programs for African-American students. These strategies all attempt a proactive facilitation of African-American students' academic development, retention and identity development. While these efforts may be helpful, non-minority faculty and staff do not always support them. Some individuals of privilege even oppose ethnic celebratory activities, arguing that such activities promote separatism and contribute to the racial divide (Lords, 2002).

Retention strategies often put the responsibility of resolving attrition issues on the students themselves, a few faculty of color, a particular college office or a particular group of individuals, and not the institution, which functions under the regime of the dominant culture. This then frees the remaining faculty and staff of any responsibility or accountability. Ultimately, individuals should be intrinsically motivated to participate, to expand their perspectives, and to incorporate new ideas into the learning environment—both inside and outside of the classroom—or the environment will not change. They must assume the responsibility for motivating themselves to learn about their students if they ever hope to establish connections with their students.

Often, African-American students are the first among their families and friends to attend college. Unlike many first generation dominant culture college students, who can connect to professionals from their culture (both on and off campus), first generation African-American college students often have no co-ethnic professionals (with common background and experiences) to guide and support them in their academic pursuits. If the family and friends do not understand the value of a college education, they may not be able to offer the needed encouragement, especially the kind one can offer from the perspective of having had the same experience (e.g., money, tutoring, baby-sitting, encouragement, advice about academics, transportation, etc.). If family members and friends have never attended college, they may not be able to provide the needed advice about college and college survival (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, many African-Americans rely on the limited (if any) support systems established by the academic institutions. However, can the institutions provide the appropriate support without an understanding

of the barriers (both cultural and institutional) without have had the same experiences and without an appreciation for the individual struggles?

The families and friends of first-generation college students often have limited understanding of the value of post-secondary education. Some individuals are pressured by family to forego college and begin "earning their keep" by working full-time immediately after graduation from high school (Tinto, 1993). Seeking a college education is believed by some as simply postponing for an extended period of time an individual's ability to "earn their own way." Pursuing a college education is felt to be a waste of time since many believe college-educated African-Americans will not be hired into the same position as an equally qualified White person. Individuals are sometime reminded of the failures of previous family members and friends who have attempted such a venture. The fear that the college-educated family member will be rejected by the dominant culture society is a heavy burden of African-American families.

Boykin and Allen (1992) examine the impact of the incorporation of certain cultural factors into the learning context on the performance of Black children. They state:

> Since pedagogy in the United States is founded upon mainstream ideals, the traditional classroom lacks outlets and vehicles for expression of afro-cultural behaviors. Such a constraint in learning and performance experiences reduces the chances that many Black children have to exercise existing competencies, as well as reduces the chances that the classroom will provide the contextual conditions necessary to sustain and enhance the motivation of the student to engage in required tasks. Moreover, the absence of afro-cultural factors within the

classroom lends the perception that the most salient aspects of these children's lives are neither valued nor relevant to the academic arena. (p. 590)

Though this argument is focused on children, its essence can be transferred to the older students. Cultural discontinuity results in a disconnect between the teacher and the students—students of any age (Allen & Boykin, 1992). However, the role of the teacher is to assist the student in making connections. Perhaps teachers (and institutions) might begin the enculturation process by learning about various cultural aspects of their students. To gain a better understanding of their African-American students, learning about the influence of the church, the burden of heightened visibility and stereotype threat, the survival mechanism of biculturalism, the tradition of verbal performance, and the pressure of representation might prove to be transforming experience for dominant culture educators.

Manifestation of Culture

Though there are many factors that influence the persistence of African-American undergraduate students (e.g., limited personal finances, inadequate college preparation, poor time management), culture is one factor that has rarely been studied. In the African-American culture, the "community/village" forms an extended family that plays a major role in the development of the individual, both academically and socially. The individual learns the historical traditions, language, behaviors, beliefs, shared values, practices and rituals—the omnipresent culture—of that "community/village" from time of birth and continues learning throughout his/her lifetime. Cultural values, beliefs and practices are at the core of their group life and identity and are powerful factors that share or influence individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Guy, 1999).

Shared knowledge, norms, shared behaviors, common beliefs and values, and a common sense of origin unites individuals into cultural groups. These attributes manifest themselves through a process of group programming (i.e., indoctrination/instruction) and facilitate communication and behavior interpretation by individuals within a culture (Hecht, Collier & Ribeau, 1993). The programming begins at birth and continues throughout one's lifetime. When African-American students enter the community college classroom, they bring with them attributes from their cultural groups. However, upon entry, they are usually expected to disassociate from their cultural attributes (i.e., check their luggage at the door) and conform to the accepted cultural behaviors of the classroom. The cultural norms of the classroom are mostly determined by the institutional culture.

I have chosen to examine six key factors that I consider most unique to the African-American culture and shared heritage. In my review of the literature (Darder, 1991; Foster, 1983, 1989; Peterson, 2000; Smitterman, 1977; Steele, 2000), these six factors appear most often and seemed to me to have a common connection to the African-American learning experience. Through programming, these factors contribute to the manifestation of culture and ingrained behaviors within the African-American community: church as it relates to socialization behaviors, ethnic identification and the impact of heightened visibility, bi-culturalism as it relates to an enculturation process, extended family as a support network, oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors, and representation as it relates to being perceived as the spokesperson for an entire race of people.

Church influence. The church has played a critically important role in sustaining the African-American family since the days of slavery. The church focuses its attention on the family, faith, education, politics, civil rights and economic issues. It has provided leadership for social change, helping its members and associates develop skills to survive in a racially discriminatory society, and has served as a major social institution for people who have been denied access to the mainstream of American life (Green, 1982; Olin, 1975). It makes a significant contribution to the socialization of African-Americans.

The worship style and discourse in many African-American churches is one of observable participation of the congregation. Hearty responses, laughter, and applause can often be heard. Individuals will often loudly verbalize their agreement with the minister's words. This agreement provides instant feedback to the minister, who is stimulated to continue. The exchange is very animated and interactive. Such behavior in the dominant culture college classroom might be considered distracting or disrespectful.

Church services often include lengthy programs with roles for several individuals, encouraging participation and cultivating leadership among its members. The church services, unlike the college classroom, very often elicit emotional participation. Many African-Americans spend much of their lives in this environment, resulting in ingrained behaviors. The same discourse carries over into other social situations (i.e., the campus and the classroom) but must often be contained because such behaviors do not conform to what is considered appropriate classroom behavior.

Ethnic identification. Though the skin tones of African-Americans come in an array of colors, African-American ethnicity is usually fairly obvious to the eye. On a predominately White college campus, the African-American students usually standout in

the crowd. Tatum (1997) talks about "heightened visibility." She explains, "When Black people are sitting together, White people notice...." (p. 89). African-Americans are noticed when they enter the room, and it is noticed when they are not present in a class in which they are considered a member. As professionals or college students, African-Americans are often the extreme minority (i.e., often only one or two African-Americans in classes with enrollments of 30 or more), and the opportunity to connect with peers of color are few and far between, leaving them with feelings of isolation.

African-Americans and other people of color are often subject to stereotypic assumptions. Steele (2000, p. 4) describes "stereotype threat" as "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype." These students are unable to shake the fear of being viewed through the lens of negative stereotypes. This can lead to general mistrust and constant apprehension. Ultimately, the internalization of these feelings can decrease their motivation to succeed and ultimately affect grades, test scores, and academic identity. Individuals, who are constantly placed in situations where they are the extreme minority, are sometimes plagued by the concern of being stereotyped, examined and critiqued according to dominant culture norms. This can be frustrating and distracting. Over time, this can exhaust the spirit.

Biculturalism. The term "bicultural" connotes an enculturation process that is distinct from that of dominant culture students. Bicultural students, throughout their development, must contend with: (a) at least two cultural systems whose values are very often in direct conflict; and (b) a set of sociopolitical and historical forces dissimilar to those of the dominant culture students and the educational institutions that bicultural

students must attend (Darder, 1991). Guy (1999) sees biculturalism as a mechanism of survival because individuals maintain their "home" culture while also becoming competent in the mainstream culture. Bicultural students are forced to make connection in the learning to experiences from the dominant culture perspective. This can be extremely difficult, and therefore frustrating for bicultural individuals who are not thoroughly enculturated. Those who are academically and professionally successful must work extremely hard to learn the behaviors, beliefs and values that are often very different from their own.

Extended families. African-Americans may likely construe family more broadly than the traditional nuclear family and could include a parent's partner, grandparents, siblings, and in-laws as well as others (beyond biological ties) they jointly consider 'their family' by definitions of proximity, frequency of contacts, and mutual obligation and influence (Wilson, 1986). For many African-Americans, the definition of family has always reflected diverse forms of familial organization and embeddedness in extended family networks (Foster, 1983).

Aschenbrenner (1973), Frazier (1966), and Sudarkasa (1997) discuss in detail the roles of the extended family, emphasizing consanguinity (i.e., the close relationship of those with the same ancestry), in the development of the African-American individual. In the lives of African-Americans, extended families and the intergenerational presence provides added support to adolescents and young adults. Dressler (1985) suggests that the extended family network can buffer individuals against the negative life events commonly experienced by African-American adults. This added support contributes to

their ability to cope with difficult situations (i.e., discrimination, stereotype threats, isolation, heightened visibility) encountered on a routine basis.

HBCUs work hard to create an extended family-type support system within the campus environment. However, when African-Americans venture out from their "village" into the community college setting, they essentially "cross the border" to step onto foreign soil—leaving their support system behind—vulnerable, isolated and exposed.

Oral tradition. "African-Americans come from a rich oral tradition. The ability of a person to use active and copious verbal performance to achieve recognition within his or her group is widespread in the African-American community, having its roots in African verbal art" (Anokye, 1997, p. 229). Many African-American speakers have gained the public's admiration by their skillful ability to manipulate language orally, using the oral tradition to convey messages. Many well-known African-American speakers like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Jesse Jackson, Mohammed Ali, Barbara Jordon, to name a few, each possess a linguistic style that might be described as sermonic (Foster, 1989). This sermonic style lessens the social distance between the speaker and the audience, emphasizes a shared knowledge and creates an identification that is indigenous to the African-American culture.

Aspects of African-American oral tradition can be observed in storytelling by African-American students. When telling stories (both written and oral), it may seem as though they are meandering from the point, which may cause problems for Eurocentric listeners who would prefer that the speaker get to the point. Though rarely observed in the college classroom, stating and counterstating, acting and reacting, and seeking

feedback from the audience through *call-and-response*, where the audience responds verbally when prompted by the speaker—confirming the audience's understanding—are routinely observed in African-American communication.

> In African-American communication style, we find the following: overt demonstration of sympathetic involvement through movement and sounds; a prescribed method for how the performer acts and how the audience reacts; total involvement of the participants; the tendency to personalize by incorporating personal pronouns and references to self (African-American students tend to use first-person-singular pronouns more frequently than Anglo-American students to focus attention on themselves); and use of active verbs coupled with adjectives and adverbs with potential for intensification. (Anokye, 1997, p. 229)

In order to give voice to all students, teachers must be willing to explore all students' ways of knowing.

Representation. African-Americans often feel the pressure of representing a total race of people. In Person's (1990) investigation into whether Black student culture existed on campus, students expressed that professors and students often turn to them for an explanation of the Black experience. This is sometimes felt by some African-Americans to be an opportunity to make a difference by superimposing a positive image over an imagined negative image of African-Americans. At other times this kind of expectation—being considered the expert or spokesperson for an entire race of individuals—can be a tremendous burden. Occasionally, the representation role is felt to be one of tokenism rather than a valued voice. Over time such burdens can drain one's enthusiasm, motivation and commitment. These burdens might also intensify feelings of

isolation. Like in all cultures, there are a plethora of exceptions to what might be considered the norm, and one person cannot represent all individuals within a culture.

Summary

Today 42% of African-Americans deciding to seek a post-secondary education select two-year institutions (Harvey, 2001). This is resulting in a shift in the community college demographics from one of predominantly White and of European ancestry to one that is more heterogeneous (Keller, 1999; Rendon & Mathews, 1989; Wilds & Wilson, 1998). However, African-Americans enrolled in predominantly White institutions tend to be less successful than other students and are less persistent to degree or goal completion.

A higher percentage of African-Americans attending HBCUs persist in their studies to complete their academic goals than those who attend predominantly White colleges and universities. HBCU's retention success might be attributed to such strategies as early intervention, mentoring and monitoring, faculty/role model advising, small group discussions/support groups, and study groups. Faculty and staff at predominantly White institutions must be willing to invest the time and energy necessary to learn about the African-American culture in an effort to appreciate its richness as different, not deficient. Rendon (1996) concluded that proactive efforts by college staff to validate the students' abilities or achievements (e.g., college staff reaching out and encouraging students, nurturing and supportive faculty) contributed to student achievement. They also concluded that certain out-of-class efforts (e.g., role models who were family members or friends) were also influential for students of color.

Many African-American students are not comfortable on predominantly White college campuses across the United States due to their less than welcoming environment.

The college environment often causes a tension between the discourse common within the African-American community and that common within the dominant culture learning environment. African-Americans are often the extreme minority in college classrooms and on college campuses with few opportunities to connect with their African-American peers. To succeed academically and socially and to avoid alienation by White students and marginalization by White faculty and staff, they must be fluent in at least two cultural systems. They are disconnected from their families or other extended family members who usually provide the support needed to overcome the negative life events. This environment contributes to their self-doubt and interferes with effective thinking, planning and decision-making causing anxiety, confusion, tension, and distressing anticipation that spirals their performance toward disaster.

The community college must begin by recognizing the need to reflect the lives, experiences and ways of knowing of its student population and community. In this study, I explored the connection between the marginalizing of the African-American culture and the attrition rates of African-American community college students. In the next chapter, I focus on the methodology used to address my research questions and the six key cultural factors. I also explain the process used to analyze the data.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between cultural factors and academic persistence of African-American students in a large, urban, non-residential community college. In other words, I sought to determine the degree to which cultural factors and learning experiences predict the persistence of African-American community college students.

Research Questions

A review of the literature led me to the following four research questions:

1. How do students rate the importance of cultural factors on their community college learning experience?

2. Do community college learning experiences correlate with African-American students' perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?

3. Is there a correlation between African-American community college students' decisions to persist to goal attainment and their perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?

4. Is there a correlation between cultural factors and persistence of full-time, degree-seeking African-American students who were first enrolled at GRCC during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters?

A quantitative research study was initiated in an effort to discover the answers to these four questions.

Rationale for a Quantitative Design

Previous research documents the attrition rates for African-American community college students as being higher than attrition rates for their White peers (Allen, Epp & Haniff, 1991; Carter & Wilson, 1994; Nora, 2000) and documents that African-American students enrolled at HBCUs are more likely to persist to goal attainment than those enrolled in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Fries-Britt, 2002). However, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the underlying realities of these contrasting attrition rates. Previous studies used the quantitative paradigms to examine enrollment and withdrawal patterns that demonstrated the contrasting attrition rates. Though such data are useful in spotlighting a problem, they do little to illuminate the root causes.

This survey study attempted to focus on the root causes based on a theory that a cultural disconnect exists between the students and the faculty and staff. This cultural disconnect represents a barrier for the African-American students, negatively affecting their ability to persist to goal achievement. Using a survey instrument helped to distance me from the participants and encourage objectivity. It allowed me to collect data from a somewhat large representative group of students in a way that allowed for maximum exposure of experience, attitudes and perceptions. Conducting a survey by mail was an economical way to reach a large number of individuals and to facilitate a rapid turnaround in data collection. The quantity of data also allowed me to generalize my findings to other community colleges that have characteristics similar to Grand Rapids Community College, and it allowed me to promote findings that predict and explain the relationship between culture and persistence for all African-American community college students (Creswell, 1994).

As an African-American researcher whose personal experience and concerns brought me to this study, I am acutely aware of my own potential for bias. The quantitative design of this study helped me to neutralize those biases as much as possible and to resist the insertion of my own experience and understanding as a representation of the voice of the participants.

Setting

I chose Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC), located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as a site for my study. GRCC is a comprehensive community college founded in 1914. GRCC was the first community college in Michigan, founded as Grand Rapids Junior College by the Grand Rapids Board of Education, following a resolution passed by the University of Michigan faculty. It became Grand Rapids Community College in 1991, after a countywide vote. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools has accredited the College continuously since 1917.

The GRCC campus encompasses more than 25 acres in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan. The College offers instruction from off-site facilities in the metropolitan Grand Rapids area and supports two Michigan Technical Education Centers (MTEC^{sm}), one in Ottawa County and one in downtown Grand Rapids. These centers offer training opportunities for occupations such as construction, manufacturing, and automotive servicing. GRCC serves more than 400 local businesses annually with its job training and retraining programs.

GRCC organizes instruction into two schools: the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Workforce Development to support a Fall, 2002, semester enrollment

of over 14,000 credit and over 5,000 non-credit students. GRCC awards seven associate degrees: Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Music, Associate of Nursing, Associate of Applied Arts and Science, Associate of Business, and Associate of General Studies. A multitude of certificates for completion of courses of study are also offered, requiring less than 60 credit hours of course work.

GRCC's faculty is made up of nearly 240 full-time instructors and approximately 250 adjunct instructors. Many GRCC faculty members have been recognized regionally and nationally for their expertise and innovative teaching styles.

GRCC was chosen for this study for several reasons:

- I have been an employee at GRCC since 1982, the first fifteen years as a full-time faculty member and the last six years as a dean in the Academic Affairs Unit. I am, therefore, very familiar with the college's systems of operation and evolving organizational culture. My position also allows me easy access to the college data.
- GRCC's Institutional Research and Planning Department agreed to assist me with data collection and analysis because the findings will provide information for the college's strategic planning.
- The findings of this study will benefit GRCC, the Grand Rapids community and other community colleges with similar profiles.
- The attrition rate of GRCC's African-American students (i.e., 57.1% of GRCC's African-American degree-seeking freshman beginning in Fall 2002 did not continue Fall 2003 as compared to 44.8% of their White counterparts) is representative of that across the nation, and I have been curious about the reasons why the African-American students' attrition rates continue to be higher than that of White students.

- The GRCC is located in the second largest city in Michigan, is the largest community college in West Michigan and is the oldest community college in the State of Michigan.
- The GRCC student population is representative of the population of the Kent County community, GRCC's service area.

The Sample

The selection parameters for this study were:

- Students who self-defined their predominant ethnic background (PEB) to be African-American.
- Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) identified as first time college enrollment.
- First time enrolled in Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters (Fall 2001 chosen to increase the sample size).
- Attending full-time (enrolled in 12 or more credit hours).
- Indicating, at the point of admission, an intent to earn an associate degree.

The parameters were framed around students whose intent was to attend full-time and earn an associate degree because I believe these students were less likely to be employed full-time and to have a family to support; they would more likely be of "traditional" age (i.e., 18 – 21 years old). Therefore, they would be less likely to drop out or "stop out" (i.e., not enroll in successive semesters) and would have fewer family- and work-related obstacles to hinder persistence. Based on these parameters a variety of variables were examined more closely.

Measures

The **predictor or independent variables** were measures of:

1. Academic standing (e.g., college credits earned, credits attempted, semester GPA)--these data were collected through the examination of institutional records

2. Personal status (e.g., gender, age, marital status, socio-economic status, number of children)

3. Perception of faculty-student interaction

4. Experience with prejudice, racism, and discrimination

5. Perception of restricted opportunities

6. Perception of ability to accomplish academic goals (i.e., self-efficacy)

7. Cultural factors (i.e., church as it relates to socialization behaviors, ethnic identification and the impact of heightened visibility, bi-culturalism as it relates to an enculturation process, extended family as a support network, oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors, and representation as it relates to being perceived as the spokesperson for an entire race of people)

The **criterion or dependent variable** was persistence (i.e., perseverance to overcome obstacles and to complete successive semesters; Fall 2002 and Winter 2003 progression). I also sought to determine the degree to which learning experiences predicted perception of ability to accomplish academic goals (self-efficacy). Therefore, self-efficacy was further analyzed as a criterion variable.

Instrumentation

The survey questions were designed to assess the experiences of African-American freshmen enrolled at Grand Rapids Community College in order to determine which experiences contribute to decisions to persist or to withdraw from the institution. The self-designed survey instrument was modeled after existing instruments (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarrella & Hagendom, 1999; Midgley, Arunkumar & Urdan, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). All items were measured using Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and 1 (have no experience) to 4 (very important to).

The survey included researcher-designed questions related to cultural factors as well as adaptations from Midgley et al's (1996) measures related to self-esteem. Though Midgley et al (1996) studied eighth-grade, middle school students in a small, Midwest working class community, I used similar measures to test the correlation between self-esteem and academic performance and persistence. Midgley et el's (1996) study raises the possibility that African-American students are affected more negatively by an ego-orientation than are European American students (p. 431). I explored the possibility of whether adult African-American college students who are preoccupied with how they are perceived by others are likely to withdraw from the environment rather than face rejection.

Cabrera's (1999) instrument examined college students' perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. Cabrera studied Fall 1990 entering freshman class at a major public, commuter predominantly White, doctoral-granting Midwestern institution. Cabrera concluded perceptions of prejudice and discrimination negatively affect the minority

students' ability to adjust to college though do not have the overwhelming effect expected on college persistence. They suggested that minority students have become so accustomed to prejudice and discrimination that they have become hardened to related pressures. However, in an earlier study, Fleming (Fleming, 1984) concluded African-American students' experiences and relationships with peers, faculty and staff at PWIs impact persistence. I used adaptations of Cabrera's measures in this study.

Adaptations of Pascarella's (1980) scale measuring Interactions with Faculty were used. Pascarella and Terenzini conducted a longitudinal study at Syracuse University in 1976. They collected information from 1,457 incoming freshmen. The purpose of their study was to examine the predictive validity of measures in accurately identifying freshmen, who will subsequently persist or drop out voluntarily. They found the quality of faculty-student interactions, both formal teaching and informal non-teaching, significantly impacts students' decisions to persist or withdraw from the college.

Table 3 demonstrates the relationship between the four research questions, the criterion and predictor variables, and the survey questions.

Table 3

Research Questions, Variables, and Items on Survey

Research Question	**Variable Name**	**Item on Survey**
Descriptive Research Question #1: How do students rate the importance of cultural factors on their community college learning experience?	Independent Variable #6: Cultural Factors	See Questions 1 through 20 How do students rate... • the importance of church-related behaviors in the classroom socialization process? • the impact of ethnic identification (heightened visibility)? • bi-culturalism as it relates to an enculturation process? • the importance of the extended family

		as a support network? • oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors? • representation/spokesperson experiences? • overall community college learning experience?
Multivariate Research Question #2: Do community college learning experiences correlate with African-American students' perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?	Independent Variable #3: Perception of faculty-student interaction	See Questions 34-38 (interaction with faculty)
	Independent Variable #4: Experience with prejudice, racism, discrimination and perception of restricted opportunity	See Questions 25-29 (awareness of restricted opportunity); 30-33 (prejudice & discrimination)
	Dependent Variable #1: Perception of ability to accomplish academic goals	See Questions 21-24 (self-esteem)
Multivariate Research Question #3: Is there a correlation between African-American community college students' decisions to persist to goal attainment and their perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?	Independent Variable #5: Perception of ability to accomplish academic goals	See Questions 21-24 (self-esteem)
	Dependent Variable #2: Persistence	*Used institutional data to determine whether students persisted (i.e., completed Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters)*
	Independent Variable #1: Academic Standing	*Used institutional data to establish academic standing*

Multivariate Research Question #4: Is there a correlation between cultural factors and persistence of full-time, degree-seeking African-American students who were first enrolled at GRCC during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters?	Independent Variable #6: Cultural Factors	See Questions 1 through 20 How do students rate... • the importance of church-related behaviors in the classroom socialization process? • the impact of ethnic identification (heightened visibility)? • bi-culturalism as it relates to an enculturation process? • the importance of the extended family as a support network? • oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors? • representation/spokesperson experiences? • overall community college learning experience?
	Dependent Variable #2: Persistence	*Used institutional data to determine whether students persisted or not*

Participants were encouraged to select the answers that best represented their current feelings/beliefs. They were reminded that the information would be kept confidential and that individual responses would not be shared.

Institutional data were extracted during the Winter 2003 semester to determine which students enrolled and completed both Fall 2002 and Winter 2003 semesters (*persisters*) and which students did not (*non-persisters*). Institutional data were also used to assess the student academic performance by comparing percent of credits earned to percent of credits attempted, as well as their cumulative grade point average (GPA).

Pilot Study

On January 19, 2003, MSU University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) approved the cover letter/consent form and survey instrument (see Appendices A and B). On February 21, 2003, I piloted the survey with a group of eight

GRCC Black Student Union members in an attempt to establish the face validity of the survey and to refine the questions, format and scales. During this session, I asked each participant to read the cover letter and comment on its clarity and their understanding of its purpose. They all commented that the letter was clear. I then asked that they carefully read and complete the survey prior to any further explanation from me. This was my attempt to best simulate the conditions under which the survey would be received in the mail (i.e., no researcher present to further introduce the survey or to coach responses). While the group completed the survey, one participant asked about the meaning of one word "burden" (in question 20). I responded with a definition. There were no further questions about the survey.

Based on my observation during this pilot session, respondents readily answered all questions. The shortest time taken to complete the survey was six minutes; the longest time taken was 13 minutes. I then asked them to comment on the clarity of the questions and whether they would complete the survey if received in the mail. All participants stated that the questions were clear and understandable. However, they all explained that they would not complete the survey if received at home because they could see no personal benefit. They would, however, complete the survey if there were some type of an award. This discovery led me to include a coupon-type incentive (see Appendix I) with the survey mailings to encourage participation. A revised application to perform research on humans subjects was submitted to UCRIHS. On February 19, 2003, approval was granted for the changes in the survey instruments and revised cover letter/consent forms (see Appendices C and D).

Before the pilot session ended and without prompting from me, participants began to volunteer their stories—excerpts from their personal life as well as their college experiences. They talked about the reasons that framed their decisions about where they chose to sit in class. They talked about both negative and positive relationships with faculty. They discussed their family support systems or the lack of such systems. They shared experiences as student athletes. It appeared that they were hungry to share with me. This dialogue continued for approximately 30 minutes until I again thanked them for their participation and input. I was unfortunately unable to use audio recording equipment to capture these stories. (See more on this experience in Chapter 5 under Recommendations for Future Research.)

Survey Process and Population

Surveys were administered during the Winter 2003 semester. Surveys were mailed to all African-American students who were enrolled for the first time in college at GRCC during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters and who were considered full-time, degree-seeking students—a group of 399 individuals. In addition, institutional data were used to examine student persistence behaviors over four semesters. More specifically, Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 participants' institutional records were examined to determine whether they completed the Fall 2002 and Winter 2003 semesters.

During the Winter 2003 semester, all students in the sample were mailed a survey with a cover letter (consent form) of explanation (see Appendix B and C) asking about their experiences at GRCC. Though the context of the survey questions were the same, two slightly different versions of the survey were mailed. Current students received the

"Returning Student Survey" (see Appendix D), which posed most questions in the present tense. With this survey, I attempted to determine whether their learning experiences influenced their decision to persist. Former students received the "Non-Returning Student Survey" (see Appendix E), which posed most questions in past tense. With this survey, I attempted to determine whether their community college learning experiences influenced their departure decisions. Surveys were divided into four groups (see Table 4) and color-coded for easier sorting upon return.

Table 4

Survey Colors Based on Sub-Groups

	Fall 01	Fall 02
Returning Student	Grey	Yellow
Former Student	Lavender	Ivory

A single-stage sampling procedure (i.e., names of the individuals to be surveyed were known by the researcher) was used by the GRCC Institutional Research and Planning staff to extract subject names from the college's database based on the criteria listed above (see page 40). Though this group is considered a GRCC population, it represented a sample of all full-time, African-American public, urban community college students. This cross-sectional survey instrument (i.e., participants were surveyed at one point in time) collected data from a sample of African-American, community college students during the Winter 2003 semester in an effort to describe the perceptions of all African-American community college students during that same period in time.

Human Subjects Protection. All steps were taken to insure confidentially of information. This report includes no identifiable information. All data collected remained confidential, and there was no risk to the participants electing to participate in this study.

Procedure. In an effort to obtain a survey response rate as high as possible, I used a three-phase procedure recommended by Creswell (1994). On March 28, 2003, I sent an initial mailing to 399 students, including the cover letter/consent form, a survey, and a brightly colored coupon-type incentive form (see Appendix I). That mailing resulted in 32 returned, completed surveys for an initial response rate of 8%. On April 11, 2003 (two weeks after initial mailing), the same cover letter/consent form, a brightly colored reminder notice extending the return date (see Appendix H), a brightly colored coupon-type incentive form and replacement survey were mailed, resulting in 22 more completed survey returns bringing the response rate to14%. On April 25, 2003 (four weeks after initial mailing), a post card reminder (see Appendix J) was sent which extended the return date one final time, resulting in 12 more completed survey returns. In total, 33 surveys were returned as undeliverable, resulting in 366 validated addresses. This three-phase procedure resulted in the return of a total of 66 completed surveys, or 18%.

Inputting data. The SPSS software program (SPSS Inc., 2001) was used to organize and analyze the data. A coded key document was prepared prior to designing the SPSS database in order to provide a guide to locating variables in the data file during data entry and analysis. As each completed survey was received, data were added to the SPSS database that also activated a record number. The record number was written on each survey as a quality control measure.

The analysis presented in Chapter 4 examines the community college classroom environment from the perspective of African-American students. It explores cultural factors that impact the learning experiences of African-American community college students, their self-efficacy, and ultimately their decision to persist to complete successive semesters.

Limitations of Study

The study was limited to a single institution; therefore, replication of this investigation at other large, urban community colleges would be useful in further substantiating these findings and determining the predictive validity of the measures. However, performing a critical examination of a single institution at a time has value in that it is more likely to examine the experiences of students who have been exposed to the same campus environment; i.e., same faculty and staff and the same institutional procedures and policies.

Though the response rate is considered average for this type of survey (i.e., lengthy instrument containing introspective and somewhat sensitive questions) and for this population (i.e., very busy adult community college students), the data from the non-persisters do not adequately represent their views and experiences (due to low response), making it difficult to generalize their experiences to all non-persisting African-American community college students. However, the nature of the issues revealed provides important and useful insights for future research by other individuals who are concerned about the attrition disparity between African-American and White community college students.

Chapter 4 – Results

The primary purpose of this study was to discover the relationship between specific cultural factors and academic persistence of African-American community college students. The intent was to examine the community college learning environment from the students' perspectives in order to arrive at an understanding about how that environment might influence the students' decisions to persist to goal attainment. My ultimate desire is for the study's findings to provide new insights for community college faculty and staff about the way African-American students come to know, leading to new strategies for learning facilitation.

In this chapter, demographic information about the sample population and respondents is summarized and compared using descriptive analysis. Survey responses provided data regarding participant perceptions about their learning experiences and how those perceptions influenced their persistence decisions. Descriptive and multivariate data are analyzed, and the results presented.

Description of Participants

Of the 399 surveys mailed (125 former students and 274 current students), 33 surveys were returned as undeliverable (21% former students and 2% current students), resulting in 366 validated addresses. Of the 366 validated addresses, participants returned a total of 66 completed surveys resulting in an 18% response rate. According to Donna Kragt, GRCC Dean of Institutional Research (personal communication, June 3, 2003), an 18% response rate is considered average (or even good) for a multiple-page, community college student survey containing introspective questions that might be

consider by some to be somewhat sensitive. GRCC routinely administers student surveys to a similar population of students; therefore, Donna based her opinion on extensive experience with such surveys. Two such surveys include: (a) the "Leaver Survey," which attempts to contact students who have left the college in an attempt to discover their reasons for leaving, and (b) the "Student Satisfaction Survey," which attempts to determine how satisfied students are with GRCC services. Each of these two surveys usually results in 18% to 21% response rates. GRCC is a commuter college with a highly transient population. Most students work, have little time for non-mandatory college activities, and feel no obligation to respond to surveys. Therefore, I believe that I achieved a maximum possible response rate for this study.

Table 5 compares the survey respondents to the sample to reveal differences and commonalities between the two groups.

Table 5

Comparison of Respondents to the Sample

Variable	Category	Sample *n=399*	Percent of Sample	Respondent *n=66*	Percent of Respondents
Gender	Male	236	59	28	43.1
	Female	163	41	38	56.9
Age	18-25	359	90	56	84.6
	26-35	32	8	6	9.2
	36-45	4	1	4	4.6
	46-55	4	1	0	0
	Over 56	0	0	0	0
Year First Enrolled	Fall 01	188	47	24	36.9
	Fall 02	211	53	42	63.1
Current Enrollment Status	Returning	235	59	58	87.7
	Former	124	31	8	12.3

Though the male students represent 59% of the sample, 56.9% of the respondents were female. According to Donna Kragt, females are more likely than males to respond to surveys. A larger response rate would, therefore, likely produce the same disparity between sample gender and respondent gender variables. Upon examination of age, 90% of the sample would be considered traditional college age (i.e., between the ages of 18 and 25) while 85% of the respondents fell within that age group. Since 5% equates to only 3.3 respondents, the difference would not significantly alter the survey results.

Students who started in the Fall 2002 semester responded at a slightly higher rate than those who started during the Fall 2001 semester. This was not unexpected due to the large percentage of invalid addresses among the Fall 2001 enrollees and because they are less connected to the college (i.e., higher percentage of former students) and, therefore, less motivated to respond. For the same reason, current students responded at a slightly higher rate than those represented in the sample. GRCC is a large, non-residential college. Students tend to be very busy adults who not only have little time for non-mandatory college activities but also tend to be somewhat transient. It is, therefore, my belief that the results are the best possible representation of the population and response bias is absent.

Table 6

Respondent Marital Status

	Frequency	Percent
0 = no response	1	1.5
1 = single	61	92.4
2 = married	4	6.1
Total	66	100.0

According to Table 6, most respondents (92.4%) were single.

Table 7

Number of Children Supported by Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
0 = no response	1	1.5
1 = no children	42	63.6
2 = 1-2 children	16	24.2
3 = 3-4 children	5	7.6
4 = more than 5 children	2	3.0
Total	66	100.0

According to Table 7, when asked to identify the number of children supported by their total household income, most (63.6%) of the respondents reported that they had no children and 16 (24.2%) reported supporting 1-2 children.

Table 8

Respondent Total Household Income

	Frequency	Percent
0 = no response	2	3.0
1 = $10,000 or less	38	57.6
2 = $10,100 to $20,00	7	10.6
3 = $21,000 to $30,000	8	12.1
4 = $31,000 to $40,000	3	4.5
5 = $41,000 - $50,000	3	4.5
6 = $51,000 - $70,000	4	6.1
8 = over $90,000	1	1.5
Total	66	100.0

When asked their total household income before taxes in 2002, 57.6% (38) of the respondents indicated that they were earning $10,000 or less.

Table 9

Respondent Academic Achievement

		Cumulative GPA	% Credits Earned of Those Attempted
N	Valid	61	61
	Missing	5	5
Mean		2.11	71.21
Median		2.09	77.00
Mode		.000	100
Std. Deviation		.85	28.78
Skewness		-.68	-.98
Std. Error of Skewness		.30	.30
Range		3.83	100

Table 9 reveals a cumulative GPA (including Winter 2003 semester) mean score of 2.11 (average course grade of "C") and 71% mean score for the percent of credits earned of those for which they attempted. This study was not concerned with the number of credits attempted but was concerned instead with whether students completed the credits they attempted. Further, though participant selection criteria were based on students' full-time enrollment during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters, continued full-time enrollment was not a concern. This study was instead concerned about how successful students were in completing the courses in which they enrolled. Interestingly, the most frequently recorded percentage (i.e., mode) was 100% indicating that several respondents completed all classes (credits) attempted.

Description of Variables and Analyses

To explore the importance of cultural factors to African-Americans in their community college learning environment (i.e., Research Question 1), the analysis was primarily descriptive. The first analysis section of this chapter focuses on making descriptive assertions based on data distributions. The second analysis section focuses

more on explanatory observation using multivariate analysis. Prior to these analyses, Table 10 provides more detail on the specific types of analyses used to answer each of the research questions.

Table 10

Research Questions, Analysis and Variables

Research Question	**Type of Analysis**	**Variables to be Used in Analysis**
How do students rate the importance of cultural factors on their community college learning experience?	Descriptive statistics was used to organize, summarize, analyze data and includes frequencies, percentages, mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation	Predictors (independent) Variable #6: Cultural Factors
Do community college learning correlate with African-American students' perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?	Correlation (Person product-moment) was used to show the degree of the relationship between the variables.	• Predictor (independent) Variable #3: Perception of faculty-student interaction • Predictor (independent) Variable #4: Perception of prejudice, racism, discrimination and restricted opportunity • Criterion (dependent) Variable #1: Perception of ability to accomplish goals
Is there a correlation between African-American community college students' decisions to persist to goal attainment and their perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?	Descriptive statistics was used to organize, summarize, and analyze frequency data. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for differences between the outcomes. Correlation (Person product-moment) was used to show the degree of the relationship between the variables.	• Predictor (independent) Variable #5: Perception of ability to accomplish goals • Criterion (dependent) Variable #2: Persistence (collected from Institutional data) • Predictor (independent) Variable #1: Academic standing

Is there a correlation between cultural factors and persistence of full-time, degree-seeking African-American students who were first enrolled at GRCC during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters?	Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for differences between the outcomes.	• Predictor (independent) Variable #6: Cultural Factors • Criterion (dependent) Variable #2: Persistence (collected from Institutional data)

Analysis of Descriptive Data

Question 1. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the importance of cultural factors to the learning experiences of African-American community college students. The survey questions were grouped based on relatedness to form six sets of questions. The following six tables identify the survey questions and the descriptive data by response category. Each set is followed by a discussion of the data.

Table 11 presents student's perceptions of worship style, worship discourse and classroom discourse. Though interaction with the teacher using laughter and applause was not important to 40.9% of the respondents, it was important or very important to 44% of the respondents. Such interaction was important or very important (72 %) in the worship style. Further, the urge to interact with the teacher using movement and non-verbal sounds was also very important or important (76 %). This suggests that students value a more animated interaction and would appreciate a learning environment that allowed or encouraged such interaction. Oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors are very important for the respondents as demonstrated in their responses to Q10 and Q11. Students want to be able to share their thoughts in class

Table 11

Importance of church-related behaviors and oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors

	Frequency Percentages by Response Category *n = 66*				
Survey Questions:	Very Important 4	Important 3	Not Important 2	No Experience 1	No Reply 0
Q1: In my place of worship, individuals often communicate with the preacher/speaker using laughter and applause.	***51.5***	21.2	16.7	9.1	1.5
Q2: In my GRCC class, I am/was always comfortable being the only individual to interact with the teacher using laughter and applause.	18.2	25.8	***40.9***	15.2	--
Q3: I sometimes feel/felt an urge to let my instructor know that I understand by using body movement and non-verbal sounds (e.g., sounding "a-num" and nodding my head).	25.8	***50.0***	19.7	4.5	--
Q10: When I share(d) my thoughts in class, I never feel (felt) rushed to get to the point but am (was) able to share my complete story.	27.3	***53.0***	9.1	9.1	1.5
Q11: I feel (felt) comfortable sharing my thoughts and experiences in my GRCC classes.	30.0	***43.9***	18.2	7.6	--

without being rushed, and the data reveal that it is important or very important for them to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences in their GRCC classes.

Table 12 reveals the importance of the extended family as a support network to the respondents. Three questions received very high ratings. Family encouragement and assistance were rated important or very important as was the help received from GRCC staff members during class struggles (91%, 78.8%, and 68.2% consecutively). The other three received a lower rating. Fifty-six percent reported it important or very important for GRCC staff members to treat them like family when help is needed to overcome struggles. While 47% of the respondents believed it important or very important that grandparents play an important role in their academic lives, 50% believe this to be unimportant. Less than half (45%) of the respondents believed it important or very important to consider "family" as individuals beyond a blood connection or marriage.

Tables 13 examines the impact of ethnic identification or heightened visibility and finds 85% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that they are usually among only one or two African-Americans in their classes or labs. Yet 40% report they do not feel isolated from other African-American students. Curiously, however, a large percentage (30% and 38%) reports they neither agree nor disagree to feeling isolated from other African-American students and to feeling that they are characterized by negative stereotypes. These responses may indicate that the respondents did not understand the questions or the terms *isolation* and *stereotype*. It could also indicate that the students feel connected to the larger campus environment even while being part of the smaller

Table 12

Importance of the extended family as a support network

	Frequency Percentages by Response Category *N = 66*				
Survey Questions:	Very Important 4	Important 3	Not Important 2	No Experience 1	No Reply 0
Q4: My "family" includes individuals who are not related to me by marriage or blood.	***28.8***	16.7	25.8	25.8	3.0
Q5: At least one of my grandparents plays (played) an important role in my success in school.	30.3	16.7	15.2	***34.8***	3.0
Q6: My family encouraged me to go to college.	***75.8***	15.2	7.6	1.5	--
Q7: When I struggle in my classes, my family helps me succeed.	37.9	***40.9***	12.1	9.1	--
Q8: Individuals at GRCC treat(ed) me like family.	18.2	***37.9***	21.2	22.7	--
Q9: When I struggle(d) in my classes, GRCC staff members help(ed) me overcome the struggle.	31.8	***36.4***	6.1	21.2	4.5

Table 13

Impact of ethnic identification (heightened visibility)

	Frequency Percentages by Response Category *n = 66*					
Survey Questions:	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Neither Agee or Disagree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	No Response 0

Q12: In my GRCC classes, I am (was) usually among one or two other African-Americans in the room/lab.	***45.5***	39.4	6.1	4.5	3.0	1.5
Q13: In my GRCC classes, I often feel (felt) isolated from other African-American students.	4.5	22.7	***30.3***	19.7	21.2	1.5
Q14: In my GRCC classes, I often feel (felt) that people determine who I am based on negative stereotypes.	12.1	21.2	***37.9***	16.7	9.1	3.0

classroom/lab learning environment—a sub-set of the larger campus environment. Another explanation could be that they have become accustomed to being the only obvious minority in the classroom. Yet, another explanation might be that they have learned to ignore behaviors associated with stereotype beliefs in order to focus on goal accomplishment.

In order to achieve academic, social and professional success, African-American students must often function within an enculturation process that requires in-depth knowledge of at least two cultural systems and a set of sociopolitical and historical forces. When the survey inquired about a need to move between two cultures, the respondents consistently disagreed with the statement as indicated in the next table.

Table 14 reveals that only 25.8% of the respondents agreed that they usually act or speak differently then they would at home. Only 18% agreed that they must "act White" to be successful at GRCC, and only 15% agreed or strongly agreed that they tire

Table 14

Bi-culturalism as it relates to an enculturation process

	Frequency Percentages by Response Category *n = 66*					
Survey Questions:	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Neither Agee or Disagree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	No Response 0
Q15: In my GRCC classes, I usually act and speak differently than I would in my home community.	7.6	18.2	16.7	***33.3***	21.2	3.0
Q16: I feel that I have to "act White" in my GRCC classes to be successful.	4.5	13.6	16.7	15.2	***50.0***	--
Q17: Sometimes I get tired of switching between "acting White" in school and being myself at home.	9.1	6.1	18.2	16.7	***48.5***	1.5

of switching between "acting White" in school and being themselves at home. This might imply that they do not tire because they do not switch. It might also imply that though they switch, they do not tire of it.

Table 15 summarizes students' feelings about representing a total race of people in the classroom setting. Forty-four percent of the respondents did not believe that they were often expected in their classes to explain the African-American experience. However, when they were approached on this subject, 53% of the respondents saw it as an opportunity to make a difference while 19.7% saw it as a tremendous burden. Curiously, nearly one third of the respondents were consistently neutral on the subject.

Table 15

How do students rate representation experiences?

	Frequency Percentages by Response Category *n* = 66					
Survey Questions:	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Neither Agee or Disagree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	No Response 0
Q18: In my GRCC classes, I am (was) often expected to explain the African-American experience.	9.1	13.6	***33.3***	25.8	18.2	--
Q19: I see explaining the African-American experience as an opportunity to make a difference.	18.2	***34.8***	30.3	13.6	1.5	1.5
Q20: I see explaining the African-American experience as a tremendous burden.	4.5	15.2	***36.4***	27.3	16.7	--

Analysis of Multivariate Data

In this section several variables (multivariates) were analyzed simultaneously to test for correlations. Levels of significance represent the probability of the measured association being due only to sample error (Babbie, 1973,). Results throughout this chapter were considered statistically significant at level .05. This means the chances of obtaining the measured association as a result of sampling error was 5 out of 100 (Babbie, 1973).

Research Question 2. *Do community college learning experiences correlate with African-American students' perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?* Four variables were examined to answer this question: (a) perception of ability to

accomplish academic goals, (b) perception of prejudice and discrimination, (c) perception of restricted opportunity, and (d) student-faculty interaction. The latter three variables were considered measures of respondents' learning experiences. The score for each of these four factors was based on a set of related survey questions. Each set of related survey questions was collapsed into one score for each respondent, and that number was calculated by averaging their scaled responses.

Since all four variables were comprised of continuous data, Pearson product-moment correlation was used to measure the relationship between them. However, Fink (1998) cautions, "You can use correlations to identify relationships between variables, but you cannot use them to establish causation" (p. 70).

Table 16

Correlations of Learning Experience and Ability to Reach Goals

		Perception of ability to reach Goals	Perception of Restricted Opportunity	Perception of Prejudice & Discrimination	Interactions with Faculty
Perception of Ability to Reach Goals	Pearson Correlation	1	.201	-.033	-.250
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.105	.793	.043*
	N	66	66	66	66
Perception of Restricted Opportunity	Pearson Correlation	.201	1	-.137	-.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.105	.	.274	.774
	N	66	66	66	66
Perception of Prejudice & Discrimination	Pearson Correlation	-.033	-.137	1	.707
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.793	.274	.	.000**
	N	66	66	66	66
Interactions with Faculty	Pearson Correlation	-.250	-.036	.707	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.043*	.774	.000**	.
	N	66	66	66	66

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 16 reveals a significant relationship between respondents' perception of their ability to achieve their academic goals and interactions with faculty (<.05). Respondents were confident about their ability to achieve their academic goals, and this belief correlated with their positive student-faculty interactions. The data also reveal a significant positive correlation (<.01) between interactions with faculty and perception of prejudice and discrimination. Respondents did not believe they have experienced prejudice and discrimination, and they also report positive interactions with faculty. However, there appeared to be no significant relationship between respondents' perception of their ability to achieve their academic goals and their perceptions of restricted opportunity, and prejudice and discrimination.

Research Question 3. *Is there a correlation between African-American community college students' decisions to persist to goal attainment and their perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals?* Analysis of variance and Pearson correlation coefficients were used to answer this question.

Table 17

Persistence Frequency Data

Completed both Fall '02 and Winter '03 semesters	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
1 = Yes	55	83.3	90.2
2 = No	6	9.1	9.8
Total	61	92.4	100.0
Missing	5	7.6	
Total	66	100.0	

According to Table 17, 83.3% (55) of the respondents had completed both the Fall 2002 and Winter 2003 semesters, and 9.1% (6) had not. Five scores are missing because respondent surveys were returned without identifying information (i.e., incentive coupons) that could be used to determine persistence scores; therefore, persistence could not be determined for these respondents. Survey tracking records indicated that all five of these respondents returned yellow surveys forms, meaning that they first enrolled during the Fall 2002 semester and reenrolled during the Winter 2003 semester. However, Winter 2003 semester completion could not be determined; therefore, these students' information is not reflected in the persistence data.

Table 18

ANOVA of Perception of Ability to Accomplish Academic Goals

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		1.662	9	.185	2.512	.018*
	Linear Term	Weighted	.327	1	.327	4.446	.040*
		Deviation	1.335	8	.167	2.271	.037*
Within Groups			3.748	51	.073		
Total			5.410	60			

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the hypothesis that no difference existed between persisters and non-persisters, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was run to compare the two groups and to test for difference in outcomes (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). "ANOVA compares the variation between each respondent and the respondent's group mean (within groups) and the variation between each group mean and the grand mean. The grand mean is the mean

of all the individual group means" (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998, p. 71). Table 18 reveals a significance of <.05 (Sig.=.018), indicating that the output from persisters and non-persisters as it relates to perception of ability was not the same. According to Fink and Kosecoff (1998), "ANOVA cannot directly prove that there are differences among groups. It can prove only that they are not the same" (p. 70). Linear term weighted measure considered the unequal size of the two groups within the "persisted" variable (83.3% persisted and 9.1% did not) and also produced a significance level of <.05 (Sig.= .040) which further substantiates that the responses between the groups were not the same.

When I compared the means of the persister and non-persister groups, respondents who completed both the Fall 2002 and Winter 2003 semesters (i.e., persisters) had a group mean of 4.304 (i.e., they agreed) for their scaled responses to their perception of their ability to reach their academic goals. Respondents who did not persist through both Fall 2002 and Winter 2003 semesters (i.e., non-persisters) had a group mean of 3.791. Therefore, the data indicate that persisters felt more positively than non-persisters about their ability to accomplish their academic goals. This suggests that decisions to persist to goal attainment were influenced by respondents' perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals.

The next three tables (Tables 19 – 21) are used to summarize findings related to respondents' academic standing. Respondent grade point average and percent of credits earned of those attempted were used to determine academic standing. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to measure the relationship between the three variables, including respondents' perceptions about their ability to accomplish their academic goals.

Table 19

Correlations of GPA, Percent of Credits Earned of Those Attempted and Academic Standing

		Cumulative GPA	% CR earned of those Attempted	Perception of ability to reach Goals AVG
Cumulative GPA	Pearson Correlation	1	.709	.224
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000**	.083
	N	61	61	61
% Credits Earned of Those Attempted	Pearson Correlation	.709	1	.145
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000**	.	.264
	N	61	61	61
Perception of Ability to Reach Goals	Pearson Correlation	.224	.145	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.083	.264	.
	N	61	61	66

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 19 reveals a significant positive correlation (<.05) between respondents' cumulative GPA and the percent of credits earned of those attempted (.000). The higher the respondent percent of credits earned, the higher their cumulative GPA. Though there appears to be no significant relationship between cumulative GPA and perception of ability to accomplish academic goals (level of significance = .083), there appears to be a closer relationship between these two variables than between percent of credits earned and perception of ability (level of significance = .264). This might suggest that perception of ability is somewhat correlated with the cumulative GPA.

Table 20 reveals a level of significance of .763 for the combined group and a level of significance <.05 (.025) within the weighted groups when the unequal size of the groups (i.e., 55 persisters and 6 non-persisters) was considered. This suggests that the

Table 20

ANOVA of Grade Point Average

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		4.910	56	.088	.701	.763
	Linear Term	Weighted	1.528	1	1.528	12.227	.025*
		Deviation	3.381	55	.061	.492	.898
Within Groups			.500	4	.125		
Total			5.410	60			

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

persister and non-persister groups are not the same when the unequal group sizes are considered. However, when the unequal size of the groups is not considered, the level of significance is >.05 (.763) suggesting that the group outcomes are not different.

When I compared the means of the persister variable groups, the persister group had a group mean of 2.26 GPA while the non-persister group had a group mean of .74 GPA. Therefore, those who persisted were more likely to have a higher GPA than those who did not.

Table 21 reveals a significance of <.05 (.000), indicating that the output from persisters and non-persisters was not the same as it relates to percent of credits earned of those attempted. Linear term weighted measure considered the unequal size of the two groups within the "persisted" variable and also produced a significance <.05 (.000), further substantiating that the responses between the groups were not the same. When the persister variable groups were compared, the persister group completed an average of 76.25% (mean) of the credits attempted while the non-persister group completed an average of 25% (mean) of the credits attempted. Thus, there appears to be a correlation

Table 21

ANOVA of Percent of Credits Earned of Those Attempted

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		3.960	23	.172	4.393	.000**
	Linear Term	Weighted	1.547	1	1.547	39.474	.000**
		Deviation	2.413	22	.110	2.799	.003**
Within Groups			1.450	37	.039		
Total			5.410	60			

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

between decisions to persist to goal attainment and the percent of credits earned of those attempted.

Research Question 4. *Is there a correlation between cultural factors and persistence of full-time, degree-seeking African-American students who were first enrolled at GRCC during the Fall 2001 and Fall 2002 semesters?* To answer this question, it was necessary to examine whether the respondents who persisted differed from those who did not in their views about the cultural factors. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were run to make this determination. In order to account for the unequal sample sizes between the persister and the non-persister groups, the trends were also computed as weighted.

Upon examination of Table 22, it became apparent that the level of significance (.730) was >.05, indicating no significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, persisters and non-persisters are similar in their score values. This indicates that the

Table 22

ANOVA of the Importance of Church-Related Behaviors in Classroom Socialization

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		.493	8	.062	.652	.730
	Linear Term	Weighted	.106	1	.106	1.123	.294
		Deviation	.387	7	.055	.585	.765
Within Groups			4.917	52	.095		
Total			5.410	60			

decision to persist was not influenced by their beliefs about the importance of church-related behaviors in classroom socialization activities.

Table 23 reveals a level of significance of .258 which is >.05, indicating no significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, it appears that the score values of persister and non-persister groups were similar and suggests that the decision to persist to goal attainment was not influenced by the respondents' extended family support beliefs.

Table 23

ANOVA of the Importance of the Extended Family as a Support Network

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		1.710	16	.107	1.271	.258
	Linear Term	Weighted	.032	1	.032	.385	.538
		Deviation	1.677	15	.112	1.330	.226
Within Groups			3.700	44	.084		
Total			5.410	60			

For Table 24 results, analysis of variance was used to test the difference in outcomes between persisters and non-persisters as it relates to shared knowledge communications. A .915 level of significance was calculated (>.05) indicating no significant difference between the two groups. This suggests that the decision to persist to goal attainment was not influenced by beliefs about the importance of shared knowledge communication experiences.

Table 24

ANOVA of the Importance of Oral Traditions and Shared Knowledge Communications Behaviors

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)	.195	6	.032	.336	.915
	Linear Term Unweighted	.096	1	.096	.995	.323
	Weighted	.068	1	.068	.699	.407
	Deviation	.127	5	.025	.264	.931
Within Groups		5.215	54	.097		
Total		5.410	60			

Ethnic identification outcomes were examined in Table 25. A level of significance of <.05 (Sig. = .035) was calculated between the combined persister groups when the unequal size of the groups is not considered. This suggests that the output from persisters and non-persisters, as it relates to perceptions about ethnic identification and heightened visibility, was not the same. Persistence decisions were influenced by their experiences with heightened visibility and ethnic identification. However, when the unequal size of the persister variable groups was considered, the level of significance was >.05 (.536), suggesting the persister and non-persister groups are not different.

Table 25

ANOVA of the Impact of Ethnic Identification (heightened visibility)

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		1.642	10	.164	2.178	.035*
	Linear Term	Weighted	.029	1	.029	.389	.536
		Deviation	1.612	9	.179	2.377	.025*
Within Groups			3.768	50	.075		
Total			5.410	60			

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

When the means of the persister variable groups were compared, the persisters had a group mean of 3.327 and the non-persisters had a group mean of 3.501. On the Likert scale, a rating of 5 meant respondents strongly agreed that they felt a heightened visibility in their classes, a rating of 1 meant respondents strongly disagreed that they felt a heightened visibility, and a rating of 3 indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed. In this survey, there appeared to be a tension among the respondents since their responses were divided almost equally between strongly agree, strongly disagree and neutral (neither agree or disagree).

Table 26 reveals a .449 level of significance that is >.05 and suggests no difference between persisters and non-persisters in their responses about bi-culturalism as it relates to an enculturation process. Therefore, there appears to be a relationship between bi-culturalism behaviors and experiences and respondent persistence.

Table 27 examines the differences in persister and non-persister response to the questions about representation. The level of significance was .905, which is >.05. This

Table 26

ANOVA of the Impact of Bi-culturalism as it Relates to an Enculturation Process

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		1.003	11	.091	1.013	.449
	Linear Term	Weighted	.006	1	.006	.068	.795
		Deviation	.997	10	.100	1.108	.375
Within Groups			4.407	49	.090		
Total			5.410	60			

Table 27

ANOVA of the Impact of Representation/Spokesperson Experiences

Dependent Variable: Persisted (Completed Fall '02 and Winter '03 Semesters)			Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)		.392	9	.044	.443	.905
	Linear Term	Weighted	.014	1	.014	.142	.708
		Deviation	.378	8	.047	.481	.864
Within Groups			5.017	51	.098		
Total			5.410	60			

indicates no difference in their responses. Therefore, it can be assumed that representation/spokesperson experiences did not influence respondents' decision to persist.

The next chapter reviews these analyses and discusses major findings and their implications for community colleges.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

Today forty-two percent of African-Americans deciding to seek a post-secondary education select two-year institutions. This has resulted in a shift in the community college demographics from one of predominantly White and of European ancestry to one that is more heterogeneous. However, African-Americans enrolled in predominantly White institutions tend to be less successful than other students and are less persistent to degree or goal completion (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

African-American students appear to be uncomfortable with what is perceived as a less than welcoming environment on predominantly White college campuses across the United States (Turner, 1996). African-Americans are often the extreme minority in college classrooms and on college campuses with few opportunities to connect with their African-American peers (Steele, 2000; Tatum, 1997). To succeed academically and socially and to avoid alienation and marginalization, they are forced to be fluent in two cultural systems: (a) the cultural system of their home community, and (b) the cultural system of the predominantly White college campus (Darder, 1991; Guy, 1999). The less than welcoming environment contributes to their self-doubt and interferes with effective thinking, planning and decision-making "causing anxiety, confusion, tension, and distressing anticipation that spirals their performance toward disaster" (Reeve, 1998, p. 78).

In my review of the literature, six cultural factors emerged and seemed to me to have a common connection to the African-American learning experience. Through programming, these factors contribute to the manifestation of culture and ingrained behaviors within the African-American community: church as it relates to socialization

behaviors, oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors, ethnic identification and the impact of heightened visibility, bi-culturalism as it relates to an enculturation process, extended family as a support network, and representation as it relates to being perceived as the spokesperson for an entire race of people.

Church, like the classroom, is a social environment. For African-Americans, the church has played a major role in helping them overcome insurmountable societal challenges. The worship style and discourse are often seen as observable participation. The African-American culture is rich with oral traditions and shared knowledge communication behaviors. These norms transcend the church and the home to include most other social venues, but must be kept away from in the classroom. African-American families are more likely to construe family more broadly than what some might consider the traditional nuclear family. This extended family often worships together, sometimes lives together, usually shares the same ancestry and almost always provides a level of support that contributes to their ability to cope with difficult situations.

On a predominantly White campus, African-American students usually standout out in the crowd because they are an extreme minority, often leaving them feeling somewhat isolated and vulnerable to stereotypic assumptions. To further exacerbate the situation, African-American students are often expected by professors and White students to be spokespersons for an entire race of people. As a survival mechanism, they must traverse between at least two cultural systems. This process is distinct from that of dominant culture students whose behaviors, beliefs and values are already ingrained in the learning environment.

This study sought to document an influential relationship between these cultural factors, learning experiences and African-American students' persistence decisions.

Participants and process. The participants in this study were first-time, full-time, first-year African-American students enrolled in a large, urban, commuter, comprehensive, community college. They were selected from those students first enrolled in either the Fall 2001 or Fall 2002 semesters. Students matching these characteristics were extracted from the college's campus-wide information system by the Institutional Research department. A survey was mailed during the Winter 2003 semester to the total sample of 399 students. In an effort to increase the response rate, a participation incentive was included and two follow-up reminders were sent in two-week intervals. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and students were assured that their responses would remain confidential. Sixty-six completed surveys were returned and 33 surveys were returned as undeliverable. All efforts resulted in an 18% response rate, which is considered average for a multiple-page, community college student survey containing introspective questions that might be considered by some to be somewhat sensitive in nature. Most community college students work, have little time for non-mandatory college activities and feel no obligation to respond to surveys.

The survey required 43 responses in total: 5 items collected demographic information and 38 items focused on cultural and learning experiences. The participants' academic information was extracted from the College's institutional records. Eleven survey items used a 4-point Likert scale (4=very important to 1=no experience) to assess the importance of three cultural factors: (a) church related behaviors, (b) oral traditions and (c) support systems. Twenty-seven survey items used a 5-point Likert scale

(5=strong agree to 1=strongly disagree) to assess students' perceptions about specific learning experiences.

Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, analysis of variance and comparison of means and standard deviations were techniques used to organize, summarize and analyze the data.

Major Findings

In this section of the chapter, the major findings for each of the four research questions will be discussed.

Research Question 1. I used descriptive analyses to meet my first research objective of assessing the importance of cultural factors to the learning experiences of African-American community college students. I discovered that African-American students value a more interactive and somewhat animated exchange with the learning facilitator, whether that individual is their worship leader or their classroom instructor. Since responders are predominantly comprised of persisters (Table 17), who report positive interactions with faculty (Table 16), this finding supports Tinto's (1998) persistence theory based on academic and social integration. He argues that students' commitment to their academic goals is influenced by their interactions with the academic and social setting (i.e., faculty, students and college staff) and the extent to which they achieve a social integration. This discovery also supports Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) conclusion that student-faculty relationships have great positive influence on students' persistence decisions. Three-quarters of the respondents reported feeling that they belonged at GRCC. Therefore, it appears that the respondents in this study have to some extent achieved a social integration into the GRCC learning environment.

Curiously, despite the achievement of social integration, one-third of the respondents appear to struggle with their feelings about and experiences with ethnic identification, bi-culturalism and representation (i.e., neither agree or disagree with survey statements). Deeper probing would be helpful in surfacing some of the answers related to this dichotomy.

Though the respondents indicated that they were usually among a very limited number of ethnic peers in their classes, 40% of them reported that they do not feel isolated from other African-American students, and 30% could not agree or disagree about feelings of isolation. This is of notable interest and suggests several possibilities: (a) their outside classroom connections may have been sufficient enough to substitute for lacking in-class connections, (b) they have become accustomed to being an underrepresented member of the learning setting and, therefore, do not feel isolated, (c) they did not understand the meaning of the statement as it relates to their learning experiences, or (d) the faculty have intentionally or unintentionally succeeded at creating a learning environment in which all learners felt valued and included. This could also explain the students' disagreement about the need to act differently in class (i.e., acting White) then the way they act at home.

The respondents disagreed that they needed to "act White" (i.e., distancing self from ones' own racial group, maintaining an air of superiority) to succeed in their GRCC classes, and yet they do not tire of switching between "acting White" and being themselves at home. This left me struggling to understand whether: (a) they understood the statements, (b) they were avoiding answering the questions because "acting White" does not tend to be a behavior for which an African-American proudly boasts an

association, (c) their learning experience has been one that allows them to be themselves so eliminating a need to "switch", (d) they ignore the behavioral norms of the classroom, or (e) they have assimilated and, therefore, cannot relate to the question. Perhaps this helps to explain their consistent neutrality with questions of representation.

Clearly, more conversation is needed in order to probe deeper and more introspectively and to ultimately capture voices and specific experiences that might lead to less ambiguous answers.

Research Question 2. I used Pearson correlation coefficient to meet my second research objective of analyzing whether community college learning experiences influence African-American students' perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals. The data revealed a significant positive correlation between the respondents' confidence in their ability to achieve their academic goals and their positive student-faculty interactions. There was also strong correlation between their positive student-faculty interactions and the absence of experiences with prejudice and discrimination (Table 16). The respondents (i.e., predominantly persisters) believe they will achieve their academic goals, they feel good about their student-faculty interactions, and they do not believe they have experienced prejudicial and discriminatory treatment. These findings are consistent with Tinto's (1993; 1998) theory of persistence and social integration and indicates that respondents appear to be comfortable with the learning environment at GRCC.

Caution, however, should be exercised in generalizing this finding to all African-American students since the respondents were primarily persisters. The views and experiences of non-persisters are relatively unknown since this study was unable to

collect a significant number of their survey responses. The reasons for their departure were the most difficult to capture because they either could not be located or they were unwilling to share in a survey their learning experiences and reasons for departure. Their views and experiences may support or contradict the views of the persisters who appear to have successfully integrated into the learning environment.

Another possibility to consider is that the persisters have become accustomed to acts of prejudice and discrimination and were, therefore, more hardened to situations that might have pushed the non-persisters away from the institution (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Research Question 3. To meet my third research objective of assessing whether students' decisions to persist to goal attainment were influenced by their perception of their ability to accomplish their academic goals, I relied on analysis of variance and Pearson correlation coefficients to help surface the answers. The data revealed that persisters felt more positive than non-persisters about their ability to accomplish their academic goals. Therefore, it appears that persistence decisions are likely to be influenced by perceptions of ability.

It is also worth noting that the respondents appear to be progressing successfully toward goal achievement as evidenced by the data in Tables 9, 17 and 19. Table 9 reveals the most frequently recorded percentage for credits earned of those attempted was 100% and the mean score was 71%. Table 17 reveals that 83.3% (55) of the respondents are persisting. Table 19 reveals a significant positive correlation between the percent of credits earned of those attempted and GPA. This suggests the African-American students who are successfully completing each of the courses attempted and who earn GPAs of 2.0 and higher are more likely to persist. In other words, students who are experiencing

success as they continually advance toward their goal are more likely to stay on task, i.e., persist.

Research Question 4. Based on the hypothesis that no difference existed between persister and non-persister groups, I ran a series of analysis of variance tests to meet my final research objective of assessing whether cultural factors influence persistence among African-American community college students. I also examined mean differences for each cultural factor in order to better explain the findings. For all but one of the six factors, no significant difference was revealed between the two groups in their views. Therefore, the data suggest that beliefs about the importance of church-related behaviors, oral traditions, and extended family support and experiences with bi-culturalism and representation had no significant influence on the respondents' decisions to persist. When group difference was examined as it related to the topic of ethnic identification/heightened visibility, the respondents were clearly divided in their views as evidenced by responses that were nearly equally distributed between agree, disagree and neutral.

The respondents may have had varying interpretations of the statements in the survey and might have been unable to reconcile their experiences with what was being suggested by the statements. Overall, I am unable to form strong conclusions regarding whether cultural factors influence persistence due in part to the low non-persister response in this sample and in part to the set of measures that were somewhat imprecise in their determination of cultural disconnect.

Implications for Community Colleges

According to the literature review (Dawson-Threat, 1997; Kobrak, 1992; Nora, 2000; Terenzini and Others, 1981; Tinto, 1998) and the findings of this study, African-American community college students prefer a supportive and highly interactive learning environment. Achieving social integration through a welcoming and supportive campus environment and through positive interpersonal interactions with faculty and other students impacts students' college experiences. Community college faculty and staff must educate themselves about the importance of their interaction with students. This includes the frequency of their faculty-student informal (i.e., casual) contacts and the quality of those interactions, both in and out of class.

The results of this study demonstrate that African-American community college students value a friendlier faculty-student exchange, and these relationships benefit students in two ways. First, faculty engagement with African-American students helps faculty become more comfortable with such relationships, and it provides opportunities for faculty to learn about the African-American culture. This in turns helps the faculty do a better job of helping the African-American students to make connections between their experiences and the current learning topic. Second, it helps the African-American students become more relaxed with dominant culture faculty, allowing them to learn more about the culture of academia. This may allow the students to become more comfortable being themselves and create less of a perceived need to "act White" in order to be successful. Such relationships help African-American students to integrate into the academic and social environment and to increase their likelihood of persisting.

Community colleges that proclaim a commitment to diversity might consider the development of policies that result in: (a) an increase and retention of African-American students and (b) culturally sensitive hiring practices that not only increase African-American faculty and professional staff members but also result in hiring dominant culture faculty and staff who are committed to reducing the attrition disparity between African-American and White community college students. Such policies require routine monitoring to determine whether diversity goals are being met and whether the resulting actions are having a positive impact on student achievement and retention.

Related institutional practices would include the development of student advising programs that are particularly attentive to the unique learning needs of African-American students—needs that if satisfied might positively impact the disparity in attrition rates. Advising programs should closely monitor students' academic progress and social integration. Advisors should strongly encourage students to believe in themselves and their ability to achieve (i.e., helping them to build their academic confidence). They should encourage students to persevere to course completion and to use tutors and other resources that promote the achievement of higher GPAs.

Culturally sensitive advisors should advise students not only about appropriate courses in which to enroll but also about faculty whose attitudes and pedagogical strategies have proven to be sensitive to the needs of African-American students and who have demonstrated a concern for the engagement of ALL students. These are faculty who most likely concern themselves with faculty-student relationship building and who encourage success among their students. African-American faculty and staff, through their own achievement, serve as examples of what is possible. They serve as mentors and

role models, helping African-American students imagine themselves as professionals. Such visioning and encouragement strengthens their beliefs in their own ability to achieve.

Supportive niches (Sotello Viernes Turner, 1994) are needed to allow African-American students to connect to academic and social support groups. Such support groups promote unity, help to reduce feelings of isolation and provide opportunities for underrepresented groups to identify and to build supportive relationships with others who share common experiences, allowing them to share struggles and strategies in order to overcome and to adapt to a dominant culture learning environment. Support groups might include: (a) mentors with shared language, history, and experiences who have the ability to guide African-American students based on experience with same types of learning environments, (b) peers who can share knowledge about learning experiences and who can offer advice on how to form connections with faculty and staff, (c) small group dialogue sessions to share successful integration strategies, and (d) building learning communities which encourage student interaction with other students and promote social integration (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarrlla & Hagedom, 1999; Tinto, 1993).

Enrollment and demographic shifts will continue resulting in a growing population of African-American community college students (Gay, 1993; Harris & Kayes, 1995; Keller, 1999; Rendon & Mathews, 1989). Therefore, faculty and professional staff must prepare themselves if institutions hope to impact the attrition rates (Miller, 1995). Since most community college faculty have not received pre-service teacher education training and more specifically training about pedagogical strategies that

respond to diverse students' learning needs (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000), professional development and in-service activities might include cultural awareness work sessions, collaborative teaching practices, and cultural diversity seminars. One topic that could be included in faculty in-service training is avoidance of negative classroom climate and insensitive teaching practices that make students uncomfortable and "can undermine motivation and unnerve already academically bruised students" (Jacobson, 2000, p. 51). Expecting students to represent their racial group, having low expectations about their academic performance and being inaccessible to students are examples of behaviors to be avoided by faculty. Jacobson (2000) offers the following example as a situation to be avoided.

> Teachers' statements that are intended to endear them to some students may devalue and alienate others. For examples, telling a few White, female students that they are "keepers" in the presences of students of Hispanic and African-American heritage ignores the possible inference that being excluded from the "keeper" category, the minority and male students present may be considered "disposables." (p. 51)

Post-secondary teacher pre-service or in-service training might also include topics that focus on:

- Strategies that encourage highly interactive student-faculty discourse and that encourage all students to participate (e.g., incorporating, without marginalizing, students' lived experiences into the learning experience).
- Strategies that allow students to interact in ways that feel comfortable to them (e.g., somewhat animated and emotional; using call-and-response techniques)

- Helping faculty and support staff understand the African-American culture so faculty are more comfortable encouraging out-of-class relationships.

- Helping faculty and support staff understand and appreciate the historical, cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental factors that contribute to the African-American students' condition.

Community colleges must continue to examine themselves by assessing the campus environment and climate. Student satisfaction survey studies should be conducted annually, and the results should be aggregated by ethnicity in an effort to understand the African-American student experience. Focus group interviews might also be conducted to help unearth more deeply rooted reasons for persistence decisions.

In the Meantime. Until the system changes to accommodate the cultural factors that complement presence of the African-American students, it will be important for these students to continue reliance on the tenacity and fortitude that allowed them to get thus far. They will need to form connections with other African-American students who can provide support and peer mentoring. They will need to build relationships with African-American professionals who can serve as mentors, guides and advisors, helping them to navigate the dominant culture system. Seeking to build relationships with non-African-American faculty and staff can also prove beneficial if these individuals have demonstrated a caring attitude through supportive behavior and positive feedback and encouragement. Sitting together in the cafeteria (Tatum, 1997), sharing experiences and strategies helps them cope with the daily challenges of predominantly White campuses.

Recommendations for Future Research

Though the literature suggests a cultural disconnect (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Darder, 1991; Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996; Szelenyi, 2001), this research study of a single community college was inconclusive in its attempt to associate a cultural disconnect with student persistence decisions. Therefore, the findings are inconsistent with my expectations upon going into the study. Nevertheless, this exploratory study brings to light the potential of a cultural disconnect; therefore, the topic warrants further investigation. A great deal remains to be learned about the complicated relationship dynamics between cultural disconnect, faculty-student relationships, and African-American community college student persistence decisions. This study ignites several ideas about further research possibilities.

Focus Group Interviews. I piloted the survey with a group eight GRCC Black Student Union members, and that experience influenced my thinking about the value of focus group research. Without any prompting from me, the pilot study group of eight participants began to talk at the conclusion of the survey instrument review. It quickly became clear to me that they were anxious to share their stories. Individuals who share my interest in this topic might consider conducting focus group interviews in order to discover and to better understand the perspectives and experiences of African-American community college students. This type of qualitative inquiry allows questions to emerge as the discussion progresses and as clarification is needed, by either the participants or the researcher. One such area of inquiry warranting deeper probing is the tension between social integration and ethnic identification, bi-culturalism, and representation. Why did respondents overwhelmingly report experiencing positive interactions with

faculty, yet appear to struggle with their survey responses about ethnic identification, bi-culturalism, and representation (i.e., approximately one-third neither agreed or disagreed)? What does this imply about the larger campus environment?

Focus group interviews allow the researcher to focus on participants' lived experiences and their deep personal interpretations of the meanings of those experiences. Because the participants' realities are unknown, variables and categories emerge from the informants' stories, not from the researcher. Informants' frames of reference and interpretations can be captured through face-to-face interaction, which include non-verbal queues (Glesne, 1998). A small group of individuals with common characteristics often provide support to each other and encourage discussion and deeper sharing. In addition, "people often need to listen to others' opinions and understandings in order to form their own" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.114).

During the pilot study, participants did not hesitate to share stories about their relationships with family, the relationships with faculty and other GRCC staff, their learning experiences at GRCC and in high school, and their financial situations. With little or no encouragement from me, they discussed where they chose to sit in class and why. They discussed faculty-student discourse. They talked about their future. This discussion continued for about 30 minutes.

For this type of conversation to ensue, I believe my ethnicity provided some level of comfort to the participants. As an African-American researcher who approached these participants in a non-threatening way, the students may have assumed that a shared culture ensures shared experiences, creating an immediate bond and granting the researcher credibility. Ultimately, conducting focus group interviews to explore the

complex issue of how cultural factors influence persistence decisions would allow the researcher to probe more deeply into participants' experiences and their interpretations of those experiences. Furthermore, deeper probing through subsequent research would allow for the validation of the findings as cultural factors rather than classroom organizational factors. This might be accomplished by studying non-African-American community college students who are similar in profile to the subjects of this study.

Representative sample. Though there is no way to predict, a larger sample size might have provided stronger trend data. Therefore, future researchers might consider collecting data from several large, urban community colleges in order to increase the sample size. Caution, however, must be exercised in the interpretation of such data since the participants' learning environments (i.e., faculty and staff, institutional procedures and policies) will differ. Therefore, the survey instrument and/or interview questions must be selected carefully so as to avoid collecting data that is beyond comparison.

Though difficult to find them (due to changed phone numbers and addresses), it is imperative that the voices of those who have not persisted be collected to determine whether their views and experiences support or contradict the views of those who have persisted. It would be a research faux pas to assume that the two groups, persisters and non-persisters, share the same experiences and attitudes. Reasons for departure decisions must be explored. Quigley (1997) has investigated adult behaviors as it relates to adult basic education (ABE) and suggests that ABE dropout must be studied independent of the persisters because their experiences may be so different. He suggests that their thinking must be examined at the "formative stages when they begin to consider quitting and at different points after they leave" (p. 166). If educators could better understand

persisters' decision points in the program, they might be better able to plan and implement intervention measures. Once non-persisters are located, probing must be deep enough to get below the socially acceptable responses. Though there is no way to guarantee the elimination of socially acceptable responses, focus group interviews could help to facilitate deeper probing since participants' shared stories often result in more profound sharing and less superficial answers.

Quigley (1997) proposes a theory of resistance suggesting that adults reflect on nightmarish past schooling learning experiences that have resulted in low trust of the educational system. His research identified insensitive teachers (e.g., life style an views that do no acknowledge others' different life styles, views and experiences), school system injustices/cultural biases (e.g., omissions in the curricula) and boredom as the overarching reasons for dropout decisions. These negative memories overshadow their goals of continued education and results in a resistance of experiences that might lead to a repeat of past learning experiences.

Finally, Quigley (1997) offers yet another possibility. "History and resistance theory tell us that not all who are called to conform to a set of normative values or are expected to buy into the views and beliefs of a dominant culture or religion actually do what they are expected to do" (p. 196). If the classroom culture is seen as symbolic of that of the dominant (i.e., controlling) culture, they may choose to resist (whether subconsciously or consciously) a 'ruling authority' that conflicts with their own cultural values, behaviors and experiences.

The complex factors behind non-persisters' departure decisions must be examined. Though Quigley's research (1992) focuses on ABE participants and non-

participants, his study might be used to guide similar research in community colleges and to explore the root of community college non-persisters' departure decisions. It is important to more accurately and less speculatively capture the reasons for students' departure decisions if institutions are to develop policies and practices for the purpose of improving learning experiences and influencing persistence.

Isolation. Since this study surfaced a tension related to the issue of isolation, further study of this issue is warranted. Do African-American students feel isolated in their classes from other African-American students? If so, how does this impact their learning experiences? If not, why, especially since there are usually only one or two African-American students in each class? How do African-American students cope with this issue? Does it directly or indirectly impact their persistence decisions?

Perception of ability. Another topic surfaced in this study and worth further exploration is African-American community college students' perception of their ability to achieve their academic goals. What and who influences this perception?

Acting White. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) gathered ethnographic data from a Washington, D.C. high school to show how the fear of being accused of "acting White" by their African-American peers can result in social and psychological conditions that can lead to underachievement in African-American students. When I approached this subject in my study, "acting White" proved to be much more complex than expected and therefore much harder to fully explain. Further exploration of the topic of "acting White" would be helpful in determining how individuals interpret this phrase, whether they have had specific experiences, and whether they feel this behavior relates at all to their community college learning experiences. Since this is an extremely complex issue, I

believe focus group interviews would be the most effective probing method to further explore this topic.

Closing Comment

African-American community college students tend to have higher attrition rates than their White counterparts at PWIs. However, a higher percentage of African-American HBCU students persist to goal completion. Predominantly White community colleges might study strategies used by HBCUs to encourage retention.

I also learned the importance of faculty-student interaction in promoting students' confidence in their ability to achieve their academic goals and in their perceived absence of prejudice and discrimination experiences. College faculty and staff must proactively reach out and encourage African-American students, provide roles models for students, nurture students and create a welcoming learning environment if community colleges are truly ready for the highly diverse collection of today's community college students.

Finally, I believe it worth reiterating that the focus of this study was African-American culture. However, I do not support the assumption that all African-Americans possess identical cultural attributes. Though there may be commonalities among cultural groups, there are also many differences within cultural groups. Within group diversity exists and may contribute diverse values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and languages, further complicating the learning experience.

APPENDIX A

Original Survey Cover Letter/Consent Form to Returning Students

February 1, 2003

Dear GRCC Student:

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) is committed to providing an environment that enables ALL students to accomplish their academic goals. Therefore, it is important to understand students' experiences so improvements can be made within the learning environment.

Today almost half of all African-Americans who choose to enter college select community colleges, rather than universities. However, African-Americans enrolled in predominantly White institutions tend to be less successful than other students and are less likely to earn a degree or to reach their academic goals. As the Associate Provost and Dean of the School of Workforce Development at GRCC and a Michigan State University doctoral candidate, I am attempting to determine the reasons as well as any unique learning needs of African-American students. To do this, I am examining the relationship between cultural factors and students' decisions to return (or not return) each semester until reaching academic goals. I am focusing my attention on African-American students at GRCC, a large, urban, non-residential community college. This study, entitled: *Cultural Factors Influencing the Persistence of African-American Community College Students* will focus on the root causes based on a theory that a cultural disconnect exists between the students and the faculty and staff.

You have received the enclosed questionnaire because you are currently attending GRCC, and because we would like to know about your experiences. It is estimated that it will take you approximately 20 minutes to answer the questions, and you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. I hope that you will volunteer your time to assist me in this project. You are not asked to identify yourself in the survey so your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable to law. Once completed, please use the enclosed, postage-paid envelope to return the survey within 10 days.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

- **Velvie Green**, Responsible Project Investigator and Associate Provost/Dean, GRCC School of Workforce Development, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4224, fax (616) 234-3781, email – vgreen@grcc.edu;
- **Marilyn Amey**, PhD, MSU Professor and Dissertation Committee Chair, 426 Erickson Hall, E. Lansing, MI, 48824-1034, (517) 432-1056, email – amey@msu.edu; or

- **Donna Kragt**, GRCC Dean of Institutional Research, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4044, email – dkragt@grcc.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time or with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—**Ashir Kumar**, M.D., Chair of MSU's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email – ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you for your contribution to a positive learning environment for ALL students attending Grand Rapids Community College.

Sincerely,

Velvie Green
Associate Provost & Dean
School of Workforce Development
MSU Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B

Original Cover Letter/Consent Form to Non-Returning Students

February 1, 2003

Dear GRCC Student:

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) is committed to providing an environment that enables ALL students to accomplish their academic goals. Therefore, it is important to understand students' experiences so improvements can be made within the learning environment.

Today almost half of all African-Americans who choose to enter college select community colleges, rather than universities. However, African-Americans enrolled in predominantly White institutions tend to be less successful than other students and are less likely to earn a degree or to reach their academic goals. As the Associate Provost and Dean of the School of Workforce Development at GRCC and a Michigan State University doctoral candidate, I am attempting to determine the reasons as well as any unique learning needs of African-American students. To do this, I am examining the relationship between cultural factors and students' decisions to return (or not return) each semester until reaching academic goals. I am focusing my attention on African-American students at GRCC, a large, urban, non-residential community college. This study, entitled: *Cultural Factors Influencing the Persistence of African-American Community College Students* will focus on the root causes based on a theory that a cultural disconnect exists between the students and the faculty and staff.

You have received the enclosed questionnaire because you are recently attended GRCC, and because we would like to know about your experiences. It is estimated that it will take you approximately 20 minutes to answer the questions, and you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. I hope that you will volunteer your time to assist me in this project. You are not asked to identify yourself in the survey so your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable to law. Once completed, please use the enclosed, postage-paid envelope to return the survey within 10 days.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

- **Velvie Green**, Responsible Project Investigator and Associate Provost/Dean, GRCC School of Workforce Development, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4224, fax (616) 234-3781, email – vgreen@grcc.edu;
- **Marilyn Amey**, PhD, MSU Professor and Dissertation Committee Chair, 426 Erickson Hall, E. Lansing, MI, 48824-1034, (517) 432-1056, email – amey@msu.edu; or
- **Donna Kragt**, GRCC Dean of Institutional Research, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4044, email – dkragt@grcc.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time or with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—**Ashir Kumar**, M.D., Chair of MSU's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email – ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you for your contribution to a positive learning environment for ALL students attending Grand Rapids Community College.

Sincerely,

Velvie Green
Associate Provost & Dean
School of Workforce Development
MSU Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

REVISED Cover Letter /Consent Form to Current GRCC Students

March 28, 2003

Dear GRCC Student:

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) is committed to providing an environment that enables ALL students to accomplish their academic goals. Therefore, it is important to understand students' experiences so improvements can be made within the learning environment.

Today almost half of all African-Americans who choose to enter college select community colleges, rather than universities. However, African-Americans enrolled in predominantly White institutions tend to be less successful than other students and are less likely to earn a degree or to reach their academic goals. As the Associate Provost and Dean of the School of Workforce Development at GRCC and a Michigan State University doctoral candidate, I am attempting to determine the reasons as well as any unique learning needs of African-American students. To do this, I am examining the relationship between cultural factors and students' decisions to return (or not return) each semester until reaching academic goals. I am focusing my attention on African-American students at GRCC, a large, urban, non-residential community college. This study, entitled: *Cultural Factors Influencing the Persistence of African-American Community College Students* will focus on the root causes based on a theory that a cultural disconnect exists between the students and the faculty and staff.

You have received the enclosed questionnaire because you are currently attending GRCC, and because we would like to know about your experiences. It is estimated that **it will take you no longer than 15 minutes** to answer the questions, and you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. I hope that you will volunteer your time to assist me in this project. You are not asked to identify yourself in the survey so your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable to law. Once completed, please use the enclosed, postage-paid envelope to **return the survey by April 7, 2003.** Also enclosed is an orange coupon. If completed and returned with your survey within 10 days, you will be entered into a drawing.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

- **Velvie Green**, Responsible Project Investigator and Associate Provost/Dean, GRCC School of Workforce Development, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4224, fax (616) 234-3781, email – vgreen@grcc.edu;
- **Marilyn Amey**, PhD, MSU Professor and Dissertation Committee Chair, 426 Erickson Hall, E. Lansing, MI, 48824-1034, (517) 432-1056, email – amey@msu.edu; or

- **Donna Kragt**, GRCC Dean of Institutional Research, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4044, email – dkragt@grcc.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time or with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—**Ashir Kumar**, M.D., Chair of MSU's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email – ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you for your contribution to a positive learning environment for ALL students attending Grand Rapids Community College.

Sincerely,

Velvie Green
Associate Provost & Dean
School of Workforce Development
MSU Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

REVISED Cover Letter/Consent Form to Former GRCC Students

March 28, 2003

Dear Former GRCC Student:

Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC) is committed to providing an environment that enables ALL students to accomplish their academic goals. Therefore, it is important to understand students' experiences so improvements can be made within the learning environment.

Today almost half of all African-Americans who choose to enter college select community colleges, rather than universities. However, African-Americans enrolled in predominantly White institutions tend to be less successful than other students and are less likely to earn a degree or to reach their academic goals. As the Associate Provost and Dean of the School of Workforce Development at GRCC and a Michigan State University doctoral candidate, I am attempting to determine the reasons as well as any unique learning needs of African-American students. To do this, I am examining the relationship between cultural factors and students' decisions to return (or not return) each semester until reaching academic goals. I am focusing my attention on African-American students at GRCC, a large, urban, non-residential community college. This study, entitled: *Cultural Factors Influencing the Persistence of African-American Community College Students* will focus on the root causes based on a theory that a cultural disconnect exists between the students and the faculty and staff.

You have received the enclosed questionnaire because you are recently attended GRCC, and because we would like to know about your experiences. It is estimated that **it will take you no more than 15 minutes** to answer the questions, and you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. I hope that you will volunteer your time to assist me in this project. You are not asked to identify yourself in the survey so your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable to law. Once completed, please use the enclosed, postage-paid envelope to **return the survey by April 7, 2003**. Also enclosed is an orange coupon. If completed and returned with your survey within 10 days, you will be entered into a drawing.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

- **Velvie Green**, Responsible Project Investigator and Associate Provost/Dean, GRCC School of Workforce Development, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4224, fax (616) 234-3781, email – vgreen@grcc.edu;
- **Marilyn Amey**, PhD, MSU Professor and Dissertation Committee Chair, 426 Erickson Hall, E. Lansing, MI, 48824-1034, (517) 432-1056, email – amey@msu.edu; or

- **Donna Kragt**, GRCC Dean of Institutional Research, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49503, (616) 234-4044, email – dkragt@grcc.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time or with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonymously, if you wish—**Ashir Kumar**, M.D., Chair of MSU's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, email – ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

Thank you for your contribution to a positive learning environment for ALL students attending Grand Rapids Community College.

Sincerely,

Velvie Green
Associate Provost & Dean
School of Workforce Development
MSU Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E

STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS
(Combined Responses from ALL Respondents)

(n = 66)

PART 1: Demographic Information—Please answer questions a - e by placing a check mark X in the box that best applies to you.

a. What was your age on your last birthday?

18-25	84.6%
26-35	9.2%
36-45	4.6%
46-55	0
0ver 56	0

b. What is your gender?

Male	43.1%
Female	56.9%

c. What is your current marital status?

Single	92.3%
Married	6.2%
Divorced	0
Widowed	0
No Response	1.5%

d. How many children are currently supported by your total household income?

None	64.6%
1-2	24.6%
3-4	6.2%
more than 5	3.1%
No Response	1.5%

e. What was your total household income before taxes in 2002?

$10,000 or less	58.5%
$10,100 to $20,000	10.8%
$21,000 to $30,000	10.8%
$31,000 to $40,000	4.6%
$41,000 to $50,000	4.6%
$51,000 to $70,000	6.2%
$71,000 to $90,000	0
Over $90,000	1.5%
No Response	3.1%

PART 2: Read each statement carefully. Then place an X in the column (from 1 to 4) to the right of each question that best represents your response based on your experience.

Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Very Important	Important	Not Important	I have no experience	
		4	3	2	1	NO Response
1	In my place of worship, individuals often communicate with the preacher/speaker using laughter or applause.	50.8%	21.5%	16.9%	9.2%	1.5%
2	In my GRCC class, I am always comfortable being the only individual to interact with the teacher using laughter or applause.	18.5%	26.2%	40%	15.4%	
3	I sometimes feel an urge to let my instructor know that I understand by using body movement and non-verbal sounds (e.g., sounding "a-hum" and nodding my head).	26.2%	50.8%	18.5%	4.6%	
4	My "family" includes individuals who are <u>not</u> related to me by marriage or blood.	29.2%	16.9%	24.6%	26.2%	3.1%
5	At least one of my grandparents plays (played) an important role in my success in school.	30.8%	16.9%	13.8%	35.4%	3.1%
Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Very Important	Important	Not Important	I have no experience	
		4	3	2	1	NO Response
6	My family encouraged me to go to college.	76.9%	15.4%	6.2%	1.5%	
7	When I struggle in my classes, my family helps me succeed.	38.5%	41.5%	10.8%	9.2%	
8	Individuals at GRCC treat me like family.	18.5%	38.5%	20%	23.1%	

9	When I struggle in my classes, GRCC staff members help me overcome the struggle.	32.3%	36.9%	6.2%	20%	4.6%
10	When I share my thoughts in class, I never feel rushed to get the to point but am able to share my complete story.	27.7%	52.3%	9.2%	9.2%	1.5%
11	I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and experiences in my GRCC classes.	30.8%	44.6%	16.9%	7.7%	

PART 3: Read each statement carefully. Then place an X in the column (from 1 to 5) to the right of each question that best represents your experience.

Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
12	In my GRCC classes, I am usually among one or two other African-Americans in the room/lab.	46.2%	40%	4.6%	4.6%	3.1%
13	In my GRCC classes, I often feel isolated from other African-American students.	4.6%	23.1%	30.8%	18.5%	21.5%
14	In my GRCC classes, I often feel that people determine who I am based on negative stereotypes.	12.3%	20%	38.5%	16.9%	9.2%
15	In my GRCC classes, I usually act and speak differently than I would in my home community.	7.7%	18.5%	16.9%	32.3%	21.5%
16	I feel that I have to "act White" in my GRCC classes to be successful.	4.6%	13.8%	16.9%	13.8%	50.8%
17	Sometimes I get tired of switching between "acting White" in school and being myself at home.	9.2%	6.2%	18.5%	15.4%	49.2%
Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
18	In my GRCC classes, I am often expected to explain the African-American experience.	9.2%	12.3%	33.6%	26.2%	18.5%

19	I see explaining the African-American experience as an opportunity to make a difference.	18.5%	35.4%	29.2%	13.8%	1.5%
20	I see explaining the African-American experience as a tremendous burden.	4.6%	15.4%	35.4%	27.7%	16.9%
21	I usually feel good about my accomplishments and myself.	60%	36.9%	1.5%		1.5%
22	I rarely see myself as a failure.	36.9%	36.9%	15.4%	6.2%	4.6%
23	I usually feel equally as intelligent as most other students in my classes.	47.7%	33.8%	12.3%	6.2%	
24	I am confident that I will accomplish my academic goals at GRCC.	52.3%	40%	4.6%	3.1%	
25	College education is everyone's key to a successful career.	44.6%	23.1%	21.5%	9.2%	1.5%
26	College education is everyone's key to a better life.	36.9%	24.6%	26.2%	9.2%	3.1%
27	The way for people of my race get ahead in life is for them to get a good education.	52.3%	29.2%	10.8%	3.1%	3.1%
28	Getting a good education in college guarantees that you'll get a good job.	29.2%	20%	26.2%	18.5%	6.2%
29	My graduation from college is important to me.	75.4%	24.6%			
30	I have encountered racism at GRCC.	4.6%	16.9%	38.5%	20%	20%
31	I have been singled out in class and treated differently than other students.	4.6%	15.4%	12.3%	38.5%	29.2%
32	At GRCC, it has NOT been easy for me to meet and make friends with students of ethnic backgrounds different from my own.	6.2%	13.8%	24.6%	27.7%	26.2%
33	I have observed discriminatory words, behaviors or gestures directed at African-American students at GRCC.	4.6%	15.4%	26.2%	30.8%	23.1%
34	My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a negative influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.	6.2%	10.8%	26.2%	27.7%	29.2%
Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1

35	Most faculty members with whom I have had contact are not willing to spend time with me outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to me.	3.1%	9.2%	23.1%	30.8%	33.8%
36	I am NOT satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty and staff members.	10.8%	9.2%	27.7%	32.3%	20%
37	Most faculty members with whom I have had contact are generally not interested in me.	6.2%	4.6%	24.6%	35.4%	29.2%
38	I do not feel as though I belong at GRCC.	3.1%	6.2%	13.8%	33.8%	41.5%

APPENDIX F

RETURNING STUDENT SURVEY AND RESULTS
(n = 58)

PART 1: Demographic Information—Please answer questions a - e by placing a check mark X in the box that best applies to you.

a. What was your age on your last birthday?

18-25	82.5%
26-35	10.5%
36-45	5.3%
46-55	0
0ver 56	0

b. What is your gender?

Male	45.6%
Female	54.4%

c. What is your current marital status?

Single	91.2%
Married	4%
Divorced	0
Widowed	0
No Response	1.8%

d. How many children are currently supported by your total household income?

None	68.4%
1-2	22.8%
3-4	3.5%
more than 5	3.5%
No Response	1.8%

e. What was your total household income before taxes in 2002?

$10,000 or less	59.6%
$10,100 to $20,000	10.5%
$21,000 to $30,000	10.5%
$31,000 to $40,000	5.3%
$41,000 to $50,000	3.5%
$51,000 to $70,000	5.3%
$71,000 to $90,000	0
Over $90,000	1.8%
No Response	3.5%

PART 2: Read each statement carefully. Then place an X in the column (from 1 to 4) to the right of each question that best represents your response based on your experience.

Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Very Important	Important	Not Important	I have no experience	
		4	3	2	1	NO Response
1	In my place of worship, individuals often communicate with the preacher/speaker using laughter or applause.	50.9%	22.8%	14.0%	10.5%	1.8%
2	In my GRCC class, I am always comfortable being the only individual to interact with the teacher using laughter or applause.	19.3%	28.1%	40.4%	12.3%	
3	I sometimes feel an urge to let my instructor know that I understand by using body movement and non-verbal sounds (e.g., sounding "a-hum" and nodding my head).	28.1%	47.4%	21.1%	3.5%	
4	My "family" includes individuals who are not related to me by marriage or blood.	28.1%	14.0%	24.6%	29.8%	3.5%
5	At least one of my grandparents plays (played) an important role in my success in school.	29.8%	15.8%	14.0%	36.8%	3.5%
Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Very Important	Important	Not Important	I have no experience	
		4	3	2	1	NO Response
6	My family encouraged me to go to college.	77.2%	14.0%	7.0%	1.8%	
7	When I struggle in my classes, my family helps me succeed.	36.8%	40.4%	12.3%	10.5%	
8	Individuals at GRCC treat me like family.	19.3%	38.6%	21.1%	21.1%	
9	When I struggle in my classes, GRCC staff members help me overcome the struggle.	29.8%	38.6%	7.0%	19.3%	5.3%

10	When I share my thoughts in class, I never feel rushed to get the to point but am able to share my complete story.	26.3%	50.9%	10.5%	10.5%	1.8%
11	I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and experiences in my GRCC classes.	29.8%	45.6%	15.8%	8.8%	

PART 3: Read each statement carefully. Then place an X in the column (from 1 to 5) to the right of each question that best represents your experience.

Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
12	In my GRCC classes, I am usually among one or two other African-Americans in the room/lab.	49.1%	38.6%	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%
13	In my GRCC classes, I often feel isolated from other African-American students.	5.3%	21.1%	29.8%	21.1%	21.1%
14	In my GRCC classes, I often feel that people determine who I am based on negative stereotypes.	12.3%	21.1%	42.1%	12.3%	8.8%
15	In my GRCC classes, I usually act and speak differently than I would in my home community.	8.8%	19.3%	17.5%	31.6%	19.3%
16	I feel that I have to "act White" in my GRCC classes to be successful.	5.3%	14.0%	19.3%	15.8%	45.6%
17	Sometimes I get tired of switching between "acting White" in school and being myself at home.	10.5%	7.0%	21.1%	14.0%	45.6%
Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
18	In my GRCC classes, I am often expected to explain the African-American experience.	10.5&	14.0%	35.1%	22.8%	17.5%
19	I see explaining the African-American experience as an opportunity to make a difference.	19.3%	36.8%	28.1%	12.3%	1.8%

20	I see explaining the African-American experience as a tremendous burden.	5.3%	17.5%	33.3%	28.1%	15.8%
21	I usually feel good about my accomplishments and myself.	61.4%	36.8%	1.8%		
22	I rarely see myself as a failure.	38.6%	33.3%	15.8%	7.0%	5.3%
23	I usually feel equally as intelligent as most other students in my classes.	49.1%	31.6%	12.3%	7.0%	
24	I am confident that I will accomplish my academic goals at GRCC.	57.9%	35.1%	5.3%	1.8%	
25	College education is everyone's key to a successful career.	45.6%	21.1%	24.6%	8.8%	
26	College education is everyone's key to a better life.	38.6%	24.6%	26.3%	8.8%	1.8%
27	The way for people of my race get ahead in life is for them to get a good education.	50.9%	31.6%	10.5%	1.8%	3.5%
28	Getting a good education in college guarantees that you'll get a good job.	29.8%	21.1%	26.3%	17.5%	5.3%
29	My graduation from college is important to me.	78.9%	21.1%			
30	I have encountered racism at GRCC.	5.3%	17.5%	38.6%	19.3%	19.3%
31	I have been singled out in class and treated differently than other students.	5.3%	17.5%	12.3%	36.8%	28.1%
32	At GRCC, it has NOT been easy for me to meet and make friends with students of ethnic backgrounds different from my own.	5.3%	15.8%	26.3%	24.6%	26.3%
33	I have observed discriminatory words, behaviors or gestures directed at African-American students at GRCC.	3.5%	15.8%	29.8%	26.3%	24.6%
34	My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a negative influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.	5.3%	12.3%	28.1%	24.6%	29.8%
Question #	**SURVEY QUESTIONS**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
		5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
35	Most faculty members with whom I have had contact are <u>not</u> willing to spend time with me outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to me.	3.5%	10.5%	22.8%	26.3%	36.8%

36	I am NOT satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty and staff members.	10.5%	10.5%	29.8%	28.1%	21.1%
37	Most faculty members with whom I have had contact are generally not interested in me.	5.3%	5.3%	26.3%	31.6%	31.6%
38	I do not feel as though I belong at GRCC.	3.5%	5.3%	15.6%	31.6%	42.1%

APPENDIX G

NON-RETURNING STUDENT SURVEY AND RESULTS
(n = 8)

PART 1: Demographic Information—Please answer questions a - e by placing a check mark X in the box that best applies to you.

a. What was your age on your last birthday?

18-25 100%
26-35 0
36-45 0
46-55 0
0ver 56 0

b. What is your gender?

Male 25%
Female 75%

c. What is your current marital status?

Single 100%
Married 0
Divorced 0
Widowed 0

d. How many children are currently supported by your total household income?

None 37.5%
1-2 37.5%
3-4 25%
more than 5 0

e. What was your total household income before taxes in 2002?

$10,000 or less 50%
$10,100 to $20,000 12.5%
$21,000 to $30,000 12.5%
$31,000 to $40,000
$41,000 to $50,000 12.5%
$51,000 to $70,000 12.5%
$71,000 to $90,000
Over $90,000

PART 2: Read each statement carefully. Then place an X in the column (from 1 to 4) to the right of each question that best represents your response based on your experience.

Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Very Important to Me	Important to Me	Not Important to Me	I have no experience	

		4	3	2	1	
1	In my place of worship, individuals often communicate with the preacher/speaker using laughter or applause.	50%	12.5%	37.5%		
2	In my GRCC class, I was always comfortable being the only individual to interact with the teacher using laughter or applause.	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	
3	I sometimes felt an urge to let my instructor know that I understood by using body movement and non-verbal sounds (e.g., sounding "a-hum" and nodding my head).	12.5%	75%		12.5%	
4	My "family" includes individuals who are not related to me by marriage or blood.	37.5%	37.5%	25%		
5	At least one of my grandparents played an important role in my success in school.	37.5%	25%	12.5%	25%	
Question #	**SURVEY QUESTIONS**	Very Important	Important	Not Important	I have no experience	
		4	3	2	1	
6	My family encouraged me to go to college.	75%	25%			
7	When I struggled in my classes, my family helped me succeed.	50%	50%			
8	Individuals at GRCC treated me like family.	12.5%	37.5%	12.5%	37.5%	
9	When I struggled in my classes, GRCC staff members helped me overcome the struggle.	50%	25%		25%	
10	When I shared my thoughts in class, I never felt rushed to get the to point but was able to share my complete story.	37.5%	62.5%			
11	I felt comfortable sharing my thoughts in my GRCC classes.	37.5%	37.5%	25%		

PART 3: Read each statement carefully. Then place an X in the column (from 1 to 5) to the right of each question that best represents your experience.

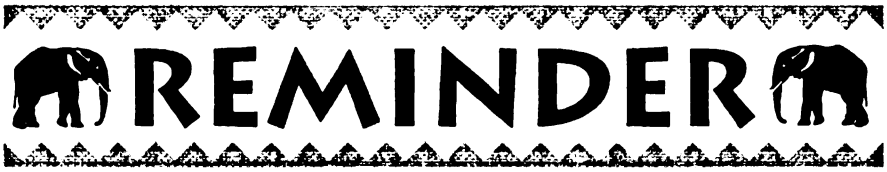
Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
12	In my GRCC classes, I was usually among one or two other African-Americans in the room/lab.	25%	50%	12.5%	12.5%	
13	In my GRCC classes, I often felt isolated from other African-American students.	37.5%	37.5%		25%	
14	In my GRCC classes, I often felt that people determined who I am based on negative stereotypes.	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	50%	12.5%
15	In my GRCC classes, I usually acted and spoke differently than I did in my home community.		12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%
16	I feel that I had to "act White" in my GRCC classes to be successful.		12.5%			87.5%
17	Sometimes I got tired of switching between "acting White" in school and being myself at home.				25%	75%
Question #	SURVEY QUESTIONS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		5	4	3	2	1
18	In my GRCC classes, I was often expected to explain the African-American experience.			25%	50%	25%
19	I saw explaining the African-American experience as an opportunity to make a difference.	12.5%	25%	37.5%	25%	
20	I saw explaining the African-American experience as a tremendous burden.			50%	25%	25%
21	I usually felt good about my accomplishments and myself.	50%	35.5%			12.5%
22	I rarely saw myself as a failure.	25%	62.5%	12.5%		
23	I usually felt equally as intelligent as most other students in my classes.	37.5%	50%	12.5%		

24	I was confident that I would accomplish my academic goals at GRCC.	12.5%	75%		12.5%	
25	College education is everyone's key to a successful career.	37.5&	37.5%		12.5%	12.5%
26	College education is everyone's key to a better life.	25%	25%	25%	12.5%	12.5%
27	The way for people of my race get ahead in life is for them to get a good education.	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	
28	Getting a good education in college guarantees that you'll get a good job.	25%	12.5%	25%	25%	12.5%
29	My graduation from college is important to me.	50%	50%			
30	I encountered racism while attending GRCC.		12.5%	37.5%	25%	25%
31	I was singled out in class and treated differently than other students.			12.5%	50%	37.5%
32	At GRCC, it was NOT easy for me to meet and make friends with students of ethnic backgrounds different from my own.	12.5%		12.5%	50%	25%
33	I observed discriminatory words, behaviors or gestures directed at African-American students at GRCC.	12.5%	12.5%		62.5%	12.5%
34	My non-classroom interactions with faculty had a negative influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.	12.5%		12.5%	50%	25%
Question #	**SURVEY QUESTIONS**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
		5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
35	Most faculty members with whom I have had contact were <u>not</u> willing to spend time with me outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to me.			25%	62.5%	12.5%
36	I was NOT satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty and staff members.	12.5%		12.5%	62.5%	12.5%
37	Most faculty members with whom I have had contact were generally <u>not</u> interested in me.	12.5%		12.5%	62.5%	12.5%

38	I did not feel as though I belonged at GRCC.		12.5%		50%	37.5%

APPENDIX H

REMINDER NOTICE SURVEY ENCLOSURE



It's not too late to respond to the survey that was mailed to you on March 28th. Just in case you misplaced the previous survey, I am enclosing a second copy. Please take 15 minutes to tell me about your learning experience at GRCC. I would very much like to hear from you. If you **respond by April 21** and include the orange coupon, you will still be eligible for the drawing. Thank you for sharing!

P.S. If you have already returned your survey, it is probably on its way to me. Please ignore this letter and accept my apology for cluttering your mailbox.

APPENDIX I

INCENTIVE COUPONS

This incentive coupon was included in the survey mailings sent to former students.

RETURN THIS CARD WITH YOUR COMPLETED SURVEY TO ENTER THE DRAWING FOR ONE OF THREE (3) ITEMS:

$50 WOODLAND MALL GIFT CERTIFICATE
$25 MOVIE THEATER GIFT CERTIFCATE
$10 BLOCKBUSTER GIFT CERTIFICATE

Preferred Theater in GR: Studio 28 (28th St) Celebration! (E. Beltline) Star (Alpine)

NAME: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: Michigan ZIPCODE: _____

Survey must be received within 10 days to be eligible for the drawing.

This incentive coupon was included in the survey mailings sent to returning students:

RETURN THIS CARD WITH YOUR COMPLETED SURVEY TO ENTER THE DRAWING FOR ONE OF THREE (3) ITEMS:

$50 GRCC BOOKSTORE GIFT CERTIFICATE
FREE GRCC SWEATSHIRT
$10 CAFETERIA GIFT CERTIFICATE

Sweatshirt Size: small medium large extra large

NAME: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: Michigan ZIPCODE: _____

Survey must be received within 10 days to be eligible for the drawing.

APPENDIX J

POSTCARD REMINDER NOTICES

These postcard reminders were mailed to student four weeks after the initial survey mailings and extended the survey return date one final time.

Dear GRCC Student:

It's still not too late to respond to the survey that I mailed to you on April 11th. Please take only 15 minutes to tell me about your learning experiences at GRCC. If you respond by May 9th and include the orange coupon, you will have this final chance to be included in the drawing.

If you have misplaced your survey and wish to respond, please call 234-3744 for a replacement survey. If you have already returned your survey, please ignore this postcard and accept my apology for cluttering your mailbox.

I am looking forward to hearing from you. THANK YOU!

Dear Former GRCC Student:

It's still not too late to respond to the survey that I mailed to you on April 11th. Please take only 15 minutes to tell me about your learning experiences at GRCC. If you respond by May 9th and include the orange coupon, you will have this final chance to be included in the drawing.

If you have misplaced your survey and wish to respond, please call 234-3744 for a replacement survey. If you have already returned your survey, please ignore this postcard and accept my apology for cluttering your mailbox.

I am looking forward to hearing from you. THANK YOU!

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