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CRITICAL FACTORS AFFECTING AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE COMPLETION AT TWO SELECTIVE RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

CRITICAL FACTORS AFFECTING AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE COMPLETION AT TWO SELECTIVE RESEARCH INSTITUTION

By

Vanessa M. Holmes

This exploratory study examined those critical factors associated with increasing the quality of the academic experience for the Black collegian. Additionally, this investigation considered how these factors may be replicated at similar postsecondary institutions. Two public flagship state universities, recognized as most selective, were identified for inclusion based upon their demonstration of academic success with African American college students. This study relied on the interviews of 17 participants. The analysis of the data was conducted utilizing a qualitative design that included both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) and (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This study exposed eight critical factors that have positively influenced the educational attainment and graduation of African American students at the two public flagship universities used in this investigation. The eight factors are: (a) Faculty Initiatives, (b) Institutional Expectations, (c) Institutional-Unit Response, (d) Presidential Priorities, (e) Retention/Support Programs, (f) Special Purpose Offices, (g) Student Affairs, and (h) Valuing Diversity through Collaboration. These factors should be employed in conjunction with one another. Thus, in order to effectively heighten the achievement of Black collegians, the institution should implement as many of the factors as possible to enable an amalgamation of the specified factors.

To my loving and supportive family Lonnie, Anita, and Damon

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"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" Joshua 1:9.Teachers want the courage to impact the lives of their students. Students want the courage to meet their teacher's standards without giving up too much of themselves. And we all want the courage to believe that our contributions are valued.

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CHAPTER ONE

Problem Statement

According to *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, African American enrollments in higher education have never been higher. The American Council on Education's "Minorities in Higher Education Twenty-First Annual Status Report 2003-2004"cites that between 1991 and 2001, African American college enrollment increased 37 percent, by growing to nearly 1.8 million students between 1991 and 2001(ACE, 2005). For more than two decades, these students have continued to show steady increases in college enrollment. According to *Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks in* 2000, 31 percent of 18 to 24-year–old Blacks were enrolled in postsecondary institutions; this number was 19 percent higher than the rate in 1980. In 2000, Black students comprised 12 percent of those enrolled in 2-year institutions and 11 percent of those enrolled in 4-year institutions (2003). This data clearly substantiates the consistent improvement in the enrollment of Black students. Ironically, the national graduation rate for the African American student is 42 percent; this figure is 20 points below the 62 percent rate for White students ("Black Student College Graduation Rates," 2006). Additionally, in comparison with White students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), Black students are less likely to complete a bachelor's degree within four years because of problems in both the social and academic areas (Allen, Epps, and Haniff, 1991; Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984; Hall, Mays, and Allen, 1984; Nettles, 1988; Thomas, 1981). At nearly half of all historically Black colleges/universities (HBCUs), two thirds or more of all entering Black students do not go on to earn a degree ("The Nation's Colleges,"2003). Overall, a relatively small group of institutions have had a significantly

higher rate of African American graduates than other post secondary institutions. As a result, a small number of HBCUs and PWIs are producing the highest percentages of African American graduates. This exploratory study will determine how those critical factors, utilized by those institutions with high college completion percentages, impact the academic success of African American students. Additionally, the researcher will gain an understanding of how the students, the institution, the faculty, and the administrators interact. This study will determine what the faculty and academic administrators and student affairs personnel, at the flagship state universities, are doing to facilitate the academic success and college completion of African American students. This determination will be made by examining the methods employed by those aforementioned university personnel at those institutions that have been identified as "most selective." My research questions are: What are the critical factors that faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrators report their institutions are doing to contribute to success among African American students? And, what are the similarities and differences between the factors contributing to the success of Black collegians at two selective postsecondary institutions?

Significance of the Study

The examination of how educational leaders employ tactics to meet the needs of their students is significant in understanding the overall academic performance of students. Specifically, the African American college student is in a challenging position. The college enrollment rate of these students has never been higher, and most would interpret this as the lessening of some discriminatory practices and the overall leveling of the playing field, in terms of opportunities for advancement. Thus, it would appear that

there are more opportunities for African Americans. Ironically, the college completion rate for this student remains below both the national graduation rate of all students and the rate of their White counterparts. This is highly critical in light of the elimination of race-based admissions. If those in the academy do not become more responsive to the needs of the African American student, this may lead to both wasted potential of Black collegians and the loss of some of the advancements, made in higher education over the last 20 years. Additionally, the U.S. Economy may experience significant financial loss due to an underprepared workforce.

Focus of Study

The focus of this exploratory study will be on identifying the pedagogical strategies, administrative practices, and institutional policies that seem to contribute to the high performance of African American college students. The selection of the institutions was based on two criteria utilizing the publication *U.S. News & World Report*: (a) compile a list of those flagship state universities identified as "most selective" and (b) based on that list of institutions, select the institution with the highest African American graduation rate and the institution with the lowest African American graduation rate. Additionally, the study will identify the similarities and differences between the factors contributing to the success of Black collegians at two selective postsecondary institutions?

In terms of identifying the rationale for this exploratory study, it is important to acknowledge that many once viewed the HBCU as an enclave that provided entrée into the academy as effectively as those institutions that were once restricted to Whites. The values and strategies, taught in HBCUs served to be the catalyst that would propel a host

of educators, politicians, athletes, and activists to extraordinary levels of both intellect and influence. Unfortunately, HBCUs have failed to consistently produce African American college graduates, in high percentages. Interestingly enough, in comparison to HBCUs, some PWIs have higher percentages of African American graduates. This is particularly disconcerting because of the historical relevance of the mission of the HBCU, which is to offer the Black student an environment that reflects, promotes and produces educated individuals prepared to make effective contributions to their community and nation. Nonetheless, the Black college completion rate still remains 20 points lower than that of their White counterparts. It is my hypothesis that if an increased number of both HBCUs and PWIs would duplicate the methods being employed at "most selective" flagship universities, the African American college completion rate would improve. Thus this country needs the intellectual contributions of the African American students and cannot afford the academic failure of this student population.

Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine what the institutional leaders at the "most selective" institutions are doing to facilitate the academic success and college completion of African American students. The following are my two primary research questions: What are the critical factors that faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs personnel report their institutions are doing to contribute to success among African American students? And, what are the similarities and differences between the factors contributing to the success of Black collegians at two selective postsecondary institutions? It is important to note that the responses provided from those at both sites will be based on individual experiences and interpretations. Therefore, as a qualitative

researcher, the accuracy of these responses will be documented by the reiteration of these same, noted strategies from other members of the institution(s), also referred to as empirical saturation. In essence this term is defined as ". . . to reach a moment in data collection or analysis when similar or consistent patterns of argument or articulation are being offered by the research participants. Such saturation presumably indicates that the meanings. . . reflect some durable, and purposeful, shared cultural artifact" (Young, p. 2).

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

This research focuses on the irony that exists in the seemingly positive picture that has been presented for African American collegians. Despite the fact that the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* asserts that the enrollment of African Americans has never been higher, these students are experiencing low graduation rates. In fact, the college completion rate for Blacks in the academy remains 20 points below their White counterparts, whose national graduation rate is an impressive 62 percent ("*Black Student College Graduation Rates*," 2006). A number of HBCUs were included on the list of institutions with low graduation rates for African Americans and it is important to note that only a small set of institutions, including both PWIs and HBCUs were experiencing overall academic success and consistently notable college completion rates for African American students. As a result, the researcher began to question the strategies that must be utilized, by faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs personnel to enhance and promote the academic success of Black collegians.

From my examination of the literature, I determined that researchers have substantiated the notion that successful achievement of student outcomes is not solely based on the student, the institution, or the environment, but rather on how each of these variables interact with each other. Additionally, I found no short supply of studies conducted to improve the college experience for the African American postsecondary student. These studies have addressed success stories (Hall & Allen, 1989; Hebel, 2007; Freeman, 1997;Graham, 1994; Stikes, 1984); student background and socio-economic

status (Hebel, 2007;Thomas, 1981); pre-college academic characteristics (Astin, 1982; Astin, Tsui; Avolos, 1996; Monastersky, 2006; Tinto, 1993) psychosocial factors (Fleming, 1984; Glenn, 2007; Nettles, 1988); coping strategies (Glenn, 2003; Prillerman, Myers, & Smedley 1989) institutional adaptation to diversity (Boyd, 2004; Richardson & Skinner, 1991; Schmidt, 2005; Wade – Golden & Matlock, 2007) involvement in academic and other campus activities (Fischer, 2007;Tinto, 1993) attrition (Hutto & Fenwick, 2002); and models of racial identity development (Cross, 1971; Phelps, Taylor & Gerard, 2001;Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, Jr.& Worrell, 2001;Worrell, Cross, Jr. & Vandiver, 2001). Although my study will examine some of these research areas, it will not reflect this list in its entirety.

The next section of this chapter focuses on the retention of Black college students. At the outset, this discussion on retention will provide an examination of African American high school students and their perceptions of academic identity and college aspirations. Next, this section examines "stereotype threat" and its implications for the Black students' educational success and navigation through the academic pipeline. The third section on Federal Educational Policies discusses how legislative policies have had an initial positive impact on the access of higher education for Blacks, but may have inadvertently negatively impacted the persistence of these students, particularly at four-year institutions, due to the increased financial responsibilities. In the fourth section, I identify and discuss seven factors, found in the literature, that have consistently revealed positive correlations with the persistence of Black undergraduates. The fifth section examines the role of African American student development. Specifically Cross' Model of Nigrescence serves this discussion to acknowledge how Black students view

themselves and how this view impacts the students' behaviors. In the sixth section, institutional factors and their impact on African American students are offered to substantiate the importance of institutional responsibility to its student demographic, from university personnel, to policies, to extra-curricular programming. The seventh section of the chapter will examine the practices of both faculty and academic administrators that promote success for Blacks in the academy. These data are presented to emphasize the positive correlation this relationship can have on the retention of African American students. Additionally, the success of this relationship rests on the university personnel's capacity to acknowledge the role of race by displaying culturally sensitive behaviors, while interacting with Black undergraduates.

African American Students' Pre – College Perceptions

Prior to examining retention, it is important to consider the viewpoints of Black students before they enter the academy. This information can offer a lens into the psyche of this student demographic, in terms of their concerns, expectations, and fears. This lens can provide an opportunity for university personnel to create services that address these areas in a manner that is mutually beneficial for African American students and the institution.

There has been a great deal of discussion about the African American student and this student's level of preparation, as compared to White students, for the university community (Banks, 2005; Daire, LaMothe & Fuller, 2007; Dervarics, 2005; Fischer, 2007; Hawkins, 2005;Lum, 2005; Mercer, 2002;Wimberly, 2002). Ironically, many of these conversations have not included the voice of the African American student. Thus, Howard (2003) decided bring the African American high school student into this

continuing discussion and shed light on how these students perceive their academic identities and their aspirations for college. In a national climate that continuously questions the Black students' capacity to learn and to succeed, how do African American high school students maintain their pursuit of higher education? What strategies are these students using to move forward amidst the excessive questions and insinuations? Howard's study focused on African American students at two urban high schools, located in the western and Midwestern parts of the country. The students ranged in grade levels from ninth to twelfth grade, with a total of 20 students. Fifty percent of the participants were from the high school in the western part of the country, while the remaining 50 percent were from the school in the Midwest. As a qualitative study, the data collection emphasized the semi-structured interview conducted with the students. The study revealed three key findings that influenced the students' academic identities: the role of parents, the influence of teachers and counselors, and the overall interest in attending college;

1. Students were asked to describe their academic identity, many students discussed the impact their parents had on their decisions to attend college; "Several students had a positive construction of their academic identity and mentioned their parent's insistence on going to college. It also appeared as though several students took these messages to heart despite what they have heard from others" (p.9). Here it appears that the students place more emphasis on the opinions of their parents, as opposed to those of others.

2. Many students discussed how school factors contributed to the development of their academic perceptions. Issues like race and teacher expectations became more

pervasive in the discussion on school – related factors, " My uncle told me to that I needed to go talk to my counselor at the beginning of the year to tell her all these classes I wanted to take. She was like 'you can't take those classes, they are for college – prep students. . . those classes would be too hard for you.' It makes you think, what's the point?" (p. 12). This account suggests that educators need to be cognizant of their attitudes, words, and behaviors because they can have a serious impact on the way students view their academic ability.

3. Many of the students equated "academic identity" with being intelligent or their plans to attend college, "My academic identity is not very good, because my grades are just okay, so I probably won't be going to college. I'm just going to have to find a job or something. But college is not in the plans" (p.13). These opinions reveal that there is a greater need for educators to engage in more explicit discussions about the preparation and requirements for admission into college. This student appears to be misinformed regarding the requirements for college attendance. Specifically, there are colleges that will accept students with mediocre grades, while providing the opportunity for the student to both improve his/her grades and to receive a college degree. Howard ended his discussion by emphasizing how the roles of parent and teacher expectations, race and socioeconomic status are critical in the formation of the African American students' academic identities, "What also became clearer in this work is that students continue to rely on teachers, counselors, staff, and other adults to reinforce a belief in their abilities to be successful learners" (p.14). In response to one of the questions that was presented earlier in this section, how do African American high school students maintain their pursuit of higher education?

As we continue to examine the viewpoints of Black students prior to their entrance into college, the role and impact of stereotype threat must also be acknowledged in this discussion. In 2006, Monastersky discussed the effect of stereotype threat and its repercussions on the academic achievement of Black students. The effects of stereotype threat occur when "a person is concerned - - either consciously or subconsciously - - about being a member of a group that is perceived as being inferior in some way" (p. 2). This study on stereotype threat was conducted by Geoffrey Cohen and Julio Garcia. The researchers studied 243 seventh graders, both Black and White, at a suburban school in the Northeastern part of the country. At the beginning of the fall semester, during their social studies classes, the students were placed into two groups and given different writing assignments. One of the groups was asked to read a list of values, select the most important, and discuss why they selected that value. Students in the control group were asked to read the same list, but instead of selecting the value that held the greatest importance for him/her, the students were asked to select the value that he/she viewed as least important. Then describe why this value would be significant to another person. At the end of the year, the Black students who had described their most important values experienced higher grades than the Black students in the control group. Specifically, the difference was one – third of a grade point on a four – point scale. In the writing exercise, this group, with the higher grades, focused on his/her values and discussed, without judgment, why the values were important. Here, the students experienced affirmation and value for his/her perspectives and ideas. On the other hand, the students in the control group were forced to not only reflect, but to justify what others might consider "significant," while the student considered the same value "insignificant." Here, the

students' opinions and thoughts were not highlighted or viewed as relevant, leaving the student to feel devalued and inferior. Thus this group of students was required to acknowledge and think about how others, who were different, might view his/her thoughts and might attribute these differences to racial biases. These results illustrated how racial stereotypes can negatively affect minority students and lead to increased levels of stress. As a result, the increased stress levels may lead to decreases in academic performance.

At the beginning of the year in this study, on stereotype threat, there was an achievement gap between the African American and White students in the social studies classes. However, as a result of the writing assignment, 40 percent of the gap was reversed, "These results suggest that the racial achievement gap, a major social concern in the United States, could be ameliorated by the use of timely and targeted social psychology interventions" (p.2). It's important to acknowledge that the achievement gap can be attributed to several factors including: economic constraints, lack of support, and discrimination, but if secondary educators and administrators can find ways to demonstrate value and appreciation for the African American student, in terms of this students' sense of self, this students' perspectives, and this students' contributions, increased usage of affirmation could lead to higher levels of achievement, and ultimately graduation, for the African American university student.

Retention

In terms of retention and the Black collegian, Michael Eric Dyson, African American scholar, discusses the role of race and how it should impact the responsibilities of those in the academy. "Race is an inevitable feature of the classroom; it is the

ineluctable product of the racialization of American society. To expect that the classroom will somehow be exempt from the racialized meanings that circulate, even explode, in our culture is to have a pedagogical perspective that is not only naïve and insular but in some cases destructive"(Open Mike, 2003, p. 83). Here Dyson reminds us of the pivotal role that race plays in our lives and that it is actually irresponsible and self-indulgent to believe that race should be ignored and not discussed in today's university classroom. Dyson adds, ". . . the classroom is the place where we should examine the intents, affects, goals, ideals, norms, privileges, practices, and so on, of race" (p. 83). Perhaps if more educators considered Dyson's challenge, in terms of acknowledging the true utility of race in our postsecondary institutions, the African American collegian would experience higher levels of academic success and retention.

Over the past 100 years, the U.S. dropout rate has consistently remained at about 45 percent, other than when the GI Bill was in effect. In terms of retention and the Black collegian, previous research has focused on the social and academic environments (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1984; MacKay & Kuh, 1994; Tinto, 1993), predictors of retention (DeFrancesco & Gropper, 1996; Levin & Levin, 1991;Rogers, 1991), and programs related to retention (Dale & Zych, 1996; McCormack, 1995; Sherman, Giles, & Williams – Green, 1994)."Because retention patterns and factors differ among subpopulations of students, it is important to examine the factors associated with the retention of each group in order to develop effective intervention strategies" (Furr & Elling, 2002, p. 188), Furr and Elling examined those factors that have a positive correlation with the retention of Black college students. After identifying 183 African American freshmen at a predominantly White southeastern public university, the

researchers spent the sixth and seventh weeks of the semester conducting telephone interviews with the students. The researchers were interested in examining how those first semester connections, made by students, impacted the students' retention for seven consecutive semesters. Overall the researchers determined that there are several persistence factors that educators can identify early in the university experience of Black students and can be used as warning signs:

1. If the institution accumulates information during registration, orientation, or other pre-enrollment activities, information related to financial matters may also be gathered, "by knowing students' financial needs and intentions to work, interventions can be designed to reach those students most at risk" (p. 196).

2. If the institution gathers information shortly after the beginning of classes, additional information related to social integration, employment, and participation in extra-curricular activities can also be obtained. By collecting this information for a second time, university personnel could measure and address changes experienced by the students. As a result, advisors could assist students in increasing their connections with the institution.

3. Prior to the final exam, university personnel could use intrusive advisement. Specifically he/she could ask students very specific questions about grades received on assignments, mid – terms examinations, and test grades. This knowledge could facilitate the identification of risky behaviors that encourage attrition and poor academic performance. Thus, resources or steps could be recommended to promote academic success.

Furr and Elling's study clearly states that the retention of African American greatly relies on the obtainment and utilization of information from all accessible sources, " ...institutions must first make a commitment to collecting accurate information from all available sources of data on campus, disseminating this information in appropriate ways, and designing interventions to meet the needs of a widely diverse population" (p.198). Historically, PWI's have not fully addressed the needs of African American students. By identifying the strengths of this demographic, PWIs may create a foundation that allows them to design services and programming that will proactively address the barriers that some Black students encounter during their university experiences.

Retaining incoming students is one of the most vital concerns encountered by postsecondary institutions. This issue is particularly challenging regarding minority, low-income and first – generation students, "Many institutions, including non – HBCUs, admit that until fairly recently retention has not been their main focus because they have been more concerned with getting students into their respective schools than with keeping them there. Yet, how to retain and graduate students is one of the major issues all higher education institutions are wrestling with" (Hurd, 2000, p. 43). According to Dr. Jorge Fuentes, retention expert and chairman of the Search for Education Elevation and Knowledge Program at Hunter College, lack of financial assistance and being academically unprepared are the most common reasons for student dropout. Fuentes added that the social and academic adjustments are key determinants in the students' capacity to attain a college degree. According to Dr. Rodney Smith, Hampton University's Vice President for Planning and the Dean of the Graduate College, there are two categories of at – risk students: the drop – outs and the stop – outs. During the

transition from high school to college, some students decide that college is not for them and they would rather work, while others decide to transfer to another college. In both cases, these students are considered drop outs. The students who are considered stop – outs are those students who have moved beyond the freshman year, yet they're confronted with financial difficulties. These students leave college, work for a while, and then return to college, "The ideal situation, say many administrators, is to have a well – supported program to track every student and get them one – on -one help if they need it. But in most cases, the onus is on students to make their academic problems known" (Hurd, 2000, p. 44).

According to "Demography Is Not Destiny: Increasing the Graduation Rates of Low – Income College Students at Large Public Universities, " a 2007 report conducted by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, there are several steps that institutions can take to increase the graduate rates of low – income students. In this study, researchers from the Pell Institute examined 14 public universities, each of which had relatively high student populations that received Federal Pell Grants. Based on this information, the researchers predicted the expected graduation rate for each institution. The predictions were based on two factors: the selectivity of the institution's admissions criteria and the enrollment percentage of low – income students. After examining the actual graduation rates, some institutions exceeded the researchers' expectations, while others fell significantly below the researchers' anticipations. Overall, the high – performing institutions helped their students by: (a) implementing programs that helped personalize the undergraduate experience, such as by closely monitoring student progress through advising; (b) emphasizing teaching and compensating faculty

members who did it well; and (c) encouraging student involvement on their campus even among commuters.

As a result of this study, "Demography Is Not Destiny: Increasing the Graduation Rates of Low – Income College Students at Large Public Universities," the Pell Center offered the following recommendations to institutions serving a large number of low – income students: (a) track the academic progress of low – income students more closely and (b) put in place admissions programs that will encourage more economic diversity among entering classes. The report also urged the Federal Government and the states to consider the provision of financial and other incentives to reward universities for effectively serving large numbers of low – income students.

Previous research has confirmed that the transition to college plays a vital role in the students'capacity to achieve success at the postsecondary institution (Gail, Evans, & Bellrose, 2000; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; (Padilla, Trevino, Trevino, & Gonzalez, 1997; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo, 1994; Tinto, 1987). In 2007 Fischer examined how race and ethnicity can impact both the transition to college and the retention rates of both Black and Hispanic students. In the study, Fischer noted that the adjustment to college for this student populace is different when compared to the adjustment of their White and Asian peers. Fischer attributed the difference in college transition to the increased likelihood that Hispanic and Black students tend to be first generation college students, that these students tend to come from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, and that these students may encounter difficulty as a result of being a minority student on a predominantly White campus (p.127). Overall the author determined, ". . .that minority retention could be improved by efforts focusing on

increasing involvement in campus activities and improving the racial climate on campus" (p. 155). To expand on Fischer's finding, the author noted two major conclusions: African American and Hispanic students who are consistent participants in formal social activities earn higher grades and are less likely to drop out. And, the institution's atmosphere can play a crucial role in the college adjustment for African American and Hispanic students. Specifically, the author revealed that minority students had more negative observations of the racial climate than their White counterparts, and African American students revealed the "most negative" appraisals of the university's climate. Thus, the university personnel must be cognizant of the images and priorities that are reflected in the institutional climate.

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), students who are involved in extracurricular activities and who spend time with faculty earn higher grades, are more satisfied with their education, and experience an increased likelihood of staying in college (Wasley, 2006). These results revealed an even stronger impact on minority students, "But the gains from those practices are even greater for students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds, or who come to college less prepared than their peers" (p.1).Also known as the "Nessie," this survey included 260,000 freshman and seniors at 523 postsecondary institutions. The purpose of the survey was to measure student engagement. Specifically, the survey administrators wanted to determine the students' involvement level in terms of both academics and university activities. The survey determined that student engagement has a "compensatory effect" on both academics and the retention of students, especially for underserved minorities and those who entered the institution with academic deficits. According to Dr. George D. Kuh,

director of the survey, when postsecondary institutions implemented effective activities that genuinely reflected student interests, they offered an incentive to those students who entered the university with academic challenges. As a result, these students became more involved, improved their grades and successfully met the same academic standards as those students who entered college with higher levels of academic achievement. Kuh added, "18 colleges found that once African American students attained an average level of engagement, the odds that they would return for a second year of college at the same institution surpassed those of White counterparts" (p. 2). This data clearly substantiates the value of African American student involvement in campus activities to increase this students' academic achievement and retention. Thus a discussion on student retention and involvement would not be complete without including the contributions of Dr.Vincent Tinto, a distinguished professor and researcher who has written extensively on higher education, particularly on student retention.

Although Tinto's studies on student departure have been widely noted and utilized for addressing the needs of students and increasing institutional retention, some researchers have criticized Tinto's model for its inability to address the needs of non-White students ("Attrition of Low," 1997). According to William Tierney, ". . . integration, as it is being used by Tinto, represents the imposition of the values of one culture onto another, while simultaneously forcing the members of the subordinate culture to take responsibility for their inability to adequately and efficiently adapt"(in Masursky, 1997, p. 6). Tinto (1987) stresses the importance of both academic and social integration for student success and persistence to degree: "It is apparent

that effective programs are those that are able to integrate individuals into the mainstream of the academic and social life of the institution in which those programs are housed" (p. 692). Additionally, some have challenged Tinto's assertions and found that the environment can play a pivotal role in the Black collegians' integration, consequently impacting this students' academic achievement and graduation.

Fries – Britt &Turner (2002) conducted extensive interviews and focus groups, to examine the experiences of 34 Black juniors and seniors successfully persisting towards graduation at an HBCU and a PWI. The purpose of the study was to identify experiences that both challenged and supported the academic success of these students. The questions highlighted the students' college experiences, based on a framework of academic and social integration (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Both institutions are public four-year colleges with graduate programs and both enroll under 10,000 students. Fifteen of the students attended the PWI and 19 attended the HBCU. The researchers described the data from both campuses using two broad themes: (a) The first theme, establishing support and campus involvement, reflected the distinctive social and emotional experiences of the students on both campuses. Students at the HBCU felt at home described activities that held their interests, and developed important relationships with faculty and peers. The students at the PWI lacked a critical mass of Black peers and faculty and described campus activities as those that focused on White students and (b) the second theme focused on how Black students' energy was either nurtured or diverted by their interactions on campus. The students attending the HBCU described increased energy from the tremendous confidence they gained in interactions with faculty and peers. In contrast, Black students at the PWI described their energy as diverted away from their studies by their role as the

"token" Black representative. They believed that they were the "Black voice" especially when the discussion focused on racial/cultural issues. Overall Fries – Britt and Turner recognized the relevance and application of Black student retention and involvement and integration (Tinto, 1987), however the researchers highlighted the challenges that the environment can have on the African American collegian. As a result, they emphasized the continued need to learn about the Black collegian and to ensure that both the environment, in and out of the classroom, is one that enhances the learning of all students. The researchers concluded the study by cautioning university personnel, "Institutions must regularly reflect upon the numerical representation of students, faculty, and administrators of color, and on the history of the inclusion or exclusion of certain racial groups in both the curriculum and in campus activities (Hurtado et al., 1999), to ensure that they reflect the changing culture and needs of the student body" (p. 328).

This literature reveals that Tinto's theory on Black student retention and involvement and integration (Tinto, 1987) holds true and that much can still be accomplished through its application. Thus the academic achievement of African American collegians can be positively impacted through increased levels of participation in campus activities. Additionally, it's important to emphasize that the data substantiate the need for institutional personnel to continually monitor their climate to ensure that the interests, needs, and cultures of the minority student population are reflected in the campus environment.

In concluding this discussion on retention, it must be accentuated that it is impossible to completely eliminate attrition and that student dropout and persistence both reflect the strengths and weaknesses of an institution Tinto (1982). However, the

institutional emphasis should be on which types of students and in which setting should those in higher education act to reduce student departure. If an increased number of postsecondary institutions follow this plan, institutions will retain the more capable students and a larger share of prospective students will seek to attend their institutions. In terms of the dropout process, Tinto identified three basic elements of the theoretical model: individual characteristics related to the students' persistence in college, characteristics associated with the individuals' interaction with the college setting, and characteristics of the institutions that have correlations with dropout. In terms of the low percentages of African American college graduates, institutions may consider Tinto's three elements to identify those students who possess those characteristics that can be translated into success and achievement at their institution. Once the institutions have recognized these students, strategies and other sources of support can be implemented to promote the collegians' success.

Federal Educational Policies and Black Collegians

At this point in our country's history states like Michigan, California, Florida, Texas, and Washington have been confronted by legislative mandates that have forced postsecondary institutions to make changes in admissions policies. Some critics believe these efforts may have a negative impact on those African Americans who are considering higher education (Schmidt, 2006). Detractors also believe that due to the small percentages of Black students on campus, African American students will view these campuses as having "a hostile climate" and believe they will be alienated. Others view these forced changes as the perpetuation of educational imbalance and the revisiting one of the most compelling forces in American higher education, institutional racism.

However, this suspected revitalized threat to perpetuate unfairness in education can be utilized as an impetus to improve the Black collegians' academic experience. Additionally, an examination of these legislative measures will provide a better understanding of the critical factors required to heighten the African American college completion rate and how these measures can be duplicated at an increased number of postsecondary institutions. It is important to consider the impact of federal educational policies on the African American collegian to acknowledge the perceived obstacles students may experience from these policies.

For more than 50 years court decisions and legislative proceedings have challenged the chief delegation and function of both the PWI and HBCU (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Gratz v. Bollinger, 2003; Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003; Higher Education Act, 1965; Hopwood v. Texas, 1996; Regents v. Bakke, 1978; U.S. v. Fordice, 1992). Although the espoused rationale for the implementation of these measures was to promote equity in higher education, some viewed these policies as another obstruction to postsecondary education access in a society that subscribes to marginalization and disenfranchisement (Kinzie et al., 2004).

Prior to 1940, those in higher education discriminated against African Americans, women, and the poor (Bonner, 1986). However by 1947, the G I Bill was enacted and the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) created more access for Black collegians by contributing to HBCUs through fund raising efforts. At this time, HBCUs were serving more than 90 percent of the African American student population (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). However, the landmark decision of Brown v. Board of Education opened more doors for the Black collegian because this case forced White institutions to admit

qualified African American applicants. As a result, African Americans no longer exclusively relied on the HBCU as the only source for higher education.

In 1945, 15 to 20 percent of high school seniors went on to college. By 1960, 40 percent of high school graduates were being accepted into colleges (Lucas, 1994). As a result, the 1960s and mid-1970s were referred to as the "Golden Age" of American higher education. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced the academy to recognize the importance of including women, minorities, and low-income students in college (Gelb & Palley, 1982; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). During this time, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was enacted under the leadership of President Lyndon B. Johnson. This act is seen as the most comprehensive national legislation that provided financial assistance to private colleges, public colleges, and individual students. This act also established the original Trio Programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. All of these programs were funded by Title IV of the Higher Education Act, which was established to provide educational access for all, regardless of race or economic background (Kinzie et al., 2004). Under President Johnson's "Great Society" plan, the college enrollment patterns became more diverse in terms or race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic regions. During this time, there was tremendous growth in federal student financial aid, in terms of Pell Grants. Federal financial assistance greatly increased minority student enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities and enabled more students to enter and remain in the college of their choice (Bonner, 1986; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Spearman, 1981; Wolanin & Gladieux, 1975).

This sentiment of increasing the diversity of the academy continued into the early 1970s when affirmative- action policies were enacted. These policies were created to

ensure equal treatment for women and minorities. Additionally, Title IX of the 1972 Federal Education Amendments was enacted. This document outlawed discrimination on the basis of sex. All of these policies enforced desegregation and required a diverse mix of students and staff at public colleges and universities (Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacob, & Cummings, 2004).The goal of the legislation was to create greater access and retention of minority students in higher education. Interestingly enough, despite all of the emphasis on integration in higher education, more funding was allocated for both HBCUs and minority college students.

By the 1980s, the college participation rates of African American collegians began to vacillate due to lack of academic preparation and the prohibition of race as an admissions criterion (Hossler, 1984). Although the importance of diversity was supported by federal financial assistance, those underprepared minority students faced difficulty navigating the postsecondary environment. During the 1990s, the "diversity" campaign was challenged by the Hopwood v. Texas case that asserted that race could not be utilized to determine college admittance. As a result, access policies for minority students were threatened (Bresler, 1996). Later institutions experienced a decline in the applications of minority applicants. The affirmative-action rulings in the University of Michigan cases played a pivotal role in the decline of federal and state government financial support (Springer, 2003). As a result, African American students seriously questioned both their ability to finance their educational goals and their capacity to achieve acceptance on college campuses, particularly at PWIs.

In 2006, the state of Michigan passed a state ballot proposal that banned public colleges and other state agencies from using affirmative-action preferences based on race,

color, ethnicity, national origin, or gender. Known to most as Proposal 2, the ban was approved by 58 percent of Michigan's voters. Previously, similar measures were adopted by California in 1996 and by Washington State in 1998. Although Michigan is the third state in the country to approve this kind of initiative, the measure passed by a larger margin in Michigan than in California and it received as much support from voters as the initiative that passed in Washington State (Schmidt, 2006). The impact of Proposal 2 is expected to extend beyond race and ethnicity; this new policy will also impact those student programs targeted to the recruitment and support of minority college students. According to Jay Rossner, the executive director of the Princeton Review Foundation, a nonprofit organization which assists minority students with meeting college admissions standards, the adoption of Proposal 2 has placed Michigan's public colleges and universities in a challenging position, "Michigan's public colleges may have more difficulty than those in California did in maintaining diversity in the absence of racial and ethnic preferences in admission. Along with being intensely segregated, Michigan does not have nearly as large a minority population as California to try to draw upon to keep its numbers of minority students up" (p. 4).

In addition to implementing changes in postsecondary admissions policies, legislators are engaging in public policy debates and determining that most of the benefits of attending college are personal (The Value, 2002). Therefore, many policymakers believe the majority of the financial responsibility should fall on the student. As a result, many students borrow money to attend college and the federal assistance programs continue to decline, creating a schism in the right of entry to higher education. It is unlikely that any federal initiatives will emerge to challenge this mind-set, "Some of the

strongest language in a recent U.S. Supreme Court opinion in a Michigan case stated, that in 25 years, affirmative actions admissions policies shouldn't be necessary" (Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacob, & Cummings, 2004, p. 46). Consequently, many wonder about the growing stratification in higher education institutions, meaning students from middle-income and upper-income families will attend four-year institutions, while students from low-income families will be disproportionately found at two-year institutions. This will place a huge constraint on the college choices of students of color, who come from low-income families. The schism in the right of entry to higher education will also have an adverse impact on equity and access to the academy. Thus, students from low-income families must ensure their early submission of financial aid for fear they will not have funding for their college expenses. As a result, this may affect those Black collegians who sought to attend four-year institutions, but may be forced to surrender their pursuit of higher education.

Who benefits the most from higher education, the individual or society? This question reflects the delicate balance that has impacted the right of entry to higher education. Federal and state officials base their economic and resource allocations on the dominant sociological background of the institution's student population (Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacobs, & Cummings, 2004) As a result access is heightened for that student demographic. Recently Ward Connerly, well-known affirmative -action critic, has targeted five more states to vote on banning the use of race, ethnicity, and gender preferences by all public colleges, and other state and local agencies. According to Schmidt (2007), the political analysts believe that Connerly stands a very good chance of getting the bans passed on all five states during the November 2008 election. Together,

Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, "all account for 7.4 percent of the nation's population, have laws that make it fairly easy to place such referenda before the voters. . . All have populations that are well over three-fourths White and all lack the presence of minority –advocacy groups strong enough to easily mount large-scale opposition campaigns" (p.1). Recently each of the five states has experienced a backlash against illegal immigration, heightening tensions between both White and Hispanic populations. Thus in an attempt to make their argument stronger, the organizations leading the bans on affirmative-action, have made efforts to tie the issues of affirmative-action with those of immigration. According to Ronald Keith Gaddie, University of Oklahoma Professor of Political Science and president of the Southwestern Political Science Association, "In Oklahoma, the illegal-immigration issue is fertile ground for exploiting because the state's predominantly Protestant non-Hispanic White population and its predominantly Catholic and rapidly growing Hispanic population are clashing across the board on language, on culture, on religion" (2007, p.2). Connerly's targeted attempts have the capacity to not only create even greater barriers for the African American collegian; his attempts may systematically eliminate postsecondary access for some members of this student populace.

This examination of federal educational policies has accentuated the growing stratification in postsecondary institutions. In addition this examination has emphasized the importance of ensuring that African Americans are represented in the sociological backgrounds of institutions across the nation. Institutions must heighten the Black collegians' level of acceptance and improve this students' overall success at the institution (Allen-Castellitto and Maillard, 2001. If university leaders espouse that they

are creating programming and resources that facilitate a student population representative of society as a whole, then the continued pursuit of equity and access should be reflected in the institution's economic policies and institutional culture. If these policies and programming are not developed, these deficits will serve as an additional obstacle in the Black collegians' pursuit of the baccalaureate.

Contributing Factors of Black Student Success

In terms of indicators of academic achievement for Black collegians, my research has consistently documented six factors that have a positive correlation with persistence for African American college students: pre-college preparation, self efficacy, African American role models, resilience, family support, faith, and African American Identity Development.

Pre-College Preparation

"Education reformers have a 'long haul' before them to raise high school quality to meet the expectations of postsecondary education and the job market," (Wasley, 2006, p.1) this caution was offered in "Closing the Expectations Gap 2006," a report compiled by Achieve, Inc. This nonprofit group was formed by governors and business leaders to help raise national academic standards. During this time, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New York, Oklahoma, and South Dakota have raised their requirements to: (a) raise high school standards to match college and workforce demands, (b) require high school students to take rigorous curricula, (c) develop tests of college and work readiness, and (d) hold high schools accountable for producing graduates able to cope with college-level courses (p.1) However, there are several states that remain far behind in making progress towards this goal. Previously, in 2005, at a National Education Summit on High Schools,

it was revealed that one-third of high school students drop out and of those students who graduate from high school and attend college, one-third require remedial courses. Governor Bob Taft, of Ohio and a co-chairman of Achieve Inc., said that it is "absolutely critical" to improve America's high schools and that this skills gap is a serious threat to the economic vitality of America. Interestingly enough, these statistics do not take race and ethnicity into account, but directly speak to a movement of inadequate academic preparation that our young people now face. However the impact of this trend on low-income, minority and underrepresented students, specifically African American students, is even more alarming because these students tend to take the standard courses, as opposed to the more rigorous college prepatory courses. Additionally, these students tend to suffer from issues of access because of America's legacy of discrimination and marginalization. Therefore if high schools are not adequately preparing students for college, African American students will experience an even greater likelihood of not achieving access or success at postsecondary institutions.

According to *The Expectations Gap: A 50- State Review of High School Graduation Requirements* released in 2005, "Nationwide, about half of White students and two-thirds of Asian students took a math course beyond Algebra II, compared with one-third of African American, Hispanic and American Indian students" (Devarics, 2005, p.2). These low rates of participation are profoundly troublesome because minority students show dramatically significant achievement when they participate in these courses and their chances of completing college greatly increase as well. According to Matthew Gandal, executive vice president of Achieve, Inc. "Rigorous high school

courses also help African Americans achieve at a level closer to that of Whites, it's a gap closer" (p.1).

In 2001, the National Center for Education Statistics found that only 17 percent of African American high school graduates were able to demonstrate effective literacy skills. These skills include finding information, understanding, summarizing or explaining complex texts (p.22). In 2002, the National Assessment for Educational Progress reported that for the past 10 years the average twelfth-grade Black student has experienced a decline in his/her reading proficiency score. As a result, these students displayed lower proficiency in literacy. In terms of responding to this issue, Delpit (2002) attributed the under preparation of these students to a school climate that was deficient in significant cultural illustrations and an overall lack of appreciation for diversity. Delpit went on to describe this shortcoming as the stimulus for both resistance and alienation, in terms of the curriculum, for African American students. The repercussions of limited literacy skills among some African Americans is not limited to their university academic experiences, but also have the potential to impact this students' capacity to secure gainful employment opportunities and to attain a productive quality of life.

To increase the knowledge of this literacy gap, Banks (2005) conducted a study on 11 African American college freshmen enrolled in two freshmen English seminars, both designed to focus on the cultivation of the students' writing, thinking, and reflection skills. Utilizing the qualitative phenomenological approach, the study focused on three research questions: (a) how do African American first-year college students perceive their high school literacy preparation? (b) what factors do African American first-year college students perceive as necessary for college literacy success (c) how do African

American students develop strategies to cope with the transition from high school to college? Banks found that the African American Students' perceptions of their high school preparation are integral in addressing this college literacy crisis. This researcher determined that literacy performance was impacted by three factors:

1. Teacher expectations significantly contributed to the students' perception of his/her literacy preparation. Some students reported that teachers demonstrated low expectations by assigning writing assignments that focused on rote memorization and explicit recalling of comprehension, as opposed to assignments which required critical thinking and analysis. Thus, during college these students were forced to overcome the challenges associated with writing utilizing critical analysis and interpretation.

2. The influence of social comparison worked as both a source of burden and motivation. Some students stated that their White counterparts were more prepared; they attributed their preparation to affluent school districts and the pervasiveness of A.P. courses. Interestingly enough these students acknowledged that they felt angry and felt that they had been cheated by their high schools, but indicated that they remained motivated to overcome this deficiency.

3. Coping strategies were developed in spite of the students' frustration and lack of preparation. Some strategies were based on active listening or participating in class discussions that focused on the African American experience. Overall, Banks' study determined that students are aware of the impact that their high school literacy preparation can have on their college experiences. One of the most compelling themes revealed was the low expectations that some high school teachers had for their African American students. This theme supports the argument that ". . . it is not the African

American students' lack of capacity to learn that limits their academic success, rather it is the quality of instruction that most influences academic outcomes" (Hilliard, 2002; Texeira & Christian, 2002).

There is a great sense of urgency to close the achievement gap among college leaders and educators. As a result, new collaborations have been developed like The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in conjunction with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. All have provided nearly $10 million in grants to fund the Early College High School Initiative, "the concept offers local minority and disadvantaged high school students small classes, rigorous course work, committed teachers and attentive counseling. . ." Hawkins, 2005, p.25). The Coppin Academy is one of Baltimore's public high schools. However this particular school is distinctively located on the campus of Coppin State University, just an elevator ride away from the university president's office. Supported by a 4.9 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Coppin Academy is just one of the school partnerships that exists around the nation. Recently HBCUs have been willing to launch these "early college high schools," in an attempt to provide both education and support to this group of students. Although the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund (TMSF) administers the grant from the Gates Foundation, TMSF has also partnered with several HBCUs and school districts as part of this university-assisted initiative. The fund offers merit-based scholarships and programmatic support to both HBCUs and the students who attend these institutions as well. High school rigor is essential for African American students, "Schools send a clear message if they do not have early and regular access to college gateway courses, such as Algebra. If it's not offered, there's an assumption that

students aren't going to college" (Devarics, 2005, p.7). This literature has revealed that the African American has the intellectual capacity to succeed in rigorous A.P. courses as successfully as their counterparts of other races. This literature has also revealed the perils that can be encountered without adequate preparation for the university setting. It is imperative that the Black student is given the opportunity to participate in college prepatory courses to ensure their place in the academy and to ensure their contributions to a society that is in desperate need of receiving them.

Self Efficacy

According to Sedlacek (1998), the possession of strong self esteem is essential for all students, but even more critical for women and students of color because of their navigation through a system that was not developed for them. Sedlacek adds, "Studies have indicated that self-esteem relates to academic success in much different ways for students of color (particularly African American students) from the way it does for White students" (p. 55). Why? Because of America's history of racism, many African Americans believe that their work will be judged in a harsher manner than that of their White counterparts. Therefore they spend more time on their performance to ensure that it satisfies the stricter assessment. For example, African American students who believed they did not have total control over their environment tended to do better in college than those Black collegians who believed they exercised total control over their lives. In contrast, White collegians, described as high achievers, did not view outside factors as significant to their success. Those in the academy should strive to positively affect the students' beliefs in their ability to achieve specified goals.

Bandura (1999) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p.1). Bandura added that those with a strong sense of this concept are very confident and assured of their capacity to accomplish difficult tasks. In fact, these individuals do not view challenge as something to be avoided. Conversely, those with low levels of self-efficacy doubt their abilities and avoid challenging tasks. They view these tests as personal threats and when confronted by these scenarios, they focus on their deficiencies and previous setbacks. Bandura offered four constructs that influence self-efficacy: experiences that demonstrate an individual's mastery over a task, seeing those who are similar to oneself achieve goals, social reinforcement of an individual's ability to overcome a difficult situation, and a personal mindset that reflects strength and overall self confidence (p.13). Although Sedlacek's and Bandura's theories reflect conflicting notions on the students' perceptions about environmental control, both researchers acknowledge the power of self efficacy and its positive correlation with the pursuit of academic achievement. Additionally, both theories can shed light on the positive correlation between self efficacy and the Black collegian's academic success.

In *African American College Students at a Predominantly White Institution: Patterns of Success*, Hall (1999) found that there were more quantifiable distinctions between successful Black college students and their White counterparts. For example, the Black students provided a list of coping strategies that supplemented their academic ability. Although the students mentioned ethnic organizations and a "critical mass" of African American students as major coping strategies to assist their persistence, the African American students who experienced success at White institutions also noted their

use of "high self-concept, high aspirations" as two of their coping strategies. These data support the notion that African American collegians who persist at PWIs are not primarily relying on the institution to promote their achievement. Rather, these students are taking responsibility for their own success. However, this discussion highlights the utilization of self-efficacy to reduce the differential college completion rates of Black students when compared to their White peers. Nonetheless, it must be noted that both the institution and the African American student must each contribute to the improvement of this population.

African American Role Models

For more than a century, social scientists have emphasized the importance of the relationship between role models and the development of aspirations for young people (Cooley, 1982; James, 1962; Mead, 1934; Skinner, 1971; & Stryker, 1980). Studies on race-and gendered-match role models provide compelling evidence of the possibilities that exist for those from minority groups (Griffiths, 1995; Robst, et al., 1996; Sumrall, 1995). Young people learn how to navigate American society by noting the race and gender of adults in various professions: "The presence or absence of like others in different social positions implicitly conveys information to young people about the possibilities for their futures" (Zirkel, 2002, p. 1). Students of color and women have demonstrated success with grades, retention, and graduation rates with the support of a role model (Ancis & Sedlacek, 1997; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Tidball, 1986; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, &1989). Unfortunately, many students of color, especially at PWIs, are less likely than their White counterparts to have access to a mentor or role model (Allen, 1992). Thus, the college campus poses great academic and

social challenges to these students who, in turn, become discouraged and may end up dropping out of the institution.

Research supports the notion that young people will not devote their time and effort to complete a task if they do not believe they can achieve it (Fordham, 1998; Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiosseoglou, 1998; Ogbu, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Zirkel (2002) utilized a two-year, longitudinal study to explore the ways that race – and gender-matched role models improved adolescents' perceptions of their capacity to positively impact the world. The study examined the implications of race – and gender – matched role models on the development of self concepts and educational outcomes for minority youths. Race – and gendered -matched role models demonstrate the unlimited opportunities that are available to the adolescents' own social group. And, these role models can offer information, specific to the adolescents' culture that nonmatched role models would not consider. The results of the study proved that the availability of a race – and gender – matched role model was predictive of better academic performance, greater interest in high achievement, and more awareness and focus of one's future. Therefore it is logical to presume that Black collegians who have race - and gender – matched role models would also experience improved academic performance.

Littleton (2001) emphasized the role of African American role models in the retention of Black students saying, "The idea of an older adult with whom to share cultural understanding seemed to be of interest to African American students. The term 'mother figure' or 'father figure' was sometimes used in reference to such a role model "(p. 23). Although many African American students noted the importance of Black

faculty and administrators as role models. It is important to recognize that many students already viewed members of their immediate families as their role models.

Lavant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1997) conducted a study on how mentoring can positively impact the persistence of African American men. They found "Application of mentoring proves to be an affective tool in providing the support necessary to overcome barriers that prevent many African American men from completing college" (p. 48). This study cited several national college programs created to recruit and facilitate the academic achievement of Black men: The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), The Black Man's Think Tank, The Black Male Initiative, the Bridge, Project BEAM, and The Meyerhoff Program. All of these programs include mentor relationships. The philosophy of these programs is to give Black students an experienced and caring adviser who will create a nurturing environment for the student. These programs exist at institutions across the country, at both PWIs and HBCUs. Although one of these programs is specifically targeted to graduate students, the Meyeroff Program, each program couples African American students with mentors who range from college students, to university faculty and staff, to business and community leaders. Because of increased scrutiny, some of the programs admit women, but the primary focus is on men. The pervasiveness of these types of programs documents the importance of the African American role model for the Black collegian's success in the academy.

Resilience

According to Rigsby (1994), resilience "is the response to a complex set of interactions involving person, social context, and opportunities" (p.89). Resilient individuals are said to have outlooks on life that make them attractive to others (Masten,

1994; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). They are reported to be intelligent (Anthony 1987; Masten, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992; Worland, Weeks, & Janes, 1987) and are commonly described as confident, optimistic, and goal directed (Benard, 1991; Masten, 1994). For individuals who demonstrate resilience, life has great meaning and they are said to exhibit lofty expectations and high levels of self-efficacy (Benard, 1991; Masten, 1994). Resilience has been shown to have a positive impact on the success of African American students. As a result, university personnel might consider different strategies, in the form of curriculum development or student affairs activities, to promote and cultivate resilience in their Black students.

Despite the fervent efforts of previous researchers to shed light on the challenges confronting the African American student population, many criticized these studies because of their emphasis on the deficiencies of this student population, "their historic preoccupation with explaining the school failure of poor and minority youth has 'netted us nothing more than new theories of school failure,' and regularly stigmatized these populations as being deficient, resistant, or less able learners" (McDermott, 1987, p. 361). Today researchers are spending their energies on explaining "how" and" why" those students from marginalized backgrounds have attained school success; thus, literature on resilience has become increasingly essential for those investigating this area.

Harrison (2001) examined the role of race in the educational experiences of African American doctoral students at a PWI. Specifically, the study focused on their coping strategies and the students' use of resilience was heavily documented throughout the study. The research revealed that despite being accepted into the university doctoral program, faculty and students still questioned the abilities of these Black doctoral

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students and resisted their presence on campus. The students noted several categories of race – related difficulties: harsher grading from faculty, underestimation of abilities, and denial of opportunities. Overall, these students utilized coping strategies to overcome these struggles. The coping strategies were based on two themes: a strong sense of self and a strong sense of connectedness. A strong sense of self was based on the psychological concept of "optimal theory," which underscores spirituality and presumes self worth is intrinsic, independent, and not based on external entities (Myers & Speight, 1994). The students identified relationships with family and friends as connections that contributed to their sense of self and their degree completion. These students manifested tremendous personal control because of their prior experiences with race related conflicts. Consequently, "Their strong sense of self fueled a determination that helped them to rise above the difficulties of their doctoral studies. Through reflection on their accomplishments and the adversities they had to overcome, they empowered themselves and stayed on course" (Harrison, p. 235).

This literature review has substantiated the academic and social hardships faced by the Black collegian. Thus, this literature has shown why resilience is paramount to the success of the African American scholar. However, in addition to the academic and interpersonal trials, these students may be forced to rely on their resilience to overcome threats to their lives. In *Race Relations on Campus* (2004/2005), a compilation of recent racial incidents at America's institutions of higher education, numerous conflicts were presented:

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At Virginia Tech, the words "Hang the niggers" and "Go back 2 Africa" were written on the door of the NAACP Chapter office. A brown substance described as "feces or mud" was smeared on the door.

In a news conference, Bob Pruett, the head coach of Marshall University's football team, referred to The Ohio State University's football team as, "a bunch of Mandingos." The coach said, "I used the term in an effort to explain superior physical ability. I was trying to be complimentary" (p. 1).

At the University of Virginia, a Black student found her car vandalized and the word "Nigger" was written across the front windshield.

At the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a group of White students drew a series of cartoons that were disseminated on campus. The illustrations depicted a White student dressed in a Ku Klux Klan uniform, burning crosses, and included the caption, "I love ALANA," an acronym for a campus student organization created to support Asian, Latino, African, and Native American students.

The significance of these recent racist occurrences confirms and forces the reader to acknowledge that African Americans are still devalued and viewed as expendable by some. Additionally, the African American student continues to be unfairly burdened both psychologically and emotionally. Hence, this article reiterates that these students must rely on their resilience to deal with the academic and racially motivated challenges that also exist. Faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs personnel who work with Black college students must be willing to discuss how race, class, and gender affect the educational experiences of these students (Coker, 2003).

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"A Fly in the Buttermilk: Descriptions of University Life by Successful Black Undergraduate Students at a Predominately White Southeastern University" is a compelling look at the success factors utilized by African American students at a PWI and a vivid illustration of how these students both rely and utilize resilience to effectively chart and navigate their academic journeys. The study focused on 11 Black undergraduates, 7 women and 4 men. Each student had successfully completed all degree requirements and was preparing to graduate. The students were asked, "Please describe some experiences that stand out to you from your own college experiences?" Overall, the students noted themes that ranged from daily acts of sabotage and condescension, from both the faculty and the university community, to having to prove their worthiness as a student, to feeling both invisibility and hypervisibility. The students described invisibility and hypervisibility as ranging from feeling ignored by members of the campus community to having to act as their race's spokesperson when instructors directed all of the questions, specific to Blacks, to those students. Overall, the students cited their resilience as a major coping strategy to deal with these circumstances. "It also appeared that while our participants perceived the need to prove their academic worth and engaged in behaviors to do so, they also had the goal of invalidating negative prejudices about the academic ability of black students. . . they did want to do all they could to improve negative impressions the university community might hold concerning the ability of black students to succeed (Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Thomas, & Thompson, 2004, p. 439). In spite of the fact that these students compared their experiences to that of "A Fly in the Buttermilk," because of the way they were viewed and treated on a predominantly White campus, they demonstrated their resolve by not

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succumbing to this unfair treatment. Additionally, they felt compelled to successfully meet all of the university's academic requirements and to assist in eliminating some of the racial stereotypes that exist for Black collegians. This depiction of the students' resilience or fortitude illustrates their capacity to not only confront challenge, but also to create opportunities for dismantling racial labeling.

Family Support

Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, (2003) assert, "A supportive relationship with parents has been shown to be important for the maintenance of psychological well-being for ethnic minority college students" (in Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco 2005, p.225). Research examining the strong influence of family members on Black collegians dates back to the late 1980s (Hughes, 1987). Later in 1993, Tinto surmised that strong relationships with procollege family and community members facilitate adjustment and college retention.

Johnson (2001) conducted a study on the survival strategies utilized by African American women at a community college. She found that the majority of the women cited family support as one of their major survival strategies. Although the women included aunts, uncles, and cousins, most of the women cited the parents, children, and siblings as their three familial sources of support. The parents and mothers were prominently highlighted by the women in the study as evidenced in this comment, "I had a lot of support. My mom's a teacher. There was a lot of pressure from my mom, and dad also, to do the best I could so I guess you could call it support too but it came out fine in the end" (p. 52). Some of the other women stated that their mothers had encouraged them to be highly motivated and to seek success: "My mother had always told us we could do

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anything we wanted to do in life. She really pushed us to do the best and be the best at whatever we choose to do whatever it was . . ." (p. 54).

Although only some of the participants from Johnson's (2001) study had children, those who did stated that their children were great mechanisms of support for their persistence and college completion. The women said they wanted to be role models for their children and emphasize the importance of higher education; one of the women attributed her persistence to her three sons saying they, "keep the motivation going by allowing me to be their role model due to the fact that I am a single parent . . . Yes, she is Black in America, but she is still trying to succeed in life" (Johnson, 2001, p. 56). The women in Johnson's study listed their siblings' encouragement and inspiration as another survival strategy. They stated that they felt a sense of support that motivated them, "my family has been very, very supportive. I couldn't have done it [college] without them at all you know from studying late at night and them watching her [daughter]" (Johnson, 2001, p. 59). Although the women in this inquiry attended community colleges, their perceptions of success and survival mechanisms are highly relevant and reflective of the Black collegian who attends a four-year institution.

In 2002, Hinderlie conducted a study that examined the effect of parental attachment on the adjustment of 186 African American college students at PWIs. The study revealed that not only did the family play a major role in the persistence of the African American student, but that a supportive paternal attachment is positively correlated with self esteem. The researcher stated that university personnel should recognize the relevance and value of parental relationships, in terms of the off-campus support they provide to Black collegians. Hinderlie cautioned those in the academy to

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ensure that on-campus support mechanisms did not compete with family support. Institutional climate should promote an integration between the students' familial values and the cultural norms of the campus, "Colleges should maintain open communications with parents, including fathers, enabling family members to become involved in and feel comfortable on the college campus and better understand the college experiences of their sons and daughters" (2002, p. 6). Perhaps faculty, counselors, student affairs personnel, and administrators can offer coursework and programming that will assist the students in incorporating their cultural backgrounds with the institutional norms. How can university personnel impact off-campus relationships and why should they be held accountable for facilitating these relationships? These data support the notion that some African American collegians utilize and rely on different sources of support to persist in college. In order for educational leaders to improve the experiences of African American students, they must acknowledge those determinants of success provided by the students. As a result, these contributing factors must be noted and programming could be developed to support these resources. Perhaps Black collegians would feel their presence was valued by the interest expressed in their background. As a result of the increased value and respect from members of the campus community, the retention rates of Black collegians could be increased.

In Hall's (1999) "African American College Students at a Predominantly White Institution: Patterns of Success," he interviewed 45 recent graduates from several different majors to determine the factors that contributed to their overall academic success at a PWI. Hall's study revealed, "students overwhelmingly credited family members, particularly mothers, with playing a very important role in their success at the

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university. Students seemed to draw strength and inspiration from their parents" (p.17). Other students noted different reasons for achieving academic success, including crediting their parents' financial sacrifices as the reasoning for their academic achievement. In essence, these students noted that they felt a huge obligation to achieve because of the financial investment made by their parents.

Faith

Although many definitions exist for the term faith, Black intellectual, W.E.B. DuBois, presents a compelling look at this concept, "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife-this longing to attain self-conscious [selfhood], to merge his [sic] double self into a better and truer self"(Lazarus & Steward, 2002, p. 579). This longing has been identified as a spiritual awareness that acknowledges the interrelated nature of the human experience and the need to feel complete, as an individual. DuBois' elucidation of this concept forces the reader to confront the African American's desire to improve as an individual, while existing in an environment that often reflects the African American as inferior or inept. Additionally, the African American's capacity to cling to this aspiration, amid environmental struggles, reflects a religious cognizance that reinforces an individual's need to self actualize. Researchers believe this espoused notion is reflected in the African American students' reliance on spirituality to navigate their educational experiences (Fleming, 1984; Hughes, 1987; Sedlacek, 1987). The African American student, particularly at PWIs, is placed in an environment that reflects the dominant culture. Here, these students must exist and achieve academic success by relying on their spiritual consciousness to support their ability to overcome those seemingly insurmountable challenges.

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James Fowler (1981) describes faith "as people's ultimate support when the other things they depend on in their lives collapse around them. Faith enables one to find meaning in the world and in one's life, and is about making a commitment to what is known and living in a way that is informed by that commitment" (Lazarus & Steward, 2002, p. 581). Sharon Daloz Parks (2000) extended this definition by applying it to young adults and the way they make meaning in different social contexts, such as higher education. According to Parks, faith is "the capacity and demand for meaning, the self-conscious discovery of what is ultimately true and dependable in life" (p. 581). It is important to note that both Fowler and Parks emphasized that faith, in essence, is one's attempt to seek "coherence and wholeness among the myriad identities, responsibilities, and relationships that all human beings possess" (p.582). This emphasis holds great significance for the current challenges impacting the African American student.

Religiosity and spirituality are demonstrated in behaviors, attitudes and beliefs that include participation in worship services, prayers, and perceptions of a God image (Smith & Richards, 2005). Johnson et al. (2003) also explored religious orientation among African American college students. Specifically, they examined academic performance differences as measured by g.p.a.s. They found that African American students who exhibited more private, devout and rigid religious attitudes experienced higher levels of academic performance. According to the study "Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose," the results revealed, "African American students are more likely than other students to believe in God, pray, and attend religious services frequently" (Bartlett, 2005, p. A38). The study also showed that religious beliefs vary by race. For instance, 95 percent of

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African Americans believe in God, compared with 84 percent of Latinos, 78 percent of Whites, and 65 percent of Asian Americans. Additionally, 53 percent of African Americans frequently attend religious services, compared with 42 percent of Whites, 39 percent of Latinos, and 35 percent of Asian Americans. This literature demonstrates that Black collegians place great priority on faith. Specifically, these students take part in both private and public behaviors to cultivate their faith. As a result, the achievement and success of Black collegians is heightened.

Sanchez (2005) examined the relationships between religious orientation and racial identity and found that racial and religious issues are an integral part of the self-identity processes for African American collegians. Private devotional activities, like prayer, are among the major strategies that African Americans use for coping with stress and anxiety (Mattis & Jagers, 2001; McAdoo, 1995). Therefore, African Americans rely on a religious system of meaning to combat racial inequities and to interpret other societal challenges (Blaine & Crocker, 1995; Brega & Coleman, 1999; Ellison, 1993).

George, Larson, Koenig, and McCullough, (2000) distinguished spirituality as a more comprehensive term that described an individual's personal relationship with a god or acknowledgement of a higher power. For those of African heritage, religious beliefs and practices have and will always exist as an important feature of culture and rearing (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Many African Americans have a background that accentuates religion, spiritual convictions, and a belief in God or a higher power (Richardson & June, 1997). These ideas are all illustrative of the term, faith. Throughout much of American history, African American society has placed great value on its religious institutions (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Moore, 1991). The African American church has been the

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most revered institution within the Black community (Billingsely, 1999). It is a major purveyor of support for African Americans in their educational, social, and economic development. For some African American students who persist and achieve college completion, they have utilized their faith to assist and direct their academic journeys. The navigation of their academic journeys was facilitated by managing their identities as both African Americans and members of the university community. These students utilized their faith to effectively carry out their responsibilities as students and to maintain their relationships with faculty, administrators, and other students (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000).

African American Identity Development

The desire to facilitate the overall success of the African American collegian requires institutional personnel to be familiar with those developmental issues confronting this segment of the student population. According to "Identity Development of Diverse Populations: Implications for Teaching and Administration in Higher Education," most people who have attended college emphasized this period as a time of overwhelming and critical change, specifically stating that they became more grounded and stable. This notion reflects student development and the concept that the college years are vital for the maturation of identity (2003). The belief that student identity is developed through the college years is widely recognized and accepted. Thus institutional personnel must seek an increased level of fluency to improve their role and impact as they relate to the African American collegian.

Of all the racial identity models, Black racial identity has been the most studied (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001). Racial identity has been the focus of numerous texts (Austin, Carter, &Vaux, 1990; Bagley & Copeland, 1994; Helms, 1990; Helms & Piper,

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1994); (Hughes & Demo, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1981). The central role of identity development is the effective cultivation of a worldview, which encompasses how one perceives society and feels connected to it (De Haan & Schulenberg, 1997). Race is a concept that is an indelible feature of U.S. culture that carries many meanings and stereotypes (Omi & Winant, 1986). This term has powerful implications for the mental health and personality development of any individual (Bruno, 2002; R. Carter, 1995, 2005; McCowan & Alston, 1998). For African Americans and other minorities, personal identity development is particularly challenging because we exist in a society that requires minority individuals to overcome the negative perceptions that exist for this group (Helms, 1994). As a result, people of color are bombarded with messages that dictate and asses the appropriateness or inappropriateness of their behavior (R. Carter, 1995, 2005).

In order to effectively combat those negative societal messages and address the Black collegians' important maturation issues, educators must acknowledge the relevancy and impact of how these students view themselves in terms of racial identity." Cokley (2001) found that some Black college students call upon their racial identity as a powerful source of motivation. The author determined that Black females at HBCUs who exhibited high levels of racial awareness and greatly accentuated race as a large part of their identity reported high academic self-concept and elevated levels of intrinsic motivation. Although this notion did not hold true for Black males in the sample, Cokley concluded that Black females connected their academic achievement to their racial identity, whereas males separated their achievement from their racial identity. This

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In another study that examined the impact of racial identity development on the Black collegian, Griffin (2006) examined the motivation for Black high achieving collegians. The researcher found that those students who emphasized race as a large part of their identity tended to exert more effort in the classroom, wanted to be an example of pride for the Black community, and wanted to make contributions to the Black community. The researcher determined that a multidimensional framework must be utilized to examine these students. The study incorporated three models: self-determination theory, socio-cognitive theory, and attribution theory. Griffin's research revealed that high achieving Black collegians were impacted by both internal and external forces of motivation. Additionally, these students noted how their racial background served as a powerful influence on their behavior. Although all of the students identified themselves as Black, eight of the nine respondents acknowledged their awareness of common stereotypes about Black students and felt that labels, held by their peers and professors, influenced their behavior both in and outside of the classroom. Griffin emphasized the students' reliance on both their racial background and their desire to improve their community, "Four students also noted that they wanted to address the under representation of Black professionals" (p. 393).

Cross' Nigrescence Model

William Cross introduced one of the most important and widely-noted theories of African American racial identity development, the Cross Nigrescence Model. According to Cross (1971), Nigrescence is defined as "the process of developing a Black identity."

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He noted that there are five psychological stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. Cross characterized each stage by combining race with self-concept issues. For example, the individuals' stage of racial identity greatly influenced their interactions with both Blacks and Whites. Additionally, the stage of the person is significantly influenced by the person's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. By noting Cross' dual analysis of race and self-concept, researchers can gain insight on how both factors are manifested in an academic setting. As a result, the institution may utilize this information in the planning of curricular offerings, institutional programming, and economic allocations.

The Preencounter Stage is described as the realization that the White world view is dominant. Consequently, the Black person separates from the Black culture and denies one's Black identity. During the Encounter Stage, the individual experiences a desire to interact with other Blacks and with Whites who appear to be sensitive to Black culture. This stage is viewed as the individual's determined and purposeful search for Black identity.

The Immersion-Emersion Stage is manifested in two phases. In the first, the individual idealizes Blackness and denigrates anything associated with White culture. Emersion is the second phase. Here the individual develops a healthy perception of Blackness, which allows for assessments of both the assets and deficits found in the Black culture.

In the Internalization Stage, the individuals merge their unique personalities with an acknowledgement of the African American identity. Although racism and

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Cross characterized the Internalization/Commitment Stage as one that reflected social activism and cognitive development. The utilization of Cross' Nigrescence Model can aid university personnel in addressing some of the most compelling challenges that Black collegians experience in the campus community, "Having a clear understanding of race and racial identity, and their impact on the experiences and worldview of college for students of color, is vital to providing developmentally appropriate and meaningful support and services" (Pope, 2000, p. 305).

Overall, racial identity theory is a psychological model that explains the complex ego identity development process for African Americans" (Sanchez, 2005, p. 283). Racial identity theories propose that race is more than an individual's skin color or features. Rather, racial identity theories claim that a person's understanding of their identity is cerebral. Thus, these theories guide an individual's feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and level of investment in the cultural patterns of the individual (Helms, 1996) as well as other aspects of their identity (Carter & Pieterse, 2005; R. Carter, 1995). In U.S. culture, Whites have been given privilege based on race, while minorities have not (Helms, 1996; 2005). Racial identity theories facilitate the minority individuals' socialization in a society that marginalizes those who reflect "difference." If university personnel become more knowledgeable of racial identity development for students, the information could be utilized to create a more all-encompassing campus community, which may result in augmenting the Black collegian's acclimation to the university.

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Most would agree that the attainment of a baccalaureate degree remains to be the most vital conduit to obtain a career, pursue graduate education, or to lay a foundation for lifelong learning. Although this same sentiment is true for African Americans, its importance takes on a greater meaning. For African Americans, the fulfillment of the undergraduate degree represents the key strategy to overcome or to avoid those undesirable conditions that were produced by slavery. Despite the fact that significant gains have been made in the African American population, the remnants of institutional racism are still prevalent and present in the consciousness of most Americans. As a result, the baccalaureate takes on more significance for the Black collegian. Thus this study takes on more importance and increased relevance for those who seek to support and propel the African American collegian in the pursuit of higher education. The first half of the literature review discussed those crucial issues that have challenged the African American student as this student has moved through the educational pipeline. Additionally, the literature has shed light on those internal and personal methods that Black collegians have used to prevail over challenges and to stay motivated. The presentation of this literature has prepared the argument that proves the Black collegian has the capacity to meet and exceed institutional expectations. However, it is imperative that institutions create mechanisms that will acknowledge the needs of these students and provide opportunities for academic achievement and graduation. Hence the next part of this literature review focuses on those aspects that can be addressed and resolved by postsecondary personnel.

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Institutional and Organizational Factors

Institutions of higher education must be held accountable to the entire student population. As a result, the institution's faculty, administration, student affairs personnel, policies, curricular offerings, and extra-curricular programming should respond to a cross-section of student interests and ability levels. In their discussion on the value that diversity brings to educational institutions, Rothman, Lipset, and Nevitte (2003) noted this enthusiastic endorsement by Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger:

> Diversity is not merely a desirable addition to a well-run education. It is as essential as the study of the Middle Ages, of international politics and of Shakespeare. For our students to better understand the diverse country and world they inhabit, they must be immersed in a campus culture that allows them to study with, argue with, and become friends with students who may be different from them. It broadens the mind and the intellect-essential goals of education (p. 25).

Thus, it is important to emphasize that institutional culture does have an impact on the individual experiences of every student. Numerous studies have cited the correlations between institutional environments and the persistence of students (Allen, 1981; Bean, 1980; Bollinger, 2007; Boyd, 2004; Clark & Crawford, 1992; Clewell, 1982; 1986; Hebel, 2007; Tinto, 1982; and Wade-Golden & Matlock, 2007). Therefore it is imperative for postsecondary institutions to recognize the value of diversity and fully implement this concept into their campus community.

Additionally, those in the academy need to assist in the development of the students' educational goals and in the navigation of their educational experiences, "This is particularly true for African American students whose families and communities may simply lack the necessary information and educational resources to get them to college" (Wimberly, 2002, p. 19). Consequently, it is imperative that postsecondary institutions

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are prepared to assist these students by creating environments that reflect both interest and value in its African American student population. The institutional climate should convey a genuine sense of belongingness to its entire student demographic that is demonstrated through institutional initiatives and the behavior of university personnel.

Climate

In the October 2003 edition of *Black Issues in Higher Education*, the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) was listed among a group of universities that has made significant progress in recruiting and retaining ethnically diverse faculty. In response to this recognition, RIT's Assistant Provost for Diversity Eulas Boyd offered his reaction in a compelling and prolific article, entitled, "Placing Diversity at the Core of Institutional Excellence." In this text, Boyd courteously reminds readers that the successful recruitment and retainment of minority faculty "speaks to only part of our intended mission." Boyd elaborates by emphasizing that in order for an institution to be truly successful, the institution must have a broader institutional strategy. Specifically, Boyd notes, "The diversity of the faculty is a key element, but not the only one. At the heart of the mission is the education and graduation of increasing numbers of students of African American, Latino American, and American Indian heritage. A diverse faculty has an important role to play in this mission, but they are not solely responsible for the success of these students. . . (Boyd, 2004, p.4).

In order to effectively understand college access, persistence, and graduation for African American students, institutional climate must be understood and scrutinized. "Students on college campuses who experience a system of oppression every day have tremendous difficulty maintaining good grades, communicating with classmates,

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connecting with faculty, and feeling comfortable calling their future alma mater 'home'"(Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003, p. 90). As a result, these students develop a set of survival strategies that can have a negative or positive impact on the students' identity development and academic persistence. Torres et al. developed a monograph entitled *Identity Development of Diverse Populations: Implications for Teaching and Administration in Higher Education* that examined various controversial issues, including how race can affect the college classroom and the campus community at a PWI. The text began by acknowledging one of the unspoken truths that exists for any campus community, "The first aspect that should be understood about campus culture is that dominant campus features reflect the influence of the dominant groups" (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 122 in Torres et al., 2003).

In terms of African American students, Torres et al. offered two recommendations to make traditionally White campuses reflect more inclusive environments to support the adjustment of those from diverse backgrounds:

1. Increase the structural diversity of the faculty, staff, and student body. By diversifying the university personnel and student body, there is a promotion of interaction and challenge among those from different backgrounds. As a result, old paradigms can be challenged, this challenge promotes a learning environment that reflects and values diversity and expands one's view of how the world should function (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999).

2. Make an assessment of the current literature or other university representations to ensure that all cultures are reflected. For example, " Providing a group of students with cameras to do a photographic assessment can provide administrators with interesting

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information on how messages are interpreted and what values students see on the campus" (Torres et. al, 2003, p. 91). It is important that the campus reflect a very inclusive, welcoming environment to support those from diverse cultures.

In order to have an effective discussion on institutional climate, the role that race plays in that climate must be acknowledged. Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) used a critical race framework to examine how racial climate impacts the undergraduate experiences of African American students through microaggressions, "subtle insults directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (p. 60). Their study, "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microagressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students," observed how African American students responded to the microaggressions and how the collegiate racial climate was impacted by this same concept. Their discussion on microagressions cited Steele and Aronson's (1995) research on racial stereotypes, which revealed "that racial stereotypes are deeply woven into the fabric of U.S society, yet their daily effects are often misunderstood" (p. 62). Specifically, Steele and Aronson determined that racial stereotypes interfere with the Black collegians' academic success. This interference manifests itself as "stereotype threat," which can result in low scores on standardized tests, " . . . in a high-stakes testing situation if African American students are reminded of stereotypes that they are intellectually inferior to Whites, their test performance is depressed" (p. 62).

Solorzano et al. coupled Steele & Aronson's work with a critical race framework to determine how a racial climate that includes racial microaggressions impacts the undergraduate experiences of African American students. The study revealed that African

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American students experienced microaggressions in both academic settings and social settings. As a result, these students noted several negative outcomes: questioned their academic ability, experienced feelings of frustration, and considered leaving the institution. Overall, Solorzano, et al. cited (Carroll 1998; Guinier, Fine, & Balin 1997; Hurtado 1992; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton – Pedersen, & Allen 1999) and defined a positive collegiate racial climate as: (a) the inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color; (b) a curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color; (c) programs to support the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color; and (d) a mission statement that reinforces the institution's commitment to pluralism. Some researchers (Boykin, 1983; Perry, Steele, & Milliard, 2003) believe that Black students learn more in environments that are characterized as harmonious, cooperative, affective, and emphasize a strong sense of community. Conversely, they believe these students learn less in environments that are highly stratified and competitive. This view is consistent with that of Gallien and Peterson (2004), Delpit, (1996), and Hale-Benson (1986) who proposed that many Black students use people-oriented and relational approaches to learning rather than the independent and analytical style favored in most White higher educational environments.

If postsecondary institutions do not demonstrate an interest in Black students and their academic success through institutional practices and policies, these students will not have the inclination or tools to achieve success in the academy. According to Buck (2001), if postsecondary personnel are going to understand the racial and cultural differences that exist within their communities, they must understand that enlightening a pluralistic populace is a sobering and difficult task. Moreover this task requires

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institutional personnel to modify many facets of institutional life, by demonstrating warmness through institutional initiatives, extracurricular activities, and positive student interactions with faculty and administrators. This notion is not new and has been studied for more than 30 years. Therefore, in addition to an obligation to prepare African American students, PWIs should also feel accountable for creating an environment, for these students that will support their success, "...Since the elimination of 'dejure segregation' predominantly White institutions are responsible for educating a vast majority of minority students, particularly students of African American heritage..." (Psychological Barriers, 2003).

Retention Programs

"There's an unfortunate gap in services once students reach college. We have programs that help increase the pipeline of people going to college, now we want to help them become college graduates,"(Devarics & Roach, 2000, p. 21) says Representative Chaka Fattah. This Philidelphia-based congressman worked with leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Clinton administration to earmark Federal funds for college retention programs. Seven years ago Fattah introduced a college retention proposal that grew into a $35 million program that was apart of the Clinton administration's 2001 budget proposal. This documents that national retention rates, particularly for the minority student, are bleak and can no longer be viewed as an afterthought, but rather as an issue related to both the access and the preservation of students of color.

Retaining incoming first year students is one of the most vital challenges confronting postsecondary institutions. This issue is particularly critical for minority,

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low-income and first generation students (Hammer, 2003). Every year Noel –Levitz, a postsecondary consulting firm that advises higher education institutions on retaining students and acknowledges the most successful retention programs. The winners are selected by a panel of postsecondary administrators and consultants on "measurable results, originality and creativity of the programs, resource use, and adaptability to other institutions" (p.28). In 2006, Noel – Levitz recognized two institutions for their award-winning retention programs:

1. "Excelling in Science and Engineering Learning," is provided at Michigan Technological University and the King-Chávez-Parks Initiative in Houghton, Michigan. This program focuses on a partnership between the College of Engineering, the Department of Educational Opportunity and the State of Michigan's King-Chávez-Parks Initiative. This initiative is aimed at increasing student success and retention for both minority and disadvantaged first-year students enrolled in the College of Engineering. Typically there are 108 students who participate in the program. The strategy combines coursework, peer mentoring, progress mentoring, and personalized services. Since the program began, student retention has increased 16.4 percent and the average fall semester GPA has increased 30 percent. During this time, there's been a 4.1 percent decrease in students who are placed on academic probation and an 18 percent decrease in students dismissed for academic issues (Noel-Levitz, 2006).

2. "Pegasus Success Program," is offered through the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. The Pegasus Success Program (PSP) is a collaborative learning community that focuses on an integrated curriculum, interdisciplinary courses and social interaction to provide students with a strong academic and personal

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development foundation. This program is targeted to students who fall short of the standard admission criteria, but demonstrate the potential for success. Prior to the fall semester, the program runs for six weeks. During this time, the students participate in a structured environment that emphasizes succeeding in college through academic advising, peer mentoring and supplemental instruction. On average, there are 150 participants. Since 2000, the retention rate for the PSP has consistently been 97 percent with an average freshman-to-sophomore retention rate of 80 percent. These programs effectively demonstrate that targeted approaches to facilitate minority students and unprepared students can significantly impact the students' ability to achieve academic success and to attain an undergraduate degree.

In "Leave No College Student Behind," Smith (2004) offers her personal perspective on how retention programs can be enhanced by discussing the "hidden curriculum" concept. This term refers to ". . . the unwritten and unspoken rules of how to successfully navigate through the nebulous academic culture of higher education, which is essential to academic success. For example, there is an appropriate way students should interact with faculty when discussing grades, which might not be transparent to all college students" (p. 48). The author went on to criticize retention programs for their solitary emphasis on academic skills and their inability to also address those key components needed to access the "hidden curriculum" or those rules that are needed to recognize and navigate the institutional culture. As a result, Smith suggests that retention programs include this essential component to achieve overall success in the higher education context. ". . .they should concentrate on how to teach students the academic

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cultural knowledge of the institution, for example the most appropriate way to engage in classroom discussions" (p.48).

Additionally Smith (2004) went on to discuss the mentor component that many retention programs offer by identifying two major problems: they do not include a plan that would explicitly and comprehensively reveal the unwritten rules of navigating the college environment and that one –on –one mentoring relationships lead students to be poorly informed of the "hidden curriculum." In order to address these concerns, Smith suggested the restructuring of the mentor component by implementing a clearly developed and systematic way of teaching the students to identify, interpret and navigate the hidden rules of engagement in the university setting. And to eliminate the one-on – one mentoring approach and replace it with a network-mentor model. This approach would require the student to interact with various individuals in the community, such as faculty, administrators, and upperclassmen, all of which would be considered mentors to the individual student. This network notion would ensure a more comprehensive exposure to the university culture and those unspoken rules that are required for success in that culture. The information on retention programs depicts the critical need for universities to develop a more comprehensive approach to supporting the African American collegian. Although it is imperative that students are highly efficient in critical reading, analysis, and writing skills, it is equally as important that this student demonstrate a proficiency in the cognizance, recognition and application of those obscured guidelines that are integral to the effective course-plotting of postsecondary institutions.

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In "What Color is an A," Schmidt (2007) discusses Skidmore College's overwhelming success of assisting those minority students who have academic deficiencies. Skidmore utilizes two major retention efforts: the Higher Education Opportunity Program, restricted to New York residents and the Academic Opportunity Program, available to all out-of-state students. Both programs assist students who have been identified as having academic potential, but lack an appropriate SAT score or students who come from modest high schools that were not academically challenging.

Both retention programs were developed to facilitate the students' college transition. Prior to fall semester, incoming students are required to attend an academic boot camp. For more than four weeks, students take intensive mathematics and writing courses. Additionally, the students must take a third course on analytical writing, in which students are introduced to the writings of figures like Plato and Darwin. At the end of the day, students are required to study for three hours with the assistance of professional tutors. The program has experienced success, ". . . As of last fall, nearly 60 percent, of the 133 students involved in the two Skidmore Programs had grade point averages of at least 3.0 and more than a fourth had at least a 3.5" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 4).

In addition to the academic requirements, the office that houses both retention programs has a friendly and caring staff who appears to be ready and willing to assist students with their homework or to chat with students. According to Susan B. Layden, who oversees both retention programs and is the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, "To help minority students feel they can achieve at higher levels regardless of what is going on around them, we create a smaller environment within this place where students feel safe" (Schmidt, 2007, p. 8). Student retention programs provide access to those who

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have been traditionally underrepresented in the postsecondary environment. This access is found in the form of transition programs, course instruction, tutoring, mentoring programs, and interest groups. The data in this discussion has substantiated the notion that effective retention programs have a significant impact on at-risk students and allow these students to not only meet the institution's academic standards, but in some cases exceed them. Toney and Lowe (2001) emphasize the importance and value that retention programs offer the African American collegian. However, these authors also question the postsecondary institution's commitment to genuinely seeking inclusion for their campuses:

> "They [at-risk students] can be retained, maintain acceptable grade point averages, and graduate within a reasonable time frame from highly competitive institutions if they are provided adequate academic support services. Nearly every university in this country claims to be an equal opportunity institution. The truth of these words lies in the treatment of those who were previously excluded from participation in higher education" (p. 14).

The global workforce requires its population to be educated in terms of academic disciplines, but also in terms of having the capacity to interact with those who are dissimilar. As a result, the learning process for each individual is heightened and the quality of the work is improved. Retention Programs allow students who reflect "difference" to receive the academic and transitional assistance that is needed. These programs also allow these students to enter a community that sees the value and benefit in their presence and in their contributions. As a result, the entire university community is enhanced through the integration of various ideas, perspectives, and contributions made by the entire student community.

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For more than two decades, interaction between institutional personnel and students has been consistently cited as a positive contributor to student success and persistence for all students, including African Americans (Astin, 1985; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Previous literature still remains true and significant (Hale-Benson, 1986) in suggesting that Black students respond best to teachers who are fair, concerned for their well-being outside the classroom, effectively convey the academic content to students, and challenge them with an attitude of "we lift as we climb" (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, p. 203). There are specific classroom strategies that educational researchers associate with effective instruction for African American students in all postsecondary environments. The first is teacher immediacy, Canary, Cody and Manusov (2000) define this concept as signs that show attentiveness, liking, psychological closeness, and demonstrate active engagement in interactions. Verbal behaviors include humor, addressing students by name, conversing with students before or after class, praising student work, and encouraging students to ask questions and talk (Gorham, 1988; Neuliep, 2002). Second, nonverbal immediacy behaviors include vocal expressions, smiles, eye contact with students, and movement around the classroom during teaching (Gorham, 1988). Third, teachers' communication of immediacy is critical because researchers have demonstrated that students learn most from teachers who are "warm, friendly, immediate, approachable, and fostering of close, professionally appropriate personal relationships" (Andersen & Andersen, 1987, p. 57).

Although the data has clearly revealed that neither HBCUs nor PWIs are experiencing great success with the African American collegian (Allen, Epps, & Haniff,

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1991; Astin, 1982; "Black Student College Graduation Rates," 2006; Fleming, 1984; Hall, Mays, & Allen, 1984; Nettles, 1988; "The Nation's Colleges," 2003; Thomas, 1981), there are some lessons to be learned from the HBCU's classroom and its positive impact on the African American collegian. The HBCU classroom is in contrast to that experienced at traditionally White institutions. In pedagogical terms, professors at HBCUs utilize teaching styles that are more consistent with the learning styles of Black students. Rucker and Gendrin (2003) concluded that Black identity and instructor ethnicity positively influenced student perceptions of learning objectives. Their findings also suggested that African American instructors may manifest more teacher immediacy behaviors than their Caucasian counterparts. Therefore, African American students have a stronger identification with their African American instructors than they do with White instructors. Moreover, Rucker and Gendrin (2003) concluded that "the racial/cultural congruency of the HBCU classroom is likely to increase students' sense of racial identity and enhance student cognitive learning within the context of student learning style," (p. 208). This finding is also supported by Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003). The pedagogical practices utilized by faculty at HBCUs, could prove to be highly effective when combined with other teaching practices of faculty at PWIs. Thus, the achievement and graduation of African American students could be heightened.

According to the text, "What Research Says about Race-Linked Barriers to Achievement" (2007), "Some researchers say subtle factors, like fears of not fitting in or perceptions that professors have low expectations of them, may hinder the progress of today's nonwhite students more than blatant discrimination does" (p.1).

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Fowler and Villanueva (2002) noted that White college faculty tend to take one of three stances in their interactions with African American students, particularly African American male students. Although the first two stances tend to lead to negative consequences for the African American college student, the third stance enhances the rapport with the Black student: (a) deemphasize the effect of racial differences, by not accentuating the students' racial identity; (b) become overly hesitant or, in some cases, paralyzed by their awareness of racial differences, as a result the faculty member ends up unintentionally ignoring and avoiding interaction with the student; and (c) demonstrate a special awareness of the effect racial differences have on students of color by acknowledging the marginalization that exists in society (p.9). As a result of these stances, the text demonstrates how faculty can unintentionally negatively impact the African American student.

In the article, "Scholarly Research on the Higher Education of African Americans" (2006), African American faculty were found to have a significant impact on higher education. Specifically, this group of faculty was examined by Dr. Paul Umbach who used a 2003 survey of 13,500 faculty at 134 predominantly White colleges across the country. Umbach found that African American and other minority faculty were more likely than their White counterparts to interact with their students and to use a wider array of teaching practices. He also found that Black faculty were more likely to create classroom environments that promoted diverse interactions and emphasized active and collaborative learning techniques. Umbach speculates, ". . . because Black and other minority faculty come from diverse backgrounds themselves, they are more likely to have unique perspectives and different teaching methods" (p. 2)

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Lundberg (2004) examined the imbalance that exists between African American collegians and African American faculty members, "within degree-granting institutions in the United States, African Americans make up 11.5% of the student body, but only 5.4% of the faculty" (p. 548). As a result of this disproportion, there is an increased likelihood that Black collegians will consistently interact with faculty who do not share their race or ethnicity. To assess the impact of the imbalance that exists between African American students and non-Black faculty, Lundberg conducted a study on seven different racial/ethnic groups that examined how the quality and quantity of faculty interaction impacted student learning. Lundberg's research substantiated the notion that frequent and high quality faculty-student interactions were a better predictor of learning for students of color than for their White counterparts.

Lundberg's results revealed that satisfying relationships with faculty members were defined as frequent interactions and those that encouraged students to work harder. Even though these relationships were noted as strong predictors of learning for every racial group, Native American and African American students reported experiencing slightly less satisfying relationships with faculty. Interestingly, these two groups of students reported higher levels of working harder due to faculty feedback because they believed they needed to work harder to disprove their instructors' preconceived notions of their abilities. Conversely, Steele's (1997) groundbreaking work in the area of stereotype threat found that critical feedback to African American students can be a great motivator when coupled with the students' optimism about their intellectual potential. However, receiving tactless criticisms from faculty resulted in a greater negative reaction from African American students than it did from White students (Cohen, Steele, & Ross,

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1999). Steele also stressed the importance of other practices that he labels "wise schooling" for students of color: giving challenging work to students, affirming that they belong intellectually in the college environment, valuing multiple perspectives, and providing an environment in which the students receive nonjudgmental feedback.

Based on the results of her study, Lundberg (2004) suggested that faculty should emphasize the quality of faculty-student interactions. Students assessed faculty satisfaction, in terms of the extent to which faculty were "approachable, helpful, understanding, and encouraging, rather than remote, discouraging, and unsympathetic" (Lundberg, 2004, p. 563). Lundberg offered some recommendations to enhance the interaction between faculty and students: (a) institutions must work to diversify the racial and ethnic representation of the faculty; (b) all faculty members must make themselves more approachable to students, particularly African American and Native American students; and (c) institutions must create environments and opportunities for students and faculty to engage with one another in an effort to make faculty members more approachable. These opportunities can occur in orientation, residence life, recreation programs, and in other student affairs domains where students may feel more comfortable. The responsibility for enhancing student relationships should not be restricted to faculty, administrators, and students, but should include student affairs professionals. These individuals must strive to generate seamless learning environments that support the institution's mission (Kuh, 1996).

Though Lundberg emphasized the quality of faculty – student interaction, Fowler and Villanueva (2002) extended this discussion in the text, *Included in English Studies: Learning Climates that Cultivate Racial and Ethnic Diversity*. Here, the authors discuss

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the significance of the faculty-student relationship in higher education settings. The text reiterated the massive impact this relationship can have on the success of African American college students (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997; Kobrak, 1992; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 1977). Additionally, some of these same researchers noted that faculty-student relationships among mixed race pairings demonstrate that race does influence how the interaction turns out. For example, Grant-Thompson and Atkinson (1997) found that that White faculty who worked with Black students found tremendous success when they displayed culturally sensitive behaviors. The authors noted the example of the African American student who mentioned the importance of race and ethnicity as a student at a PWI and the White faculty member who openly recognized the importance of both, as opposed to ignoring the students' comments on this topic. This reinforcement of the students' viewpoint leads to a greater rapport between the faculty member and the Black student. The faculty – student relationship can provide a powerful source of reiteration of the Black collegians' value to the learning environment and campus community.

The role that faculty play in the promotion of academic success for Black college students is highly significant. African American students rely on those verbal and nonverbal cues, used by faculty, to communicate faith or disbelief in the students' capacity to achieve success. It is important to emphasize that Black students' academic success is not exclusively based on the action of the White, Black or minority faculty member, but rather that there are a myriad of other contributing factors, including the students' determination. However, it is imperative that an increased number of faculty become cognizant of their role in promoting the Black students' academic achievement.

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As a result, the African American college student will have an increased likelihood of attaining academic success.

Administrators

"Leaders are key to how organizations function, and there is little doubt that the leaders who are needed to guide postsecondary institutions in tomorrow's complex environments have to think about their work differently than did their predecessors" (Amey, 2006, p. 58). Demographic research indicates that the population will continue to experience racial/ethnic diversification (NCES, 2002). As a result, if there are no intentional plans to provide education on issues of race, our society may experience disruptive interactions and repercussions (Gurin, 1999). Alternatively, if higher education administrators design purposeful multicultural experiences for students, these students will experience constructive learning and social outcomes (Milem, 2003).

Cross and Slater (2001) discussed several contributors of Black student attrition in higher education, including two areas that academic administrators must address to resolve this issue: implement mentoring programs and increase the availability of financial aid. Williams College, the University of Virginia, and Brown University are institutions that have high Black student graduation rates and programs developed to nurture and guide the Black collegian. These schools developed mentoring programs that pair first-year freshmen with upperclassmen. In terms of major barriers to college completion, Cross and Slater write that, "The most important reason that Black kids drop out is *money*" (p.3). The authors cited a study by Nellie Mae, the largest nonprofit provider of federal and private student loans that indicated 69 percent of Black collegians who dropped out of college said that they left because of high student loan debt as

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compared to 43 percent of their White peers who cited the same reason. The availability of increased financial aid would reduce the students' economic burden. In recent years, Princeton University has been noted for their unprecedented use of financial aid packages in an attempt to draw more students from urban areas and working-class backgrounds. Recently, this institution implemented a new program that ". . .consists of forgiveness of all tuition charges for families earning less than $46,500 and the substitution of outright grants in place of student loans for all financial aid students" ("How Princeton University," 2001, p. 1). Although it must be noted that Princeton has the largest endowment per student, it is evident that this institution is willing to take unparalleled steps to ensure that African American students have access and success at their institution.

Coomes (1994) discussed the importance of institutional policies and how they should reflect the diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of the student body. He cautioned administrators to avoid implementing policies that substantiated and reinforced the ideals of the dominant culture. Based on research from Manning & Coleman-Boatwright (1991), Coomes discussed five recommendations to assist university administrators in building a community that reflected equity and fairness by developing policies that: (a) distribute power equitably; (b) blur gender role boundaries; (c) lead to the development and inclusion in the curriculum of course work that explores the contributions of multiple cultures; (d) stress consensus and collaboration; and (e) foster the development of nonbureaucratic organizational forms. These data support the notion that administrators must ensure that the allocation of resources and programming effectively represent both the majority and minority populations. If resources are utilized

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In terms of how academic administrators can enhance the success of Black collegians, Coomes (1994) offered the following, "Building a campus community founded on the principles of equity and fairness presents a formidable task for campus administrators" (p. 432). Some researchers have concluded that institutional policy is a direct reflection of institutional economic values based on economics. Essentially administrators make decisions that support the institution's budget instead of making decisions that advance the quality of the educational experience for all of the students (Astin, 1993). As a result, African American or other minority students with different needs do not receive the academic, social, or economic support required to heighten their success. Ultimately, these students are placed in an environment that seemingly does not acknowledge or value their distinctive backgrounds and they are left to feel as if they are not appreciated members of the campus community. Additionally, these students will be left out because the allocation of monetary and programming resources will coincide with the needs of the majority students.

Faculty and Academic Administrators Enhancing Success

Many authors have examined strategies that faculty and academic administrators can use to increase the likelihood of African American student success. A small sample of this volume of research is presented to show examples of commonalities in the literature. Wade-Golden & Matlock (2007) developed 10 recommendations to assist university personnel in successfully fostering institutional diversity, five of which were specifically directed to faculty and administrators:

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1. Campus Leadership Must be Visible and Heard. The campus community must know that the institutional leadership places emphasis and priority on diversity. University leadership must continually encourage those concepts and people that reflect "difference." Additionally, there must be an emphasis on placing minority faculty and staff in leadership roles. These individuals should not be relegated to offices or roles that primarily focus on meeting the needs of minority students.

2. Institutional Diversity is Everyone's Business-No Exceptions. The entire campus must demonstrate dedication to campus diversity. Additionally, institutions must ensure that the academic units play a major role in institutionalizing campus diversity, for fear of leaving the impression that diversity initiatives are limited to students and staff. University personnel should also review programs, policies, institutional traditions, curriculum, and climate issues to ensure that diversity is encouraged and supported through institutional, college, and departmental programming efforts.

3. Integrate Campus Diversity Priorities with the Institutional Mission. The institutional mission should be aligned with the institution's diversity priorities. Meaning the university's mission should contain elements of the university's diversity plan.

4. Campus Diversity is More Than a Numbers Game. In measuring its success, the university should consider the retention graduation rates for minority students. Despite the fact that these groups tend to have lower rates that their White counterparts, universities fail to develop systematic efforts to address this issue.

5. Communicate Institutional Diversity Priorities and Successes. Institutional leaders must utilize campus forums to share diversity-related successes and to address generalizations attributed to people of color. Overall these leaders must send a direct

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message that demonstrates their support for diversity. The authors offered this cautionary note for faculty and administrators, "Campuses have to be proactive and aggressive in communicating diversity successes to counter some of the media and campus constituents that view diversity only in negative terms" (2007, p. 7). Although many colleges still struggle to promote inclusion, the demographic data report that our country will continue to become increasingly diverse over the next 40 years. Failure to effectively address these issues of diversity could put our country at risk if our students are not prepared to compete in a global workforce. When university personnel acknowledge the minority student population by enacting policies and programs to facilitate high quality interactions, the educational experiences for all students will be improved (Chang, 2001).

"Each faculty member and administrator must understand how he or she as an individual and as a member of the institution influences the success or failure of those who are not from the white culture. It is only when this discomfort is dealt with that higher education can truly say, 'we value diversity'" (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003, p.7). A study conducted by Johnson (2001) highlighted that the actions of faculty and administrators are pivotal to the success of the Black collegians at both HBCUs and PWIs. For example, one student in the study said "one-on-one communication with the teachers is another major aspect of college survival. . . For me that makes me feel like they care just a little bit if they learn my name. . . I'm able to go talk to Mr. Whoever and ask for help and them being able to give out their time and help me out" (pp. 77 – 78). Other students added that some instructors offered to continue to assist them even after the course was completed. Another student reflected on

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encouragement from the college president, ". . . every time we are ever around his office. . . he would always make a point to come up to me and say 'Good job, stay encouraged.' I thought that was really nice" (p. 79). Other students mentioned mentors and financial aid representatives as additional sources of support and encouragement.

Dias-Bowie et al. (2004) examined the success strategies of Black collegians and found many strategies that heighten the academic experiences of Black learners: (a) university personnel need to develop and constantly evaluate ways to help Black students connect with various segments of the university; (b) faculty members should be encouraged to learn about cultural identity development;(c) faculty and academic administrators should examine their own behavior to assess where they are in this regard, and set goals for further development; and (d) faculty members should find ways to hear the stories of their black (and other) students (p. 443). These data prove how caring faculty and administrators can be viewed as not only a survival strategy for Black college students, but also a useful strategy to heighten the academic experiences for the entire student population.

Student Affairs Professionals

When institutional personnel commit themselves to successfully cultivating a pluralistic population, there is an expectation that the "business as usual" sentiment that ignores the needs of African American and other minority students should vanish. Furthermore, it is expected that those in student affairs realize that the students' race and ethnicity should not be viewed as the "the problem," but rather the "university environment" should be regarded as a major contributor to the problem (Buck, 2001). Student affairs professionals often take the lead in seeking change in campus conditions.

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In terms of how student affairs personnel may assist in promoting a more wide-ranging campus climate, Constantine (2002) studied 151 Black and Latino college students enrolled at Midwestern PWIs. Constantine focused on the relationships among collective self-esteem, perceived social support, and cultural congruity. Overall, the research revealed that both Black and Latino women experienced higher levels of cultural congruity than their male counterparts. Constantine determined that higher public collective self-esteem and higher social support satisfaction were associated with higher cultural congruity scores, and made several recommendations to improve the overall institutional climate for students of color:

1. Student affairs personnel in predominantly White universities may wish to consider how their environments contribute to Black and Latino men's comfort (or lack thereof) on campus. For example, it may be useful for these universities to conduct comprehensive self-assessments to identify the extent to which they provide comfortable academic, cultural, and social milieus for Black and Latino men and other students of color (Constantine & Watt, 2002).

2. Aggressive recruitment and retention efforts for the purposes of increasing the numbers of Black and Latino men on predominantly White college and university campuses may also be an indicator of the degree to which these institutions value and appreciate cultural diversity.

3. Student affairs personnel may wish to consider engaging in outreach programs that focus on educating the larger university milieu about the experiences of Black and Latino men and other students of color. In particular, anti-racism and diversity sensitivity programming may be fruitful in promoting a valuing of all cultural groups on

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Constantine believes student affairs personnel should play a pivotal role in creating an environment that promotes success for students of color, "By serving as 'social change agents' on their campuses, student affairs personnel may make enormous impacts on the institutional climate of their universities in ways that support the personal, social, and academic matriculation of students of diverse cultural backgrounds" (p. 10). Although this holds true for all students, historically postsecondary institutions have responded differently to the African American student population and left the students feeling alienated.

Black Collegians and HBCUs and PWIs

In the next section, I will introduce institutional variables that impact academic persistence. In *The Road to Racial Equality*, Beverly Daniel Tatum, ninth president of Spelman College and author, expressed her concerns of teaching students to interact in a pluralistic society," Whether at an HBCU or predominantly White institution, we all must ask ourselves, How do we create and sustain educational environments that affirm identity, build community, and cultivate leadership in a way that supports the learning of all students?" (2004, p. 34). Today the African American student has found success at both HBCUs and PWIs, however in both cases at just a select few institutions. In terms of the HBCU and its graduation rates, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* reports that the lowest graduation rate was at the University of the District of Columbia, where only 5 percent of entering freshmen go on to earn a bachelor's degree ("The Nation's Colleges," 2003). At Texas Southern University, 12 percent of all entering students complete college. This statistic is quite alarming considering the history of the HBCU.

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What factors have contributed to the African American students' inability to achieve at an institution that has a legacy of creating African American world leaders?

By a large margin, the highest Black student graduation rate at a historically Black college belongs to the academically selective and prestigious Spelman College, with a college completion rate of 76 percent (Cross & Slater, 2001). This institution is highly noted because it has a higher Black student graduation rate than prestigious and primarily White colleges such as the University of Chicago, Bates, Hamilton, Grinnell, and Bryn Mawr. The success of Spelman College reflects the institution's capacity to embrace the changes that accompany competition in a global society. Dr. Tatum noted some of the incentives that prompted improvements at the oldest historically Black college for women. Because of the increased competition from PWIs, the institution improved its faculty development, added new resources for scholarships and expanded facilities, and ensured that the campus community continues to reflect an environment that will motivate talented young women to seek Spelman as the "only" choice for higher education (2004). According to Tatum, Black colleges like Spelman will always remain relevant and the preferred choice for many talented Black students, "I recognize that college choice is a reflection of identity--a statement about how you see yourself, who you are now and who you hope to become. Students are drawn to an environment where they see themselves reflected in the environment in powerful ways, places where they see themselves as central to the educational enterprise" (p.34). The success experienced by Spelman College reiterates the powerful impact that institutional climate can have on the African American college completion rate.

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Additionally, there were similar impressive graduation rates for Black students at other nationally ranked PWIs. For example, between 1998 and 2002, the University of Pennsylvania, Rice University, and Columbia University each witnessed improvements in its Black student graduation rate by at least 10 percentage points ("The Nation's Colleges," 2003). Over the past nine years Vanderbilt University has watched its Black graduation rate jump from 69 percent to 81 percent. Interestingly, because of the small number of African American students, these percentages must be considered in a specific and limited context because critics would argue that these institutions would restrict their admissions to the "best and brightest." Therefore, it should not be surprising that "any" student, who is admitted to this type of institution, would achieve academic success and timely college completion.

Although HBCUs have always been viewed as a "safe haven" that fostered cultivation for African American students, some HBCUs lag behind in terms of college completion rates. Ironically, in comparison to some PWIs, the HBCU is not experiencing higher graduation percentages of these students (The nation's colleges, 2003).

Black Collegians and PWIs

Research supports that some African American students who elected to attend PWIs described their experiences as both undesirable and objectionable. Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) concluded that African American undergraduates consistently reported more racial-ethnic conflict at PWIs, pressure to conform to stereotypes, and less equitable treatment by faculty, staff, teaching assistants, and campus police. These students also reported less satisfaction with the institution and claimed that faculty members were more critical of their academic performance in comparison to their White peers.

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The elimination of the race-based directives could lead many to believe that the system of higher education has become "color blind." However, many African American students who attend PWIs still make claims of racism and disenfranchisement in their interactions with other students, faculty, and administrators. For more than 30 years, the socialization and academic difficulties experienced by African American students at PWIs have been documented in numerous studies (e.g., Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Nettles, 1988). According to Allen-Castellitto and Maillard (2001), PWIs enroll 80 percent of Black undergraduates and despite the fact that these students attend in great numbers; the African American student faces great challenges in both academic and social pursuits at PWIs. African American students do not always feel included in the traditional White college community and feel alienated. As a result, a disproportionate number of Black collegians lag behind their White counterparts, in academic success, persistence, and enrollment in graduate studies, and attrition rates can be quite high (Allen, 1992; Astin, 1975, 1982; Blackwell, 1987; Fleming, 1984; Griffin, 1992; Lomotey, 1990; Tinto, 1993, 1987).

The campus climate reflected at a PWI often perpetuates the notion that all who enter must adjust. Those who resist this change are typically viewed as noncompliant or uncooperative (Ibarra, 2001). African American students may also feel alienated because of the limited interracial interactions between their peers and faculty (Braxton, 2000). Eventually those who feel isolated may drop out.

The culture of the classroom on a traditional White college/university requires the student to make accommodations in order to survive academically. For example, the teaching styles utilized in many White university classrooms consist of lecture and

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question-answer techniques that are divergent to African Americans' dominant learning styles of cooperation and extensive interaction (Delpit, 1996; Hale-Benson, 1986). Anderson (2001) argues that most of the teaching that goes on in higher education is oriented toward learners who tend to be critical thinkers, comfortable with learning material in relatively abstract terms, and at ease with separating concepts from their own life experiences. As a result, Anderson concludes students who tend to be more relationally oriented, such as many African Americans, often feel excluded. As a result of this mismatch in teaching and learning styles, African Americans may develop animosity and become less interested in college completion (Delpit, 1996; Hale-Benson, 1986).

The disparity in educational outcomes between White college students and their African American counterparts has been labeled the African American achievement gap. Rovai, Gallien, and Wighting (2005) examined the under performance of African American students and the conditions that exist at PWIs. Specifically, Rovai et al. presented the major factors correlated with the achievement gap: the transmission of knowledge by schools in cultural codes, mismatches between teaching styles and African American learning style preferences, weak institutional support for minority students, a fragile racial climate on predominantly White campuses, racial stereotyping, peer influences, low expectations, and weak study habits (p.367). Efforts to close the academic achievement gap between minority and Caucasian students have been largely unsuccessful and that differences in educational performance persist at all achievement levels, with the largest gap between students of color, and their White and Asian American peers (Schwartz, 2000). Researchers (Boykin, 1983; Hale-Benson, 1986; Ogbu, 1995) argue that pedagogical approaches must reflect differences that exist in

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Black and White cultures. If the faculty at PWIs do not incorporate culturally responsive pedagogies, Black collegians may experience stress and find no educative value in the coursework. According to Hale-Benson (1986), students must find relevance in their education. African Americans seek education that reflects their cultural background, which reflects cooperation, collaboration, and cultural relevancy.

Although some believed the movement of many African Americans into PWIs indicated a strong blow against segregation and discrimination Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen (1999) report diversity does not always lead to positive interracial interactions. In particular, Davids (2002) writes that students, faculty, and staff have prejudices toward certain groups even though they have learned to restrain these prejudices. In times of stress, inhibitions are reduced and prejudices may be manifested and negatively influence educational outcomes of minority students.

By and large, if faculty at PWIs want to retain and promote success for Black collegians, they must develop a new understanding of the obstacles encountered by these students in postsecondary environments. Accordingly, both faculty and educational administrators must commit themselves to reaching out to all students using a variety of educational practices that can mitigate challenges and promote academic excellence (Rovai, et al., 2005). These practices help avoid mismatches between teaching styles and African American learning style preferences, weak institutional support for minority students, a fragile racial climate at PWIs, racial stereotyping, and low faculty expectations. Alternatively, Ibarra (2001) supports designing learning communities for various groups of students, using learning communities as sites for curriculum transformation, and developing pedagogical practices that heighten the comprehension of

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To conclude this section on institutional and organizational factors, it is important to accentuate that racial prejudice and marginalization are not "relics of history," but are a daily reality encountered by some African Americans and other people of color. Bollinger (2007) offers four reasons for universities to seek and maintain the "racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically" diversification of their student bodies:

1. Universities need to understand that to remain competitive, their most important obligation is to determine and then deliver-what future graduates will need to know about their world and how to gain that knowledge. The emerging global reality calls for new specialists who can synthesize a diversity of field and draw quick connections among them.

2. The experience of arriving on a campus to live and study with classmates from a diverse range of backgrounds is essential to students' training for this new world, nurturing them in an instinct to reach out instead of clinging to the comforts of what seems natural or familiar. It has been proven that connecting with people very-or even slightly-different from ourselves stimulates the imagination; and when we learn to see the world through a multiplicity of eyes, we only make ourselves more nimble in mastering-and integrating-the diverse fields of knowledge waiting for us.

3. Affirmative-Action Programs help achieve that larger goal. And the universities that create and carry them out do so not only because overcoming longstanding obstacles to people of color and women in higher education is the right thing to do, but also because policies that encourage a comprehensive diversity help universities achieve their mission.

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4. At the same time, such policies foster a greater spirit of community on campuses as well as between universities and the cities and towns they call home (pp. 1-3).

Summary of Literature Review/Rationale for Study

Overall the most compelling topics found in this literature were: (a) retention; (b) federal educational policies and Black collegians; (c) contributing factors of Black student success; (d) institutional/organizational factors; and (e) practices used by faculty and academic administrators to enhance African American student performance. Today the enrollment of African American college students has never been higher and these students can be found on the college campuses of many HBCUs and PWIs. This demonstrates that these students have made significant progress and our nation's colleges and universities have eliminated some discriminatory practices. However, despite these significant gains, African American students are experiencing academic success at a small number of institutions. Attrition rates for these students remain high and, in comparison to White students, they lag behind in college completion. Although existing literature has addressed the African American collegian's academic deficits (e.g., Astin, 1982; Astin, Tsui, & Avolos, 1996; Monastersky, 2006; Tinto, 1993), socio-economic challenges (e.g.Hebel, 2007;Thomas, 1981), and dropout rates (e.g., Hutto & Fenwick, 2002), the literature has not examined those integral factors that propel Black collegians to success at highly selective flagship state institutions, though factors affecting success in general of African American students are documented. Thus, this explorative study looked to uncover new ideas for African American students and address a gap in the literature base.

In the next chapter, I present the methodology that was utilized to address my research questions. My data analysis will also be discussed.

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CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The African American college student is in a precarious position. The college enrollment rate of these students has never been higher, ironically the college completion rate for this student remains below both the national graduation rate of all students and the rate of their White counterparts. This disparity in achievement is highly significant in light of the elimination of race-based admissions. If those in Higher Education do not become more responsive to the needs of African American students, this may lead to both the wasted potential and the wasted contributions of Black collegians. Additionally, an underprepared workforce will place an additional burden on the U.S. Economy. Thus the focus of this exploratory study was on the identification of those pedagogical strategies, administrative practices, and student affairs tactics that seem to contribute to the high performance of African American college students. As a result, the nature of this study is consistent with the Qualitative Paradigm, which supports the notion that multiple realities are socially constructed by individuals, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world "(Merriam, 1998, p. 6). All qualitative research is based on the philosophical supposition that truth is created by individuals working together with their social worlds. In addition to findings that are richly descriptive, there are four characteristics associated with qualitative research: (a) In order to understand the phenomenon, the *emic* or insider's perspective must be relied on as opposed to the *etic* or outsider's perspective; (b) the data collection and analysis will be solely conducted by the researcher; (c) the researcher must physically go out into the

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field to interview and observe behavior in its usual setting; and (d) the inductive research strategy is primarily utilized in qualitative research (1998, p. 7). Additionally, this research is characterized by highly interpretive methods that facilitate the researcher's understanding of the subjects' life histories. These methods include: interviews, case studies, photographs, introspection and any personalized artifacts that reveal the character of the subject. This research type is in direct contrast to quantitative research, "Quantitative researchers use mathematical models, statistical tables, and graphs, and usually write about their research in impersonal, third-person prose" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 17). It is my hypothesis that qualitative researchers have both an intimate relationship and a greater rapport with their subject. As a result, there is an increased level of investigation and, ultimately, an increased level of knowledge that researchers may apply to address the needs of their subjects. Qualitative research, ". . . is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 4).

Purposeful sampling, a form of nonprobabilistic sampling, was utilized in this qualitative study. This sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Patton stated that the "logic and power" of this sampling strategy is heavily dependent on the selection and exhaustive consideration of "information-rich" cases. As a result, the researcher can learn a great deal about those critical issues related to the research question. My research questions are: What are the critical factors that faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrators report their institutions are doing to contribute to success among African

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American students? And, what are the similarities and differences between the critical factors that contribute to the success of the Black collegian at two selective postsecondary institutions?

This exploratory study was based on the inductive research strategy and it examined those critical factors associated with increasing the quality of the academic experience for the Black collegian. Additionally, this investigation considered how these crucial aspects may be replicated at similar postsecondary institutions. The research design for this inquiry was the multisite case study, which ". . . involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). According to Creswell (2003), the case study allows the researcher to critically examine an individual, a process, an activity, a program, or an event utilizing various data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. Stake (1995) asserts that the case study allows the researcher to conduct an assessment of individuals, processes, and events. Although the cases are bounded by a defined period of time, the researcher is offered an opportunity to collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures. As a narration, based on the Constructivist Paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), the case study facilitated a heightened level of knowledge of how factors affecting the academic performance and college completion rates for Black students at two institutions because the Constructivist Theory reflects " . . .trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, confirmability" (2003, p.34). Thus, I believe the results from my multisite case study will prove to be highly useful to other institutions that are similar in terms of institutional classification, admissions selectivity, location, and overall student experience.

Site Selection

Based on data from *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, *U.S. News and World Report,* and the National Collegiate Athletic Association those national flagship state universities identified as "most selective" were revealed.

The Sample

This explorative study focused on flagship state universities. A selection of two organizations for inclusion in this study was based on the publication *U. S. News and World Report.* The focal point of this study was identifying the critical factors that seemed to contribute to the high performance of African American college students. The selection of the institutions was based on: (a) a compiled list of those flagship state universities that have been identified as "most selective" and that have demonstrated success with the African American collegian and (b) the selection of an institution with a high African American graduation rate and an institution with a low African American graduation rate Additionally, I wanted to examine the institutional similarities and differences in the factors used to achieve increased success for African American college students.

In an effort to maintain the confidentiality of each institution, the names of each university, study participants, institutional programs, and academic departments were changed to pseudonyms. Additionally in this study, Southern University was identified as the flagship university with the highest African American graduation rate and Midwestern University was identified as the flagship university with the lowest Black graduation rate.

Data Collection

As a qualitative researcher, I wanted to learn more about the shared meanings that exist among the faculty, academic administrators and student affairs personnel in their efforts to facilitate the academic success and college completion of African American students. To achieve this goal, I used a semi-structured interview format that was more open ended and less structured (Merriam, 1998), "In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. . . This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 74).

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the data collection process also included gathering artifacts from each site, such as institutional literature, course outlines and minutes from meetings. Patton (1990) emphasizes, "Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective. . . By using a combination. . . the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings" (p. 244). It is also imperative to note that as I collected the data, I also analyzed it. In qualitative research, this practice is not an option; rather it is highly recommended. Specifically, I conducted person-to-person interviews with university administrators, student affairs professionals and faculty members to gather their perspectives on specific strategies, policies, and institutional initiatives that are employed to specifically heighten the academic success and graduation rate of African American students. These categories of subjects were selected because I

presumed people in these roles might provide the most pertinent and useful information on this topic that cuts across institutional levels.

In terms of gaining entry to secure permission for my study, initially I contacted a university representative in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at each institution. During this time, I was required to submit documentation from the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board Office to document my permission to carry out the study. Once my documentation was received by each institution's IRB Office, I was asked several questions regarding the study and later I received institutional approval to conduct my data collection at each site.

Subsequently at Midwestern University, I contacted a member of the central administration, based on his title and listed responsibilities listed on the university web site. He sent me a list of prospective faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals who might be willing to participate in the study. At Southern University, I contacted a representative in the Office of Black Studies who sent me a list of prospective faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals. Next I contacted each site's prospective participants and included a letter that explained the study. Once each participant verified his/her consent for participation, I sent an additional letter that confirmed the onsite interview date and location. On the day of the interview, I provided the consent form that outlined the interview process and explained how the information would be used.

Overall, I interviewed 17 people: eight at Midwestern University and nine at Southern University. I focused more on facilitating the interviewees' ability to reveal their own history with the challenges facing the African American student. During the

audio tape recorded interview, participants were asked about their role, experiences, and insights relative to the African American collegian. This procedure was facilitated by my utilization of an interview guide, also known as an interview protocol (see Appendix C). Additionally, I included probes as a part of my interview process facilitating my capacity for understanding and providing the opportunity for respondents to provide additional information or clarification on specific subject matter, "You sense that the respondent is on to something significant or that there is more to be learned. Probing can come in the form of asking for more details, for clarification, for examples" (Merriam, 1998, p. 80).

During the site visits, artifacts were gathered such as programming brochures, minutes from administrative meetings held with the university president and various members of the campus community, memoranda from the university president requesting the review of the organization's diversity protocols, course outlines, institutional literature, and anything related to student outcomes. The use of artifacts assisted me in understanding the culture of each institution and in determining and studying the participants' setting.

Data Analysis Procedures

A qualitative design is emergent. Thus "qualitative research is not a linear, step-by-step process. Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). The analysis began with the first interview and the first artifact that was gathered. As a result, the emergence of insights and tentative impressions were used to guide the next stage in the data collection process. The validity and reliability of qualitative research is found in the ". . . researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between the researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the

interpretation of perceptions and rich, thick description" (p. 151). At the outset, I decided to utilize "within-case analysis." Here the researcher considers each institution separately first, "Each instance is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. Data are gathered so the researcher can learn as much about the contextual variables as possible that might have a bearing on the case" (Merriam, 1998, p. 194). Next, I applied "cross-case analysis" to facilitate my attempt ". . . to see processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.172).

After deciding how the two stages of analysis would be approached, I transcribed verbatim 17 recorded interviews, eight from Midwestern University and nine from Southern University. Each transcript was read twice. The first reading was done to gain a superficial level of knowledge of the respondents' comments. The second reading facilitated a deeper familiarity with the information and prepared me for discourse regarding the data. As I reviewed the transcripts, I searched for any constructs that seemed to serve as contributors to the academic achievement and graduation of Black collegians. In some cases, respondents specifically identified resources or actual directives that encouraged achievement for this student population. In other cases, individuals described the action that should take place to promote the academic success for this student. During this time, I started to develop a preliminary set of broad themes that emerged in the text.

In an attempt to corroborate the trends that appeared in the transcripts, I simultaneously reviewed the artifacts gathered during the data collection process, "in

judging the value of a data source, a researcher can ask whether it contains information or insights relevant to the research question and whether it can be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner. If these two questions can be answered in the affirmative, there is no reason not to use a particular source of data" Merriam, 1998, p. 124). In addition to validating the emerging trends, the artifacts also served to substantiate both the respondents' and the institution's overall commitment to the accomplishment of African American students. The emerging trends were reflected in the artifacts and translated into the development of the "critical factors" that answered my research question. As Merriam suggests, ". . . the challenge is to construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern. . . These categories or themes are concepts indicated by the data" (1998, p. 179).

The themes that initially appeared in the transcripts and the artifacts were identified as those "critical factors" that positively impacted the college completion of African American collegians at two selective research universities. Those factors were: (a) Faculty Initiatives, (b) Institutional Expectations, (c) Institutional-Unit Response, (d) Presidential Priorities, (e) Retention/Support Programs, (f) Special Purpose Offices, (g) Student Affairs, and (h) Valuing Diversity through Collaboration. Merriam offered several strategies to ensure the effectiveness of the categories: (a) categories should reflect the purpose of the research, (b) categories should be exhaustive, (c) categories should be mutually exclusive, (d) categories should be sensitizing, and (e) categories should be conceptually congruent" (p. 184). Then, I developed definitions for each factor to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the analysis process.

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Next, examining each institution separately, the Midwestern University transcript was carefully scrutinized for a third time. Both individuals and their comments, which were reflective of the research question, were placed into categories. During this stage, eight categories emerged from the data. Under each category, a record was compiled that explicitly listed the individuals and their category-specific responses. Once the list was assembled, I summarized each individual quote and then used this information to generate an overall lesson or descriptive statement that reflected the reactions, provided by each respondent, for each category. This information also provided insight into how the category was illustrated and depicted at the institution. This information was reviewed for accuracy and this same process was repeated for Southern University.

Next I developed a description of each institution "The most basic presentation of a study's findings is a descriptive account; even that description requires thinking through what will be included and what will be left out from the hundreds of pages of data collected for the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). In each depiction, I provided an illustration that reflected the cultural knowledge and organizational expectations for those who exist within each environment.

To ensure validity, clarification of researcher bias and peer examination were utilized by the researcher. It is important to note that the constructivist – interpretive paradigm of research guided my research methods in this study. Thus, a definition is presented: Constructivism, is defined as ". . . human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience . . . We do not construct our interpretations in

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isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 p. 305). As a researcher who subscribes to the tenets of this paradigm, I valued and relied on my subjects' ability to re-enact their experiences and understandings of occurrences. I also believe this paradigm guided my ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions throughout my study. In this perspective, the nature of reality was based on multiple realities. Therefore, the subjects' personality, experiences, and life history all contributed to the reality or context for their experiences.

In terms of the epistemology or the relationship between me and the known, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm required that I worked collaboratively with the subject and negotiated understanding. According to Outhwaite (1975), interpretivist epistemologies are depicted as hermeneutic because they emphasize that researchers must comprehend the circumstances in which their subjects draw conclusions in order to say one has an understanding of the particular action. The hermeneutic view is based on the notion that in order for researchers to understand the comment or act, echoed by the subject, they must understand the entire context. The researcher who engages the constructivist-interpretivist perspective gathers knowledge in a naturalistic setting. Specifically, I drew on hermeneutic and dialectical practices to gather knowledge of my informants. And, the constructivist's influence on the methodological assumptions highlighted the utilization of dialectical methods to gain the data on the subject matter. Dialectical collection methods are those that incorporate discussion and reasoning through dialogue to investigate and gather information.

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Role of Researcher

I am an African American woman who has worked as a postsecondary educator for 13 years, and has taught at both HBCUs and PWIs. As a result, I have a significant amount of experience teaching a diverse group of students in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability level. Additionally, both my undergraduate and graduate degrees were attained at two large, research universities. As a result of these experiences, I have developed interpretations and biases that have shaped my views of the concept of higher education. To assist my analysis, I utilized two peer debriefers in my study. I wanted to ensure that my history as a student and as an educator did not adversely impact my research.

In addition to working as a postsecondary educator, I have also worked as a professional journalist. As a result, I am highly aware of the differences between leading and open-ended questions. Thus my professional experience around the employed data gathering techniques greatly facilitated my capacity to listen for the respondents' constructions of understanding around those issues related to African American college completion. My background also assisted me in my ability to appropriately consider the institutional contexts of those understandings.

In terms of addressing my biases, overall, I do believe that postsecondary institutions should be doing more to assist the African American collegian with college completion. Although I am very aware of how the political, budgetary and societal constraints can impede this process, I believe that every academic institution should conduct an institutional review that examines its diversity protocols. This institutional review would serve as a fervent attempt to ensure that all students have a solid foundation

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of both resources and support to achieve academic success and graduation. As some know, many of the support mechanisms that were created to help African American students are rooted in helping all students.

As a researcher, I was quite humbled by my respondents' contributions. These 17 individuals not only contributed their time and knowledge; they shared their passion and dedication for the success of African American students. Thus, as a researcher, I felt a greater need to be highly responsible and fair in handling this data.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Pilot Study

In an attempt to heighten the effectiveness and validity of the study, I conducted a pilot study, which is "crucial for trying out your questions. Not only do you get some practice in interviewing, you also quickly learn which questions are confusing and need rewording, which questions yield useless data, and which questions, suggested by your respondents, you should have thought to include in the first place" (Merriam, 1998, p. 76). This pilot study provided an opportunity to ensure that the interview questions were worded in a manner that promoted clarity and an effective response. The pilot was conducted at Michigan State University with three individuals representing the administrative, student affairs and faculty segments of the institution. As a result of the pilot, I modified my list of questions and received positive affirmation regarding the overall focus and wording of my questions.

Peer Debriefer

To ensure that the researcher is cognizant of personal biases, misinterpretations or elements of incoherence, I used two peer debriefers. Although both individuals shared a

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similar educational background with me, both debriefers were White males who were mid-career professionals. In some areas, both debriefers offered responses that were similar to mine. In other cases, their interpretations were different. As a qualitative researcher, this distinction caused me to consider the role of both my educational and professional history and how each might have impacted the interaction between me and the participants. And, ultimately I reflected on how my history may have impacted my review and interpretation of the data. This purposeful selection of the two debriefers was employed to ensure the reader's overall understanding and clarification of the information. Although I was very familiar with this information, I wanted to make certain that those from varied backgrounds also understood this information.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

By definition, the qualitative tradition is obtrusive because of the methods of inquiry. Therefore, it is imperative that I respect the rights, needs and values of the participants. Given my subject matter, I did not use language that was biased against individuals because of age, disability, race or ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Also I ensured that my findings were not suppressed or falsified in any way because this behavior is not consistent with those practices used in professional research communities. In planning my study, I was cognizant that the results would not be misused to place any group in a position of advantage or disadvantage. And, it is important to note that the details of my research design were provided to facilitate readers as they determine the credibility of my study. I also incorporated Creswell's four safeguards to heighten the qualitative process: (a) the research objectives were clearly expressed in both verbal and written forms, (b) the participants provided written permission to conduct the study, (c)

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the researcher closely adhered to all policies required by the institutional review board, and (d) the participants were informed of all data collection strategies (2003).

Trustworthiness

This concept focuses on how the research findings reflect reality. In essence, are the findings corresponding with what is really there? This question is based on how I, as the researcher, define reality. As a qualitative researcher, I believe that reality is constructed utilizing my subject's understanding of the world. Thus Merriam (1998) stressed that, ". . .when reality is viewed in this manner, trustworthiness is a definite strength of qualitative research. In this type of research it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (1998, p. 203). To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I utilized triangulation, peer examination, and researcher's biases.

The first strategy that was utilized to enhance the trustworthiness of this study was triangulation. This strategy implemented multiple and varied sources of information. Additionally, the data collection emphasized both the semi-structured interviews and the artifacts that were gathered at each institution.

The second strategy was peer examination. This tactic was conducted by two colleagues, both of whom did not share my race or gender. Thus both peer reviewers were White males. This examination served to scrutinize and clarify my thinking process in preparation for both the assessment and feedback that may be offered from others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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The third strategy that was used to heighten the study's trustworthiness was the acknowledgement of my biases as a researcher. In the section entitled, Role of Researcher, I presented my background, identified my biases and offered my views on the institutional sample (Merriam, 1998, p. 204 -205). As previously stated, my biases have been shaped by my educational background, professional experiences and my observations as an African American woman.

Transferability

This notion is based on the degree that my study's findings can be applied to other contexts, meaning can the results be generalized to other settings? According to Patton (1990), ". . .qualitative research should provide perspective rather than truth, empirical assessment of local decision makers' theories of action rather than generation and verification of universal theories, and context-bound extrapolations rather than generalizations" (p. 491). Overall, the qualitative researcher must consistently and effectively use ethics in every phase of the research process. Merriam (1998) captures this notion best with, "The best a researcher can do is to be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and to examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-à-vis these issues" (p. 219).

In this study, transferability was aided by my efforts to record and examine my decisions to use purposeful sampling. This sampling type offered critical information about my study's context because this sampling strategy heavily relied on information-rich cases. In turn, I was able to gain a greater amount of information, resulting in an increased knowledge base to answer my research questions.

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Limitations

The limitations found in this study were a direct result of the type of study, the research design, and the variability of organizational cultures and the occupations of the respondents. Due to this study's reliance on only two institutional samples, there are inherent limitations in this study. As a result, only those institutions that are similar to both Midwestern University and Southern University may experience success in replicating those critical factors revealed by the participants. In this qualitative explorative study, my role took on increased importance because of the interpretive methods employed. Additionally, the results of the interviews were contingent on the level of rapport established between me and the respondents. There was also a potential that the participants might have been unwilling to divulge information. Thus, as the researcher I had no control over this facet of the interview.

As previously stated, the multisite case study was the research design for this inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted that case studies can oversimplify a situation and erroneously lead a reader to believe that the researcher has addressed a "whole" when, in fact, he/she has only addressed a "part-a slice of life." Also, it is important to acknowledge the role and impact of institutional variability. Hence, each institution had a specific culture and a specific method of addressing challenges that may affect the decision to adopt new supportive practices. As the researcher, I viewed this organizational characteristic as a significant indicator of the institution's commitment to the increased graduation rates of African American students

Although the participants were found in three professional areas: administrators, student affairs and faculty, some individuals held previous positions or current dual

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positions that allowed them to speak from more than one vantage point. Thus this served as a delimiter on the study and the data was enhanced because some of the participants could extend their views beyond one role.

Editorial Comments

As a qualitative researcher, I have gone to great lengths to balance the reader's needs for certainty and lucidity with the respondents' needs for anonymity. Thus, I have elected to present this study's results in a very coherent manner that is consistent with the identification and substantiation of those eight critical factors that were reported by institutional administrators, faculty and student affairs professionals. The factors were labeled as critical because of their positive impact on the academic success of Black collegians attending either Midwestern University or Southern University. As previously stated, all names of participants, organizations and institutional references have been changed to protect the obscurity of the participants. The participants' quotes have been presented exactly as they were stated. This decision was made to protect the authenticity of the data and to share the vibrancy of the respondents' accounts. For clarification purposes, I added information in brackets to aid the readers' understanding. In this study, improved retention percentages and heightened graduation rates will be used interchangeably with the terms success and academic achievement.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The information provided in this chapter will include: (a) a description of each university, (b) a brief explanation of each critical factor and an illustration of each institution's relationship with each critical factor, (c) an institutional comparison, (d) the institutional points of similarity, (e) the institutional points of distinction and (f) the unanticipated responses.

Midwestern University

Described by members of its own community as tough, highly competitive and one that has a student population that likes to flaunt its wealth, Midwestern University has an enrollment of more than 35,000 students. Despite the fact that this public institution has a checkered history of exclusion and segregation, all of the students who are admitted are viewed as highly prepared and fully capable of excelling and graduating from the institution. The organization's decentralized culture fosters opportunities for students to make the university work for them. As a result, those students who are aggressive and entrepreneurial are rewarded through increased opportunities for development. Although the institution has an African American enrollment of more than 2200 students, these students were reported to feel disconnected from both Midwestern's community and that of the larger Black collegiate community. Additionally, even though the overall graduation rate for Midwestern University is 86.9 percent, the graduation rate for Black students is 67 percent.

In terms of organizational expectations, Midwestern's leadership has a long history of dealing directly with student issues and of consistently emphasizing, promoting

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and holding personnel accountable for implementing "difference" in all facets of the university. This same sentiment has been supported by some of the faculty. As a resource-rich place, those at Midwestern University believe it is very important for its students to find a "home" on campus, hence many resources are provided to both its students and their organizational programming efforts. The institution conducts many campus research projects that aid and infuse those services offered to students. Due to the abundance of resources, each school and college has some type of support that includes attractive scholarships and funding for student organizations.

The Office of Multiethnic Studies (OMS) is Midwestern's Special Purpose Office. The goal of the OMS is to offer a variety of opportunities to enhance the learning experiences of the students for the express intent of building community among the students, building community between the students and their teachers, and building community among the faculty members and their disciplines. To achieve this goal, OMS assembles a student cohort who participates in a small college setting by enrolling in courses offered by OMS faculty. During this time students are provided with course instruction throughout the academic year, academic support, academic advising, peer mentors, and tutoring opportunities. Given all of these activities and the closeness that is established, the OMS appears to operate as a learning community. In addition, OMS includes an integrative seminar, which is called the Summer Transition Program. This Program offers intensive academic training, personalized academic advising and individualized attention from faculty in a nurturing environment. The students enrolled in the Summer Transition Program typically take an English course, a mathematics course, and a freshman colloquium. These courses are credit-bearing, academically challenging

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and become part of the student's official university transcript. The Summer Transition Program gives students the opportunity to strengthen their academic skills, construct a peer support network and to familiarize themselves with Midwestern University and its resources. The OMS works closely with various academic units throughout the institution. Although the services offered by this learning community are primarily utilized by African American students, the Office provides a wide-ranging support system for the entire student population that includes tutoring, peer advising, educational support, course instruction throughout the school year and a summer acclimation program.

Midwestern University has placed several African Americans in influential positions, such as faculty and administrators, within the organization. Also some academic units have employed a race and ethnicity requirement for their majors. Additionally, this University is a highly collaborative organization. There are many collaborations found between some academic departments and university alumni to improve the performance of future graduates. Other partnerships have included current African American students and off-campus entities and alliances between African American faculty and other on-campus units.

Following is a brief explanation and an institutional illustration of each critical factor. As previously said, these factors were identified as critical because of their positive affect on the academic achievement of Black collegians at both Midwestern University and Southern University. Although the factors are presented as distinct constructs, it is important to note that the factors have to be enacted together in a more comprehensive manner in order to effectively support the achievement of Black

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collegians. Participants at Midwest University recommend that institutions implement as many of the factors as possible to create the strongest environment for students' academic success. Both the critical factors and the institutional representations have been presented in an order that reflects the dominance and emphasis that was expressed by the Midwestern participants.

Institutional-Unit Response

Midwestern University supports the academic success of Black collegians at many institutional levels. As a critical factor, Institutional-Unit Response was the most noted among the participants and was revealed in four forms: (a) developing committees to monitor diversity programming, (b) implementing academic stipulations and warning systems, (c) placing African Americans in influential positions, and (d) encouraging non-Black personnel to commit to enabling the success of Black collegians. In an attempt to respond to the needs of minority students, the College of Engineering developed a Diversity and Outreach Council. Damon explains his unit's reasoning for this initiative:

> . . . what we have is a diversity and outreach council that's made up of faculty, staff and students who are evaluating our diversity programs and coming up with ideas for new ones. It was clear that we needed to address this in a really formal way. So we formed a combined committee between Literacy, Science and the Arts College, the STEM fields there and the School of Engineering. And the people on the committee were made up of faculty and staff who were concerned with success rates at the university. Overall, but students of color are a significant part of that. And they had, over the winter, to look at what other people were doing and sort of to glean the best practices from different places and recommend something. Damon

Damon expressed dissatisfaction with his unit's reaction to the challenges faced by both women and other minorities. Thus, in an attempt to improve his college's

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response to the needs of these two groups, Damon discusses his college's plan for an evaluation of their diversity programming and their plans to pilot a new program:

> Diversity is all over the college. We looked at where we were a couple of years ago and we saw some trends that were not what we wanted to see in the females in engineering. Nationally, there was a slight decrease of a few percentage points. And in the minorities, there was a considerable decrease; we were almost at half of where we were before. So we said well if we continue to do the same things we're doing, we can't expect a different outcome and so in any organization, the first thing you do is reorganize. . .So anyway, we have this recommendation now and we'll be taking it to the deans. Right now we're trying to price, get a cost estimate for a prototype program for this fall with the idea of rolling out a full program, if everybody agrees for the fall of 2008. So we're not satisfied with how well we're doing even if we're doing better than average. We hope to be doing even a lot better in a couple of years. Damon

Elonzo describes how the College of Education has responded to the needs of minority students. The College has attempted to improve and enhance the overall academic experience for the minority student by developing a Social Justice Agency. This commission directly deals with issues of inequity, conducts workshops, does programming and tries to sensitize the university community on issues of social justice:

> We have created, over the last several years, what we call our Board of Social Justice. That's a committee to deal with issues directly. But we also try to bring people in, have workshops in the schools, give presentations for people to sensitize all of our students, faculty, and staff about issues of social justice because it doesn't really matter whether you're a secretary or a professor, you contribute to the environment that the students come into. Elonzo

Although a significant part of the mission of the Office of Multiethnic Studies is to create a supportive environment for the minority collegian, the OMS introduces a second type of institutional tactic that can be used to address Black collegians and their achievement gap. As a senior leader in OMS, James discusses two of his office's features: the early warning system and the electronic midterm estimate. Both enable

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students to avoid dismissal and have significantly impacted the success of African American students:

> I think that it's [early warning system] really unique and different and a working model. . . In this college, if you get a GPA below a 2.0, you're going to get a letter that says you're on academic probation. If that happens, a second semester, you're going to get a "NTR letter," not to return. Our office has student progress reports... And we now have an online midterm estimate and that lets our advisors know whether or not this student is in jeopardy of failing the class. So . . . I believe our expectations are high. James

Midwestern University departments seem to exercise autonomy over those practices that support diversity. To demonstrate the institutional awareness and the priority of this concept, Damon explains how one of the university's academic units requires its students to take courses that will raise their awareness and sensitivity to diversity issues:

> Also Composition, Fine Arts and Science has a race and ethnicity requirement. I think it's three or four credits and they provide a set of courses, I think 12 or so, and a student can take any one of them, but the intent of any of the courses is to raise the awareness and sensitivity to diversity issues. Damon

Placing African American professionals in influential position is another strategy that Midwestern University has utilized to address the needs of African American students. Senior Research Associate Marilyn addresses this tactic:

> Uhm, Johnathon Winters, an African American, over at the Society for Social Examination, would be another important face. And I say that, he's leading one of the major social science institutes in the world. And, just by his presence challenges people's thoughts of what kind of person would be leading that effort . . . Also we have a pretty good number of African American administrators in high places. I think that's a very positive thing. Marilyn

Damon expands on Marilyn's point by accentuating the need to have African American role models. Damon noted the importance of minority students seeing people

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who look like themselves in the faculty and that each group identifies with its own minority group, in terms of role models:

> The Black faculty, it's very important. I think each minority group identifies with their own minority faculty. When there's a diverse faculty, that's an advantage so you look out and you see Hispanics, you see Native Americans, and you see women, you get the idea that all of these can achieve, but I think you get the strongest idea when you see someone who looks like yourself. Damon

Elonzo elaborates on the notion of placing African Americans in key positions, but offers different reasoning for this measure. According to Elonzo, the College must closely monitor the number of African American faculty. Low percentages of African American faculty are conversely related to the satisfaction of African American students. Elonzo shares this as another example of how his college facilitates the success of minority students:

> In this environment, what I've found is if you increase the number of minority faculty, it improves the quality of support not only from the African American faculty, but it helps with the non –African American faculty. As that number goes down, we get more complaints about what the instructor said. Elonzo

The final category of Institutional-Unit Response is presented as Lonnie emphasizes the need for a collective effort to assist Black collegians. He discusses how the facilitation of success for this student populace is not only relegated to African American or minority university personnel, but rather those from other races should take an interest in this student populace as well:

> . . .But we have a great many people here: some of them work in our office. . . and, again, the people in the offices are not necessarily Black or minority, but they may have an interest and a commitment to the students' success or they may simply have a commitment to that broader thing I talked about: society and the future. They have a vision of what our society should be like and they want to make sure that they have done their part to make it so. Lonnie

As a White administrator and faculty member, Damon offers an open invitation to fund faculty enrichment or faculty development opportunities. This includes support to bring in women or other minorities from the engineering field. This gives minority students the chance to see people, like themselves, in leadership roles, and promotes achievement for the minority student:

> And also, part of my office's responsibility is called faculty enrichment or faculty development. I have standing offers to every one of the departments. If they want to bring in females or minority leaders, in their disciplines around the country, I'll pay for it. So that this provides an experience where students can see someone, minority students, can see someone like themselves who has done very well and are clearly respected leaders and the majority population can see minorities in a leadership role, so that they understand that that's a normal situation, so we do that. Damon

As a final thought, Marilyn acknowledges those Midwestern units that have created initiatives to facilitate the achievement of the Black collegian. However, she notes that the African American achievement gap still persists, even at her institution. Thus she questions this discrepancy and believes her university should do more to address this issue:

> . . . but we have to figure out our way through these challenges. We have a gap in graduation rates. And, as far as I'm concerned, that's not achievement, specifically to African American students. Most of our other groups of students are graduating at a much higher rate. Why are African Americans left trailing? That's something we need to grapple with. Marilyn

At Midwestern University, Institutional-Unit Response is defined by initiatives at various institutional levels. These reactions include those committees, academic stipulations, hiring decisions, and commitments from non-Black staff to close the African American achievement gap. Additionally these responses serve to enhance the overall

experience for either the minority student community or the African American student community in particular.

Institutional Expectations

Institutional Expectations was the second most- noted factor. Participants spoke of both implicit and explicit expectations for those at Midwestern University. The responses in this section focus on three areas: (a) expectations for the entire university community, (b) expectations for university personnel, and (c) expectations for students. However there was great emphasis placed on the university employee's role. Specifically, the participants revealed that university employees view their environment as very student-focused, that university employees are committed to creating a supportive environment, that university employees are committed to helping students resolve problems that may arise, and that university employees are committed to training their own personnel to sensitize them to the various cultures found within the university community. Additionally the study's participants stressed that Midwestern students are expected to assist other students. Robert describes Midwestern's culture and expectations for those within its community:

> Well I think the cultures of Midwestern University; it's a strong commitment to diversity is one. It's strong commitment to student leadership development, leadership period. It's a culture of activism. . . I think this whole thing of activism, commitment to engagement, whether it's community service, whether it's protesting is probably the primary part of institutional culture. Also the commitment to academic excellence, those reflect the culture. . . It's our job as an institution, to produce outstanding leaders. Robert

Lonnie extends Robert's description of the institutional culture by accentuating the concept of collaboration and how this notion can positively impact Midwestern's culture. Lonnie notes how this notion can both empower those within the university

community and increase the intellectual discourse among those in this institutional populace:

> One of the things we're constantly saying to people in the academy is that knowledge precedes by working together, by interacting with your colleagues, by sharing your thoughts, be being collegial. And so if you don't feel like you can actually talk to people, if you don't feel that they are receptive to you, all of these things make it much more difficult for you to feel that you belong and to take advantage of all of the resources that are available. But a big part of that resource is simply interacting with other people in a collegial manner, exchanging ideas, getting feedback. . . The idea is to have an impact, not simply me, me, me. And I think that is our culture, it is certainly an intellectual, research – oriented, hard working place, but a place that is concerned with the development of people so that they can have an impact on society. Lonnie

Lonnie initiates the second set of responses which focus on expectations for university personnel. According to Lonnie, those who work in Midwestern's University community are expected to be motivated to work with students to help them succeed. And Midwstern's employees are expected to remind students that the university is an intellectual community:

> We have a culture that is to be built on hard work, accomplishment. This is a culture that requires one to be motivated, that requires commitment. When one works here, one has to have a commitment to working with young people and trying to see them succeed. .. This is a place where we are committed, as an academy, to solving problems: sometimes they're societal problems, sometimes their engineering problems, sometimes they're architectural problems, or biological chemical problems, public policy problems. That means it's an intellectual community. It's important to stop, think, and reflect from time to time. Lonnie

Although those at Midwestern University hold great expectations for their students to achieve success, they are aware that some students might enter their university with academic deficits that need to be addressed. As an administrator and faculty member, Damon emphasizes that his academic unit is willing to do whatever is necessary to accommodate students in their adaptation to meeting the standards of the university:

> We're willing to accommodate the transition that these students need and we're willing to do even more than we've done in the past. Damon

Marilyn provides an example that depicts how student affairs professionals can effectively assist students at a large university. Additionally, Marilyn shares that this assistance is directly reflective of the institutional climate that exists at Midwestern University:

> A key example, I may have one of my student employees sitting in here, from time to time, talking about "you know I'm really frustrated about" and we've been able to contact an office that related directly. You know whether it was a need or want or kind of an interest. And, connect that person directly, so that person had the opportunity to then go take care of the need or explore the interest as the case might be. Marilyn

In terms of Institutional Expectations for students, Marilyn emphasizes that every student is expected to graduate. At the same time, she reiterates the accommodating role of Southern's institutional personnel:

> So I think part of that is that there's simply an expectation, here, that may not be true at other campuses. . . here about nine out of 10 people graduate. Yeah so we just expect that they are ready for it, they're good for it, and our job is simply to help them get through it. Marilyn

Although Midwestern University's climate is very academically challenging, Robert notes that the institution provides resources for students. Quickly, he adds that there is an expectation for students to utilize those resources to facilitate their success in this environment:

> There are certain things that they [institution] are just not changing. They're not going to cut back on the amount of homework, they're not going to cut back on the philosophy that students here are expected to make their own way and figure things out. There is kind of an attitude that you're smart, so figure it out. The kind of students who come here, generally, like that. . . The resources are here if you need them, but you've go to make sure that you decide you need them and how to make them work for you. Robert

Elonzo shares his thoughts on how students are expected to behave in Midwesten's community and emphasizes the concept of helping one another. He reiterates the acknowledgement that no one succeeds without receiving help from others:

> The notion here is you've got to help out. It's not I have mine, so you get yours. We expect our students to help each other out. For example, our doctoral students work with everyone from our undergraduates to other doctoral students. I tell those doctoral students it's expected that you help others. After all, someone helped you. It's good for them to be role models for the others. Elonzo

In terms of Institutional Expectations for both students and professional staff, Elonzo discusses how some resources can serve two purposes. Those resources that are targeted to both students and professional staff can lead to educating those at Midwestern University and they can also serve to sensitize this university's populace on social justice issues:

> Well it's part of the continuum of education because most of what we do is we bring people in and we try to, at least, do some training and provide information that will allow both our students and faculty to be more sensitive to the issues we're talking about now. I think by bringing in well known individuals to talk about what they're doing, how they're doing it, providing information to our students, faculty and staff is a way of making everybody more sensitive to the equity and the need for it. Elonzo

Robert summarizes Midwestern's Institutional Expectations and asserts that because the university puts a lot of resources into engagement programs, students have a greater likelihood of developing as individuals and in finding a home on campus:

> Well I think the students have opportunities to develop as individuals. They can get involved in research programs. We put a lot of resources into engagement programs, community service, learning, mentoring high school students, tutoring. Midwestern University has many student organizations that are supported by the university. And if you don't like any of them, you just start your own. But we want students to be involved. . . This is a very decentralized institution. And that really works for students because they can go to many different places for assistance; there isn't a single office that they have to deal with. And, it works for

> them because there's more variety. . . The most important thing is to have a home, a place where you feel comfortable. And, it's not forced on you or rammed down your throat. They all work for students because you've got many places to go to. As opposed to just one place to go to. Robert

Participants at Midwestern University expressed institutional beliefs, rules or behaviors that reflect the identity of their community and that guide the actions of those within that community, all of which promote the Black collegian's academic experience. Although they sometimes spoke of these factors as part of the university's culture, more often the participants referred to them as institutional expectations.

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration

The next factor that was stressed by the study's respondents was Valuing Diversity through Collaboration. At Midwestern, the participants noted three categories for this critical factor: (a) Black and White student organizations effectively collaborating with each other, (b) on-campus units successfully collaborating with other on-campus entities, and (c) on-campus entities collaborating with various off-campus entities to encourage diversity. In terms of partnerships between student organizations, Robert opens this section by discussing the importance of African American students partnering with other student groups and learning their role in the national diversity model:

> The focus is on cross culture and across race to get these groups to work together. Because there's no monolithic African American group, which is why we have about 50 Black student groups alone. I would say 25 years ago, there might have been 10 or 20, so that becomes extremely important, working across culture. Because one of the things that I tell Black students is that they fit into the diversity paradigm too. Because when you go into the job market, you're going to have to learn and understand other cultures, other isms, chances are your boss may be a female or a foreign national, so you're in this too. We're all in this. They have a responsibility too. Robert

Marilyn discusses how one of Midwestern's programming efforts that bring student organizations together has greatly facilitated student discussion across race and religion. She believes it has also eliminated conflict and strife across these same constructs:

> Uhm our Discussion Between Groups programming has interesting conversations in terms of helping across both racial divides and other types of divides, but specifically to talk through what's the difference in experience for an African American student here, as compared to a White student? Or across religion, Jews versus non-Jews or Jews versus Christians? Uhm we've had African Americans and Jews, a workshop over the course of the semester. Different combinations like that where there has been strife at times and we strive to help students learn to talk intelligently with each other about that. And really learn about themselves and from each other, about that. Marilyn

Marilyn offers a second example of how African American and White student organizations align to educate, promote and support diversity on Midwestern University's campus:

> Uhm the students of IFC and Pan -Hellenic Conferences uhm last summer came in wanting to study a little bit more about homophobia and racism, within the traditionally White fraternities and sororities on campus. And really address those issues in their community. . . They're still some division I perceive in terms of the organizations, but in terms of working together, they're trying to do more of that to at least be in proximity and actually enjoy each other's company. Marilyn

The second category of collaborative measures provided by the Midwestern sample was collaborations between on-campus units. Marilyn introduces this second category and highlights how her area, Student Affairs, and the Office of Multiethnic Studies have partnered on several projects:

> One key area, right now that we've been doing over the last few years is with our Office of Multiethnic Studies. He [Dr. Lonnie Smith] checks in with us frequently for data about the students who are coming in through his program so that's one use of our CIRP data is we connect that with other admissions data and then with the data that he has further down the line to get a sense of how students are changing as a result of his program. Marilyn

Lonnie elaborates on Holbrook's point and share how his office has collaborated with a variety of other academic departments, student groups and on-campus offices:

> That means we're collaborating with academic departments, but we'll also participate in programs whether that means sponsoring it outright, co-sponsoring in collaboration with someone else. But we collaborate all the time, sometimes with student groups, sometimes with academic departments, sometimes with other offices on campus; it's a lot of what we do. Lonnie

To demonstrate the prevalence of collaborative measures throughout Midwestern University, Damon offers an example of how his unit, the College of Engineering has partnered with a campus theater group to promote and reiterate the importance of diversity:

> And so we try to set up situations where students can work through it and we try to give them tools to work in teams, but some of that needs to be done better. And, in fact, one of the recommendations from the Council of Diversity and Outreach is being implemented. That in Engineering 100, which is the first engineering course that our students take, we're going to use theater to demonstrate good and bad practices among teams. We have a couple of theater groups, on campus, that are used this way. And we've contacted one to develop a skit that is "student team" and we saw one early this semester and it was excellent. So we're going to incorporate it into our normal curriculum. It was really effective because it is very non -threatening. If you come in and lecturing to people, that's political correctness and people turn you off, but if you watch something and you start to detect things that aren't right or people around you do and they start talking about it, that makes you more sensitive to something that you didn't see before. Damon

As an OMS math lecturer, Kenedhi discusses her reliance on collaboration with her math colleagues to effectively meet the needs of her students:

> My colleagues in the Office of Multiethnic Studies, we work as a team. We do a lot of things together. If I'm not around, my students will go to them and vice versa. All of the math instructors, we bounce ideas off one another. I've also worked with the School of Engineering and people who do other academic things around campus. With the instructors, in the Office of Multiethnic Studies, we do everything from review sessions to planning and developing reading guides. Kenedhi

Kenedhi provides a second example of her partnering efforts with another on-campus initiative. In this effort, the pre-college student population was the target of this example:

> Well just knowing Robert and John, I did a program in the summer where they bring the high school students to campus, I've done that. They bring a group of kids in every week and they stay in the dorms and they take certain classes. I was teaching them math and SAT prep courses. Kenedhi

The third category of collaborations noted among the Midwestern institutional sample was on-campus collaborations with off-campus entities. Marilyn shares her thoughts on how several units across the institution have a number of collaborations in a large metropolitan city:

> Uhm we also have a number of service projects that take place in a large urban area. We have a number of our university departments that do studies, based out of this area in social sciences, the health sciences, and public health in a wide variety of ways. Marilyn

Damon shares how his college collaborates with their alumni to address issues of diversity and to address expectations for incoming employees:

> There's another aspect to it, we have a national advisory committee made up of presidents and vice presidents of industry, mostly, who are graduates of our institution, but they come from all over the U.S. They come back twice a year and we spend a full day, the first half of the day presenting some key problems that we would like them to advise us on. And then they sort of "caucus" among themselves in the afternoon to suggest things that we should try. We start out these meetings usually by asking a question. A typical question might be, tell us what's your main concern about the recruits that you might get from the School of Engineering? What are your concerns? So you go around this table and there must be 25 of these industry leaders and what struck me last year when we did this was every last one talked about the global environment that they had to work in and that the students they hire had to be comfortable working with people who aren't like themselves. They didn't have time to bring someone in who had grown up in an all White community and who had went to an all White college and then came out and figured out that the world is not all White. So every one of them said that and so when we think about diversity, in the college, we consider a quality of

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> education thing. We're not just teaching the academics, we're teaching people how to work on teams. . . Damon

At Midwestern University, Valuing Diversity through Collaboration includes those activities that result in an increased awareness and/or promotion of diversity as a result of combining the efforts of two or more on-campus and/or off-campus groups. Participants were clear when describing the benefits of cross-unity collaboration in supporting African American student success. These partnerships also provided opportunities to increase both awareness and sensitivity to diversity.

Faculty Initiatives

Faculty Initiatives was the next factor that was stressed by the Midwestern participants. The Midwestern University participants accentuated four beliefs regarding Faculty Initiatives: (a) faculty recognize the value of diversity and the benefits it brings to the learning experience, (b) White faculty express a fervent interest in the success of African American students, (c) faculty are willing to assist students who hold academic deficiencies, and (d) African American faculty are willing to cultivate strong relationships with Black collegians, including representing a maternal or paternal figure in the students' life. Although each of the response types is represented by an understated amount of quotes, the respondents who discussed this factor utilized great emphasis and enthusiasm. As the single contributor to the first category of institutional responses, Lonnie highlights the importance of faculty who are willing to realize the genuine value and benefit that African American students bring to the classroom:

> A realization, really, on the part of the faculty that the future of the country depends on today's young people. I think a lot of people also realize that, in the past, and I'm talking about faculty members now, they did not have the benefit of the perspective of African American students in their classes and they began to

> realize that those are ideas and perspectives and experiences that are important... So there's a realization, on the part of the faculty, that what we mean by higher education, is actually facilitated by having a diverse body of students. Lonnie

The next response type focused on White faculty who express a concerted effort in assisting African American collegians. Associate Vice Provost and Director of the Office of Diversity and Academic Programs, Robert, believes when there is an overall commitment from faculty to promote academic success, this assists Black students in becoming more familiar with the university community and in navigating this community:

> But I also think the strong commitment of a lot of faculty – White faculty in particular, is also very helpful. One of the things is that there's no way that a student can come here and have an all – Black experience, they just can't do it. You've got to deal with folks all over the board. And you just can't come and say I'm only going to take classes from Black faculty and deal with Black staff. It's just not going to happen here. So there's a reality, no matter what I think or what a student may think, the world should be about dealing with reality and this is a White university and you knew that when you came here, it's not a historically Black school. And, so the trick is how do you navigate it?
> Robert

As the Associate Director of the Office of Multiethnic Studies and a lecturer in the English Program, James notes that OMS faculty is committed to making up for the deficiencies that some students may have. James shares his thoughts on this third category of responses offered by the institutional sample:

> . . . and so we're trying to make up for four years of inadequate high school preparation, but we have people who are committed and willing to do this. We give mock exams, that's something else the department does. Our instructors will give our students two or three tests that mirror the final exam, prior to them actually taking the test. Because one of the things our kids suffer from is test anxiety. So that would be another feature of our classes; mock exams. We also have prepared notes; actually the entire university uses this feature. Specifically students can now go online and every handout that I've given them in class, they can review it online. James

The fourth and final categorization of participant responses focused on African American faculty and their willingness to cultivate strong relationships with Black collegians. Participants also spoke of the ability of this faculty to project a maternal or paternal figure for students, which was considered an important support mechanism. Elonzo, an African American education professor and Director of the Educational Opportunity Program, believes it is his responsibility to not only effectively teach, but to also assist students, especially African American students, in any way that he can:

> But my role as a professor on campus is, as I see it, is to one do what I can to teach what I teach as best I can, but having said that I also know that as we try to attract students here, particularly African American students, they're interested in other African American professors and when we say yes to that, it means will that be someone that I can talk to? And part of my role, at least it's an unofficial role, is to assist with whatever I can to make sure that this graduation rate, that we're talking about, continues to increase. So they come to me if there are problems. Elonzo

Elonzo extends his point by elaborating on how he cultivates his relationships with African American students:

> Well I tend to have a fairly positive interaction with them [African American students] because I think part of my job is to provide support for those students and so we talk about anything and everything. It doesn't have to be about the problem they're having in math or what the professor said, I mean we can talk about how they feel about wanting to go home and why you need to go home. And I guess I see it more of a counseling role with students. Elonzo

As a Mathematics Lecturer in the Office of Multiethnic Studies, Kenedhi takes the initiative to encourage students to pursue their career goals. She also realizes that faculty need to help students find alternative ways to achieve these goals if they encounter problems:

> So with me. I'm trying to build confidence and letting them know that they can do this. Even if my students don't do well, I let them know, don't let one course alter your life's plans, not that you know your life plans at 18 – years-old, but if this is

> something you want to do take the course at a community college, but don't let this one course decide for you to block you out of everything you want to do. Kennedhi

Kenedhi concluded her thoughts on Faculty Initiatives by describing how her role as a faculty member is often coupled with that of a mother figure:

> It's very maternal, I'm everybody's mentor. They find a safe haven with me very early on, like during the summer. Then they're with me for all four years or until they graduate. They keep in touch; it's a very maternal relationship. Kennedhi

Those participants from Midwestern University view faculty initiatives as those responsibilities or roles, articulated by faculty or other university personnel that speak to the perceptions of how faculty should carry out their jobs to facilitate the academic success of African American students.

Retention/Support Programs

Retention/Support Programs was the fifth highlighted factor offered by the Midwestern study participants. In terms of this critical factor, participants revealed four forms of Retention/Support Programs at Midwestern University that offer instructional and/or transitional assistance to the African American collegian or to the university community as a whole. They are: (a) support programs located within every school and college, (b) programs that incorporate the students' cultural background to specifically address student needs, (c) programs that incorporate a mentoring component, and (d) programs that are targeted to the pre-college student population. Robert talked about Retention/Support Programs located within the many schools and colleges of the university. He describes how both the size and decentralization of the university has facilitated the adjustment and success of the entire student population:

> Every school and college, here we've got more than 20 schools and colleges, they each have some type of support: some of them in the academic area. . . and they're pretty comprehensive, the funding that we provide to student organizations, and also our scholarships. Midwestern University has very attractive scholarships and stuff like that. Robert

Damon echoed Robert's comments and noted that in addition to support provided through colleges and schools, there is centralized assistance at the university level as well:

> Our campus is very decentralized, but there's a tremendous amount of support within those colleges and within those individual offices for students. . . and each one sets up their own programs to support their students where they need help, we can go to the central university for financial help. Damon

Echoing the sentiment of both Henry and Murphy, Elonzo offers an example of one of his College's Retention/Support Programs and notes its positive affect on African American collegians:

> We have an office called the Minority Student Relations Office and that office is within this School of Education. It was created to provide support for minority students, and a sizeable portion of those are African American. There's some Hispanics and a few Asians, but primarily it's African American. Elonzo

Damon shares the belief that Midwestern's Retention/Support Programs actually empower students. He talks of increasing the students' capacity to take accountability for achieving their own success:

> And, essentially, over a period of the first couple of years, you turn that kind of control over to the students. You start out where it's a very paternalistic system where you define what the student has to do to succeed and put a carrot in front of them and say if you follow what we say, you will succeed and they do. . . So what these support programs do it's more than academics, they essentially set up a contract with the individual of the expectation. And you work in groups where all of the members of the group agree that the academics are important and they try to help each other learn. And the expectation is that you turn in every homework and you attend every class and you're the group that's going to get the highest grades in the class, not just the group that's getting along. And once you start building that kind of environment, then the success builds on itself. Damon

Marilyn discusses the second form of Retention/Support Program that was offered by the participants at Midwestern University. Two specific programs are those that address student issues in a manner that is specific to the students' cultural background and those that pair first and second year minority students with minority peers who are located in their residence halls:

> We have our Multiethnic Scholar Relations and that is one area I don't say that as all of our areas, but that's an area that provides support for students from a number of backgrounds in a specific way, support for Asian American students in a specific way, support for African American students in a specific way, as examples . . . we have minority peer advisors in our housing to help students in their proximate environment, that's 98% of our first-year students and 40% of our sophomores. Marilyn

Like Marilyn, Robert shares an example of Retention/Support Programs that emphasize a mentoring component, which is another feature of these initiatives at Midwestern. The Navigation Mentoring Program for first-year college students also addresses parents and their role in the overall success of their minority college student:

> In the program, the students are paired with juniors and seniors. A lot of students. . . are student leaders. And so we push the engagement piece. So first we start with a weekend program, where we invite the parents because with some of this stuff we want parents to know what their role should be, how they fit into this equation, certain things that they need to avoid. For example, not encouraging your son or daughter to come home every weekend. You may think that's a support system, but it's not because people don't study when they go home on the weekends, where everyone else puts in studying on at least one of those days, three or four hours a day studying. Robert

Robert concludes his comments by discussing the fourth type of Retention/Support Program, those programs geared toward pre-college students:

> On this side of the fence, Educational Multicultural Projects, this is an academic support office that is in the Provost's Office. It's a part of Academic Affairs and we break down several things; we have an active pre -college program. We probably deal with about 2500 students a year that range all the way down to 7th grade. We have scholarship incentive programs. We have summer programs, so

> that's the pre -college programs. But within the pre -college age, we have a large number of student employees who work in our pre -college program. They do the mentoring, they do the planning. I think we have about 100 students who work in this office. So therefore, it's important for us to have a good student development program and a student leadership program. Robert

Midwestern University has developed several kinds of Retention/Support Programs that faculty and administrators believe are vital to the success of African American collegians.

Special Purpose Office

Midwestern University's Special Purpose Office is the Office of Multiethnic Studies (OMS), a learning community that provides opportunities for students to take credit-bearing courses throughout the academic year, receive individualized attention from faculty, and obtain personalized academic advising. According to the study's participants, there were three major themes related to the OMS and its contributions to Black student success: (a) celebrating the Office's overwhelming success with African American students, (b) accentuating the Office's effectiveness in teaching Black students to manage the academic component, and (c) noting the Office's utilization of a all-inclusive model that offers both instruction and adjustment assistance. As the Director of the Office of Multiethnic Studies, Lonnie initiates this discussion on the first type of response. He credits his office for having the most significant impact on the academic success of Midwestern's Black collegians:

> I would say the Office of Multiethnic Studies. I've been here 15 years and in that time, more than 6000 of our students have graduated from Midwestern University. And probably two-thirds of that number was African American. So that's probably in the neighborhood of around 4000 African American students, within our Office of Multiethnic Studies. Lonnie

Supporting Lonnie on the significant achievement of the OMS, and specifically the Transition Program it provides, is James, the Associate Director of the OMS. James boldly credits the office for the success of African American students, suggesting it may be even greater than institutional data report for this student population:

> The Transition Program. . . I'd have to say that the Transition Program is one of our best examples of success. And I would think that the graduation for the Transition Program students is higher than the 67 percent rate for all Black students. James

When asked which program has had the greatest impact on African American achievement, Alonzo echoes both Lonnie and James and adds that this Office's success is connected to its purpose:

> The Office of Multiethnic Studies and the Transition Program are the two. It's more systematic now. It doesn't mean they have not made individual contributions, but these are units that have large numbers of students and, as part of their mission, they've been very successful in that regard. The Transition Program is a summer program. The Office of Multiethnic Studies offers year-long programming, so it continues to provide that kind of support. Alonzo

Like Alonzo, Robert was also asked which program has had the greatest impact on the success of African American students. Robert's thoughts are similar to those of his colleagues. He reiterates that the Office's focus is on the needs of all Midwestern students and not solely on those of African American students:

> . . . But if I had to pick one, I would say the Office of Multiethnic Studies probably. They have done a good job with African American students. Although that office works with other groups, they have a long track record of working with African American students and they're more diversified now. Robert

Supporting the other respondents, Marilyn credits the Office of Multiethnic Studies as having the greatest influence on the academic success of African American

students. She notes that this Office greatly assists students in handling the academic piece and in accessing the campus resources:

> Overall, the Office of Multiethnic Studies is the one program that I believe has had the most impact on African American achievement. The office gives them some idea of how to manage the academic piece. In terms of taking notes and time management and that sort of thing, some about how to manage this university in terms of where to go for resources. Marilyn

Finally, Lonnie discusses how the OMS takes an all-inclusive approach to working with the African American student population and their success:

> . . . We use the all encompassing model to provide both instruction and adjustment assistance to students, not just African American students of course: Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and White students. Anyone can use our services, but we do have a focus on those who have been underrepresented in higher education in the past. . . So we have different ways we work with students that support them. We want them to be leaders on the campus. I guess you could say we try to encourage them to do different things. And when I say different, I mean innovative, come up with some new ideas. So our relationship incorporates all of those things. We might contribute some funds to help them put on a project, of some sort, to carry out a project. They might come to us with ideas that they simply bounce off of us. Different parts of our staff will have different relationships with the students. Lonnie

Although Midwestern University's Office of Multiethnic Studies was developed to aid the entire student community, the Office has experienced great success with the Black collegian. By utilizing an all-inclusive approach which targets both instruction and adjustment assistance, this Office has effectively supported the overall achievement for African American college students, while enabling them to cultivate productive relationships with faculty, staff and other students.

Student Affairs

At Midwestern University, the participants in this study emphasized five strategies that were utilized by their student affairs professionals to support African

American student success: (a) student affairs professionals offer an abundance of programming to increase the students' ability to find a "home" on campus, (b) student affairs professionals target students in many different ways and did not solely rely on race and ethnicity, (c) student affairs professionals took the time to assist African American students with problems related to their identity, (d) student affairs professionals identify environmental factors that may lead to student drop out, and (e) student affairs professionals examine students over the course of their time on campus to assess the institution's impact on their development. Robert discusses the first Student Affairs strategy and expresses tremendous pride in the fact that Midwestern is a resource-rich institution that will go to great lengths to meet the needs of its students:

> We have lots of programs and activities. Sometimes people say there's duplication, but Midwestern University has always had this approach that if you throw everything out, in terms of a smorgasbord, and [the institution] let students pick and choose. The most important thing is to find them a home, but our institution puts more resources into students and student organizations than anyplace I've ever seen. And I've worked with a number of institutions. Robert

As a student affairs professional, Marilyn thinks it is important to create student programming in several different ways including race, gender, etc. She believes that students will engage based on the part of their personality that is the most relevant at a particular time:

> We target people in a number of different ways for services. We target them by gender; we target them by age, by major, by race certainly. Uhm it's worth it. And we know that students are going to engage at different levels too because students will see different parts of their personalities as more salient at different times. Marilyn

Marilyn thinks it is important to assist Black students who encounter problems and doubts regarding their institutional selection. Here Marilyn describes how she assists

African American students when the student feels alienated or feels that they have made a mistake by attending Midwestern University:

> Well part of that is talking with them about why did you choose this institution, do you think you would choose something else if you had to do it over again? Because helping them with some guided questions as far as helping them to think through is this the choice that I wanted to make? Is this a choice that gives me a feeling of belonging? Uhm yeah, are there people who embrace me here who will be there for me here? Marilyn

To address issues of attrition, Marilyn believes it is important to create a profile of those students who leave and to identify environmental factors that might contribute to someone leaving. As a result, she hopes the institution can reduce the number of students who eventually leave the university. Marilyn shares the steps her institution is making to combat the dropout rate:

> Uhm we're starting to work on ways in which we might be able to connect the various data points that we have on campus to get a sense of at what points students are leaving and why and perhaps a profile of the types of students who are leaving so that we can get a better sense of who needs support earlier and in what ways? In the student affairs context, I am working with a wide array of units to study how their offerings have an impact on students. I also do some larger scale studies. I do the CIRP on our campus. And my use of the research then is to help infuse how it is we offer our services on campus. Marilyn

Marilyn concludes this discussion on Student Affairs by emphasizing the need for institutions to explore how students change throughout their tenure at the institution and to use this information to address student drop out:

> To take a look and see how students have tangibly changed over that time in a pre and post test sort of way, measures a variety of things: confidence levels, self assessments on an array of traits ranging from fuzzy things such as warmth, confidence, to more tangible things such as mathematical skills. Their political views, how they might have changed their views on specific pieces of political issues. Their activities, what they thought they'd engage in, what they really do engage in. Their long-term goals, a variety of things such as that. Marilyn

Despite the fact that Student Affairs was not mentioned by every member of the institutional sample as a contributor to the success of the Black collegian, the examples clearly illustrated that actions of student affairs professionals were significant for this student populace. The efforts of those in Student Affairs were connected to increasing the African American students' cultural capital, increasing their retention rates, and raising their graduation rates.

Presidential Priorities

Those at Midwestern University describe Presidential Priorities as those directives, initiated by the university president and/or central administration, which require university personnel to examine, develop, implement, maintain, and evaluate their unit's programming in terms of diversity. Participants Midwestern University revealed two major tactics that reflect Presidential Priorities in supporting the success of African American students: the president emphasizes that diversity is a top priority and the president establishes a team charged with leading the university on the implementation on diversity initiatives. As the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and an engineering professor, Damon opens this discussion on Presidential Priorities by noting the importance of the president's emphasis on diversity. He believes that this emphasis can have a significant impact and influence on how the entire institution embraces diversity:

> The single thing that has made the biggest difference is leadership at the top declaring that it's [diversity] important. . . And if that leadership doesn't keep saying that, as our president keeps saying it. . . it'll drift away in the organization. It isn't enough that at the working level you realize that it's important, you've got to have the leader saying it is. Damon

Lonnie, Director of the Office of Multiethnic Studies, echoes Damon's sentiment and adds that the implementation of diversity is not an option; the president expects the university to embrace this goal:

> We have good leadership at the very top. The president of the university has to say this is a priority; this is something we want to do. This is something we're committed to doing. This is something that we'll put efforts into accomplishing, not just something that's on the periphery, so that we can do it if we want to. Lonnie

As an illustration of how institutional leadership can hold campus departments accountable for the success of their minority students, Damon points out:

> . . . When each college is reviewed by the Provost, each year, we're asked, what's your graduation rates? And if our minority numbers are significantly different, then our majority numbers, what are you doing about it? So they encourage us to perform. Damon

Marilyn, a senior research associate in the Student Affairs Division, describes one of the presidential initiatives that focus on underrepresented students:

> . . . the Design Taskforce is a university – wide effort to identify initiatives in ways to reach out to a variety of students, but predominantly students who otherwise wouldn't achieve well or who may be shut out of the system. To make sure that they're included and forwarded on to graduation.... It's a task force and there are a number of people who are feeding the task force. So I'm in one of those groups whose feeding the task force. Marilyn

Although Presidential Priorities was not highly emphasized by the respondents, those that mentioned this factor attributed great significance to its role in the success of African American collegians.

Midwestern University –Dissenting Voices

Throughout the data collection process, I encountered some responses that did not appear to reflect or substantiate the comments of the other respondents. Additionally some of the comments seemed to seriously challenge the institutional depiction that was

presented by the other interview subjects. These perspectives are included because they are often from the same participants who spoke highly of various aspects of Midwestern University's efforts to support African American students. They show the complexity of both Midwestern as a flagship university and the task of really achieving a climate for student success. Also these responses reveal the lack of knowledge that exists for some of Midwestern University's professional staff.

In spite of the many positive actions of faculty, for example, some participants were sharply critical of Midwestern's faculty. James alleges that the faculty lacks a commitment to diversity and accused them of not supporting the efforts of his office, the Office of Multiethnic Studies:

> I think that Midwestern University is getting more and more anti –diversity and anti-affirmative action. Now keep in mind that we have a great president and a great central administration, we have a great Office of Student Affairs and all of them are committed to diversity, but you know who's not really committed to diversity? The faculty. There would've been no way that [a piece of legislation] would've passed if there weren't tons of people who didn't think that we were getting some kind of advantage. So the faculty has always been anti –Office of Multiethnic Studies, but they would never articulate that. We've also had some other faculty members who have been extremely supportive, but I would have to say they're in the minority. James

Like James, Kenedhi also believes that the Midwestern University faculty do not value or see the benefits of diversity:

> I think the president is really, really dedicated, but I don't think she has the backing of the university community at large. I was in a faculty meeting, during a time of great political turmoil on campus and I posed a question, I said you know I never saw anything that the faculty signed and I want to be on board and part of this, was there anything that went out? And they all got quiet and said, we're not political, we don't have to back that, that's not our place, we're just instructors, we're just teaching. So she really doesn't have the faculty support. And they did a poll with the students and the students did not support diversity. Kenedhi

As a student affairs professional, Marilyn expresses disappointment over her inability to empathize with her African American students as they confront doubt. Marilyn explains that her students share their inability to identify with African Americans students who attended HBCUs and African American students who attended Midwestern University:

> And that's a frustrating thing to work with them, to help them process because, obviously, I won't be going through that same processing that they're going through, but they're dealing with some issues of perhaps hurt or confusion that are very difficult or unnecessary, they're great students. Uhm they chose Midwestern and they're doing well here. Marilyn

OMS Math lecturer Kenedhi flatly declares that she would not want her children to attend Midwestern University. Although she acknowledges the prevalence of the campus' retention/support programs, she criticizes the inconsistency in the quality of support throughout the campus:

> I think, personally, I would not send my child here. Some programs are different. The Engineering College, the Minority Support Services Office is extremely supportive; it's awesome over there. Also the business school is similar. This is a big place, you can get lost. Kenedhi

Although Midwestern University has retention/support programs throughout the campus, Damon notes why some African American students still encounter problems that may lead to dropout:

> But if they're coming from a school located in a big metropolitan city if they're coming from a smaller city, or some place like this, even if they're the top students in the class, they haven't had that competition and often they're the first generation going to college. So their parents haven't really explained why they're in college, they know they have to for this to succeed, but they haven't built in the real motivation for why it's worth all the effort and what it takes to succeed. And so they're coming in at a disadvantage, even if they've had the same courses and even if they're straight "A" students and so their transition has to be longer because you're having to put in some support that they haven't gotten before. Damon

Although Kenedhi believes that Midwestern University entices African American students with promises of academic and career success, she does not believe that these students are receiving the support that they genuinely need:

> I think just giving them more support overall . . . but I think more should be done in terms if retention and supporting them once they get here. The same effort that went into bringing them here, they should get the same effort for four years to help them stay here, to make it easy for them. Kenedhi

In terms of Institutional-Unit Response, Elonzo notes that because the School of Education lacks minority professors and lacks minority students, this deficit has translated into minority students feeling unsupported and complaining about the shortages:

> We have had, over the years, complaints from students that started out more generally, but they focused primarily on the School of Education when they talked about the lack of minorities in teacher education and the need for minority teachers in K – 12 settings. We have been sensitive to it, we have tried very hard to address the issues, but we find that the numbers of African American students who were interested in education have dropped over the years. . . students often feel that they don't have the kind of support that they would need, the kind of peer to peer interaction or faculty to student interaction and so we are very conscious of that. Elonzo

When asked how African American students were impacted by the placement of African Americans in influential positions, Kenedhi did not view the impact on students as significant or noteworthy:

> You know what, even though there are only a few of us here, I think we're pretty polarized. I don't think we know each other, I think the community doesn't have a sense of who's who . . . So I don't think the students here or people here, in general, have a sense of the African American presence here. They might know us individually, but nobody knows what we really do. Kenedhi

Although the institutional climate was reflected as diverse and valuing those from different backgrounds, Kenedhi blatantly challenges Midwestern's claims of diversity and openness and ponders her own personal safety:

> So here, I wouldn't consider this a diverse environment. The culture is not warm and fuzzy. In fact, the bottom line is I would not be caught on campus in the evening, late in the evening with a bunch of White guys. Over the summer, my kids were telling me that they were being called "nigger," they got intimidated. We're talking about guys and girls being out by themselves at night. This is not a friendly environment, it's hostile. Like last semester, when [a piece of state legislation] was passed, there were many White students there at this rally on campus and they were happy about the passing of [a piece of state legislation]. My kids came back crying because they heard them talking. They talked about how vicious it was and that people were saying we're happy it passed Kenedhi

Marilyn shares her thoughts on how students at Midwestern University reacted to the legislation and provides an example of what happens when students are given the opportunity to freely express their views on diversity:

> And particularly Midwestern has become known as a place that has been invested in our admissions strategy to bring in students from a wide variety of backgrounds, considering a wide variety of demographics, including race. Some of our students on campus translate that to, let's make African American students feel unwelcome and that was particularly notable the days after [a piece of state legislation]. We were running a survey about [a piece of state legislation] and some of our White students, not a majority, but some of our White students said, 'Well good we can get the wrong students off campus now.' And those students are the peers who are spending more time with our African American students than we are. I mean they're the ones spending time with them in housing, at meal time, in classes. And that can't be pleasant. . . I think in terms of the negative; a lot of the conversation around [a piece of state legislation] was very unhelpful in terms of both on the street and in class. . . This whole notion that this university should be owned by one particular race or exclusive of one particular race is just offensive that peer to peer there seems to be empowerment of those students who feel that way. And that's decidedly unhelpful. Marilyn

Marilyn elaborates on how the use of stereotypes and assumptions can cloud the perspectives and negatively affect the perspectives of Midwesten's student population and its institutional climate:

> I also think that sometimes we do different work with our students depending on where they come from and we make different assumptions. So we know for example that many of our students who come from other places in around the state come from very racially segregated places. And they may not receive the same support as far as coming to Midwestern University that they would come from some other places. I know a number of students from a large urban city; I meet them in my volunteer work, who end up at Florida A&M or Kentucky State. Other institutions like that. And they wonder why people would go to Midwestern. . . I think there are some SES factors at play as well. Our student body is a fairly wealthy student body. And, then on top of that, they like to flaunt their wealth a bit. So it would be hard to compete in a sea of North based jackets and Kates Bay Bags. If you think I have to be like that or I'm the only one who's not like that, we know that these people aren't the only ones who aren't like that. One out of eight of our students is a first – generation student. Marilyn

Elonzo discusses the seemingly elitist climate on campus and how African American students are confronted by feelings of inadequacy and of feeling poorly prepared to achieve in that kind of environment:

> . . . because we tend to have a higher socioeconomic level of students here. And because of that, that seems to create some tension from time to time about how people perceive what goes on here. It's perceived, externally, as being elitist in many ways, but this elitism comes across race. Because some people think that the African Americans who come here are also somewhat elitist as well. But I think when you ask the average student, on campus; they will tell you that there are some tensions here relative to Social Justice and just being an African American student on this campus. Elonzo

When asked to describe how the institutional climate affects students, Robert shares:

> This is a tough place, it's competitive, it's a tough place and you have to be clearly focused. Robert

Marilyn imparts a similar response when asked about the impact of the institution's culture on the students:

> I think they're left pretty buffeted by our culture. I think it takes them a while to tough up to it. And I don't say that in terms of saying that students are weak, it would take anybody a little while to toughen up to this culture. Marilyn

Marilyn offers her views on how those within various segments of Midwestern University view themselves:

> In parts of the university, a bit arrogant in thinking that 'We're Midwestern, the world revolves around us' . . .within our little division of student affairs, just 1300 of us, that's taken a lot of work to gain that level of trust, because we have had previous university presidents who have had as their motto, 'every ship on its own bottom' or basically, I'm not looking out for anybody else, I'm just looking out for us. And, that hasn't contributed to collaboration very well. I think we're in a different place today with the administration we have, but we still have a lot of people who worked a lot of years under those previous administrations, about a third of our campus has been here for 10 years or more. Marilyn

Marilyn offers another view on why Midwestern's climate might pose problem for African American students:

> I think another area of challenging assumptions is a lot of our students in this state; in particular our White students who don't come from a large metropolitan area, uhm have a perception of African Americans, in general, as being poor and being poorly prepared. And, we know that even most of our African American students on campus, come from fairly well off means, not all of them, but some. And, they range a pretty wide spectrum of income, of political beliefs, of interest in majors. And I think, sometimes our students from out – of – state need that kick in the pants to realize that there's not one blanket assumption that they can make when they see someone of color on campus. They can't make an assumption about major, or preparation or anything like that. Marilyn

Midwestern University has been described as having a climate that promoted student engagement. Even with the risk of duplication, institutional personnel took great pride in noting the plethora of resources for their students. When asked how the campus climate facilitated the participation of African American students on campus, Kenedhi did not believe that African American students were engaged in the life of the campus:

> College is so much more than academia and getting grades. It's your proving ground when you become an adult where you learn your leadership skills, your

> coping skills, you need to get exposure, get experience with other things besides academia. Well student activities are the things that expose you to what happens in real life and I just don't think the average minority student is involved, nobody writes for the newspaper. I see a picture of one every now and then. If you look at the yearbook, student government has made some strides, but as a whole, I mean if you're in journalism and you don't write for the school newspaper out of four years of college. And besides sports, it's not a lot that minority students can do as far as leadership, as far as planning things and being in charge. . . They have some fraternity and sorority life, but other than that, there's not a lot of avenues and chances for minority students to really be a part. I mean if you vote for something, the majority rules. So I think a lot of them go home every weekend. Their comfort level is to go home, so they keep very, very strong ties back at home and in church. They all go home for church when they go home for the weekend. Kenedhi

James did not hold the university fully accountable for the challenges that confronted the Black collegian and questioned the African American students themselves on their role in facilitating their own success:

> Midwestern used to be a lot more solid in terms of the African American student. Well when there were fewer African American students here, they were much more community – oriented and much more together as students. The greater the numbers, the more diverse and disperse they've become, the less they seem to be interested in being with each other, it's strange. There's like a vibe at Midwestern, before people would just be arrogant then after a while they would calm down. Then after they would encounter some academic difficulty, they'd realize I'm not that hot and I need to be friendly with the other minority kids, but I don't get a sense of that, that is not happening here as much. It has gotten worse and that's sad to me. James

During my data collection at Midwestern University, I asked each respondent to refer me to additional Midwestern sources who would be able to effectively contribute to my study. I was referred to Michelle, the Director of Support for the College of Mathematics. Over the course of the interview, it became increasingly apparent that Michelle was highly competent and informed regarding her program area. However, she was significantly unaware of those institutional factors that contribute to the academic success of African American collegians. Michelle lacked the university-wide insight that

was needed to discuss those institutional strategies that facilitate the success of Black collegians. She responded to the majority of the questions by relying on her program area and providing responses that were more relevant and appropriate to the college of mathematics.

This part of the discussion will address The Office of Multiethnic Studies (OMS) and four occurrences that were inconsistent with my initial viewpoints:

1. Despite the fact that Midwestern University has a student population that is highly prepared, decidedly competitive and academically astute, the OMS personnel consistently expressed the need to create academic support mechanisms to enhance student success. I presumed that because Midwestern students are so academically prepared, the accentuated need for academic support would be minimized.

2. In working with students, the OMS staff did not avoid being both paternalistic and maternalistic. Instead, they openly embraced these forms of influence. For example, during my interview with Lonnie he mentioned that if a student is consistently showing up late for class or behaving in a noncompliant manner in class, this student is required to meet with him to discuss his/her behavior. Due to the fact that college students are "legally" viewed as adults, I did not anticipate that students would be required to explain this "type" of behavior in a classroom setting, excluding behavior that would be viewed as dangerous.

3. There is a significant and noteworthy detachment that exists between OMS and the rest of Midwestern University. OMS has not been fully integrated into Midwestern University. Lonnie, OMS Director, stated that some view OMS as the "remedial" office and condemn those students who make use of the provided services. Associate Director

James shared that the OMS faculty do not work with other Midwestern faculty and that OMS does not receive an appropriate amount of support from the Midwestern faculty. Additionally, during my interview with Damon, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and an engineering professor, he never mentioned OMS in any manner or reference. All of these factors suggest that there are those in Midwestern's community who do not recognize the value or contributions of OMS. Because of the university's national reputation for excellence, the heightened issue of discrimination within the institution is inconsistent with my initial thoughts on the university community and the interactions of those within that community.

4. Despite the fact that the services of OMS are available to all students, the Director, Lonnie, remains highly concerned that his office would be vulnerable to the attacks and criticisms of various anti-affirmative action groups. I found it interesting that the director remained anxious and troubled of a potential verbal attack on the OMS. Thus, the Director's anxiety leads me to seriously question the level of support offered from the Midwestern University community for both Lonnie and his office.

Next, there were subtle nuances that occurred during my interviews that have to be addressed. These nuances can be attributed to my race and gender and how each impacted my rapport with the respondents.

At the completion of one of my interviews at Midwestern University, once I turned the tape recorder off, an African American male respondent started to talk with me. In what I would describe as a post-interview conversation, the participant described the climate that exists among the African American professionals on campus. He went on to describe how one African American Midwestern alumni, who currently worked on

campus, insisted that he wanted to seek employment elsewhere because he did not like the environment that existed within the community of Midwestern's African American employees. The respondent described the young man as saying, "The Blacks on campus are not supportive of one another. The environment is changing and I don't like it." Based on both comments, I wondered if I would have been made privy to this information if I was not an African American. It appeared as though the participant presumed that because I am African American, I would understand the frustration that existed for him and the other university employee.

Southern University

As a public university that seeks to reflect the broader world in its student population, Southern University has a student enrollment of more than 20,000 and emphasizes student self-governance and academic excellence. This university has an overall graduation rate of 91 percent and an African American rate of 86 percent. Like Midwestern University, Southern has a history of discrimination, specifically based on gender, race, and sexual orientation. According to Aloni, Special Advisor to the Vice President of Student Affairs, this institution "wants to move away from a discriminatory past of all male and all White." Although this centralized organization is currently undergoing change, Southern University does revere tradition.

In terms of the institutional leadership, the president places great priority on diversity. Even in light of university budgetary cuts, the president requested the implementation of university-wide diversity initiatives and supported the implementation of an electronic biased reporting system that would publicize and confront those who participated in bigoted acts against members of the student populace.

As an organization, Southern University holds high expectations for those who exist within this community. As well as believing that they should be role models, some faculty at Southern University believe they should empower African American students by encouraging them to take ownership of the university. Additionally, other faculty hold informal meetings to discuss ways to enhance diversity.

Those in student affairs work to develop effective relationships with students that reflect mutual trust. These professionals also stress the recognition that all students have varied backgrounds and experiences and that these students should be respected and valued. In terms of institutional retention and support, the university has a summer program, which introduces selected students to the university, its resources, and student responsibilities. Furthermore, each college has an association/academic dean who is placed in the residence halls to provide academic assistance to students. In order to heighten student access to organizational resources and to make the institution appear small, personnel place great emphasis on consistently being available to assist students with their concerns. In addition, some believe that it is the institution's responsibility to educate those from underserved populations.

The Office of Black Studies is Southern University's Special Purpose Office. The Office was established as an essential element of the Division of Student Affairs. The primary responsibility of this Office is to facilitate both academic and non-academic units in meeting the needs of African American students. In addition to fostering an environment of support for Black students, this Office is responsible for educating the university community on the needs and backgrounds of this student population.

Southern University places great value on collaboration and this value is reflected in partnerships between: professors and students to prevent prejudiced acts in the classroom, the admissions office and Black student organizations to improve the African American recruiting process and the university and members of the regional community to recruit African American applicants.

Following is a brief explanation and an institutional illustration of each critical factor. Although the factors are presented as distinct constructs, it is important to note that the factors have to be enacted together in a more comprehensive manner in order to effectively support the achievement of Black collegians. Participants at Southern University recommend that institutions implement as many of the factors as possible to create the strongest environment for students' academic success. Both the critical factors and the institutional representations have been presented in an order that reflects the dominance and emphasis that was expressed by the Southern participants.

Special Purpose Office

As previously stated, the Office of Black Studies is Southern University's Special Purpose Office. Founded as a critical component of the Division of Student Affairs, the primary task of the Office is to assist the campus community in meeting the needs of African American collegians. As a critical factor, the Office of Black Studies is highly celebrated and overwhelmingly credited for the success of Southern's Black collegians. The participants from Southern revealed four major response categories regarding the Office of Black Studies: (a) the Office's success in heightening the overall experience for African American students, (b) the Office's assistant dean, Carolyn and her tremendous effectiveness in effectively pairing students together for the Peer Counseling Program (c)

the Office's Peer Counseling Program, and (d) the Office's Dean and his overall thoughts on the Office of Black Studies. As the Dean of the Office of Black Studies, Lance introduces this first section of responses by discussing the development of the Office of Black Studies and how the office addresses the needs of the African American student achievement:

> . . . This office was set up, in the 70s, to provide a more welcoming environment that you see now. We have three buildings, a number of deans who can help students out. There's one dean whose job is to ensure that the cultural center provides them with a home where they can celebrate Black History Month, cultural activities of all kinds, Kinte cloth ceremonies, in addition to graduation. You name it, anything that will help them define themselves as successful African Americans. Lance

To expand on the development of the Office of Black Studies, Lance shares the purpose of his office and he notes some of the challenges that Black collegians might encounter during their college career:

> We are here to try to meet whatever need comes about for the African American students. It's a total experience going to school. It's a total experience furnishing what students need to succeed. You never know what somebody needs, how to get good grades, or what's getting in the way of the good grades. Lance

Aloni specifically addresses the Office's success in increasing the achievement of Black collegians and shares her enthusiasm for the Office of Black Studies:

> . . . But the obvious entry point for them is the Office of Black Studies, which does a phenomenal job. I'm really excited for you to speak with them because they will really lay it all out for you. Aloni

Deborah, Director of the New Student Orientation Office, elaborates on Aloni's enthusiasm and stresses the contributions of the Office of Black Studies and its capacity to heighten the overall experience of African American Students:

> The Office of Black Studies. I think that office does a great job of trying to retain and attract Black students and all of the services and all of the things that have

> been provided over there only help us help them have a better experience. Deborah

Aloni introduces the second set of response categories by sharing her thoughts on how the Office of Black Studies supports the achievement of Black collegians' through their Peer Counseling Program:

> I would say the Assistant Dean of the Office of Black Studies, [her] Peer Counselor Program. . . I think any good program is good because of the people who run the program. And Dean Baker is so good at it, she makes such good matches and such good connections with students and I think they're very successful because of that. And again, it's a good way for us to feel small even though we're big because students come in and they're immediately paired with someone and they have that support. And the mentors that they are placed with have such good training in so many different areas and, so really, pretty much any issue or obstacle that a student faces, the mentor will know how to solve it. It's just very, very good. Aloni

Andrew introduces the third section of response categories by highlighting the effectiveness of the Office's Peer Counseling Program. However, he also notes the assistant dean's contributions to the success of Black collegians:

> Without question, the Peer Counselor Program, from the Office of Black Studies. And the assistant dean does a marvelous job. It's really the students helping one another. And it isn't just gaining [learning to navigate] the system, it's really making people feel that it's okay to work, it's okay to feel worried, it's okay to get a little behind you'll get through it. It's not gimmicky. Andrew

Andrew elaborates on his point by reflecting on his tenure at Southern University. He credits the Office of Black Studies Peer Counseling Program with making the students feel that they are genuinely valued and he feels the Office has a positive impact on the students' overall experience:

> I've been here for 21 years and the Office of Black Studies has really ramped up. They assign students to peer advisors from the beginning, every student is made to feel as if he/she counts, that they're not just tuition – paying units and I think just that

alone makes a huge difference. Andrew

When asked which program has had the greatest impact on the success of Black collegians, participants typically credited the programs in the Office of Black Studies, even over the efforts of their own units. However, the Director of Admissions jokingly offered to take credit for this success:

> The Peer Counselor Program. We'd like to say it's admissions, but I'd have to say the real answer is the Peer Counselor Program. Michael

Like Michael, Linguistics Professor Marie credits the Peer Counseling Program for its success. She specifically notes the Program's peer-to-peer support which enhances academic achievement:

> I would really credit the Office of Black Studies with having developed programs specifically targeting African American students . . . I would guess the Peer Counselor Program may be the most effective because students are more likely to listen to each other and see them as role models and as people who are successful. Marie

Anita, Associate Dean of Residence Life, notes the services offered by the Peer Counseling Program as another example of support for African American students and their overall achievement:

> . . . and then when you add the peer counselor from the Office of Black Studies, you can see that they're multifaceted elements of support that allow our students to thrive here. Anita

Deborah extends Anita's sentiment on the Peer Counseling Program by highlighting the program's emphasis on student engagement:

> I think the other piece of our success is the Peer Counseling Program. So again, it's that feeling of being known. So every first year student has a peer advisor who is African American. Because I can't stress enough how important it is for these students to feel known and for them to know that this is their place. I think that Dean Baker stresses to the peer advisors that this is "your" university; these are "your" grounds. Thereby those students impress that upon the first –year students.

> Then when they begin to feel like an outsider, you're able to focus on your academics. I think that program really impacts the graduation rate because those students are motivating each other to do well, whenever they have difficulty, they can call that peer advisor and that person is there to assist them. Deborah

In the last four quotes Lance discusses his views on the purpose of his Office, the rationale for his Office's mission, and his goals for his Office. He offers an example to illustrate the extent to which the staff is willing to go to meet the needs of African American students:

> For example, if a student walks in here and says, 'I'm an engineering student, I have one month to graduate. I have all of the quantitative skills on earth, but my research requires qualitative skills to nuance my findings and I don't know anything about qualitative. I know I'm going to fail because there's not enough time for me to learn this, what can I do?' Then I would teach it, so that this person can graduate on time. I have all kinds of students with many different kinds of needs and I've got to be ready to have the resources to deal with it or to have colleagues, in house, or colleagues on the campus who can deal with it. Lance

As a Dean, Lance's experience puts him in a unique position to offer perspective on the purpose and goals of the Office of Black Studies. As illustrated, other participants also recognize the importance and impact of the Office and its various initiatives:

> Because it's important, because who else will do it? We have the next generation and if we don't do it, who's going to run this country? Who's going to run our families, our homes, your corporations one day? So you have to prepare them for life. Lance

This comment also reiterates Lance's commitment to increasing the expectations for African American students to make contributions to society and to pursue advanced education. Ultimately, Lance's goal is to transcend those biases and misperceptions associated with African Americans:

> The direction that I'm shaping with this office is the new direction because it says that I'm not impressed with the g.p.a.s of our graduates. I'm not saying, publicly, that it's not impressive because it is. But I'm saying it's the starting point for the

> next step. The next step is for me to get African Americans, in the double digits, into law school, Black faculty through our graduate schools, get more Black doctors. That's the next generation of success in my opinion. Ultimately we want to be able to actualize a following. Human beings are defined by their capacity to transcend the received. They can reconfigure themselves and that's the whole point of education. Lance

Lance concludes by explicitly sharing his thoughts on his choice to focus on Black Studies as opposed to diversity:

> Therefore the effort to correct history has to be intensive and that's why I do Black Studies and not diversity at this time. Some day, I will do diversity. And even in the context of this university, I do some diversity to try to collaborate with Hispanic and Asian American students, but it's not my primary goal. My primary goal is to correct history and to make sure our students succeed. Lance

Southern University's Office of Black Studies is devoted to cultivating and implementing those actions that contribute to the overall achievement and success of the African American collegian.

Faculty Initiatives

Faculty Initiatives was the second critical factor that was highlighted by the participants at Southern University. The group's responses reflected six areas: (a) this organization's faculty take a special interest in the African American student populace; (b) both faculty and advisors monitor African American students from the beginning of their undergraduate experience until graduation; (c) faculty members assure their African American students that they can be successful; (d) faculty members engage their African American students in class by holding them accountable for learning from one another; (e) faculty informally meet to create diversity practices; and (f) faculty utilize specific strategies to demonstrate their dedication to the academic success of African American

students. According to Michael, Dean of Admissions, the faculty at Southern University has a genuine interest in promoting the accomplishments of the Black collegian:

> And we have lots of faculty that really want everyone to do well, but I think many of them take a special interest in African American students; they just want them to do well. Here the faculty really want everyone to finish. There is an overarching sense that everyone finishes, that everyone is prepared to be here and works hard and graduates. Michael

To facilitate the sustained achievement of African American students, Andrew discusses why faculty and advisors should create a system where both frequently monitor the success of these students:

> That means, creating a network of faculty advisor support, and not just checking on them on their way out. That is making sure that someone is looking after them at early points where we can make a difference. . . but I also think more than any place we have made a commitment to give the students the education they deserve, not just get them through, but get them an education. Andrew

Because of issues like affirmative action and marginalization, Andrew believes that African American students need to be reminded that they have the capacity to successfully compete in the academy, so even while faculty may be committed to student success, Andrew sees the need for more explicit faculty interaction and support for this group of students:

> In my experience, some African American students have a confidence issue and you have to let them know that they can do it. The general theme I'm developing is that students need just a little more TLC than professors are used to giving them. African American students, in particular, for historical reasons many are made to feel a little marginal where they shouldn't be, there is still this lingering issue about Affirmative Action and all of that stuff. So the best way to address that is to assure them and to tell them, look you're here and you deserve to be here, but I want you to work and I want you to not sell yourself short, by just kind of taking "gut" courses and getting "B's." I think one of the reasons we do well here is because we treat our students as more than a face in a sea of many faces. Andrew

When asked why some African American students may feel disconnected from their professors, Andrew offers that African American students are used to feeling a connection to both their instructors and the classroom, but some postsecondary faculty may not be comfortable with this level of engagement in their classes:

> Black students, in my opinion, are used to being engaged. The faculty members are afraid of them. Part of it is making everyone feel comfortable. Or I might make them read something out loud to the class and then you sort of break down the fear of talking out loud in class. Also I have a rule that you can always pass and there's no problem. You can say, I don't want to answer and that's fine, I'll come back to you. Part of it is making everyone feel responsible, responsible for learning from one another in class. I even emphasize that they're not competing with one another. It's funny because they think they are, but they can't." Andrew

Expanding on his statement, which sanctions the promotion of diversity, Andrew works to ensure that both his classroom and his program benefit from the effects of this concept. Because of Andrew's personal commitment to diversity, he believes increased measures are warranted. Thus, he uses additional tactics to recruit students who can add diversity to his environment. When asked how he would respond to those who question his methods, Andrew offered this response:

> Because I want a diverse student, because we have illustrated that people learn better in a diverse environment and the classroom experience is better. So I don't make any bones about it, I say look I have to use different techniques to get different students . . Also, I've talked with the social studies teachers in this city. I have mentees on campus. Also I go and talk with the Black groups all of the time. Andrew

To illustrate how dedicated some of the Southern University faculty are to diversity, Professor Anderson shared this example of a group of Southern University faculty who work as mentors to Black students and work with the students on other projects:

> There's a group on grounds, a group of faculty members who meet on their own and get together to promote issues of diversity. They're not an official group. The younger faculty are very interested in this. . . I see evidence of their picking out mentees and working with students. Andrew

The next set of quotes center on very specific strategies utilized by Southern's faculty to demonstrate their interest and commitment to African American students. As another example of the faculty's desire to promote and support diversity, Marie shares how her department demonstrated their value for the African American student population:

> There's a controversial segment of the student population – athletes. In particular, revenue – gathering sports, mainly football and basketball. And, in both sports, there's a certain amount of African American students who are recruited specifically for their abilities in the sport and oftentimes they are not prepared when they enter our institution. So the question is what are these students going to major in and how are they going to get through? They [African American athletes] have a lot of tutoring and they work with the students quite a bit. But a lot of times some of these students are just really struggling academically. And we had a discussion in our department about whether to put a minimum g.p.a. requirement for declaring a major. And most departments, here, have that requirement. We decided not to implement that minimum g.p.a. on the grounds, partly that we felt those students had something to contribute to the university, not just in terms of sports, but in terms of the perspectives they bring into the classroom. And that was something that we didn't want to just toss them out to find some other major. Marie

For those who may question Marie and her department for not implementing the minimum g.p.a. requirement, she offers this response:

> I think it's the argument that we don't want to close doors. We don't want to put up barriers, we want to be welcoming. If we're going to talk about diversity, if we're going to talk about race and cultural difference, then we can't be the department that is putting up barriers to people. So we have to be prepared to accept all kinds of students. Marie

As an Assistant English Professor, Anita tries to emulate the values that she resses both in and out of the classroom:

> Because I teach, in and out of the classroom, I also see my role as a teacher and I try to role model that which I speak about and that which I believe and that is that I value students' learning, I value challenging them to learn. I value challenging them to step out of their comfort zones; whether it's in my classroom or whether it's in a one –on – one with a student that I'm interacting with. I value trying to get them to understand how important it is to become a global citizen, someone who is responsible first to self and then to our community. And our community is the planet. Anita

Anita elaborates on her statement by acknowledging the responsibilities that African Americans have to the world. She tries to reinforce the notion that Southern University belongs to them:

> I also, even, do that in my classroom and I acknowledge that and I try to empower them. I tell Black students, when I work with them in the particular, that this is your university. I've been saying that for 32 years and I mean it. And this is truly my university because if you don't become invested in the place where you spend your life, then what are you doing, just passing time? Anita

Southern University participants view Faculty Initiatives as those responsibilities or roles, articulated by faculty or other university personnel that speak to the perceptions of how faculty should carry out their jobs to facilitate the academic success of African American students.

Institutional Expectations

In terms of Institutional Expectations, the participants from Southern University shared five types of expectations: (a) the university expects the whole community to see the educational value of diversity; (b) the university expects its values to transfer to students; (c) the institution expects the students to fully exercise their leadership and to believe that the university belongs to them; (d) the university expects all students to graduate; and (e) the dean of admissions expects his staff to support the university's value for diversity and academic quality. Lance, Dean of the Office of Black Studies, opens this

section by accentuating that Southern's students are taught that diversity has an educational value that is recognized by the entire campus community:

> . . . It's quite simple; people get to learn that diversity has an educational value, plain and simple. You can't educate with only the philosophies and mindsets of one group of people, when we're entering the global world. Without diversity as an educational value, we're handicapping all students; we're not preparing them for the world. The same is true for faculty, administrators and those in student affairs. . . This is a good university, first of all. A good university in the sense that it has a very committed administration and faculty and they demand high standards from our students. Lance

When asked about the university's culture and how it impacts students, Lance offers this example:

> I can tell you that the aspirations of this university transfers to the students. The students pick it up and they rise to it. One student here once told me, 'they tell you here that you're smart and you get to believe it.' Students have the opportunity to test themselves and to discover that they can be smart. So from the students' standpoint, the expectation that they are going to be future leaders that they're going to be decision makers in their fields is an expectation that they'd love to embrace and so they take charge of that at some point. Lance

When Aloni describes the institutional culture, she reinforces Lance's emphasis on student life, but includes that the university's climate also focuses on student self governance. Thus, the students are given a full opportunity to cultivate their leadership and this is found throughout the campus:

> Well I think as you talk to people, the one thing you might hear out of their mouths first is student self governance, that is the culture that really permeates this place. As I describe the university's Judiciary and Honor Committee, the students really do run the show here and we really serve to facilitate that, that element. And, that's a unique piece. As an outsider, when I came in, I thought, oh yeah they really do pay lip service to that, but do they really walk the walk? And they do, they absolutely do. And so it's a real cultivation of leadership that we do. Aloni

Aloni offers this example to demonstrate the latitude that is offered to Southern's students in an attempt to cultivate their leadership skills:

> Well recently our judiciary chair, [an African American] who graduated last year, came back to see us and said he's now doing paralegal work in New York and he said, "You know I feel so well prepared in a lot of ways I feel bored by the real world because we were making such critical decisions and people really gave us a lot of power here just to do that. And now that I'm out in the real world and I've got that entry level job, you know I'm really doing very little and I feel prepared to take on more. That's what we want to hear from our students, that they feel they've succeeded and are prepared to be good leaders. I think they can offer us great perspectives. And I think our African Americans are coming from a wide cross – section of cultures and they can offer us diverse perspectives in a way that other communities, that exist here, can't. As you know, from your research, our institution does not have a pretty history. We're a Southern school and we discriminated. Aloni

To extend Aloni's discussion on the latitude that is offered to Southern's student population; Lance reiterates the university's priority of establishing a culture of ethical self governance, which translates into student leaders who have the capacity to make effective decisions both on campus and in their professional disciplines:

> It's a culture of ethical self – governance. That's the very first thing one should say about this university. Students know that they're expected to be leaders, decision makers, and so that's the first important template that's provided for our students. Lance

Echoing both Aloni and Lance, Michael insists that the institutional climate has convinced African American students to exercise their leadership skills and to believe that the university belongs to them. To prove his point, Michael cites several examples of African American students in prominent leadership positions on campus:

> Another thing is this is a place where students run the university. We have over 500 clubs and organizations. And there are no faculty advisors. So this establishes a sense of ownership and responsibility. One of the things you'll see here is that every couple of years, the student body president will be African American. And the top positions: head of the honors committee; will go to a Black woman or a Black man. Since 1979, we've had 6 – 8 Black student body presidents. And I think it says that students come here and feel as if they have ownership and this is theirs. It seems that almost everyone feels that he/she owns the place and wants to be a part of it. They are engaged. . . Michael

Deborah, Director of New Student Orientations, concurs with the observations of her colleagues. She sees the autonomy that is offered to Southern University students as another important cause for their academic and developmental triumphs. Deborah adds, the campus climate is one that gives students a great deal of independence, which translates into the students' "buy in" and their ability to carry out those tasks that they feel were developed by and for them:

> At Southern, we certainly give students a little more autonomy than other universities may give them, but it's basically an educational philosophy that other institutions really think is important. As most of us know, "buy in" happens whenever it's created from the students. It can't happen when it's us saying this is what you have to do. Deborah

In terms of institutional expectations, the fourth type offered by Southern's participants was the expectation for all students to graduate. Andrew believes the success of African American students can be directly attributed to the climate of Southern University, which requires university personnel to accept responsibility for the students' success. He also believes that Southern's personnel is dedicated to the academic success and graduation of every student who attends the institution. Notwithstanding all of this, Anderson sees some ways in which there is room for improvement:

> But also the university does take more seriously the idea that when we accept these students, it's our responsibility to help them get through, so we don't regard these students as sort of superfluous and once they're here, they're kind of thrown in at the deep end and they're on their own." .. . But I think the university has made a commitment that all of the students, who come here, should graduate. So our graduation rate is pretty good, but there's still a gap between non-White graduation rates and Black graduation rates. And that's really too high as well. I think, more than most places, and we do make it a priority to help these students get through. Andrew

Southern's Dean of Admissions, Michael emphasizes both diversity and academic quality to his staff in helping them support African American students. Michael's

definition of diversity is not exclusive to race, but includes those who hold varied perspectives, backgrounds and those from other parts of the world:

> Well I tell my staff that there are two primary goals: there's academic quality and diversity. And everyone buys into that. We say diversity on many scales, not just race or ethnicity, but we want people to know that we value different opinions, different backgrounds. Also geography, to some extent. Right now, we're at five or six percent of international students. Michael

When asked about the institutional climate, Marie shares her views on the direction of Southern University's climate. She feels that a more diverse student population serves to remind people to avoid stereotypical responses and view people as individuals:

> I think it's important for this place to develop an identity that is not like it was in the past; all White and all male, good old boy type. And I think that having African American students here is crucial for moving away from that image and bringing this university into the 21st century, and looking more like the country as a whole. So I think that's an important aspect. And also just continuing to remind people that their own experiences are not the same as anybody else's. So I think just having the experience of having a range of students who are visible on campus, makes people recognize that you can't just stereotype everybody and you should treat people as individuals. Marie

The Institutional Expectations of those Southern University participants are those institutional beliefs, rules, or behaviors that reflect the identity of the community. Also, these expectations guide the actions of those within that community, all of which promote the academic experience of the African American collegian.

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration

In terms of Valuing Diversity Through Collaboration, Southern University's institutional sample noted four types of collaborations: (a) those on and off campus collaborations that help promote diversity and provide support for African American student success; (b) those collaborations between various on-campus offices and

between faculty and staff to help recruit students; (c) those collaborations that facilitate the students' transition to college; and (d) those collaborations that require members of the campus community to work with those elsewhere to support Southern's Black collegians. Michael, Dean of Admissions introduces the first type of collaboration between campus units. He describes how the Admissions and Financial Aid Office work together to provide admissions offers to students. Direct communication with the student occurs through collaboration between the offices:

> One of the things we do is go to the financial aid office in April and there will be one financial aid officer with one admissions officer and the admissions officer will call and congratulate the student. And then the financial officer will take the phone and explain the aid award, and just take the student through what's involved in getting financial aid. This is done for every African American student who is offered admissions. So we do that and sometimes it might take a couple of nights to do that. Michael

The Admissions Office also actively works with African American students to recruit new students to campus:

> I think we have a strong, active working relationship. We have a lot of students who work with us in recruiting students. We have a program called African American Student Admissions and our students call prospective students at night. They even visit high schools as ambassadors. They host visitors in the dorms. I think we're certainly seen as a friend of the Black students here, and so I think it's a warm and positive relationship. . . Also we work with student groups. There's the Black Student Network, we work with them and try to get them to help us out through our African American Student Admissions. They visit high schools for us or they're on panels. There are a lot of things they assist us with. Michael

Michael also mentioned other ways in which Admissions and other campus units work with "friends" of the university and with alumni for recruitment, placement, and internship experiences:

> Yeah we've got one with Rhonda Milton in a large metropolitan city. She identifies kids through a local scholars program and she sets up interviews in

> hotels in the city and we go up and interview students and then she has some scholarship money too that she gets from the local newspapers and some others. She's a great partner and asset. She isn't an alumni, she's just a good friend. . . We work with a lot of partnership programs. For example, there's one in this city, that one of our alum started about 10 or 12 years ago. We place Black kids from the city schools in businesses in Richmond for the summer. And some of those go throughout the academic year too, putting them in a stock brokerage firm or a big real estate office, just to get the real world experience. And many of those businesses are run by alum. One time, we actually placed one of our university students there as a summer intern. Michael

Andrew gave examples of collaboration related to academic programs and units. He discusses how he used collaboration to improve his Social Philosophy Program. Specifically he collaborated with the Office of Black Studies to recruit African American students for his program, resulting in higher minority student participation and a more effective program:

> I have a straight professor position in the Politics Department, but I also run a program which is an interdisciplinary program to which students apply. And that is the Political Social Philosophy Program. I take about 20 – 21 students for that every year. . . When I took the program over, they were doing a poor job at recruiting minority students. So one of the first things I did was essentially reach out to the people in the Office of Black Studies and said, look I want you to help me. I need good students. So I addressed the misperception that students needed a 3.8 to get into the program. I changed that. And, since then, I've had a pretty good rate of participation among minority students in the program. And the program has been better as a result. Andrew

Andrew expounds on other collaborative measures he has used to increase the participation of African American students in academic programs with which he is affiliated. He actively seeks advice and support from current students to acquaint his program to new students:

> Well I've done some direct recruiting of African Americans, but I would ask my current students is there anyone that I should be talking to? So I'll say who is a good prospect to get interested in Political Social Philosophy? I'll talk to the peer advisors and introduce my program to them. So I'll go to the first meeting called

> Harambe and I'll introduce myself and I'll talk to them about my program. Andrew

Andrew discusses his co-teaching a diversity course with Anita, an English professor and Dean of Residence Life. During the course, the students offered suggestions to increase the participation of African American students in university programming, thereby providing additional opportunity for collaboration:

> Me and the Dean of Residence Life did a January class one time where we had the students come up with some ideas on what kinds of programs would work. And the students actually gave us ideas on what programming our university could implement. Andrew

As a student affairs professional, Deborah shares her thoughts on two of the collaborative projects she has participated in, one with the outreach office and the other involves parents of prospective students:

> Yes for example the outreach office has both fall kickoff and spring kickoff and during fall kickoff, they ask me to come to speak to Black parents who are considering Southern for their kids. So, in that way, yes I go and say yes send your students here, it's great for Black students. So I do those kinds of things all the time. . . Also Dean Baker, of the Office of Black Studies, has invited me for the last five years to speak to the students in the peer advising program. There I talk about the first – year experience and I talk about things that are specific to first – year African American students. So those are the kinds of things, in terms of collaborative ways that we're able to come together to ensure that Black students are successful and to help parents understand that if they send their students here, that those students can be successful and that this is a good place for Black students. Deborah

As an opportunity to educate Southern's faculty on diversity, Anita discusses her collaboration with another faculty member in which they developed a videotape to depict the unfair treatment experienced by some African American college students while interacting with faculty:

> This project was done with one of my colleagues. The tape really focused on African American students' experiences and then we used that tape to talk with

> different departments. So we were trying to make inroads to increasing the numbers of Black students... I interviewed and taped a panel of students. I got a panel of Black students, a professional cameraman, and we walked around with hand – held microphones and I just interviewed students. And we put it all together on one tape. The stuff they talked about, I could hear their stories and so I have a tape on African American student experiences at this institution, but even though we did it a while ago, it's still timely. I could show it to you and other students today and the issues would still be relevant. The students would say, oh yeah that happened to me, too. It was provocative to be able to put that in front of faculty members because we're so invisible to so many people, where they don't want to think that there is an issue here, especially if there are signs of success and excellence. Anita

The Director of the Office of Black Studies, Lance concludes this discussion on Valuing Diversity through Collaboration by summarizing the importance of this concept and the pivotal role it plays at Southern University:

> I think it's a composite experience, making sure that if my office succeeds, career services will succeed. If career services succeed, my office has succeeded. So if you want one thing, it would be the value -added collaborations between this office and other entities in the university. In a word, a fusion of experiences that will build, not one isolated entity. Lance

Participants at Southern University, view Valuing Diversity through Collaboration as those activities that result in an increased awareness and/or promotion of diversity as a result of combining the efforts of two or more campus entities or the combined efforts of an on-campus entity with external entities. Participants engaged in such activities believe in the importance and utility of these collaborations in supporting African American students.

Student Affairs

Southern University's study participants offered eight types of strategies used by student affairs professionals to heighten the academic achievement and graduation of Black collegians. The strategies were: (a) student affairs professionals provide mentoring

programs in the residence halls, (b) student affairs professionals express openness and appreciation for those who represent difference, (c) student affairs professionals increase their effectiveness with students because of the low R.A. to student ratio, (d) student affairs professionals train their student staff in multicultural awareness, (e) student affairs professionals establish strong relationships with students to cultivate mutual trust, (f) student affairs professionals ensure that students have completed all institutional paperwork prior to the start of classes and address the needs of their parents, (g) student affairs professionals reiterate that the university belongs to the students, and (h) student affairs professionals demonstrate diversity in the selection of student employees.

Associate Dean of Residence Life, Anita introduces the first category of responses. She stresses that the university community serves to facilitate the overall success of African American collegians, including the availability of resources in the residence halls:

> It's not just one office that supports our students in terms of their trying to make sure that they have an environment where they can excel academically and where they have comfort. I'm in charge of the residence halls. We require all of our first – year students to live on grounds in housing that is supported by a peer advising program or peer mentoring program. . . Anita

Deborah introduces the second set of responses. As the Director of the New Student Orientation Office, Curtis and her staff place a high priority on cherishing the experiences of all students and demonstrating an appreciation for the talents they bring:

> I think that our office does a good job of trying to be aware of the fact that everyone's experiences are different and everyone needs to be valued; feel valued because of their experiences. So I think just having that level of awareness helps. So I think because of the nature of our work, we have to be open and we have to create space for students who are different or the same to feel welcome at this university and to feel like this is their university. I think that's one of the things that we really try to do is let students know that this is your university. . . Deborah

When asked why she believed African American students flourished at Southern University, Deborah provides several examples from her own work and that of other student affairs colleagues. Deborah credited the low Resident Assistant to student ratio because students have a greater opportunity to interact with their RAs, so they are more likely to become known from the beginning. As a result, the students have a greater likelihood of becoming engaged in the university community which leads to greater academic achievement:

> I think the first thing I've seen at Southern University, that's been a little bit different, is that the R.A. to student ratio is really low. . . And most institutions, particularly state institutions, you'll find that these students have one R.A. for every 50 students. So it's hard to feel like you're known in an environment like that. Whereas here, the R.A. has 16 to 20 students to get to know and so those students feel known from the outset. So I think that's one thing, so the R.A. is heavily involved in connecting the students with other students. Deborah

There is a sense from several participants that part of Southern's overall strategy is to support Black collegians with early intervention. This may start during summer orientation and continue throughout the first year as Student Affairs professionals establish relationships with the students and provide information on campus resources. When asked about Southern's low RA to student ratio and how that ration impacted the success of the African American collegian, Anita emphasized the staff's training and the impact of the RA / student relationship:

> Ours are predominantly undergraduate, that we take the time to train, to train them on issues such as multicultural awareness. I've been doing that with the residence staff since 1978, meaning the R.A.s and I have 230. For first – year students, the ratio of an R.A. to a first – year student is one to 18 or one to 20. So it's a program where they have an older student, second through fourth year usually, who basically helps them to negotiate the environment, helps them to negotiate the culture, the traditions of our institution, plugs them into academic advising, is a referral for a lot of different things like counseling, etc. So it's a

very low ratio of R.A. to student and that's for all of our first – year students. . . Anita

As the Special Advisor to the Vice President of Student Affairs and Liaison to the General Counsel, Aloni emphasizes the need for student affairs professionals to develop a mutual trust with students:

> Because in that culture, where they're really running the show, it's so imperative for student affairs professionals to have a really good intimate relationship with students so that they feel that they can trust us and so even though they're running the show, it feels like a more hand in hand type of relationship. . . Aloni

When asked about her role and how it impacted the success of African American collegians, Deborah mentioned the inclusion of parents in their programming efforts. In addition, in the New Student Orientation Office Deborah and her staff ensure that students have completed all of the necessary asks to start classes by working with students and parents before the fall term begins:

> My primary responsibility is to be sure that by the time students get here in the fall, that they have all the tools that they need to be successful. So that means registering for classes and ensuring that they have everything they need to get done, providing an opportunity for them to get to know their peers. We offer that during summer orientation. And also providing the opportunity for parents to get to know the university as well. And so I see that as our primary charge to be sure that the students have the tools that they need so they can begin the year successfully once they're here for the first day of class. Deborah

When asked about other tactics that student affairs professionals can use to assist African American collegians, Deborah emphasizes that they should remind students that the university belongs to them and that institutional personnel are committed to providing those vital campus resources that facilitate the students' success:

> I think that's one of the things that we really try to do is let students know that this is your university, it's whatever you to make of it. There are some core values that we certainly ascribe to, but this is your place you do with it what you will, but

> here's some tools that we want to provide for you in your exploration of how you're going to make this university your own. Deborah

As the Dean of Residence Life and a student affairs professional, Anita was asked to discuss how student affairs professionals can impact the achievement of Black students. Anita mentioned that diversity in her staff was very important. This diversity was accomplished by crosscutting race, sexual orientation, different viewpoints, and geographical origin. As a result, she is proud of her area and she believes it is a very dynamic environment that is highly visible and noticed by many students, particularly minority students:

> I have a very diverse staff and I'm not just talking about race. I'm talking about international students, different points of view, and sexual orientation. So I'm proud of what we do as a program, and it has an impact on African American students because they can see those who are different all throughout my area. So it's a very dynamic environment. Anita

Southern University's Student Affairs professionals draw attention to the value and benefits of diversity and assist in the establishment of cultural capital, which leads to increased retention rates and heightened graduation percentages for African American collegians. These professionals reach out to students early on and try to support them throughout their academic careers at Southern University.

Institutional-Unit Response

Although this critical factor was not mentioned by every participant in my sample, those that mentioned it conveyed its significance and its presence on Southern University's campus. In terms of Institutional-Unit Response, the participants at Southern provided five types: (a) university personnel act as a resource to assist both African American students and their parents; (b) university personnel have personalized

some institutional processes and developed a program to recruit low-income students; (c) university personnel are willing to hire more African American professors; and (d) university personnel set deadlines for all students to ensure a timely graduation. Deborah introduced the first type of institutional response by explaining why she believes it is the institution's responsibility to facilitate the overall transition of students:

> I think it's our role and our duty to help them see that other people can also be resources and helpful tot hem as well. Most parents and most students want to succeed and we're able to give them the names, faces, and phone numbers of people who are going to help them succeed and if I'm recommending them, they they're going to think ok well she know, she's Black, so she's not going to send me to someone who is crazy. So I think there's some level of automatic trust right there because we share that experience of being African American. Deborah

In another attempt to respond to the inequities that exist for some African American students, Southern University has created both a more personalized admittance program and an initiative to attract those from diverse SES backgrounds. Michael, Dean of Admissions, discusses both endeavors:

> In the admission process, we deal as if we're running a manual operation. We talk individually with students and parents. So I think that through the admissions process, we try to personalize it, and to make it small scale. We're dealing with about 18,000 applicants, but we try to break that down and humanize it as much as possible. . . And now we're trying to attract many students of many different races and backgrounds, but also we have a new effort called Southern ACCESS, which tries to attract low – income students and that cuts across every race and ethnicity. It does bring a different kind of population. Michael

In terms of creating proposals to retain more African American college students, Andrew believes that the university should hire more Black professors who could be role models for Black students, whereby the students could see those who look like themselves in influential positions. Andrew believes this is the best way for the University to retain African American students:

> In terms of Black students, what I keep telling my colleagues is one of the best things for retention is to just see more Black professors, it's not rocket science. Then the students will see that they can do this. Andrew

Deborah credits the institution's four year requirement for graduation for positively affecting Southern's African American students. She asserts that this initiative serves as both a motivator for African American student success at the institution and an opportunity for students to intellectually challenge themselves:

> The other thing is, I think it's pragmatic; you only get eight semesters to be here. Like, at other schools you can ride your college career out as long as six years, eight years, you can't do that here. They give you eight semesters to finish your degree. If you have a family situation that precludes you from finishing, it doesn't mean that they don't take those kinds of things into consideration. You will not find students here who say, I've been here for six years, there's none of that. Once they reach their fourth year, they're done. Deborah

Southern University defines Institutional-Unit Response as those ideas, committees, proposals, stipulations and hiring decisions initiated by any member of the university community. The responses serve to enhance the overall experience for either the low-income student population or the African American student community in particular.

Retention/Support Programs

Although most of the other critical factors mentioned by participants connect to the support of Black collegians, a few were specifically designated as Retention/Support. Thus, this critical factor was emphasized by only a few of the participants and it was revealed that the African American students utilized this feature as a supplement to the support received from the Office of Black Studies. Those respondents at Southern University revealed two types of Retention/Support programs: those that assisted the

academic development of African American students and those association/academic deans who are located in the residence halls:

> Well we have a program called the Acclimation Program; it's not designed for Black students, although initially it was. And it continues now, but it's not based on race. But it involves counseling and advising. It involves a summer program where students come and stay for about six weeks here, taking two courses and doing a lot of things like seeing student groups and meeting faculty. Things that help students figure out how to be successful here; like how to use the library, make sure they have access to a computer. And, it's really sort of an assimilation process. And with that group, those are among our most at risk students, academically. Their admission is contingent upon their participation in this program. And the courses will be counted toward their graduation, and there's no cost to the student, including the supplies. Michael

The students who participate in the Acclimation Program come from high schools that are less competitive, so both academic and transitional support are provided. Rollins highlights the Program's success:

> The graduation rate of the students in the Acclimation Program is nearly 100 percent. It's extremely high. . . The criteria for participation in the Transition Program are typically if they've come out of a very modest high school, where the challenges aren't very great. They might have "A's," but there isn't a lot of competition or it could be that they're weak in one area. They might have trouble in math, where we think that a little support would help them. If we see a pattern like they're from a first -generation family. Michael

Deborah elaborates on the support provided by the association/academic deans. These individuals represent academic disciplines, but their offices are located in residence halls across the campus. The deans provide both academic support and personal counseling. Deborah discusses the role of the deans and how she views their efforts as another form of institutional support for the African American collegian:

> In all of the colleges, they have an association dean. And if any student is having difficulty, based on where they live, meaning the residence halls, each group of houses has an association dean. And I really believe the association dean is such a great example of anybody who's having academic difficulty or someone who just wants to get academic advice, the dean is open and willing to talk. Most of them

> have a good sense of difference and multiculturalism and stuff like that. I think that is such a critical success factor that you know you always have a dean, within your four years, that you can go to if you're encountering any academic difficulty. Each school has some version of that. . . And you have that person for your entire four years. So I think that's a critical success factor for Black students. . . The academic deans who are assigned and placed in the dorms. They make a point of having diversity within their offices. So there are pockets at this institution and so when you have pockets, even though they might not all be together, but we've got some places that will take care of students. Deborah

Andrew extends the discussion on the association/academic deans by emphasizing the need to assist students and by challenging institutions to do more to support Black collegians:

> That is, we have to make college more affordable to students, and we have to support these students by giving them the skills and the background that they need to succeed in college. Andrew

The Retention/Support Programs offer instructional and/or transitional assistance to the African American collegian or the university community as a whole.

Presidential Priorities

This critical factor was not significantly highlighted by the study's respondents, but those who discussed this factor viewed it as highly relevant to the awareness, acceptance, implementation and continuation of diversity protocols at Southern University. The participants' responses fell into two categories: the president's unwavering commitment to cultivate diversity and the implementation of the recommendations made by the Presidential Review Commission. As the Special Advisor to the Vice President of Student Affairs, Aloni works closely with both students and administrators. She discusses how the president has demonstrated his unyielding commitment to diversity even in the midst of fiscal crisis:

> And even in the budget cuts, the aspects that kept getting funded were the university's various initiatives and the president of the university ordered a review commission to review the state of the university, in terms of its diversity protocols. And it's an interesting document. It's fairly long, but it gives you a very good framework for the different diversity benchmarks that we believe we need to meet. Aloni

Aloni expresses her admiration to the university president and the board for their stanch dedication to expose the racial tensions that exist at Southern University:

> And then another piece that I was involved in was the development of a biased reporting system, which we now have online. And the president and the board were very interested and involved in pursuing this project. The biased reporting system is an electronic – based system whereby any student who believes that they were the subject of bias, can make a report and it's on our website. . . And that's really why I applaud the board and the president for moving forward with that. Because as we studied that whole system and implemented it, there were a lot of schools that had such a system and they removed it because they didn't want to advertise or track that they were having these problems. And our idea, all along, has been that the best way to rid it is to expose it, so that's what we've been doing. Aloni

Like Aloni, Andrew offers an example of the university president's influence on institutional diversity programming. Here, Andrew, Professor and Co-chair of the National Diversity Board, explains that the President's Review Commission requested that the university hire an individual who would cultivate and promote diversity. Members of the President's Review Commission were charged with examining and implementing university-wide initiatives that would encourage inclusiveness for minorities and ensure that members of the university are aware of their obligations to promote and support diversity:

> This is one of the reasons we wanted this Vice President of Equity and Diversity. We wanted a very visible figure whose job it was to pull together the very disparate elements of the university and make sure people were paying attention to this. If it's one of 10 things in your job description, maybe you'll get around to it, but if it's not the way you think about it everyday, then it doesn't happen. The broader culture still needs a huge amount of education on race. Andrew

Presidential Priorities was defined by Southern University as a critical factor that included those directives that were specifically initiated by the university president and/or central administration. These administrative directives require university personnel to examine, develop, implement, maintain, and/or evaluate their unit's programming in terms of diversity.

Southern University-Dissenting Voices

In this study, Southern University is the institution with the highest African American graduation rate, thus it would seem that this institution has made great strides and has resolved many of the challenges that seem to confront African American collegians and impede their success. This section illustrates that Southern University has not settled all of its problems and that there are several administrators, faculty and student affairs professionals who are boldly willing to discuss those contentions and some of the causes, as well. Although she is a student affairs professional, Deborah is not inhibited when it comes to discussing faculty initiatives and the disengagement that exists between university Black students and faculty. Deborah believes this detachment leads to poor class performance and low grades for the African American students:

> I think that more students and faculty members here need to see that there are African American students who aren't just out here with their pants sagging down and listening to hip hop all the time and not trying to focus in on their academics, that they can do that and be successful academically. So I'm impressed by that. When I see that they're able to be bi-cultural and be successful at it. Unfortunately, I think the faculty here think they already know who the African American students are before they sit down in their classrooms. There is a gap between the African American students' g.p.a.s and the Whites. So I think there is a disconnect between the faculty members and what they perceive about the African American students. Deborah

As a faculty member, Marie describes her role as one that includes valuing the experiences of all students and ensuring that her department is doing whatever is necessary to assist students. However, Marie recalls an example when an African American student became very insulted by one of her course discussions, which resulted in a very negative experience for both Marie and the student:

> But also, I've had a student who was very offended about a discussion of language. And he was an African American student and denied that there was any such thing as "Black English" and said it's a racist concept to even talk about a particular kind of language that's associated with African Americans, and sort of arguing that that was even racist to use that terminology. So I've had both negative and positive experiences. Marie

Anita, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life, highlighted her pride and enthusiasm in both her staff and the work that they do. She even described how she personally spends time training her RA staff on various issues that might impact first and second year students. However, Anita shares an incident that caused her to become both hurt and greatly disappointed:

> This past year, one of the things that hurt me deeply was that one of my Black female R.A.s was called the "N" word by her residents, who when she confronted them, they denied it, but that is something that happened to one of my R.A.s. That impacted her, she's a student. It impacted that community, it was traumatic. So glass half full. That shouldn't have happened to her as a student, as an R.A. that shouldn't have happened, but it did because we have people coming in every year and they come to us with these biases, with these prejudices, with this entitlement, with this lack of civility. We're no better, we're no worse. I think that we are trying, but to say that we've arrived well I can't. Anita

In an attempt to promote leadership and integrity, those employed by Southern University give the students a great deal of autonomy. However, Deborah, a student affairs professional, discusses the challenges that accompany student autonomy:

> So the way that plays out in terms of us saying this is your university is sometimes students want to do whatever they want without input or perspective of

> faculty members and I think that tension is difficult for many freshmen who haven't been here long. So what happens is that students want the privilege of making independent choices without the responsibility that goes along with it. So I think we're constantly in that struggle. So that's how it plays out, we're constantly talking to students about what does it mean to have student self governance? And what are your responsibilities as a part of that? When things go great, they get the credit, when things go wrong, we get the blame. So just trying to share both the credit and the blame is a struggle. . . Deborah

The Office of Black Studies has been depicted by personnel at Southern University who participated in this study as a source of great pride and an organization that is highly sought after for collaborations and other programming to facilitate African American student success. However, Andrew shares an opposing viewpoint offered by another segment of the university minority community:

> We had a fairly awkward session with the Asian Student Association one time. They said, well there are two deans in the Office of Black studies and we don't have a single dean and how come they have all this and we don't. I said, figure out what you need and then ask the central administration for that. Don't direct your ire at somebody who has actually succeeded at getting what they need. You're fighting for crumbs from the table to begin with. So why are you fighting with one another over these crumbs? Andrew

Marie endorses Anderson's point about the Office of Black Studies and adds the dissenting voice of the student Latino population:

> And this is not an area that traditionally had a Latino population, but it's starting to now. So it's starting to be other groups of students who are saying, what about us? Why are we all lumped together in the Office of Student Affairs? And why do the African American students have their own special office? And so, at a certain point, there was talk of creating a single office that would be a sort of umbrella for all students of color. And it was tabled. There was discussion over it and a committee, but it was like, we're doing something well here and so fooling around with it is not necessarily a good idea. It might lead to us losing something by trying to make this change. So nothing happened and things remained as they were. Marie

In terms of the many Institutional-Unit Responses that Southern University implemented, there are many projects that have enhanced the overall experience of the

African American student community. However one of the major goals of this institution is to recruit more African American faculty and this institution has been unable to accomplish this goal:

> We're in a awkward situation in this city, except for the few Black faculty and the handful of Black doctors and ministers, most of the Black families who live here, work in service positions at the university. And so there isn't much of a Black middle class here to attract other faculty here. So I think that's one of the problems that we have. We want more Black faculty. We don't seem to be able to get large numbers of Black faculty. Michael

Andrew questions the institution's attempts to increase the African American faculty and boldly charges the institution's faculty for their covert demonstrations of racism:

> I do think we need to do a better job at recruiting African Americans, staff and faculty. . . You know I think, in most departments and certainly my department, it's the subject that never gets raised. In general faculty are, in a departmental context, they get very formal and turf – conscious about their field. And even people, who are quite reasonable on the subject of Affirmative Action when they're not talking about hiring, become crazy when it comes to this subject. So all of these issues are never addressed directly. It's particularly true of someone who does racial politics, they'll say we don't need another person doing urban, we already have one. So race is something that is almost never said directly. Andrew

Here Andrew offers an example of how the faculty exercises subtle forms of racism which converts into low numbers of African American faculty:

> They will never say, I'm never gonna hire a Black man even though we know that's what they actually think, but they'll never say it. But there's this built – in prejudice that someone has to be Tiger Woods to be included in their foursome. So I think that in the departmental context, it's still harder to address these issues. You might get people to agree in the faculty senate that it is a goal of the university to diversify the faculty, but as long as that's somebody that's considered 'a legend' and that's the hardest nut to crack. Andrew

Although Southern University has a history of both discrimination and segregation, today those at this institution are fervently trying to rectify the institutional

history by continually emphasizing and embracing diversity. Despite all of the Institutional-Unit Responses to support diversity, the institution is still challenged by issues of racism. Michael believes that students play a major role in the prejudiced acts that have occurred on campus:

> Of course we have some racism here. There are some awful things that have happened. We've had a few incidents that happened this past year and we assume those responsible were students. Michael

Aloni acknowledges the university's history and shares her concerns for minority groups that have seemingly been the target of many racist acts on campus:

> . . . Southern University does not have a pretty history. We're a Southern school and we discriminated. . . I would say that I think we're doing great things, but we can do better. When I look at those "bias reporting" numbers, the populations that we continue to see, feeling targeted, include the African Americans, include sadly some of our Asian Americans, it includes our LGBT community. Aloni

Anita discusses how the racial incidents have affected the institutional climate in terms of both the impact on students and the impact on recruiting more minority faculty:

> We have some retention issues because of our statistics, but we do have a climate issue, in terms of the disparity in the amount of incidents that students of color experience versus those who don't. There are also these invisible kinds of or really hidden rules. So when you have someone who doesn't necessarily know the traditions of our institution, or doesn't have the same kind of comfort level because their great grandfather didn't live in those residence halls or they were exceptional in their high schools and they come here and everyone is exceptional and you are no longer the big fish anymore. So there's challenges. Now where we actually have done a better job is in terms of the student experience even though we have those issues. We have yet to still excel in recruiting and retaining faculty of color. We have yet to excel in recruiting and retaining women and that's ridiculous because you can't say that there's a lack of a pool as you can say with certain ethnic groups, racial groups, so there's that goal out there, but there are efforts being made. Anita

Lance shares a piece of Southern University's history to reflect on some of the obstacles that were imbedded in the institutional climate and that served as a great source of pain for those who represented that which is different:

> There was a time when African Americans, who were qualified to come to school here, were paid to go to Harvard, Meharry, and other places instead of coming here because this university was originally set up for White males. So it meant that if you were qualified and you wanted to come here, as a Black man or a Black woman, the state would pay you to go to another university. And, this changed only in the 50s, in our lifetime. . . Lance

Andrew elaborates on Lance's point and shares his personal history with the climate of Southern University:

> When I first got here, I was really quite "put off" of basically the anti-intellectualism of a lot of the prevailing culture. Also a lot of this stuff was exclusive, not just to gays, but to those of color. You're not included in all of these old traditions. . . For example, one day me and a colleague were at the alumni association and they sent out a little thank you card for people who had contributed and the card had a picture of five "lolly gagging" White guys smoking pipes on the lawn. And the message was 'Well it's changed, but it hasn't really changed that much it's still your university.' And on the back, there was this tiny postage stamp which showed, if you used a magnifying glass, a woman and maybe a Black person there, sitting on the lawn. And they thought it was a charming, old picture. They weren't being deliberate, so we said to the head guy of the alumni association, what kind of message does this send to our Black alumni? Or to our female alumni? They just didn't get it. And this allowed us to say, you know if you had a few more Black people in the office or women, maybe this wouldn't be such a revelation to you? So I was a little more blunt than I should have been. Andrew

Deborah provided her thoughts on Southern's climate, emphasizing the role of socioeconomic status and how it impacts the perceptions of "fitting in" for some students:

> I think it's wealthy and elitist. I think the students who come here are certainly privileged across the board, regardless or race. . . And so I think, because of that, that's why I feel like, on some levels, it's a very preppy university. It's a very elitist university. There are many students here who are really wealthy. On that level, I think there's that part of the community. I also think there's a part of the community here that doesn't necessarily fit into that and then they feel like they don't fit in here because they see this part of the university. Most of the students

> who go here, their parents' income combined is over $100,000 a year, at least 50 percent of those students. So I think that says something that most of these students here are middle class to upper-middle class to wealthy students. . . I think we're a community that tries to welcome and embrace everybody, but I think, for some students, it might feel a little bit harder to figure out where they belong in a community like this. Deborah

Deborah elaborates on how the socioeconomic status of some students can have a negative affect on the ability of other students to engage and establish a sense of ownership:

> I think it makes some students feel left out and not able to participate in some things; like being part of a sorority costs whatever amount of money it costs, so if you can't afford that then you can't be in. Students just take it for granted that other students "summer" in different vacation spots over the summer, that kind of stuff, just the language and the assumption that everyone does that. I think that assumption is probably the most difficult piece of being a part of this community, that you assume that everybody is like you and they're not, many of them aren't to that level of wealth. Deborah

Marie explains that Southern's institutional culture is one that continuously reminds minority students that they are different. As a result, these students are left feeling "on guard" and unable to relax and be themselves. Marie also shares a similar sentiment from an African American colleague:

> In terms of the culture of Southern University, I've heard people say that it's not a particularly comfortable place for students of color. . . So my sense is that in the college, as a whole, there's a fishbowl feeling and so the comfort zone becomes places where people can congregate and feel like they don't have to be explaining themselves all the time. They don't have to be special or different all the time. They can just be themselves. So one of my African American faculty members has also talked about this and she describes this as a plantation, but not in terms of the student, but in terms of the workers. And there was a living wage campaign here. So the plantation thing has to do with workers and the disparity in salaries. Marie

Those at Southern University have made many important steps to diversify their campus and to empower all students, yet issues of race and marginalization still persist.

Anita expresses concern over the disconnect that seemingly exists between African American students and their White counterparts, but does not view these challenges as signs of failure, but as an impetus for the university to continue to work:

> A few years ago, I chaired a presidential commission on social justice and diversity and we interviewed students of color and they reported a high level of experiencing "biased incidents," but we also looked at data from other institutions and it's the same, it's unfortunate, but it's the same. We're no better, we're no worse. And, consequently, we studied tracking and put some things in place to give our students some support and also the thing that was interesting was that White students were not aware that their fellow students of color were experiencing these biases both in and out of the classroom and so there's a disconnect. When you have that disconnect and now we're in the 21st century and we do have a very impressive graduation rate, folks think that things are okay. When I say folks, I'm talking about our students here whose life is happy here and some faculty who just have their heads into their disciplines. So we haven't arrived because this institution is a reflection of the larger society. We're still dealing with those issues and so our students come here and there are still some barriers and challenges that they have to overcome even though this institution has made great strides, in terms of embracing difference, but we're still working and we need to continue to work on it. Anita

As the Athletic Director, Patricia manages Southern University's athletic programs. Although Patricia fluently represented the viewpoints of the athletic department, she was unable to effectively contribute to a discussion on how to promote the achievement of the African American collegian. Nonetheless, it appeared that Patricia did not participate in activities that reflected a more holistic perspective of the university and its contributions to the African American collegian. In addition, she responded to the majority of the questions by relying on her program area and by providing responses that were more relevant and appropriate to the athletics department.

As a Professor of Humanities, Samuel has a wealth of knowledge on a range of intellectual and expressive abilities, including those issues relevant to society, history, and culture. However in terms of my research question, Samuel appeared to lack

knowledge, be unable to clearly articulate his views, and provided one-word responses to open-ended questions. Although he illustrated a fundamental knowledge of this student population and their challenges, it appeared that his thinking had never moved beyond that of basic knowledge. Thus, he was unable to shed light on those critical factors that are needed to enhance the academic experience for the Black student.

Special Purpose Office-Dissenting Voices

In this discussion on the dissonant program-specific responses, I will address those revelations that occurred as a result of my interaction with the Office of Black Studies. I found three occurrences that were inconsistent with my initial viewpoints:

1. Lance, the Dean of the Office of Black Studies and his staff are categorically and unashamedly seeking to heighten the overall achievement of African American students. Currently, I exist in an setting in which most people carefully navigate an environment of political correctness, and one filled with futile attempts to demonstrate culturally sensitivity as is documented by the countless incidents of racism and social injustice. So, for me, to visibly witness an office that specifically targets the promotion and achievement of African Americans was definitely surprising.

2. The university community appears to have accepted the Office of Black studies and its mission. Michael, Dean of Admissions and Aloni, Special Advisor to the Vice President of Student Affairs, both expressed their enthusiasm, support and pride for the Office of Black Studies all throughout the interview. While Michael shared his goals for African American incoming students as, ". . . to get them here and get them involved with the Office of Black Studies." At one point during my interview with Aloni, she exclaimed, "I'm really excited for you to meet with them. . ." This integration and

appreciation for this office's existence and this office's efforts was something that I did not expect.

3. Lance believes that his office can act as a model for other minority groups at institutions all over the country. According to Lance, "I consider this to be a pilot for parallel populations or for the rest of the nation, in some respect. So that if I succeeded at how I'm going about this, there would be conceivably some lessons that could be drawn." This is the response that I received when I asked Lance how he would reply to those who question his office and its purpose. This was another response that I found surprising.

Overall, this discussion on dissenting voices illustrates that everyone in an organization will never feel the same about any institutional feature. What does this mean for the Black collegian and those critical factors that positively impact the retention and graduation rates for this student? University communities must seek to understand and demonstrate their appreciation for the educational value of diversity. Non-Black students illustrate this value by being open and receptive to Black students and course content that focuses on African Americans and other minorities. Faculty demonstrate this value by incorporating teacher immediacy into their pedagogical strategies. Student Affairs professionals illustrate their appreciation for diversity by utilizing retention/support programming that addresses the Black collegians' needs in a very specific way that incorporates this students' cultural background. Administrators depict their appreciation for this value by continually reinforcing that diversity is an institutional priority. And African American collegians may demonstrate their value for diversity by taking accountability for their role in the national diversity model by being knowledgeable about those who are non-Black.

Lastly, I will discuss those unexpected nuances that occurred during my interviews at Southern. I felt these nuances could again be attributed to my race and gender and how some participants responded to both. During my data collection at this institution, once the interview was completed, an African American female participant continued to speak with me about how she viewed her job. During this time, I attributed her passionate discourse to that of a committed educator. Soon she started to offer numerous examples of her professional challenges, while continually referring to me by name and insisting that I understood what it was like to be "an African American female in the academy." She went on to draw additional parallels that she believed we both shared. Although I did not disagree with her nor did I think her assumptions were incorrect, like the case at Midwestern University, I wondered how this verbal contemplation would have been addressed if I were White and possibly a man?

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Both Midwestern University and Southern University are public flagship universities. Both universities have institutional graduation rates of more than 80 percent. Both institutions have student populations that include the nation's most prepared and most affluent undergraduates, and both institutions are successfully competing with Ivy league institutions for students. Today, public flagship universities are being criticized for striving for national recognition and for targeting students who are not only academically competitive, but wealthy (Lewin, 2006). In this regard, these public organizations have become more like private institutions. Although public universities are still less expensive, their increasing tuition has become a barrier for low-income students. As a result, these institutions are being accused of ignoring their mission of offering social mobility and of shortchanging low-income and minority students, who tend to be critically underrepresented on their campuses. According to Kati Haycock, Director of the Education Trust, an advocacy group, "Public universities were created to make excellence available to all but that commitment appears to have diminished over time, as they choose to use their resources to try to push up their rankings. It's all about reputation, selectivity and ranking, instead of about the mission of finding and educating future leaders from their state." As many states continue to question postsecondary institutions on issues of spending and accountability, these organizations are under pressure and they are facing a dilemma. Should they seek to improve their institutional status and tuition revenue by targeting top-achieving, out –of-state students? Or should they focus on the ideals of the public university; broadening access for low-income

students and preparing other local residents to fulfill the state's needs for trained professionals? Should these institutions serve the people of their states or compete nationally with Ivy League institutions?

Midwestern University and Southern University both reflect this growing trend of public institutions seeking the best and the brightest and competing with the nation's best private institutions. As public institutions, each is held accountable to its respective region and its constituency. Most flagship institutions were the first public universities to be established in their states, along with land-grant colleges which focused on agriculture and general education. Flagship institutions were established after the Morrill Act of 1863 which provided federal grants of land to states to establish public universities. This legislation, in addition to the G.I. Bill and federal financial aid programs, was enacted to create more access and to support the pursuit of education by all (Duderstadt, 2000).

Midwestern University

Midwestern University reflects a decentralized organizational structure (Bolman & Deal, 1997). This description was shared by members of the institutional sample. Each college and school has its own source of support for its majors. These units also control their own budgets and make autonomous decisions on how to allocate funds for various departmental and student initiatives. Additionally there is great duplication in resources, as is evidenced by the comment by Robert, the Associate Vice-Provost, "We have lots of programs and activities. Sometimes people say there's duplication, but Midwestern has always had this approach that if you throw everything out, in terms of a smorgasbord, and [the institution] let students pick and choose. . ." The decentralized organizational structure has actually facilitated the Black collegians' achievement and graduation rate as

is documented by the institution's 67 percent African American graduation rate. The decentralized structure provides more options for students to locate and use resources, so the African American student has an increased probability of getting the assistance that is needed and thereby staying in school.

In terms of the critical factors revealed by this exploratory study, all of the factors were not equally important throughout the Black collegians' tenure at Midwestern University. To be specific, the Special Purpose Office [Office of Multiethnic Studies] plays a pivotal role when these students enter the university. During this time, OMS provides both instructional and transitional assistance to the student. Also this Office aids the students in handling the academic piece and in accessing campus resources. All of these efforts served to build the students' confidence and to increase their capacity to believe that the institution's personnel are genuinely interested in their success; for example, relationships built with those who are part of the OMS staff seem to be maintained over a students' time at Midwestern. As a result, the Black collegian is more likely to fully utilize campus resources, and to believe that they can be positively impacted by the institution. This Office provides a "proving ground" for Midwestern's Black collegians. Once students have established their abilities to flourish in Midwestern's competitive environment, they become more open and more willing to fully embrace the university and the other institutional resources.

The utilization of OMS can be problematic if the OMS students do not want to engage with the rest of the university community, nor utilize resources that are provided by other campus units. For example, the OMS has its own faculty, offers its own version of university courses, and has a full advising staff. So if students feel more comfortable

with those affiliated with OMS, the student could spend the majority of their time interacting with the Office's staff and those students who are enrolled in OMS courses. As a result, this student would not become fully familiar with and integrated into the institution, its resources, or other Midwestern students who do not participate in OMS or its programming activities. This student would not benefit from the other institutional programming and services targeted to the entire university community (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Overall, there are four critical factors that seem most important and that significantly contributed to the academic success and graduation of Black collegians at Midwestern University: Institutional-Unit Response, Institutional Expectations, Valuing Diversity through Collaboration, and Faculty Initiatives.

The significance of Institutional –Unit Response was the most noted factor. The positive impact of this response on the academic success of the Black collegian was substantiated at many levels at Midwestern University. All of these responses served to enhance the overall experience for either the minority student community or the African American student community in particular. Based on the notion that individual units responded to the African American achievement gap is another strong indicator that this university is highly decentralized because the units had the autonomy to make decisions that impact their students (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

Damon Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and College of Engineering Professor noted that his college was greatly disappointed in the small percentages of both women and minority students enrolled in their engineering program. As a result, they decided to reorganize and establish a Diversity and Outreach Council comprised of

students, faculty, and staff. This council is responsible for evaluating their college's current diversity programs and developing ideas for future initiatives. Another example of on-campus units that develop their own boards in response to improving diversity was the College of Education's development of a Social Justice Agency. In response to the academic and social challenges facing minority students, this group deals directly with issues of equity by conducting workshops and providing programming to the entire university community in an attempt to sensitize them on issues of prejudice and intolerance.

Both examples demonstrate that some at Midwestern University are highly cognizant of the challenges confronting African American students in specific academic disciplines and in university settings as a whole. In an attempt to minimize some of these educational and social challenges, both of these units have made solitary decisions to address these problems in a very straight forward and overt manner. This sends a clear message that they want African Americans and other minority students to flourish in a welcoming environment that encourages growth and accomplishment. Also the responses of both the College of Engineering and the College of Education demonstrate that every member of the university community should be aware of their contribution to the overall inclusiveness of the environment. Thus, these individuals must consider their messages and behavior as they interact with minority students.

Through different kinds of team/council efforts, both of these units have provided a more responsive and nurturing environment for the Black collegians who participate in the College of Engineering or the College of Education. As a result of these efforts, the Black collegian has an increased likelihood of achieving success at this university. Using

task forces or different kinds of committees or councils as ways of increasing university diversity programming is in keeping with recommendations made by Wade-Golden & Matlock (2007). The authors encourage campus teams to utilize both qualitative and quantitative data, to ensure that both academic and non-academic units are reflected on the team, and to make certain that all viewpoints are represented in the design and execution of the team's plan; they also recommend that university teams be charged with examining the impact of campus diversity on students. In many ways, the two examples from Midwestern are designed to achieve similar goals as those described by Wade-Golden & Matlock.

In terms of problems that could occur as a result of Institutional-Unit Reponses utilizing teams and councils to address issues of diversity, White students could start to feel that their needs are being ignored. As a result, they might become resentful over the initiatives to make the university more "welcoming" for the minority student. Additionally, this resentment could lead to conflict between White students and minority students (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 1999). The conflict could overshadow the programming efforts of the teams and councils and create a hostile environment for both White and minority students.

Implementing academic stipulations to promote success for Black collegians was another Institutional-Unit Response offered by Midwestern University. Associate Director of the Office of Multiethnic Studies James discussed the early warning system and the electronic midterm estimate. Both features have proven highly influential in assisting the Black collegian. The university early warning system sends a letter to all students who receive a g.p.a. that falls under 2.0 and the OMS utilizes an electronic

midterm estimate that sends out student progress reports to enable OMS students to address marginal grades before the semester ends. Both features provide opportunities for students to remain aware of their academic performance. This example illustrates that some at Midwestern University are genuinely interested in facilitating the success of African American and minority students by ensuring that they are continuously aware of their academic performance and have ample opportunities to address academic challenges that may arise over the course of their college careers. These Institutional-Unit Responses facilitate improved communication and interaction between the Black collegian and faculty member (Lundberg, 2004). As a result, there is a greater likelihood that the Black collegians' learning will be increased and that they will receive a higher grade (Hebel, 2007). These policies will improve the educational experiences for the entire student population (Chang, 2001).

Damon shared another example of an academic stipulation that has supported the Black collegian and educated non-Black students on multiculturalism. Composition, Fine Arts and Sciences has implemented a course requirement that obligates their majors to take three or four credits from a group of courses that focus on race and ethnicity. This race and ethnicity requirement speaks to creating a friendly atmosphere for minority students attending a PWI. To require non-Black students to take courses that focus on minority perspectives sends a powerful message that says minorities should be valued, promoted, and embraced in this environment (Boyd, 2004 & Fischer, 2007). It also reinforces the contributions of this student population and can serve to move the institution and society forward in terms of facilitating a more harmonious atmosphere. This effort is another mechanism that can improve the institutional environment,

translating into an increased level of comfort and confidence for African American collegians as they navigate Midwestern University. The efforts of those in Composition, Fine Arts and Sciences express this unit's special awareness of the effect of racial differences on students of color. It also demonstrates their knowledge of the marginalization that exists in our society (Fowler & Villanueva, 2002). Still, how an institution communicates this kind of requirement is important for all students to understand. White students, for example, may not see the educational value of fulfilling a race and ethnicity curriculum requirement and create racial strife that leaves the student population fragmented and fearful of potential physical harm (Betzold, 2000 & Clegg, 2000). Faculty and administrative leaders need to be aware of how to frame the requirement for all students so that it has the intended benefit of increasing cultural understanding on campus, rather than resulting in fragmentation and dissonance.

Placing African Americans in influential positions is another Institutional-Unit Response that was believed to aid the Black collegians' achievement at Midwestern University. Senior Research Associate Marilyn discussed the placement of Jonathon Winters as the leader of the Society for Social Examination. She emphasized that because an African American was leading one of the major social institutes in the world, his presence served to challenge people's ideas on what kind of person was capable of guiding that effort. Similarly, Damon discussed the need to have African American role models represented in the faculty. Damon stressed that each minority student identified with their own minority faculty and saw their own capabilities for accomplishment reflected in the mere presence of these faculty. "The presence or absence of like others in different social positions implicitly conveys information to young people about the

possibilities for their futures" (Zirkel, 2002, p. 1). The examples offered by both Marilyn and Damon illustrate awareness and understanding of the pervasiveness of racism and its continued impact on society (Duster, 2007). To boldly challenge society's assumptions and generalizations about a group that has been historically marginalized in American society is not only a courageous response, but reflects an authentic allegiance to eliminating racist perspectives and ideals (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to the accomplishment and graduation of Black collegians' to place African Americans in high-ranking roles on campus including in advanced faculty rank. Doing so provides the institutional opportunity for students at Midwestern to experience the same aspirations and potential for relationships with role models that previous research has documented as critical to student success (Cokley, 1982; James, 1962; Mead, 1934; Skinner, 1971; & Stryker, 1980).

The responses offered by Marilyn and Damon could lead to an unanticipated negative reaction from the African American professional that has been placed in this influential position. Overall, they may view the role modeling and mentoring practices as distractions to efficiently and effectively fulfilling their professional roles (Cleveland, 2004; King & Watts, 2004; & Milner, 2004). They may even believe that the additional responsibilities and time involved with serving as "the" African American representative to various committees and primary mentor to students puts their own position in jeopardy; this may be especially true for early career faculty at selective research universities such as Midwestern (Turner, 2003).

Institutional Expectations is the next critical factor that was identified as most important to the achievement of African American students. The Midwestern participants provided both implicit and explicit expectations for the entire university community. Robert shared that those within Midwestern's community are expected to embrace diversity and have a strong commitment to student leadership development. Robert's comments illustrate that there is an institutional expectation for both students and personnel to recognize the educational value of diversity. As a result of this anticipation these individuals should instigate approaches to advance this concept at Midwestern University. *In the Road to Racial Equality*, Tatum expressed her concerns over how institutional personnel could teach students to interact in a pluralistic society, while nurturing the students' growth and maturation "Whether at an HBCU or predominantly White institutions, we all must ask ourselves, How do we create and sustain educational environments that affirm identity, build community, and cultivate leadership in a way that supports the learning of all students?" (2004, p. 34). For the Black collegian, this expectation reveals an acceptance of that which reflects "difference." Additionally, this expectation encourages the campus community to initiate endeavors that will encourage the expansion of the inclusiveness supporting and rewarding individual initiative.

It must be emphasized that everyone in a community will never feel the same, including about expectations to embrace diversity. So even when the majority seems to support a position, there will be those who remain indifferent or simply disagree. They might verbally express their disagreement or participate in acts of symbolic terrorism like leaving nooses around various parts of the campus (Duster, 2007). To discuss those problems associated with expectations for leadership development, there are university

employees and students who have not fully cultivated their leadership skills and do not have the preparation to act as leaders. Thus, if these individuals pursue these leadership roles, their participation may result in an error that is made or in heightening a problem due to a lack of understanding.

Midwestern University's expectations for students also played a key role in the success of the Black collegian. Education Professor Elonzo emphasized that the university expected the students to help one another. He accentuated the importance of role models and how they contribute to the success of others, using ways in which doctoral students are expected to help both undergraduate and doctoral students as an example. Littleton (2001) discusses this concept in great detail and reiterates Whitehead's contention that "everyone" needs help and that African Americans who have achieved academic or professional success must be prepared to support the work African American students. These explicit expectations need to be tempered, however, so that doctoral students facing their own challenges of balance, identity, and time management do not experience increased levels of stress or grade pressures that may create difficulties with their own academic progress (Lovitts, 2001; Smallwood, 2004). It is important that the university not rely too strongly on student-to-student support networks, but that they balance these expectations of support with other forms of institutional support strategies that benefit all students.

Damon talked of doing whatever was necessary and of doing even more than they had been done in the past to help students succeed. Specifically, he discussed the transition that is needed for African American students who have an inadequate secondary school preparation. As a result, Damon expressed the commitment that he and

his staff have for facilitating the Black collegians' capacity to meet Midwestern's academic standards. Damon's declarations seem to acknowledge the need to be particularly diligent especially for those students whose families or communities may "lack the necessary information and educational resources to get them to [and through] college" (Wimberly, 2002, p. 19).

Senior Research Associate Marilyn provided an illustration of how student affairs professionals can effectively assist students who struggle with navigating a large university. Specifically, Marilyn shared that one of her students expressed frustration over not knowing who to contact for a particular problem. Marilyn took the time to not only listen to the student, but she also located the appropriate person and was able to assist the student in addressing the concern. Marilyn's example illustrates that she takes her role very seriously and wants every student to feel that she has an invested interest in their success. In this example, Marilyn demonstrates her overwhelming compassion for students, her commitment to her job, and her concern for the success of African American students at her university. Constantine and Watt (2002) believe Student Affairs professionals should play this kind of pivotal role in creating an atmosphere that encourages success for Black collegians, "By serving as social change agents on their campuses, student affairs personnel may make enormous impacts on the institutional climate of their universities . . . that support their personal, social, and academic matriculation of students of diverse cultural backgrounds" (p. 10).

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration was the third critical factor that greatly assisted the African American student populace at Midwestern University. The partnerships provided opportunities to increase the community's awareness and

sensitivity to diversity, while encouraging Black collegians to take responsibility for learning their role in the national diversity model. The participants clearly articulated the benefits of cross-unity collaboration in supporting the Black collegian. Marilyn discussed Midwestern's Discussion Between Group's programming which is aimed at bringing diverse student organizations together to facilitate discussion across race and religion. Holbrook shared that the programming has focused on African American and Jewish students and has helped to address conflict and strife existing between these two groups. Marilyn's comments depict the positive effects that communicating across race and religion can have, particularly during times of unrest. Marilyn's example proves that collaborations between Black collegians and non-Black groups can work to resolve strife, to increase the knowledge of other cultures, and to promote harmony among student groups, whereby African American students feel more welcome in the university community. It is not uncommon to read about discriminatory acts leveled against Black collegians students who attend PWIs (Race Relations on Campus, 2004/2005) The significance of these racial incidents validates and compels the reader to acknowledge that there are still some who fail to recognize the value that African Americans bring to the educational setting. The need for the type of programming described by Marilyn is documented by these incidents of racial unrest.

OMS math lecturer Kenedhi discussed her reliance on collaboration with her math colleagues to effectively meet the needs of her students. She described team teaching, developing reading guides, and conducting review sessions with her OMS colleagues. These efforts demonstrate Kenedhi's commitment to her students and to being an effective instructor. She has used collaborative activities with other members of the OMS

math faculty to create nurturing environments for her students and to promote the accomplishments of the Black collegian (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). As a result of Kenedhi's efforts, Midwesten's Black collegians can have faith in her assistance because her actions demonstrate the overwhelmingly concern and responsibility she has expressed for this student populace. Her efforts are similar to research that reinforces the need for university personnel, especially faculty, to take more accountability in assisting African American students who attend PWIs (Ancis & Sedlacek, 1997; Lundberg, 2004; & Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

Damon described the College of Engineering's collaboration with their graduates to address issues of diversity and expectations for incoming employees. His college works with a national advisory committee that is comprised of 25 Midwestern alumni members. These individuals are presidents and vice presidents of industry who return to Midwestern twice a year. During these visits, Damon and his staff present key problems to the committee and the alumni offer suggestions to Damon and his staff to resolve the problems. Later, the advisory committee presents their key concerns or issues concerning future employees. Damon emphasized that during the last meeting, one of the advisory members mentioned that they did not have time to bring in employees who were uncomfortable around minorities. Damon added that his college views diversity as a quality of education and that education is not limited to academics; it must teach students to work with those who reflect difference. To interpret the example provided by Damon, the reader understands that the College of Engineering has taken the responsibility to speak directly with those in industry. As a result, these individuals have assisted Damon and his staff by offering suggestions for the diversification of the College of Engineering.

Additionally, the advisory committee offered suggestions on how to prepare upcoming graduates for work in a highly diversified workforce. For the Black collegian, this example is another demonstration of the lengths that Midwestern personnel have gone to increase their diversity knowledge base and to prepare its students for inclusive work environments. Both demonstrate the College of Engineering's commitment to promoting, assessing, and maintaining diversity programming, which leads to a more supportive environment for the Black collegian. Wade-Golden and Matlock (2007) encourage campus leaders to seek assistance from external sources to advance campus diversity. According to the authors," External support from alumni, donors, and the corporate community is essential to the long-term success of campus diversity initiatives" (p. 7).

Faculty Initiatives proved to be one of the most important critical factors and a powerful way to heighten the academic success and graduation rate for Midwestern's African American students. OMS Director Lonnie highlighted the importance of faculty who are willing to realize and demonstrate an appreciation for the true value and benefit that Black collegians bring to the classroom. These individuals encourage the participation of Black collegians in their classes and acknowledge that the voices and perspectives of these students are important and beneficial to the learning environment. Lonnie went on to say that because some of the faculty have realized the true value that Black collegians offer the college classroom, the overall experience for each member of the class has been improved; he believes it also sent a message to the Black collegian that their intellectual contributions are relevant and significantly add to the classroom discussion. This message heightens the collegians' confidence level and encourages students to increase their learning to facilitate more participation in class discussions.

Cody and Manusov (2000) would see the relevance between Lonnie's point and teacher immediacy. The authors defined this concept as signs that show attentiveness, liking, and psychological closeness. Teacher immediacy has been associated with effective instruction for African American students in all postsecondary environments. Teacher immediacy strategies promote one on one interaction between the instructor and the student. As a result, the student may feel encouraged to speak more in class and to direct questions to the instructor. Villalpando (2002) studied the effects of diversity on student learning among 15,600 undergraduate students and found that after four years, most students felt more comfortable when faculty utilized pedagogical strategies that made all members of the class feel included as opposed to focusing on one segment of the class. Additionally, the students highlighted the effectiveness of diversity in class assignments, and course discussions that required them to think critically about diversity. Villalpando's results are similar to those advocated by Smith and other faculty participants at Midwestern.

In another example, OMS Associate Director James shared his thoughts on why faculty must de dedicated to making up for academic deficiencies that some African American students may have as a result of four years of inadequate high school preparation. One of the most common reasons students drop out of college is because they are unprepared (Hurd, 2000). To address this deficit, James emphasized that OMS faculty utilized mock exams and prepared notes. The faculty who use mock exams give students two or three tests that resemble the actual exam. Later when the student takes the actual exam, there is an increased level of comfort because the student was familiar with the types of questions found on the real exam. Both the university and the OMS provide

prepared notes for students that are found online and allow students to access every handout that was provided during the class session.

James' example stressing faculty's willingness to address four years of inadequate high school preparation is a poignant expression of his commitment to these students, but it also demonstrates James' cognizance of the inadequacies that exist in secondary education. Thus, why should faculty hold students accountable for what their high school teachers never taught them? For the Black collegians, this example tells the students that some at Midwestern University want to meet their needs and want to provide real opportunities for Black collegians to not only improve their academic skills, but to become learned individuals who are critical thinkers and who actively seek self improvement. If faculty are prepared to address the academic deficits of some Black collegians, they may experience an increased likelihood of remaining in college and excelling.

Education Professor Elonzo offered an example on how he cultivates his relationships with Black collegians. He noted that he sees these relationships as a part of his job as an African American professor and said he spends time talking with these students about "anything and everything." Although Elonzo indicated that his discussions with Black collegians sometimes revolved around academic subjects, they also talked about the students' roommate issues or the students' plans to go home for the weekend. Elonzo illustrates the extra responsibilities that some African American faculty are willing to accept on behalf of their students. The informal discussions Whitehead has with Black collegians indicates his interest in their overall success and happiness as they navigate through an institution that was not developed with them in mind. Elonzo's

interest in the welfare of these students shows that he recognizes the challenges they may face and his desire to become a genuine source of concern and assistance.

Elonzo's behavior and that of other faculty allows Black collegians to become open and responsive to other parts of the university community. Based on their interaction with Whitehead, these students become more fluent on campus related activities and issues. Thus, they student should feel an increased sense of ownership from the knowledge and comfort gained from interacting with Elonzo, who presents himself as a role model. For more than 20 years researchers have studied and substantiated the positive impact of role models on students of color and women. These studies have demonstrated the students' success with grades, retention, and graduation rates with the support of a role model (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003 & Zirkel, 2002).

As an African American, OMS faculty member Kenedhi described her role as very maternal and one that offered a "safe haven" to her students. Additionally, she is a math instructor with very high standards for her students. This combination of mother and math expert results in Kenedhi having a strong influence over her students, especially those who struggle in math and might need additional help. Her strong commitment and eagerness to assist students often results in relationships that propel students to successfully perform in her math course. This success can serve as a source of inspiration for students to achieve in other courses, as well. The level of comfort established with Kenedhi can provide the emotional stroking that might be needed for students facing difficulty during their transition to Midwestern University, and the relationships she builds with student often carry throughout students' tenure at Midwestern University. Like Kenedhi, Littleton (2001) noted the importance of African American role models in

the university, "The idea of an older adult with whom to share cultural understanding seemed to be of interest to African America students. The term 'mother figure' or 'father figure' was sometimes used in reference to such a role model" (p. 23).

There are a few issues that could be problematic for any instructor projecting a "maternal or "paternal" image for an African American student. The student may rely on the relationship too heavily and not seek the assistance of other non-Black faculty. This reliance on Kenedhi could lead to the students' inability to become familiar with other faculty and other campus resources. At the same time faculty members may be providing a very nurturing and supportive relationship with students, they need to be sure that students do not become dependent on them and build connections with other faculty and support structures on campus (Fowler & Villanueva, 2002; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper; Wimberly, 2002).

At this point, it is important to emphasize that Institutional-Unit Response, Institutional Expectations, Valuing Diversity through Collaboration, and Faculty Initiatives have been identified as the most important critical factors. The study revealed that these four factors had the greatest impact on the academic success of the Black collegian at Midwestern University. Additionally, Student Affairs and Retention/Support Programs work together to create a foundation for the four most important critical factors. Student Affairs and Retention/Support Programs work together because those in Student Affairs are primarily responsible for offering the Retention/Support Programs (Ahuna, Banning, and Hughes, (2000). At Midwestern University, Student Affairs was not mentioned by every member of the sample as contributing to the success of the Black collegian. However, the participants that did mention this factor clearly illustrated that the

actions of these professionals were significant for this student populace. The efforts of those in Student Affairs were connected to increasing the African American students' cultural capital, increasing their retention rates, and raising their graduation percentages, often by delivering various retention and support programs throughout the university. Ahuna, Banning & Hughes (2000) believe that student affairs professionals should seek to change the campus and recognize the benefits that minority students bring to the campus. In terms of Retention/Support Programs, they were found within every college and school, included services that utilized the students'cultural background to address student needs, incorporated mentors, and targeted the pre-college student population. Based on the initiatives provided by Midwestern participants, the majority of the Retention/Support Programs remain relatively important to the Black collegian throughout their four-year stay. It is my contention that at Midwestern, the Student Affairs staff are most recognized for their contributions to African American student success through their delivery of effective retention and support programs.

Student Affairs professionals who develop and carry out the Retention/Support programming to facilitate the academic success of the Black collegian may feel that their work load has been increased. Due to the increased need to conduct research African American students to ensure that programming is presented in a manner consistent with their needs, these professionals may be required to do more and to not rely on programming targeted to one group for use with other student groups (Furr & Elling, 2002; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Hinderlie, 2002; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris & Cardoza, 2003).

Presidential Priorities was revealed to have a marginal impact on the academic success of Midwestern's African American's students. Although this leader has consistently endorsed diversity on campus, challenged critics by pledging to maintain a campaign of inclusivity, and fully documented the benefits of interacting with those who reflect difference, the Midwestern participants did not highly emphasize the president's efforts. Participants reduced this leader's impact to the implementation of two tactics: articulating that diversity is a top priority and establishing a team to address the implementation of university diversity initiatives. This tells me that those with whom I spoke did not view the contributions of the president as vital to the achievement of the African American collegian.

Additionally, given the various reflections of participants, it seems that the president does not have the support of the faculty on diversity initiatives, that university faculty in general do not often collaborate with the OMS faculty and that the recent passing of state legislation, placing limits on university admissions criteria, left Midwestern students uncomfortable and fearful. These factors indicate that the Midwestern community has not fully embraced the value of diversity. So when the president speaks about these concepts, the impact is not as effective because there is not enough support within the university community to fully integrate diversity into the institution. Thus Presidential Priorities is not seen as important a factor in promoting the achievement and graduation of Black collegians. In "The Dilemma of Presidential Leadership," Birnbaum describes limitations on the role of the president, asserting that presidential decisions actually have a very "modest" amount of control over institutional events "The contributions [the president] makes can easily be swamped by outside events

or the diffuse quality of university decision making" (Birnbaum, 1989, p. 334). Thus, there is a strong possibility that Midwestern's resistance to diversity and the recent passing of state legislation may have significantly contributed to the marginal impact of Presidential Priorities on the Black collegians' success.

Southern University

Southern University's organizational structure reflects a hybrid or mixture of both centralized and decentralized institutional features. According to the participants at Southern, all of the colleges and schools are decentralized, which means they have complete autonomy, including budget authority. The decentralization of the academic units was documented by Marie when her unit decided against the implementation of a minimum g.p.a. requirement for its majors. The institution's centralized features include the Procurement Office, Human Resources, and Emergency Preparedness. Although the Office of Black Studies was established as a critical component of the Division of Student Affairs, the entire campus relied on this unit to take the lead in promoting the achievement of the African American collegian although the university supports this Office in their efforts. The organizational structure seems to have greatly aided the Black collegian as documented by Southern's African American graduation rate of 86 percent. Although the academic units exercise autonomy over their areas, the entire university has demonstrated its support and embraced the leadership of the Office of Black Studies in facilitating the success of this student population.

I found that not all of the critical factors revealed by my study were equally important throughout the Black collegians' tenure at Southern University as I did for Midwestern University. In this postsecondary community, Institutional-Unit Response

played a pivotal role in the recruitment of Black collegians and in the beginning of these students' college careers. Once the Black collegians and their parents established trust in the university's representatives and the students accepted the university's expectations, these students started to heavily rely on the services offered by the Office of Black Studies. This dependence continued throughout the students' tenure at Southern University.

At Southern University, the four critical factors that contributed the most to the achievement and graduation of Black collegians were: The Special Purpose Office [Office of Black Studies], Faculty Initiatives, Institutional Expectations, and Valuing Diversity through Collaboration.

The Southern University participants depicted The Office of Black Studies as being highly relevant and integral to the success of the Black collegian. According to Lance Dean of the Office of Black Studies, the Office was established in the 1970s to create a more welcoming environment for this student populace. Lance emphasized that the overall goal of the Office is to provide "anything" that helps students define themselves as successful Black Americans. In interpreting the Dean's example, it is necessary to acknowledge Lance's willingness to assist the Black collegian in their academic endeavors. Lance believes that this Office is viewed as the "home away from home" for Black collegians. Because it was developed for the express purpose of celebrating African American students, these collegians have one office that offers academic assistance, social networking opportunities, cultural programming and services to facilitate their adjustments to Southern University. The services offered in Special Purpose Offices promote increased achievement, heightened self confidence, and overall

empowerment for Black collegians (Devarics & Roach, 2000; Noel-Levitz, 2006; and Smith, 2004).

The services offered by this Office could be perceived as problematic if other students feel that Black collegians are receiving additional access to resources and are treated more favorably. For example in Chapter Four, Marie shared an example from a session with a group of Asian students during which the students criticized African American students for having an entire office that offered personalized services. In the same chapter, Marie revealed that Latino students expressed dissatisfaction over the Office of Black Studies. They thought it was unfair that Black students had their own office that met their individual needs, while the Latino students were being "lumped in" with the other non-Black students. The Asian and Latino students thought Black collegians were receiving extra attention and increased services and felt the need to express their concerns. This could be cause for increased racial strife among the students (Lyman, 2006) and result in the need for institutions to be sure to provide necessary support for all students of color without necessarily reducing those provisions that are working for individual race or ethnic groups.

The Peer Counseling Program was highlighted as one of the Office's services that had a huge impact on the success of Southern's Black collegian. Special Advisor to the Vice President of Student Affairs Aloni discussed the Peer Counseling Program and went into great detail to describe the extraordinary efforts of the Assistant Dean Carolyn in making successful pairings between the first-year and older students who act as mentors. These older students have been trained in several areas to heighten their success in mentoring the new students. Aloni believes that the assistant dean goes to great lengths to

train the peer counselors to address any issue or obstacle that may occur. This program and the assistant dean play a major role in Africa American students' ability to successfully manage the academic piece and the social environment of Southern University and in their ability to take ownership of the university; all of these elements are positively impacted by Carolyn and the Peer Counseling Program. The various aspects of the Peer Counseling Program were similar in the ways they positively impacted the achievement of Black collegians to those found in other studies of support systems for students (Devarics & Roach, 2000; Smith, 2004).

Director of the New Student Orientation Office Deborah offered an example that emphasized that the idea of "being known" was very important for first- year students. She highlighted the Peer Counseling Program as successfully creating opportunities for students to become known by their peer counselors and by the Assistant Dean Carolyn. Deborah believes this program serves both the peer counselors and the first-year students because in these pairings, African American students are motivating one another to succeed. In making sense of Deborah's example, like Aloni she credits both the assistant dean and the Peer Counseling Program for the Black collegians' success, but credits the program's emphasis on being known as hugely important for first-year students. Additionally, Deborah believes that the pairings of first-year students with older students leads to opportunities for the students to motivate one another. Like in Aloni's example, the Peer Counseling Program serves as a major catalyst for the Black collegian because of the emphasis on being known and the shared capacity for peer counselors and their mentees to motivate one another. The Peer Counseling program is an example of students offering support to one another while navigating a large PWI (Noel-Levitz, 2000. This

illustrates that the mentoring component played a critical role in the overall success of the program.

Based on the examples provided by Aloni and Deborah, the Peer Counseling Program could become problematic if the students spend too much time interacting with peers and not focusing on coursework. This could lead to problems in maintaining their grades and ultimately students may drop out of the institution (Bowen & Bok, 1998). The Assistant Dean and others would also need to monitor the academic progress of mentors so that they continue to be supported while providing this important connection to new students.

Lance Dean of the Office of Black Studies shared his thoughts on the focus on the Office by accentuating his desire to correct the history of the African American in a very intensive way. He added that this must be an overt and powerful effort that clearly addresses the needs of the Black collegian. Lance reiterates that the traces of racism still exist and still negatively affect African Americans, so his efforts must focus on leveling the playing field for this student population. For Black collegians, Lance's goal reflects his commitment to Black collegians. As a result, these students can utilize the services of the Office of Black Studies to fully realize their academic potential, which can lead to increased success and increased opportunities for leadership. Like Lance, Representative Chaka Fattah, a Philadelphia-based congressman, believes that universities need to do more to assist minority college students in both their coursework and in achieving graduation. According to Fattah, "There's an unfortunate gap in services once students reach college. We have programs that help increase the pipeline of people going to

college, now we want to help them become college graduates" (Devarics & Roach, 2000, p. 21).

The critical factor Faculty Initiatives was also highly important to Southern University's Black collegian. I have provided three examples to demonstrate the impact of this critical factor on Black collegians. Political Science Professor Andrew blamed affirmative action and marginalization for scarring the African American collegian, in terms of making this student feel marginal in the classroom setting. Therefore, for historical reasons, Andrew believes that faculty need to remind these students of their ability to successfully compete in the academy. He sees the need for increased faculty interaction and support for Black collegians to enable them to achieve academic excellence and to not use racism as an excuse for mediocre work. All of this tells the African American collegian that this faculty member is aware of the "educational baggage" that may be carried by some Black collegians. Andrew has demonstrated his concerned for Black students and a willingness to provide the extra assistance that is needed to achieve academic excellence. Andrew's comments are supported by Canary, Cody, and Manusov (2000) in their discussion on teacher immediacy. These are specific classroom strategies that educational researchers associate with effective instruction for African American college students Verbal behaviors of teacher immediacy include, "humor, addressing students by name, conversing with students before or after class, praising student work, and encouraging students to ask questions and talk (Gorham, 1988 and Neuliep, 2002). These strategies could prove to be very beneficial for all students' learning, in terms of the increased encouragement and interest communicated from the instructor (Bain, 2004 and Fowler & Villanueva, 2002). It may also be that not all faculty

have adopted these instructional strategies and may require additional professional development to become comfortable with implementing this kind of learning environment.

In another example, Linguistics Professor Marie demonstrated her department's value for the African American athletes by electing to not implement a minimum grade requirement for declaring a major, which may limit the student-athlete's choice of majors. Marie and her department decided against this option in an attempt to express the value offered by student athletes. According to Marie, ". . . we don't want to close doors. We don't want to put up barriers, we want to be welcoming." This example provides a compelling statement about Anderson's department, their desire to create access for all students, regardless of the students' academic abilities and to welcome the contributions of all students to the unit. Alexander's point is elaborated on in "What Research Says about Race-Linked Barriers to Achievement" (2007). The article reveals that non-White students are greatly impacted by understated factors like concerns of not being accepted or believing that faculty question their ability to handle coursework. The researchers indicated that these factors may have a greater impact on the progress of these students than overt acts of prejudice.

Although Anita is the Associate Dean of Residence Life, she is also an Assistant English Professor and she noted that both in and out of the classroom, she acts as role model who has a genuine passion for education. She described how she challenged students to step out of their comfort zones and stressed their responsibilities to both their communities and their nation. Anita demonstrated her devotion to students and also her devotion to higher education. It is clear that this teacher sees education as a necessity for

self actualization and also as a necessity to move our nation forward. Anita expects her students to stand up and take their rightful places as leaders in society. For the Black collegian, this sentiment might be intimidating at first, but with continued growth and learning, this student will seek leadership roles and opportunities to advance their community. Spelman College President, Dr. Beverly Tatum shares Anita's sentiment and expressed her concerns for teaching students to interact in a pluralistic society: "Whether at an HBCU or predominantly White institution, we all must ask ourselves, How do we create and sustain educational environments that affirm identity, build community, and cultivate leadership in a way that supports the learning of all students?" (2004, p. 34).

Institutional Expectations was the third critical factor that I identified as most important for the achievement of Southern's African American student populace. Two illustrative examples are provided to depict the impact of this factor. Michael Dean of Admissions, shares that Southern's African American students are expected to take leadership roles on campus. Specifically, he noted that there are no faculty advisors for student groups so there are increased opportunities for students to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility within the university community. Since 1979, African Americans have taken leadership roles as the student body president and head of the honors committee. Michael believes this facilitates the Black collegians' capacity to take ownership of the university and to become more engaged with the university. In support of Michael's point, Fischer (2007) determined, ". . . that minority retention could be improved by efforts focusing on increasing involvement in campus activities and improving the racial climate on campus" (p. 155).

Political Science Professor, Andrew shared his thoughts on the expectations that the university has for its personnel. He believes that university professionals are expected to make time to assist all students. As a result, African American students experience higher levels of success because university personnel have accepted responsibility for these students and are dedicated to the academic success and graduation of every student. Lundberg (2004) supports Anderson's point in her study that examined the imbalance that exists between African American collegians and African American faculty members "within degree-granting institutions in the United States." Her results revealed that satisfying relationships with faculty members were defined as frequent interactions and those that encouraged students to work harder.

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration was the fourth critical factor identified as most important to the overall success of the Southern University's Black collegian. Michael described how the Admissions Office and the Financial Aid Office worked together to provide admissions offers to African American students. Specifically, a representative from each office shares a call with a newly admitted student. The admissions officer congratulates the student and the financial aid officer explains the aid award. Michael highlighted that even though it might take a couple of nights; this is done for every African American student offered admission to Southern University. For the Black collegian, this telephone call should serve as a great source of excitement and an opportunity to ask important questions that may be critical to the decision to attend Southern. Both offices want the student to feel special and that the university is genuinely interested in their attendance and success at Southern University and an opportunity to ask important questions that may be critical to the decision to attend Southern. Michael's

example is supported by Rovai, Gallien, and Wighting (2005) who examined the underperformance of African American students and the conditions that exist at some PWIs. The authors found the transmission of knowledge by schools in cultural codes, mismatches between teaching styles and African American learning style preferences, weak institutional support for minority students, a fragile racial climate at PWIs, racial stereotyping, peer influences, low expectations, and weak study habits (p. 367). The researchers determined that if faculty and educational administrators commit themselves to reaching out to all students using a variety of educational practices, it mitigates the challenges and promote academic excellence. The collaboration between the Office of Admissions and the Financial Aid Office is an example of an educational practice that can alleviate some of the challenges encountered by Black collegians.

In the second example, Andrew talked about his use of collaboration with the Office of Black Studies to recruit students for his program. In the Politics Department, he oversees the Social Philosophy Program. The program accepts 20 -21 students a year and the African American participation was very low. Andrew contacted the Office of Black Studies and told them that he needed help. Later, he met with members of the Office staff met and developed opportunities for Anderson to interact with Black collegians while they were visiting the Office. Andrew spoke with the students and addressed some of the misperceptions affiliated with his program. After that, several students expressed an interest in his program and the minority participation increased. Wade-Golden & Matlock (2007) supported Andrew's contention in their discussion on holding institutional units accountable for demonstrating diversity. Andrew was committed to diversifying his program and sought others on campus with whom to collaborate in order to accomplish

this goal. This is similar to Devarics & Roach's (2000) statement that on-campus units must be willing to collaborate to achieve individual and collective goals of diversity.

Dean Anita discussed her collaboration with another faculty member in which they developed a videotape to illustrate the inequitable treatment experienced by some Black collegians while interacting with Southern University faculty. Anita interviewed a panel of African American students. Over the course of the tape, several students shared their stories that revealed both inappropriate and thoughtless comments and behaviors that offended the students. Anita and her colleague took the tape to every academic unit on campus. After the tape was shown, Anita guided a conversation that centered on the issues highlighted on the tape. She believed the tape served to make more faculty aware of their roles while interacting with Black collegians. Dias-Bowie et.al (2004) examined success strategies used by this student population one of which was that "faculty members should find ways to hear the stories of their Black (and other) students" (p. 443). Anita's initiative attempted to educate Southern's faculty on diversity through the stories of Black students (Fowler & Villanueva, 2002). This collaboration led to non-Black faculty receiving increased awareness of those race-related issues that may cause African American students to feel that their contributions are not valued by some of their Southern University professors.

In this final example of Valuing Diversity through Collaboration, Lance discussed the importance of collaboration and the pivotal role it plays on Southern's campus. Additionally, he emphasized that this concept has served to advance his Office as well. For example, the Office of Black Studies is involved with much collaboration throughout the university because it assists the campus community with programming directed

toward the Black collegian. So Lance believes that collaborations allow a unit to progress with the support of another office or department, thereby increasing the opportunity for African American collegians' success similar to research of Dias-Bowie et al.(2000); Hinderlie (2000). Lance's position demonstrates that he has given great thought to the impact of collaboration on both his Office and the rest of the university community. Like Lance, Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper (2003) believe that "Each faculty and administrator must understand how he or she as an individual and as a member of the institution influences the success or failure of those who are not from the White culture. It is only when this discomfort is dealt with that higher education can truly say 'we value diversity'" (p. 7). Through his collaborations with other on-campus units, Lance brings greater visibility to the Office of Black Studies. As a result, there will be increased opportunities to develop funding, leading to increased programming efforts to assist the Black collegian.

Similar to the discussion on Midwestern University, it is important to accentuate The Office of Black Studies, Faculty Initiatives, Institutional Expectations, and Valuing Diversity through Collaboration have been identified as the most important critical factors. The study revealed that these four factors had the greatest impact on the academic success of the Black collegian at Southern University. Additionally, the four most important critical factors are supported by Student Affairs and Retention/Support Programs. As I previously stated, these two critical factors work together because those in Student Affairs are primarily responsible for offering the Retention/Support Programs. At Southern University, the student affairs professionals drew attention to the value and benefits of diversity and assisted in the establishment of cultural capital, which lead to

increased retention rates, and heightened graduation percentages for African American collegians. These professionals made concerted efforts to reach students early and to try to support them throughout their academic careers at Southern University. The efforts of Student Affairs Professionals included the low Resident Assistant to student ratio, establishing strong relationships with students to develop mutual trust, and reiterating that the university belongs to the students (Furr & Elling, 2002; Glenn, 2007). Additionally, these professionals assisted the student population by drawing attention to the value and benefits of diversity and in assisting the students' establishment of cultural capital, leading to increased retention and higher graduation rates (Furr & Elling, 2002; Taylor & Miller, 2002).

In terms of the Retention/Support Programs, they provided instructional and/or transitional assistance to the Black collegian and the university community as a whole. Specifically, there were two types of retention/Support Programs that were mentioned: the Acclimation Program and the association/academic deans. The Acclimation Program was targeted to those students who came from a less competitive high school and needed both academic and transitional assistance. The program included a six-week summer session in which students took two courses, met with student organizations, and met with faculty. Michael, Dean of Admissions called it "an assimilation process." The association/academic deans were located in the residence halls, but were represented the academic units. These deans provided academic support and personal counseling where the students lived. They were also very knowledgeable on issues of diversity and inclusiveness. Overall, these students utilized the Retention/Support Programs to supplement the services offered by the Office of Black Studies, coupling the efforts of

student affairs staff and faculty in important ways that benefit African American student achievement.

Presidential Priorities, was not significantly highlighted as a factor, but those who mentioned it viewed it as relevant to the awareness, acceptance, implementation, and continuation of diversity protocols at Southern University. Overall, I believe that many in Southern's university community have embraced the idea and the significance of supporting the Black collegian, so the president is reiterating a notion already accepted by the majority. As a result, Presidential Priorities at Southern University served to support the university's diversity agenda and set the tone for the expansion and improvement of the campaign to make Southern more inclusive. Birnbaum (1989) expands on this point by explaining that the role of the university president does not have a significant impact on the success of colleges, ". . . Most college presidents do the right things, and do things right most of the time. . But those who seek major changes in the ways presidents behave, or believe that such changes will make major differences on our campuses, are likely to be disappointed. . ." (p. 342).

An assessment of the institutional distinctions and similarities will be offered in Chapter six, along with a discussion on the implications of both for the achievement of the African American college student.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Implications

According to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* the college enrollment rate of African American college students has never been higher yet the national graduation rate for the African American student is 20 points below the 62 percent rate of their White counterparts ("*Black Student College Graduation Rates*," 2006). Additionally, with a graduation rate of 42 percent, Black students are less likely to complete a bachelor's degree within four years because of problems in both the social and academic areas (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984; Hall, Mays, & Allen, 1984; Nettles, 1988; Thomas, 1981). Overall, considering both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), only a relatively small group of institutions have experienced consistent success in their graduation rates for African American collegians. This group includes select Ivy League institutions, HBCUs and flagship state universities.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine those flagship state universities, identified as "most selective" in their admissions criteria and answer two primary research questions: What are the critical factors that faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs personnel report their institutions are doing to contribute to success among African American students? And, what are the institutional similarities and differences that exist between those factors that contribute to the success of Black collegians at two selective institutions?

The pursuit of postsecondary education is one that is filled with many personal, social, intellectual, and financial challenges for the individuals who aspire to be college

graduates. In essence, students who decide to attain a baccalaureate degree are embarking on an experience that may leave them feeling challenged, discouraged, accomplished, frustrated, empowered, unprepared, accepted or isolated. Despite the impediments that students encounter, most would agree that the advantages of college completion far outweigh the disadvantages. Those who are educated have successfully competed with their peers, have participated in self actualization, and have the capacity to contribute to both their communities and the nation. Individuals who have the ability to demonstrate both their intellectual prowess and their tenacity to complete their education are laying the groundwork for continued success throughout life (Rhodes, 2001). Thus, the completion of an undergraduate education is integral for continued academic growth, continued career growth and continued personal growth, leading to lifelong learning. Every individual deserves the opportunity to successfully attain a baccalaureate degree. However, as the literature has previously stated, inequities still exist in the American educational system. As a result, some students are treated unfairly and left feeling as if their contributions are not valued or needed to move our society forward. These facts place an additional burden on those who work in higher education. Although these individuals are expected to meet the needs of all students, they must also be held accountable for the success of those students who represent "difference," those students who have been marginalized both in the school systems and in society. Those in higher education must respond to the needs of the African American student.

This exploratory study exposed eight important features that have positively influenced the educational attainment and graduation rates of African American collegians at both Midwestern University and Southern University. This is not to say that

the institution is or should be solely held accountable for the success of the Black collegian; the success of the Black collegian is a shared responsibility that needs to be addressed by both the institution and the student, as is true for all college students. The eight critical factors are: (a) Faculty Initiatives; (b) Institutional Expectations; (c) Institutional-Unit Response; (d) Presidential Priorities; (e) Retention/Support Programs; (f) Special Purpose Offices; (g) Student Affairs; and (h) Valuing Diversity through Collaboration. Although the existing literature has addressed the African American collegian's academic deficits (e.g., Astin, 1982; Astin, Tsui, & Avolos, 1996; Monastersky, 2006; Tinto, 1993), socio-economic challenges (e.g., Hebel, 2007;Thomas, 1981), and this students' dropout rates (e.g., Hutto & Fenwick, 2002), the literature has not examined those integral factors that propel Black collegians to success at "most selective" flagship state institutions, nor have these factors been compared in their effectiveness across similar postsecondary organizations, though factors affecting success in general of African American students are documented. Thus, this study uncovered new ideas for this student populace. It must be emphasized that I determined that all of the factors were not equally important throughout the Black collegians' tenure.

In essence, under each critical factor, I have provided action steps that can be applied to facilitate the academic success and graduation rates of African American collegians who are attending postsecondary institutions that are similar to both Midwestern and Southern University. These serve as lessons learned from the two universities included in this exploratory study. Utilizing each institution's organizational structure, the factors will be presented in an order that reflects the first part of part of the Black collegians' college career, those critical factors that have been identified as most

important, the role of Student Affairs and Retention/Support Programs, and the impact of Presidential Priorities.

Midwestern University-Decentralized Public Institution

As a decentralized institution, each college and school at Midwestern University has its own source of support for its majors. These units also control their own budgets and make autonomous decisions on how to allocate funds for various departmental and student initiatives. As a result, there is great duplication in institutional services. Overall, the decentralized organizational structure actually facilitated the Black collegians' achievement and graduation rate by providing more options for students to locate and use resources, so the African American student experiences an increased probability of getting needed assistance and thereby, remaining in school.

Special Purpose Offices

This critical factor played a pivotal role for the Black collegians who just entered Midwestern University and were beginning their college career. During this time, the Office of Multiethnic Studies provided both instructional and transitional assistance to the student. Also, this Office aided the Black collegian in handling academic issues and in accessing campus resources. All of these efforts served to build the students' confidence and increase their capacity to believe that institutional personnel were genuinely interested in their success. As a result, Black collegians were more likely to fully utilize campus resources, and to believe that they could be positively impacted by the institution as a result of participating in both curricular and extracurricular programming. The Office provided a "proving ground" for Midwestern's Black collegians and relationships developed early on between students and faculty and staff

often were maintained throughout college career. Once these students developed their abilities to flourish in the university environment, they became more open and more willing to fully embrace the university and the other institutional resources.

1. Special Purpose Offices must play pivotal roles in the early stages of the Black collegians' postsecondary career. These offices assist students by providing instruction and adjustment assistance, introducing campus resources, offering individualized attention from faculty and academic advisors, and presenting instruction on various college success strategies, including note taking and time management (Devarics & Roach, 2000; Noel-Levitz, 2006; Smith, 2004).

2. Special Purpose Offices must be committed to the retention, academic success and college completion of African American collegians (Hammer, 2003; Noel-Levitz, 2006). This recommendation places great responsibility on the Office's staff and it must be emphasized that those employed by Special Purpose Offices should be prepared to go beyond the traditional roles of academic staff. For example at Midwestern University, the OMS personnel appeared to utilize both maternal and paternal behaviors with students. At one point, one instructor said that the students thought of her as a mom.

Additionally, this recommendation must be implemented even in the midst of potential criticisms from those who do not understand the purpose of this Office. For example, despite the fact that the Office of Multiethnic Studies intended to serve every member of the university student community, regardless of race, the director seemed very concerned about attacks and criticisms from anti affirmative action groups.

Institutional-Unit Response

This critical factor was identified as one of the most important and its positive impact on the academic success of Black collegians was substantiated at many levels at Midwestern. This factor was revealed in committees, academic stipulations, hiring decisions, and commitments from non-Black staff to address the Black collegians' academic deficits. At Midwestern University, this factor demonstrated that some personnel were highly cognizant of the challenges confronting African American students in specific academic disciplines and in university settings as a whole. In an attempt to minimize some of these educational and social challenges, some university personnel made solitary decisions to address these problems in a very straightforward and overt manner. As a result, the units sent a clear message that they wanted African Americans and other minority students to flourish in welcoming environments that encourage growth and accomplishment.

1. Institutional personnel must be willing to develop Diversity and Outreach Councils, comprised of students, faculty, and staff charged with evaluating their college's current diversity programs and developing ideas for future initiatives. Additionally, those in units across the institution must be willing to develop Social Justice Agencies that deal directly with issues of equity by conducting workshops and providing programming to the entire university community to sensitize them on issues of prejudice and intolerance (Wade-Golden & Matlock, 2007).

2. Institutional personnel must be willing to implement academic stipulations to promote success for Black collegians. These stipulations include early warning systems that send letters to students whose g.p.a.s fall below 2.0 and electronic midterm estimates

that send student progress reports to enable students to address marginal grades before the semester ends (Chang, 2001).

3. Institutional personnel must be willing to incorporate race and ethnicity requirements for their majors. These courses will educate the student population and assist in creating a more welcoming environment for minority students (Fowler &Villanueva, 2002).

4. Institutions must be willing to place several African Americans in high-ranking positions to challenge society's assumptions and generalizations about a group that has historically been marginalized in American society. This recommendation reflects an authentic allegiance to eliminating racist perspectives and ideals (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

5. Institutional personnel must be willing to hire African American faculty because each minority group identifies with their own minority faculty and sees their own capabilities for accomplishment reflected in the mere presence of the faculty member (Boyd, 2004; Littleton, 2001; Zirkel, 2002).

6. Institutional personnel must encourage their non-Black university colleagues to demonstrate their commitment to the success of the African American student by becoming a contributor to the vision of a society that respects and sees the benefit of difference (Buck, 2001).

7. Institutional personnel must encourage their non-Black administrators to continually offer to fund faculty enrichment and faculty development opportunities to bring in women and other minorities who work in their discipline (Dias-Bowie, et. al., 2004).

Institutional Expectations

Institutional Expectations is the next critical factor that was identified as most important to the achievement of the African American collegian. Participants at Midwestern University expressed expectations for the entire university community, expectations for university personnel, and expectations for students all of which promote the Black collegian's academic experience. Although they sometimes spoke of these factors as part of the university's culture, more often the participants referred to them as Institutional Expectations.

1. Institutional personnel must hold expectations for the entire university community to contribute to producing outstanding leaders and to meet the highest standard in carrying out their roles (Wimberly, 2002).

2. Institutional personnel must expect university professionals to place a high priority on assisting the achievement of Black collegians, by being willing to go beyond what's been done in the past and to genuinely holding themselves accountable for this students' success (Psychological Barriers, 2003).

3. Institutional personnel must expect student affairs professionals to take the time to direct students with campus offices that can assist students in resolving problems (Constantine & Watt, 2002).

4. Institutional personnel must expect all of its students to graduate. As a result, the university is expressing faith in the abilities of its students, which leads to a positive impact on the entire student population (Boyd, 2004).

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration was the third critical factor that greatly assisted the African American populace at Midwestern University. These collaborations were found in Black and White student organizations, on-campus units with other on-campus entities, and on-campus entities with various off-campus entities to encourage diversity.

1. Institutional personnel must encourage collaborations between Black and non-Black student organizations to encourage diversity and to resolve conflicts that may have developed over racial and/or religious differences. These collaborations take many forms, including discussion groups and forums (Race Relations on Campus, 2004/2005).

2. Institutional personnel must encourage collaborations between on-campus units to come together to design purposeful multicultural experiences for students that illustrate the injustices associated with racism and marginalization (Milem, 2003).

3. Institutional personnel must encourage collaborations between on-campus and off-campus entities, such as with university alumni. These collaborations could lead to increased information on the importance of diversity in the professional work environment. Overall, these external sources could assist the institution in advancing its diversity campaign (Wade-Golden & Matlock, 2007).

Faculty Initiatives

Faculty Initiatives proved to be one of the most important critical factors and a powerful proponent of heightening the academic success and graduation rate for Midwestern's African American students.

1. Faculty must be willing to express their realization and appreciation for the true benefit of the perspectives that Black collegians bring to classroom. As a result, faculty will encourage these students to participate and acknowledge their views as important and critical to the learning environment (Cody & Manusov, 2000).

2. Faculty must be dedicated to making up for the academic deficiencies that some African American students may have as a result of inadequate high school preparation. This dedication could manifest in the form of mock exams and online prepared notes based on course session (Hurd, 2000).

3. African American faculty must be willing to cultivate relationships with Black collegians. This is accomplished by demonstrating interest in this students' overall success and happiness as they navigate an institution that was not developed with them in mind (Ancis & Sedlacek, 1997; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984, 1985. 1987, 1988, & 1989).

4. Faculty must be willing to take on a maternal or paternal role for African American students. In these roles, faculty offer a safe haven for students, but require them to meet very high standards in their coursework (Littleton, 2001).

Student Affairs and Retention/Support Programs

Both Student Affairs and Retention/Support Programs have been combined because those in Student Affairs are primarily responsible for carrying out the Retention/Support Programs. These two critical factors join together to provide a foundation for those factors identified as most important. At Midwestern University, Student Affairs was not mentioned by every participant as a contributor to the success of the Black collegian, but those that did clearly illustrated that the actions of these professionals were significant for this student populace. The efforts of those in Student

Affairs were connected to increasing the African American students' cultural capital, increasing their retention rates, and raising their graduation percentages. In terms of Retention/Support Programs, participants emphasized initiatives within every college and school, programs that utilize the students' cultural background to address student needs, programs that incorporate mentors, and programs that target the pre-college student population.

1. Student Affairs Professionals must strive to assist African American collegians by increasing their cultural capital, improving their retention rates and heightening their graduation percentages (Ahuna, Banning, & Hughes, 2000).

2. Student Affairs Professionals must study African American students and examine them during their time on campus. This study can be carried out by using surveys, conducting face to face interviews with students, and assessing students as they enter and exit the institution to determine change over their tenure at the institution. This examination will assist the professionals in determining how Black collegians are impacted by institutional programming and in determining what issues contribute to this students' attrition and retention rates (Freeman, 1997; Graham, 1994; Hall & Allen, 1989; Hebel, 2007; Hutto & Fenwick, 2002; Stikes, 1984). This recommendation could greatly assist those professionals in university communities, like Midwestern University, in which racist acts are still very prevalent and where African American students are still confronted with racial stereotypes and inaccurate assumptions from their non-Black counterparts.

3. Student Affairs Professionals must create programming that addresses African American students in a very specific way. This targeted approach assists the student in

finding a "home" on campus (Furr & Elling, 2002; Taylor & Miller, 2002). For example, this support could be found in establishing a minority student relations office that offers academic support, space for students to talk with other students, and African American publications that can be checked out by students. Other examples include implementing educational programming and activities that focus on educating minority students, developing mentoring programs for first-year students, and establishing a multicultural center that provides meeting space for minority faculty, students, and staff to gather for meetings and cultural activities (Furr & Elling, 2002).

Presidential Priorities

This critical factor offered a marginal impact on the academic success of Midwestern's African American's students. As the participants indicated, the president has consistently endorsed diversity on campus, challenged critics on this concept by pledging to maintain a campaign of inclusivity, and fully documented the benefits of interacting with those who reflect difference, in both students and professionals. Although some of those who participated highly emphasized the efforts of the president, there were others who stated that the president did not have the full support of the campus community in terms of diversity initiatives. The leader's impact on the success of Midwestern's Black collegian was significantly less when compared to the impact of the other critical factors. This tells me that those I interviewed did not view the contributions of the president as vital to the achievement of the African American collegian.

1. Although the president's emphasis on diversity sends a direct message to the university that makes the community aware of the president's expectations for their behavior regarding the notion of inclusivity, the leader's overall impact on the academic

success of the Black collegian can still be marginal (Birnbaum, 1989;Dias-Bowie et al., 2004; Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). This may be especially true at institutions like Midwestern when there is a lack of authentic support across the university for diversity and inclusion.

When studying decentralized institutions, researchers must realize that many participants may not be well informed on certain topics as others because of the way the university functions. For example, Michelle, the Director of Support for the Midwestern's College of Mathematics lacked knowledge and awareness of institutional strategies that effectively contributed to the academic success of the Black collegian. She was unable to discuss Midwestern's various committees, task forces and activities that reflected a more holistic perspective of the university and its contributions to the African American collegian, even though she could talk clearly about efforts within her individual unit. This may be a result simply of a lack of knowledge beyond one's unit, which is not uncommon in large decentralized institutions. At the same time, this lack of university-wide perspective may be a function of the extent to which initiatives are institutionally integrated or valued. It appears that at Midwestern, some of the lack of understanding is because of the inconsistent value placed on and attention paid to diversity initiatives by different members of the community, even when recommended for participation in the study.

Southern University-Hybrid Public Institution

As a hybrid public institution, Southern University's organizational configuration reflects both centralized and decentralized features. All of the colleges and schools are decentralized, which means they have complete autonomy, including budget authority.

The institution's centralized features include the Procurement Office, Human Resources, and Emergency Preparedness. Additionally, the entire campus relies on the Office of Black Studies to take the lead in promoting the achievement of the African American collegian. Overall, this institution's hybrid organizational arrangement has greatly aided the Black collegian. Although the academic units exercise autonomy over their areas, the entire university has demonstrated its support and embraced the leadership of the Office of Black Studies in facilitating the success of this student population.

Institutional-Unit Response

At Southern University, Institutional-Unit Response played a pivotal role in the recruitment of Black collegians and in the beginning of these students' college careers. Overall, once the Black collegians and their parents establish trust in the university's representatives and the student accept the university's expectations, they start to heavily rely on the services offered by the Office of Black Studies. This continues throughout the students' tenure at Southern University. Thus, Institutional-Unit Responses play a key role in the early stages of the students' academic career at this institution.

1. Institutional personnel must be willing to provide assistance to both entering students and their parents, leading to increased levels of confidence and a greater likelihood that the student will start to become more engaged in campus activities, especially the Office of Black Studies (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003)

2. Institutional personnel must personalize their processes by being accessible to students. This helps the institution appear smaller and Black collegians will be more likely to establish cultural capital and exercise increased responsibility for both their

academic performance and their overall success at the institution (Allen, 1981; Bean, 1980; Clark & Crawford, 1992; Clewell, 1986 1982; Tinto, 1982; Wimberly, 2002).

3. Institutional personnel must be willing to develop initiatives that recruit and support low-income students. Although some institutions have demonstrated their efforts to expand their campus community in terms of race and ethnicity, programming directed at low-income students will lead to diversification in the socioeconomic status of the student population (Boyd, 2004; Hebel, 2007; Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2007; Richardson & Skinner, 1991; Schmidt, 2005; Thomas, 1981; Wade – Golden & Matlock, 2007).

4. Institutional personnel must be willing to hire African American faculty to provide role models for students (Ancis & Sedlacek, 1997; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Lavant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997; Littleton, 2001; Zirkel, 2002). This can be challenging for institutional personnel who covertly impede the hiring of African American faculty. For example at Southern University, Andrew discussed the subtle and covert ways that White faculty created hiring barriers by expecting the Black faculty applicants to meet higher standards than other non-Black applicants. Equitable employment standards are necessary to achieve the diverse faculty and staff who can serve as role models and mentors to students.

5. Institutional personnel must be willing to create special-purpose offices which exist to establish an institutional climate that advances and sustains the success of African American students (Devarics & Roach, 2000; Ibarra 2001; Noel-Levitz, 2006).

Special Purpose Office

The Southern University participants depicted The Office of Black Studies as highly relevant and integral to the success of the Black collegian. This factor was the most celebrated and overwhelmingly credited for the academic triumphs of this student population. Thus, Special-Purpose Office was identified as one of the most important factors. The Peer Counseling Program was highlighted as one of the Office's services that had a huge impact on the success of Southern's Black collegian.

1. Special Purpose Offices must be committed to the retention, academic success and college completion of African American collegians (Hammer, 2003; Noel-Levitz, 2006). This is important even in light of criticisms from other segments of the student population. For example, at Southern University the Asian American students expressed their dissatisfaction over the focus on the Office of Black Studies. According to the study's participants, the students did not think it was fair or appropriate that the Black students received an office that focused entirely on them and their needs. In the end, each university is responsible for developing sufficient and appropriate support services for *all* its students, and not allowing competition among student groups to fester and deteriorate the culture of the institution.

2. Special Purpose Offices must provide academic assistance, overall support and opportunities for African American students to cultivate and advance in the university community. These offices assist students by providing individualized attention from faculty and academic advisors, and presenting instruction on a wide array of strategies to facilitate the Black collegians' success. For example, the Dean of the Office of Black Studies said that his Office was committed to doing "anything" that was needed to

facilitate the success of this student population (Devarics & Roach, 2000; Noel-Levitz, 2006; Smith, 2004). Additionally, implementing this recommendation can be aided by a university community that encourages the targeted support of the African American student population. At Southern University, the staff of the Office of Black Studies unashamedly and decidedly sought to improve the lives and achievements of African American students and those in the Southern University community appear to have fully embraced the Office of Black Studies.

3. Special Purpose Offices must create opportunities for students to become "known" very early in their college career. One strategy to accomplish this is for these offices to pair entering African American students with peers who can act as both a mentor and an additional resource for information and/or assistance (Noel-Levitz, 2006; Littleton, 2001). The Peer Counseling Program used this process to heighten the success of both students.

4. Special Purpose Offices must be committed to using intense efforts to assist African American students in overcoming racial injustice and in successfully attaining their baccalaureate degrees (Devarics & Roach, 2000). This may be easier to do if Office staff realize of the deceptive and malignant practices that have been inflicted upon the African American in this country. Lance the Office's Dean said the effort to correct history have to be intensive because of the harm caused to the Black collegians' success. Because African American students are not the only group under-served and historically mistreated by postsecondary education, effective special purpose offices such as the Office of Black Studies at Southern University can serve as examples or pilots for offices that serve additional minority groups

Faculty Initiatives

This critical factor was identified as one of the most important in terms of its impact on the success of the Black collegian. It was highly emphasized by the participants.

1. Faculty must be willing to incorporate teacher immediacy into their pedagogical strategies. These tactics include humor, referring to students by name, talking with students before and after class sessions, and complimenting students on their work (Gorham, 1988; Neuliep, 2002).

2. Faculty must be willing to demonstrate their recognition for the value of diversity and the benefits it brings to the learning experience, in varied student ideas and perspectives (Dias-Bowie et al., 2004). Because not all faculty have positive assumptions about African American students as learners, implementing this recommendation may require faculty development to help educate instructors on diverse students, on the value of diversity and inclusion, and on ways of teaching to meet diverse learner needs.

3. Faculty must be willing to act as role models both in and out of the classroom. Additionally, they must be willing to challenge students to step out of their comfort zones and to seek to impact their communities and the nation (Tatum, 2004).

4. Faculty must believe that students need to be supported throughout the entire college experience and want to develop environments that encourage the accomplishments of African American collegians (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

5. In an attempt to offer support to African American collegians, African American faculty must build strong relationships with these students (Ancis & Sedlacek,

1997; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Lavant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997; Littleton, 2001; Tidball, 1986; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989; Zirkel, 2002).

6. Faculty must be willing to hold students accountable for improving and advancing our society through their contributions (Zirkel, 2002).

Institutional Expectations

Institutional Expectations was the third critical factor that I identified as most important to the achievement of Southern's African American student populace.

1. Institutional personnel must expect African American students to take leadership roles on campus and to believe that the university belongs to them, translating into an increased level of both comfort and academic achievement for this student. As a result, the African American students will feel empowered and have an increased capacity to make critical decisions (Boykin, 1983; Fischer, 2007; Perry, Steele, & Milliard, 2003; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

2. Institutional personnel must view the institution as very student-focused and see their roles as facilitating the accomplishment of African American students and as enabling students to resolve problems that arise (Lundberg, 2004; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

3. Institutional personnel must actively seek to cultivate both ethical self-governance and leadership in students (Tatum, 2004).

4. Institutional personnel must endorse diversity and academic excellence (Allen 1999; Carroll, 1998; Guinier, Fine, & Balin, 1997; Hurtado, 1992; Solorzano, et al. cited in Hurtado, Milem & Clayton – Pedersen).

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration

Valuing Diversity through Collaboration was the fourth critical factor identified as most important. This factor enabled the overall academic achievement and success of the Southern University's Black collegian through collaborations with both on-campus and off-campus entities.

1. The entire campus community must embrace the concept of collaboration (Coomes, 1994; Devarics & Roach, 2000; Dias-Bowie et al., 2004; Fowler & Villanueva, 2002; Gorham, 1988; Neuliep, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Lundberg, 2004).

2. On-Campus units must work together together to promote the Black collegians' success early in the students' introduction to the university (Rovai, Gallien, &Wighting, 2005). For example, the Admissions and Financial Aid Offices worked together to provide admissions offers to Black students.

3. Faculty must collaborate with the Office of Black Studies to increase the participation of African American students in their programming activities (Wade-Golden & Matlock, 2007).

4. Faculty must collaborate with other faculty members to make them aware of behaviors that might unintentionally offend or stigmatize the African American collegian (Dias-Bowie, et al., 2004). For example, Anita and one of her colleagues developed a videotape that depicted the negative experiences of African American students on Southern's campus. The tape was shared with all of Southern's academic units to promote diversity and increased understanding.

5. University administrators must seek to understand how they can positively influence the success or failure of those who are not White. They should seek to

collaborate with one another in order to advance the impact of both offices on African American collegians' success (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003).

Student Affairs & Retention/Support Programs

At Southern University, the student affairs professionals drew attention to the value and benefits of diversity and assisted in the establishment of cultural capital, which lead to increased retention rates and heightened graduation percentages for African American collegians. These professionals made concerted efforts to reach students early and to try to support them throughout their academic careers at Southern University. In terms of the Retention/Support Programs, they provided instructional and/or transitional assistance to the Black collegian or the university community as a whole. Overall, these students utilized the Retention/Support Programs to supplement the services offered by the Office of Black Studies Thus; I believe Retention/Support Programs should be coupled with Student Affairs to provide the foundation for the four most important critical factors.

1. Student Affairs Professionals must regard their roles as those that reflect and cultivate mutual trust with the students (Constantine, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Kuh, 1996).

2. Student Affairs Professionals must believe that their relationship with students will assist in learning more about one another and in offering increased support for students (Fleming, 1984; Glenn, 2007; Nettles, 1988).

3. Student Affairs Professionals must believe that multicultural awareness is important to stress overall and want their student employees to be knowledgeable about those concepts (Constantine, 2002; Milem, 2003).

4. Institutional personnel must recognize the role, value, and contributions of African American parents in facilitating the success of Black collegians (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco 2005; Hall, 1999; Hinderlie, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003).

5. Institutional personnel must offer instructional and/or transitional assistance to the African American collegian or to the entire university student community (Dale & Zych, 1996; McCormack, 1995; Sherman, Giles & Williams – Green, 1994).

Presidential Priorities

In terms of Presidential Priorities, some participants viewed this critical factor as highly relevant to the awareness, acceptance, implementation, and continuation of diversity protocols at Southern University. However, it was highlighted by only a few of the participants. Overall, I believe that many in Southern's university community embraced the concept of supporting the Black collegian, so the president is reiterating a notion that has already been accepted by the majority. As a result, Presidential Priorities at Southern University serve to support the university's diversity agenda and to set the tone for the expansion and improvement of the campaign to make Southern more inclusive.

1. Even in the midst of fiscal challenges, both the president and senior leadership must specifically say that diversity is important, continue to say it, and hold those on campus accountable for creating, sustaining and evaluating their own diversity programming. The president's emphasis sends a direct message to the university that makes them aware of the president's expectations for their behavior regarding the notion of inclusivity (Dias-Bowie et al., 2004; Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003).

Although institutional programming efforts intended to facilitate the success of Black collegians are rooted in assisting the entire student population, the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations is complex. These recommendations reflect institutional communities that have developed an appreciation for the educational value of diversity. However, if the university community has not embraced the usefulness of inclusivity, members will not recognize the importance of applying these recommendations. In addition, Black collegians must actively seek to facilitate their own success by fully utilizing the various forms of retention/support programming that is offered by student affairs professionals. Both the Black collegian and university personnel must take responsibility for increased retention and heightened graduation rates of this segment of the student populace.

These same recommendations have implications for the success of underprepared students, students from other races and/or ethnic groups, and others who may be historically underserved by research universities as well. Despite the fact that both institutions are identified as 'most selective," the data revealed that the student population did include students with academic deficiencies. These students were characterized to me as those who came from modest high schools that did not emphasize academic rigor. Thus, these students might have had impressive high school g.p.a.s, but the level of academic competition in their experience did not prepare them for success at a "most selective" postsecondary institution. In effect, they may have been more like underprepared learners in general than they were like other students accepted to these selective institutions. All of the critical factors, with the possible exception of the Special Purpose Office will assist the academic success of non-Black students. In terms of

organizational structure, the study revealed that Black collegians can experience success at both decentralized and hybrid institutional types. Ultimately, the organizational structure does not play a significant role in the Black collegians' academic success, but rather it is the people in that community who will negatively or positively affect the academic success of this student populace.

Overall, the reader should understand that this was an exploratory study with the limitation that it exclusively focused on two "most selective" public flagship universities. Additionally, the recommendations cannot stand alone; both institutional personnel and Black collegians must accept their contributing roles and be prepared to collaborate to improve the retention and graduation rates for this student population. In terms of institutional personnel, a reward system based on professional development and promotion might offer an incentive to professional staff. In terms of African American students, the concept of self efficacy serves as a source of motivation for these students. Specifically, if these students have confidence in their capacity to experience academic success in the academy (self efficacy), they will make concerted efforts to achieve and there is an increased likelihood of their academic success. Overall, the African American collegian's self efficacy combined with the institution's all inclusive support system may lead to an increased likelihood that the Black collegian will experience greater retention and higher graduation rates.

Overall, the recommendations for both institutional types tell the reader that continued diversity education and sensitivity training are still needed across all areas and members of the university community. This point also substantiates the critical importance of my study. If the university community believes that racial equality has

been fully realized and that everyone supports the promotion of African Americans, there would be no need to identify those critical factors needed to positively impact African American achievement and graduation.

Institutional Sample Comparison

In comparing those factors that contributed to the success of Black collegians at two selective research institutions, it is important to remember that the order of importance of the critical factors discussed is based on the dominance and emphasis given to each factor when discussed by the study participants. The dominance and emphasis were determined by the extent to which participants were aware of particular strategies and believed the strategies facilitated the academic success and graduation of Black collegians. Additionally, the ability of the participants to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the strategy on the Black collegians' success was also used to determine the dominance and emphasis of the factor in my analysis and interpretation.

Institutional Points of Similarity

The institutional points of similarity indicate two connections: both institutions established special-purpose offices to assist underserved populations and both institutions did not view presidential priorities as significantly integral to the academic success and college completion of African American collegians.

Both Midwestern University and Southern University established Special Purpose Offices to assist those students who demonstrated a need for academic support and/or transition assistance. At Midwestern, the Office of Multiethnic Studies was developed for all students, regardless of race and ethnicity, who exhibited academic deficiencies. Additionally this office is a learning community that has its own faculty, its own advising

staff, and its own financial aid staff. This Office offers an array of academic support services, including the Summer Transition Program, academic advising, peer advising, tutoring, and interest groups for first-year students. The Office also provides course instruction throughout the academic year in the following: math, English, Spanish, accounting, biology, chemistry, and physics. The Office of Multiethnic Studies works closely with a cross- section of academic departments, offices and programs throughout the university community to promote the overall achievement of the entire Midwestern student community.

At Southern University, the Office of Black Studies was established as an integral part of the Student Affairs Division for the express purpose of facilitating the academic and social advancement of the African American collegian. One of the Office's major responsibilities is to assist academic and non-academic units in confronting those service delivery challenges that may arise when working with African-American students. Also the Office assumes responsibility for creating a supportive environment that will encourage African American students to take full advantage of the university's student life and to sensitize the larger community to the needs and interests of the African American student population. This similarity demonstrates that both institutions recognize the value that the Special Purpose office brings to large, academically competitive research institutions. These offices represent the institutions' attempt to give underserved students an academic haven that allows them to get the help they need without feeling embarrassed, unprepared or stigmatized.

Institutional Points of Distinction

To address the points of difference in the way each institution used the critical factors to support the success of Black collegians, it is important to recognize that each organization's list of factors was different, meaning that participants from each institutional sample placed greater value on some factors over others. After analyzing all the data from each institution, a different critical factor emerged as most important for the two groups of participants. For example, respondents at Midwestern University expressed that Institutional-Unit Response was a vital contributor to the academic success and graduation of African American students. Yet, the participants at Southern University emphasized the Office of Black Studies as the most important critical factor. This distinction gives the reader a view into the institutional integration of both institution's Special-Purpose Offices.

As a learning community, Midwestern University's Office of Multiethnic Studies is basically a self-contained unit, offering its own courses, its own academic support services and working closely with a wide variety of academic departments, and programs throughout the institution. Additionally, the data indicate that at Midwestern everyone does not appear to support diversity. This combination of a university community not completely embracing diversity across the institution and an independent Special Purpose Office might be the reason why there is a reliance on Institutional-Unit Response. Institutional units may have to take more initiative to demonstrate their support for inclusiveness and their support for the Black collegian if a centralized approach is not fully effective. Midwestern's emphasis on Institutional-Unit Response could also be a reflection of their institutional organizational structure. As a decentralized institution,

members of the community expect to develop and implement programming in a more independent manner, so Institutional-Unit Response is highly reflective of this arrangement.

By comparison, Southern University's Office of Black Studies was established over 20 years ago as an integral part of the Student Affairs Division. Additionally part of this Office's mission is to work collaboratively with the rest of the campus community to facilitate the overall success of the Black collegian. The participants' emphasis on the Office of Black Studies could be a direct reflection of the university community's acceptance of diversity. Because the majority of the campus community appears to have embraced this concept, it is not surprising that the Office of Black Studies would be emphasized by the members who participated. Southern's emphasis on the Office of Black Studies could also be attributed to the centralized organizational features of this institution and the accepted practice of working with a university-wide office rather than recreating this kind of support unit in each college or school.

Overall, Southern University's Office of Black Studies appears to be "fully integrated, supported and utilized" by members of the campus community, which does not appear to be the case for the Office of Multiethnic Studies at Midwestern University. Based on the fact that the African American graduation rate at Southern University is 86 percent and the rate for this student population at Midwestern University is 67 percent, one might attribute some of this difference to the impact of having a Special Purpose Office that is fully integrated and accepted. The effectiveness of the Office of Black Studies and the community's acceptance of diversity might also be a response to the shame that is felt by the university community's for the racist history of Southern

University. Overall, because this institution was once restricted to White males and did not accept women or minorities, the current members of the university community may feel compelled to make up for the institution's discriminatory past.

Even though both universities were relatively consistent in identifying critical factors contributing to the success of Black collegians, the factors were implemented differently. For example, at Midwestern University the Student Affairs Professionals emphasized researching students throughout their time on campus to assist with retention efforts. These professionals also placed great emphasis on providing abundant programming specific to students' cultural backgrounds. Conversely at Southern University, these professionals accentuated the development of mutual trust between those in student affairs and university students. Also those Southern University Student Affairs Professionals stressed that their student employees were very knowledgeable on diversity and inclusivity as a result of training and staff development efforts. Although the professionals at both institutions placed priority on different concepts, both sets of participants acknowledged Student Affairs Professionals' contributions to the success of Black collegians at their respective institutions.

In a second example, at Midwestern University Valuing Diversity through Collaboration was described as the OMS collaborating with both on-campus and off-campus entities to promote diversity. This factor was also depicted as on-campus entities aligning with school systems and other external organizations. At Southern University, this critical factor reflected collaborations between African American students and the Admissions Office, alignments between the Financial Aid Office and the Admissions Office, and partnerships between the university and a friend who recruited students from

a large metropolitan area. Like the previous example, both institutions participated in collaborations, yet the partnerships reflected different priorities and varied strategies to target specific groups for both the alignment and the promotion of diversity.

Implications

Implications for Policy

"In the decades from 1960s through the early1990s, American colleges and universities were subject to political and judicial pressure to increase racial diversity on campus (Altbach, Berdahl, and Gumport, 1999, p. 450). The demand for postsecondary access increased as the population continued to expand, so many institutions made committed efforts to diversify their student populations. During this time, the attrition rate for African American students was high. Later, institutions determined that these students needed additional assistance to combat inadequate secondary school preparation and to manage the unwelcoming climates of the PWIs. Although some postsecondary institutions have experienced success with the African American collegian, the provision of additional services for this student also plays a role in the growing number of racial incidents on campuses across the country (Race Relations on Campus, 2004/2005). Additionally, the services provided for underrepresented students have come under intense scrutiny, resulting in various restrictions enacted by both state and federal legislation such as changes in college admissions guidelines that historically broadened access, changes in student loan programs that often negatively affect low-income students, particularly, and the ways in which institutions can provide support and programming for targeted minority groups. All of these increased restrictions have created barriers for underrepresented college students. Additionally, they have led to a

developing schism in higher education where middle and upper income students will attend four-year institutions and low-income students will be disproportionately found at community colleges.

My study revealed eight critical factors that contributed to the successful completion of Black collegians at Midwestern University and Southern University. It also illustrated how these critical factors can be replicated at similar postsecondary institutions. University leaders must develop policies that support the continued pursuit of equity and access and that encourage institutional climates that support the success of minority students, even in the face of external changes that inhibit access and that make creating effective learning environments more challenging. Education has always been viewed as a vital contributor to success (Rhodes, 2001). Now this concept has taken on even greater importance as American citizens prepare for competition in a global marketplace.

Implications for Administrators

This study has shown that the president and central administration can serve as highly visible proponents of diversity; however, if the university community has not embraced this concept, the impact on African American student academic success and postsecondary graduation can be marginal. Although both institutions' respondents acknowledged their leaders' endorsement of inclusion for African American students, this critical factor was not weighed heavily or significantly highlighted by the participants. At the same time, the study clearly showed that administrators committed to the success of African American students can make a difference in serving as role models and mentors, in making sure that hiring processes are equitable, in implementing

diversity training for their staffs including resident assistants, and in cultivating collaborations on- and off-campus that supports students in many different ways. The study shows that creating successful learning environments for African American students involves effective leadership from presidents to students, and all levels in between, especially at complex flagship institutions. At Midwestern University, the president was very blatant, very specific and very committed to the endorsement of diversity. Additionally, it was stated that this president expected each member of the university to embrace this sentiment. Although the Midwestern participants acknowledged and noted the president's declaration to diversity, it was stated that the on-campus units appeared to weigh this construct on the basis of their unit's priorities and value system. Those at Midwestern seemingly considered the advantages and disadvantages of diversity and based their decisions on their unit's concerns and not solely on the president's admonishment to comply. Similarly at Southern University, the president explicitly included diversity in his institutional plans, yet his actions were not significantly highlighted by the study participants. It appears that members of Southern University's community had already embraced the concept of diversity and viewed the president's endorsement as another example that reiterated Southern's stance on multicultural awareness. The illustration of Presidential Priorities offered by both Southern and Midwestern leaves the reader with an understanding of this critical factor as a secondary contributor to an organization that has already determined that diversity is important. However if the organization has not determined that this value is important, the "presidential concern" serves as just another proposition in the president's long list of priorities.

Implications for Faculty

The participants in my study clearly stated that faculty play a major role in the academic success of African American collegians. Faculty must realize that their encouragement is needed and integral to the success of the African American student. Students take their academic cues from their instructors; therefore, if the faculty indicates that students are prepared and have the ability to succeed, it positively impacts and encourages them. Conversely, if the faculty member communicates that the student is poorly prepared and does not have the capacity to successfully complete their college education; this student becomes discouraged and may end up dropping out. Many strategies that support students emerged in this study including using early warning systems, giving mock exams, waiving minimum GPA requirements to declaring majors, using particular instructional strategies, and encouraging student ownership of their education and their institution. Faculty must be willing to encourage and compliment students on their academic performances, and serve as resources throughout the Black collegian's undergraduate experience.

This depiction tells the reader that faculty must be willing to do more than teach. They must be ready to act as role models, both in and out of the classroom. They must be prepared to learn more about their students' cultural background, to communicate their "high" expectations for every member of the class, to consistently support students, and to be accountable for the success of all their students. African American faculty, in particular, must be prepared to act as sources of support for Black collegians, thereby building strong relationships with these students. At the same time, taking these responsibilities seriously may have costs for faculty in terms of their ability to also

successfully accomplish the responsibilities of their roles as research university faculty. Annual evaluation criteria, tenure and promotion processes, and faculty development programs may need to take many of these aspects into account if faculty are expected to be successful in implementing the stated recommendations on behalf of African American students.

Implications for Student Affairs Professionals

As a critical factor Student Affairs was mentioned by the study's participants, but it was not highly dominant in the data. However, there were lessons learned for Student Affairs Professionals. It is important to note that both Student Affairs and Retention/Support programs are really not distinct because the programs are typically delivered by student affairs professionals. In order to support African American students, student affairs professionals must have sufficient knowledge of research practices, multicultural awareness, and interpersonal communication to better serve this population. At Midwestern University, the student affairs professionals were actively involved in the examination of their students, helping students locating a "home" on campus, and the specific identification and implementation of programming to meet the needs of the institution's diverse population. At Southern University, these professionals developed programming to address and educate the parents on their role in the success of the student, trained their student employees on issues in multicultural education, and created relationships of mutual trust with students. This student affairs professional must acknowledge that increased knowledge and practice must be utilized to fully address the needs of the entire student population.

As with the implications for faculty, those in Student Affairs who take seriously the responsibility to support African American student success may find their roles quite expanded. These professionals must consistently demonstrate their value and interest in the needs of the entire student population, and their commitment to diversity. At the same time, institutions need to provide sufficient training, staff, and support for these professionals if they are going to be able to implement quality programming that addresses student needs across the institution.

Implications for Future Research

This study revealed that more has to be done to facilitate the overall academic success of the Black collegian. Both Midwestern University and Southern University showed that public institutions can utilize their resources to address the needs of the Black student population in a very specific way.

Future research should address this compelling issue by utilizing a sample that includes African American students primarily or that combines this student populace with university personnel. I believe that a similar study could be conducted on African American collegians who attend community colleges, religious institutions, and same -sex institutions. Additionally, because the data revealed that White collegians tend to be unaware of the challenges that confront their Black counterparts, it might prove to be both interesting and compelling to question White collegians on their ideas surrounding this critical issue.

Summary

Although other institutions may feel that they do not have the financial resources to implement my results, five of the eight critical factors can be implemented without

significant additional financial resources, although institutional personnel would need to invest increased time, energy and commitment. Specifically, faculty initiatives, institutional expectations, presidential priorities, student affairs and valuing diversity through collaboration could be implemented without increasing the budget.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Good morning,

My name is Vanessa Holmes and I'm a doctoral candidate in the M.S.U. Higher, Adult, Lifelong Education (HALE) Program. I am contacting you because I would like to include you in my sample for my data collection. Specifically, I would like to conduct a 45 - 60 minute interview with you. Based on your schedule, I would like to conduct the interview within the next two weeks. I've provided an overview of my study to give you some background and context to assist you in your decision-making process.

The title of my study is " Critical Factors Affecting African American College Completion at Two Selective Research Institutions" The purpose of this study is to examine the approaches utilized by selective postsecondary institutions to promote African American achievement. This inquiry will determine how those critical factors, utilized by those institutions with high African American college completion percentages, impact the academic success of this student population.

The focus of this study will be on identifying the pedagogical strategies, administrative practices, and institutional policies that seem to contribute to the high performance of African American college students, ultimately leading to their graduation.

The premise of this study is built on the concept of examining the tactics used by each institution, considering the similarities and differences that exist in each institution's approach and providing information to other institutions that are similar,

The data collection methods will be primarily comprised of interviews held at each site coupled with the collection of artifacts. Specifically, administrators, student affairs professionals, and faculty members will be asked to share their perspectives on specific strategies, policies, and institutional initiatives that are employed to heighten the graduation rate of African American students. I have chosen these individuals because I presume they may be able to provide the most pertinent and useful information on this topic that cuts across institutional levels. I will focus more on facilitating the interviewee's ability to reveal their own history with the challenges facing the African American student.

During the audio tape recorded interview, each participant will be asked open-ended questions based on a semi-structured interview protocol about their experiences as faculty, administrators, or student affairs personnel.

I can be reached by e-mail or at (517) 432-5223. I'll look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Thanks in advance,
Vanessa Holmes

Appendix B
Critical Factors Affecting African American College
Completion at Two Selective Research Institutions

The college enrollment rate of African American collegians has never been higher, and most would interpret this as the lessening of some discriminatory practices. Thus, it would appear that there are more opportunities for African Americans. Ironically, the college completion rate for this student remains below both the national graduation rate of all students and the rate of their White counterparts.

This study will determine what the faculty, student affairs personnel, and academic administrators are doing to facilitate the academic success and college completion of African American students. Your participation in this study will increase our understanding of the pedagogical strategies, administrative practices, and institutional policies that seem to contribute to the high performance of African American college students.

This study includes a 45 – 60 minute interview. A follow-up interview may also be conducted if the researcher believes it is needed. The analysis of data will adhere to the qualitative tradition and will be carried out by Vanessa M. Holmes. The researcher will select pseudonyms for the participants and any identifying information will be removed from the transcripts prior to analysis.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Subjects will not receive any monetary or other favorable treatment in exchange for involvement in this study. You may elect to respond to certain questions and refrain from answering other questions.

Based on your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. If at any time during the interview, you feel that the recorder should be turned off, I will comply with your request. Throughout the duration of the study, the recordings will be locked in a secure location. The participant consent form and the audio tapes will not be held in the same location. Each will be placed in a separate, secure location. Once the study has been completed, the recordings will be erased. The participant consent form, which includes your name, contact information, and chosen pseudonym, will be maintained by the researcher in a secure location until the end of the study, upon which it will be destroyed.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Due to the fact that the study includes face-to-face interviews, participants cannot remain anonymous. However, your privacy will be protected to the greatest extent permitted by law. A pseudonym, selected by the researcher, will be used in transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data.

As a reminder, if you ever become uncomfortable at any point during our interview, you may elect not to respond to a question or to terminate the interview.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of the findings of this study, a bibliography of resources for further reading, or both.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the primary investigator Dr. Marilyn Amey, 418 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, (517) 432-1056. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of the study, you may "anonymously" contact Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Director of the Human Subject Protection Programs at Michigan State University. Dr. Vasilenko can be reached by telephone (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 432-4503, by e-mail irb@ores.msu.edu, or by mail 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

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Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

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Appendix C

1. The national graduation average for African American college students is 42 percent. Although your institution has experienced success with this population, what are the major issues surrounding the low national graduation rates of African American college students?

2. Why do you think your institution has been so successful with the graduation of African American students?

3. In terms of the African American student and the rest of your student population, what contributes to this gap in graduation rates?

4. As the _____, how would you describe what you do or your primary responsibility?

5. As someone with limited knowledge of both your office and your university, how would you describe the culture that exists in your office/department/division?

How would you describe the culture at this university?

6. Please give me an example of how your students are impacted by the culture that exists in your office/department/division.

Give me an example of how students are impacted by the university's culture.

7. Tell me about the nature of your experiences with African American students.

8. What are the different actions or services your office/department/division utilizes to facilitate the college completion of African American students?

9. What evidence do you have of the effectiveness of these services?

10. If someone asked you, "Why do you offer these services to African American students?" What would be your response?

11. Who have you partnered with, on or off campus, to increase the success of African American students?

12. At this point in your institution's history, what can the African American collegian offer your institution?

13. Who do you believe are positive influences of African American student success on this campus?

14. In terms of peer to peer influence, where have you seen both positive and negative peer to peer influence?

15. In what ways have you connected with administrators and/or faculty to promote African American student success?

16. In your tenure at this institution, what one program, activity, or office do you think contributes the most to the college completion of African American students?

17. Is there anything you'd like to add regarding your institution's community and the African American collegian?

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