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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Date: January 26th, 2021

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Persistence and Retention Strategies Implemented at HBCUs That Support Successful Degree
Attainment of African American Men

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Fetera D. Henry

February 2021

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to both of my wonderful parents, Lovell and Dorothy Henry, whose prayers have kept me protected, love has kept me grounded, and support has kept me going. Thank you for instilling in me the faith that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” – Philippians 4:13. Your baby girl did it! This work is also dedicated to my grandparents, who paved the way and inspired me to get all of the education I could. Lastly, I dedicate this work in memory of my precious fur-ever love Napoleon. You were my trusted companion and friend through the highs, lows, and milestones. While I am saddened that you transitioned prior to the completion of this final educational chapter, I am happy to have had you by my side for so many years.

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To anyone that I may have missed please charge it to my head and not to my heart. Your contributions, no matter the size, were always noticed and appreciated.

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Abstract

While minority students are enrolling in college at record numbers, their completion rate is significantly lower than their Caucasian peers. This gap is particularly evident among African American men. The purpose of this study was to identify and describe persistence and retention strategies implemented by HBCUs which support successful degree attainment of African American men. Framed by Tinto's model of institutional departure, a descriptive instrumental case study design utilized data from semistructured online interviews and voluntarily submitted artifacts to explore the academic and social experiences of nine African American men who successfully completed a degree from an HBCU within the last five to 10 years. The overall findings revealed HBCUs have targeted campus retention initiatives which encompass a variety of academic support services. Social experiences are critical to social adjustment and college success. The accessibility of institutional agents, presence of male minority initiatives and mentoring programs, and familial living communities promote persistence. Participants suggested increasing alumni support and community presence, consciousness of social justice issues, proactive and intrusive measures, and financial incentives to further support African American men. Students choose HBCUs for a variety of reasons related to size and environment, family history, desire for the Black experience, and the preservation of HBCUs. Strategies utilized by HBCUs help better retain African American men; such strategies should be considered for implementation at other degree-granting institutions.

Keywords: persistence, retention, strategies, African American, male, historically Black colleges and universities

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Abstract	v
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background of the Study	1
Theoretical Framework	3
Statement of the Problem	4
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions	6
Definition of Key Terms	6
Summary and Organization of the Study	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
African American Enrollment and Retention Data	11
Barriers to Academic Achievement and Variables of Persistence for African Americans	13
Behavior, Social, and Academic Development of African American Men	16
Poor Help-Seeking Behaviors of African American Students	17
Male Gender Role Conflict	18
Significance, Role, and History of HBCUs	19
HBCU Historical Perspective	20
Challenges Faced by HBCUs	23
HBCU Student Population	25
Student Engagement and Satisfaction at HBCUs vs. PWIs	26
Summer Bridge Programs at HBCUs and MSIs	28
Theoretical Framework Discussion	29
Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure	29
Critical Race Theory	30
Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Educational Assessment Framework	31
Bush and Bush's African American Male Theory	32
Hossler and Gallagher's College Choice Model	33
Eccles and Wigfield's Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation	33
Summary	34
Chapter 3: Methodology	36
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions	36
Research Design and Method	37

Population	38
Sample.....	39
Data Collection and Instrumentation	41
Data Analysis	43
Trustworthiness.....	45
Researcher's Role	46
Ethical Considerations	47
Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations	48
Summary	50
Chapter 4: Results	51
Research Question 1: Academic Support Services	52
Federal TRIO Programs	53
Personalized Advising and Programming for First- and Second-Year Students.....	56
Summer Bridge Programs.....	59
Research Question 2: Social (Cocurricular) Experiences and Engagement	61
Social Events and Social Communities	61
Student Organizations	62
Fraternal Affiliations.....	63
Research Question 3: Faculty, Peer, and Family Support and University Culture	68
Accessibility of Faculty, Staff, Upperclassmen, and Administration	68
Male Minority Initiatives and Mentoring Programs	73
Living Communities Promote Peer Sense of Belonging	75
Research Question 4: Suggestions for Further Support.....	75
Increased Alumni Support and Community Presence	76
Increased Consciousness of Social Issues by Administrators.....	77
Proactive and Intrusive Mindset	79
Additional Funding and Student Incentives.....	80
Other Suggestions	81
Research Questions 5: Institutional Choice	81
Smaller Size Equals More Support and Creates a Family Environment ...	82
Influence of Family History and Location.....	83
The Black Experience	84
Second Chance Institutions and Preservation of HBCUs	85
Summary	87
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions	88
Summary of the Study	88
Background of the Study	88
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	89
Review of the Research Design and Methodology	90
Summary of Major Findings	91
Discussion and Conclusions of Findings	92
Research Question 1	93

Research Question 2	94
Research Question 3	95
Research Question 4	96
Research Questions 5	98
Implications for Practice	99
Recommendations for Future Research	100
Reflections and Final Remarks	101
References	103
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	123
Appendix B: Interview Guided Protocol/Questions	124
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form	126
Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Email	129

List of Tables

Table 1. HBCU Institutional Profiles of Research Participants.....	39
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List of Figures

Figure 1. Honors Convocation Notification.....	54
Figure 2. Example of Study Hall Protocol.....	57
Figure 3. Academy and Mentorship Itinerary From Athletic Handbook.....	57
Figure 4. Medical School Admission Letter	60
Figure 5. Leadership Academy Article	65
Figure 6. Alpha Network Hall of Fame Article	66
Figure 7. Recommendation Email From Professor.....	71

Chapter 1: Introduction

Success in college appears to be a significant challenge for students of every nationality across a variety of institutional types; however, this struggle is especially relevant for African American students (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Cokley and Chapman (2008) argued, “academic achievement among African American students represents one of America’s most urgent educational issues” (p. 350). They attributed poor academic achievement among this population to social and socioeconomic disadvantages “related to cultural conflict and differences in academic orientation” (p. 350). Further examination into African American college student success, revealed that a growing gender imbalance exists. According to Palmer et al. (2010), in contrast to their female peers, the number of African American men enrolled in college is quite low. The imbalance is also more prevalent among African Americans and severe when compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

Chapter 1 is organized to aid the reader in understanding the issue of African American male retention and the role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in retaining this population through targeted intervention strategies that promote persistence and support successful degree attainment. It highlights the background of HBCUs and the associated challenges these minority-serving institutions have faced. This information is followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, defining key terms, and culminates with a summary.

Background of the Study

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are distinct in their institutional makeup, student population, and academic approach in comparison to other institutions of higher education in America (Allen et al., 2007; Avery, 2009). The Higher Education Act of 1965

defines an HBCU as any historically Black college or university that was in existence and accredited prior to 1964, whose primary mission was, and is, to educate and advance people of color, specifically African Americans (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Currently, there are 105 HBCUs still in existence across the nation, and they make up 3% of all postsecondary institutions (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Jones, 2010; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011).

Over the last two decades, there has been much debate regarding the relevancy and necessity of HBCUs in the 21st century (Bracey, 2017). As stated by Palmer et al. (2010), whereas minority enrollment and retention rates have fluctuated overall in higher education, the number of African American students enrolling in college and graduating is still small in comparison to their Caucasian peers. In assessing this educational gap, it is essential to understand the areas of student engagement and satisfaction of minorities, academic performance, and variables that contribute to student persistence and retention at HBCUs versus Predominately White Institutions (PWIs).

Merisotis and McCarthy (2005) noted that while HBCUs are often criticized for their low completion rates, they fare well when comparing graduation rates of African American students to that of their PWI competitors. HBCUs cater to more than one-third of all minority populations attending a postsecondary institution. In fact, Merisotis and McCarthy reported HBCU populations are more likely to be first-generation college students, at a higher risk of academic failure, and come from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, in comparative literature examining the experiences of African Americans attending HBCUs versus PWIs, research has consistently shown that HBCUs provide family-oriented learning communities that encourage and support their students better than PWIs (Palmer et al., 2010).

Bracey (2017) noted, “HBCUs are known for nurturing Black, underserved students, while offering specialized instruction, such as exploring what it means to be a Black college student” (p. 678). Bracey also argued that HBCUs are committed to the political and social issues facing the Black community. Further study is needed to examine the impact such institutions have on minority enrollment and retention to support or negate their necessity and relevancy. Currently, there is scarce empirical research regarding the experiences of African Americans enrolled in HBCUs, as a majority of the research has been fixated on the realities of African American men at PWIs (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework used for this dissertation is Tinto’s model of institutional departure (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 2007). The supporting theoretical frameworks are the critical race theory (CRT; Taylor et al., 2009), Astin’s theory of student involvement and educational assessment framework (1984), Bush and Bush’s African American male theory (AAMT; 2013), Eccles and Wigler’s expectancy–value theory of motivation (2000), and Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model. Components of these theoretical models apply directly to the African American student experience and support the functions, roles, and developmental processes that HBCUs provide in their campus environment (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Leavy (2017) attributed social justice movements to the creation of theoretical frameworks which compromise the critical paradigm. Voigt and Hundrieser (2008) suggested that many of the retention theories and correlated research focus on what institutions are doing wrong if they fail to retain their population. As a result, there is little research on what institutions are doing right that contributes to student success.

Statement of the Problem

While minority students are graduating from high school and pursuing postsecondary education at a record rate, the number of these students who complete college is significantly lower than their Caucasian peers, even within minority-serving institutions such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs; American Council on Education, 2006; Bir & Myrick, 2015; Brooks et al., 2013; Flores & Park, 2015; Gray & Swinton, 2017). The educational gap is most evident among African American men, who remain disproportionately underrepresented in higher education, as less than 33.1% complete a degree within their major (Brooks et al., 2013). Of the number of African American men entering as first-generation college students at HBCUs, 67.6% do not graduate within a six-year timeframe (Palmer et al., 2010). Of this percentage, many have low high school grade point averages and need developmental education in one or more subject areas (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Burt, 2010; Johnson-Weeks & Superville, 2016).

Researchers have attributed student attrition to deficiencies in academic preparation for college (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Harrington et al., 2016; Johnson-Weeks & Superville, 2016; Nelson-Laird et al., 2007; Nettles et al., 1999), adverse stereotyping and marginalization (Bir & Myrick, 2015), financial difficulties (Nettles et al., 1999), and failure to engage and address social and developmental needs (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Flowers et al., 2015). However, Gray and Swinton (2017) suggested the likelihood of dropping out decreases when students are actively involved, and if their motivation and academic ability align with the educational program.

African American students may benefit from targeted interventions (e.g., summer bridge programs, learning cohorts, and the Male Minority Initiative) to reduce at-risk characteristics (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Burt, 2010; Johnson-Weeks & Superville, 2016). Palmer et al. (2010)

suggested HBCUs create an intrusive learning community that engenders academic success, as Black men perform better when surrounded by like-minded, academically-driven peers.

Existing research has focused on the historical context of HBCUs and the experiences of students attending HBCUs versus predominantly White institutions (PWIs; Jackson, 2012; Palmer et al., 2010). These studies have concluded HBCUs provide a more supportive learning environment with familial campus climates than PWI competitors (Jackson, 2012; Nelson-Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2010).

Despite the documented importance of HBCUs in the outcomes of African American men, low persistence and retention rates present a significant challenge for leadership in higher education (Flowers, 2002; Jackson, 2012; Nelson-Laird et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2010). Few contemporary studies have researched the social and academic experiences of Black male students at HBCUs, specifically, “student perceptions of alternate approaches to remediation and retention” (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 99). Researchers need to clarify the role of HBCUs in decreasing Black male attrition (Palmer et al., 2010; Shorette & Palmer, 2015) through assessment of targeted intervention programming for at-risk populations. If provisions are not made to address the issue of the invisible Black male in higher education, institutions will continue to perpetuate the stigma of racial inequity in education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to identify and describe persistence and retention strategies implemented at HBCUs that support successful degree attainment as perceived by successful African American male HBCU students. A descriptive instrumental case study design utilized data from structured interviews with recent HBCU graduates to explore the academic and social experiences of African American men who

attended an HBCU and have successfully completed a degree. Specifically, the goal was to examine the strategies which contribute to academic success among African American men who entered an HBCU via its summer bridge program or were exposed to the targeted support services such as developmental education programs and persisted to graduation. An additional purpose of this study was to support the continued need for HBCUs in the American higher education system. Ultimately, this dissertation study will provide clarity on the issues influencing African American men and strategies that can be implemented within institutions of higher education to better retain this population.

Research Questions

Q1. What academic support services offered at HBCUs contribute to African American men successfully graduating college?

Q2. What social (cocurricular) experiences offered at HBCUs contribute to African American men successfully graduating college?

Q3. In what way did HBCUs encourage faculty, peer, and family relationships to support African American men successfully graduating at HBCUs?

Q4. What suggestions do African American men who have graduated from HBCUs recommend be implemented for further support?

Q5. Why do students choose to go to HBCUs?

Definition of Key Terms

At this stage of the research, in order to enhance the reader's comprehension of subject matter, key terms utilized throughout this study were generally defined as follows:

College enrollment rate. The college enrollment rate is the number of undergraduate or graduate students, 18- to 24-year-olds (i.e., young adults) enrolled in 2- or 4-year institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019).

Completion/graduation rate. The graduation rate is determined by the number of “students in a program or assigned cohort who complete and/or graduate from an institution. On-time completions are assessed by two to three years for associate degrees and four to six years for a baccalaureate degree” (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008, p. 3).

First-generation students. A first-generation student is an individual who is the first member of their immediate family to attend a college or university and have parents who did not pursue education beyond high school (Chen, 2005).

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). A Historically Black College and University is any nationally accredited college or university established before 1964 whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Blacks/African Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Masculinity. Masculinity is those qualities, habits, and traits considered to be characteristic of men . These traits are often associated with strength, courage, independence, leadership, violence, and assertiveness (Wood et al., 2016).

Minority. A “student who is Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian American, Black/African American, Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander” (34 C.F.R. § 607.7).

Minority-serving institutions (MSIs). An MSI is an institution with over fifty percent of its enrollment made up of a single minority group or combination of groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Persistence. Persistence is “the enrollment headcount of any cohort compared to its headcount on its initial official census date. The goal is to measure the number of students who persist term to term and to completion” (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008, p. 3).

Predominately White institutions (PWIs). Predominately White Institutions are institutions of higher education, with 50% or more of the total enrollment fulfilled by Caucasians (Lomotey, 2015).

Retention. Retention is “the outcome of how many students remained enrolled from fall to fall. This number is typically derived from first-time, full-time traditional day students, but can be applied to any defined cohort” (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008, p. 3).

Summer Bridge Program. A Summer Bridge Program is an intensive academic preparation program during the “bridge” period between high school and college. These programs are designed to facilitate a seamless transition from high school to college by providing students with the academic, social, and support resources necessary to be successful in a college environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the reader to the background information on the specified problem of African American male retention in institutions of higher education and also detailed the purpose and nature of the study conducted. The subsequent chapter includes a review of the literature regarding the social and academic experiences of African American men who have earned an undergraduate or graduate degree from an HBCU. The literature included data on the historical context of HBCUs, challenges associated with HBCUs, minority enrollment, retention and student success

initiatives, and student engagement and satisfaction. Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine through the lens of successful HBCU male alumni, the persistence and retention strategies utilized by HBCUs which support African American men in successfully completing their degree. There are few studies which examine the perspectives and experiences of African American HBCU alumni on the educational relevance of HBCUs (Robinson, 2017). Through the examination of retention and persistence data related to African American men at HBCUs, educational policymakers will be better able to make informed decisions and assess the current efforts of college and university administrators to improve the persistence rates of African American students (Ingram, 2019). Currently, there is a gap in the literature and contemporary studies researching the social and academic “experiences of Black males who have earned an undergraduate degree from an HBCU” (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 99).

Chapter 2 consists of six sections. Within the first section, I review existing literature on enrollment and retention data for African American students, as this is part of the underlying problem and foundation for the research. The second section contains the study population and discusses male gender role conflict and how the concept of masculinity impacts the social, behavioral, and academic development of African American men. The third section focuses on the historical background, significance, and role of HBCUs as well as highlighting their past and present challenges. As an extension of the HBCU institutional profile, in the fourth section, I present information on the student population both demographically and academically. In section five, I examine comparative literature on student engagement and satisfaction at HBCUs and PWIs, particularly data on college choice, faculty demographics, and student success initiatives. In the sixth and final section, the study is framed and examined via the primary theoretical

framework from Vincent Tinto's retention theory, Model of Institutional Departure (1975, 1987, 2007). Also presented are supporting theoretical frameworks from the CRT, Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and educational assessment framework, Bush and Bush's (2013) AAMT, Eccles and Wigfield's (2000) expectancy-value of achievement motivation, and Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model.

The literature compiled for this study included databases such as the Abilene Christian University Margaret and Herman Brown Library, legal statutes (e.g., Higher Education Act of 1965), federal and state reports (e.g., The Coleman Report, 1966), ProQuest Digital Dissertations, relevant statistical reports from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on demographic groups in higher education, Chronicle of Higher Education, and various other search engines and university resources with scholarly peer-reviewed publications. Keywords and Boolean phrases to conduct this review included HBCUs, PWIs, Black and African American male minority retention, and higher education. In this study, data results were not delimited, and consist of data from both public and private, 4-year and 2-year degree-granting accredited institutions.

African American Enrollment and Retention Data

African American populations have been consistently underrepresented in enrollment and college completion numbers in institutions of higher education (Hall, 2017; Perna et al., 2008). The rate of African American students enrolling in college upon completion of high school has consistently risen from 42.7% in 1980 to 55.7% in 2008 to 65% in recent years (Cheng et al., 2015). The National Conference of State Legislatures (2014) reported that despite additional access to postsecondary education, gaps between minority and White students exist in college enrollment (para. 3). In a positive trend, the National Center on Education Statistics (NCES;

2015) reported the educational gap between minorities and Caucasians has decreased in size over the last decade. Caucasian college enrollment dropped from 70% to 69%, while African American colleges increased from 56% to 65% (para. 4).

According to the NCES (2019), between the years 2000 and 2017, institutions granting associate degree or higher and who also participated in Title IV federal financial aid programs saw a five percent increase in the college enrollment rate of African Americans. During this timeframe, the number of African American women (traditionally aged) enrolled in college was consistently higher than African American men except in 2007, 2012, 2015, and 2016, when the college enrollment rates were not significantly different. From 2000 to 2010, the college enrollment rate for African Americans increased from 1.5 million to 2.7 million students by approximately 73%, but later decreased by 19% to 2.2 million students enrolled between 2010 and 2017. However, in fall 2017 of 16.8 million undergraduates enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, African American men were reportedly registered at a higher number than African American (33% vs. 25%) young adults in the year 2000. As a result, the enrollment gap between African American female and male students was at 6%.

In comparison to the college enrollment rate for African American students, the national five-year college graduation rate for this population is currently around 43% (Ezeala-Harrison, 2014; Prime, 2001). In 2014, the national six-year graduation rate for first time in college (FTIC) undergraduate students enrolled full time was 60%, but was reported to be lowest for African American and American Indian/Alaska Native students at 41% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Current graduation rates for African Americans are about 20% below what is reported for Caucasian peers. Regarding numbers for African American men, Harper (2012) reported the national six-year graduation rate as 33.3% compared to 48.1% overall for students enrolled at

public institutions. Despite low graduation statistics, Ezeala-Harrison (2014) contended the completion rate for African American men has improved from 28% to 36% in the last decade.

Barriers to Academic Achievement and Variables of Persistence for African Americans

Enrollment and persistence rates for low-income students, particularly African Americans, continue to lag behind in comparison to Caucasian students (Ingram, 2019; Kuh et al., 2006). Yet over 25 years ago, Lang (1992) argued that despite existing research on the impact of socioeconomic status on Black student attrition, institutional factors are of greater significance. Lang further supported this claim by pointing out when variables such as status and background were controlled, the attrition rate among African American students and other demographics remained similar. The American College Testing (ACT) program (2006; 2015) has highlighted several obstacles and background factors that plague minority students, particularly those who enroll at HBCUs. They have suggested that minority students are deficient in areas which are critical to persistence in college.

Among the obstacles cited as factors which impact persistence, academic preparedness is most common (Braxton, 2008; Dumas-Hines et al., 2001; Ezeala-Harrison, 2014; Grier-Reed et al., 2008; Prime, 2001). According to the ACT benchmark (2006), only 21% of African American high school graduates are college-level ready in reading. Between the years 2011 and 2015, while the number of African American students taking the ACT increased by 1%, the population still scored below the ACT College-Level Readiness benchmarks (ACT, 2015). King (2000) stated of the students who complete the "new basic" high school curriculum, African American men, only account for 7%, and women make up 17%. ACT (2015) data also noted that African American students are more likely to come from underserved communities with low

performing schools (i.e., less rigorous curriculum), which can impact their college admission process.

Bettinger and Long (2005) found that one-third of FTIC students are not classified as college-level ready academically and require developmental education. While the goal of remediation is to help underprepared populations meet basic benchmarks, issues arise when students are unable to successfully complete the non-credit developmental courses and eventually stop-out (Ezeala-Harrison, 2014). Statistics for the US Department of Education (2017) show in comparison to peers not needing remediation, full-time degree-seeking FTIC students are 74% more likely to drop out of college if they take a developmental course within the first year following high school. In addition, the same statistics show less than 1 out of 10 students requiring remediation to complete their degree as scheduled. When underprepared at the k-12 level, African American students are more likely to need remedial or developmental coursework in college, which can be costly and delay degree progress and completion time (ACT, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2017; Wikstrom, 2018). African American students and other groups are overrepresented in developmental education courses, which is directly related to not persisting and poor retention and graduation rates (Everett, 2015; Ingram, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2017; Wikstrom, 2018; Xu, 2016). Ezeala-Harrison (2014) noted that studies such as Rosenbaum et al. (2009) have suggested remediation is an “ineffective determinant of college success” (p. 3) and therefore has unintended negative consequences. Thus, it is necessary to determine if rigorous remediation plans negatively impact retention rates for African American male students.

Inadequate academic preparation is particularly relevant to students who matriculate into HBCUs as they often fall short in comparison to their peers at other institutions (Ezeala-

Harrison, 2014). This gap in academic preparation arose from deficiencies in the level of rigor among high school curriculum, levels of education, and necessary academic skills (e.g., study habits, time management, rate of attendance) which are fundamental to success at the college level (Dumas-Hines et al., 2001; Prime, 2001).

Prime (2001) argued that low GPAs are the number one reasons for student attrition in college. In Prime's discussion, a deficiency model is described, which equated low grades with comprehension of the basic essentials. However, Prime noted that this is often misinterpreted as the student's inability to learn due to low comprehension skills or lack of preparation. Given tests generally focus on one method of learning and do not always account for the additional learning types and abilities, low grades might be an indicator of a mismatch in the learning that occurred, was measured, or the means of assessment.

Boyratz et al. (2013) found that exposure to trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) played a role in student persistence. They argued that students who were subject to multiple traumas in childhood increased the probability of dropping out of college. Exposure to trauma was connected to issues of emotional instability and academic adjustment difficulties in college. African American students were reported among the highest-rated regarding trauma exposure and PTSD when compared to other races (Boyratz et al., 2013; McGruder-Johnson et al., 2000). McGruder-Johnson et al. (2000) also stated African Americans are subject to more interpersonal violence over their lifetime and are more frequently diagnosed with PTSD than other demographic groups. Ulbrich et al. (1989) discussed the differential vulnerability model, which provides a theoretical explanation for differences in social status as a result of social stressors. Ulbrich et al. asserted that African Americans from a lower socioeconomic class are disadvantaged due to differential exposure and differential vulnerability. African Americans are

more likely to reside in areas of high-risk and, therefore, are exposed to greater instances and more severe types of traumatic experiences (Ulbrich et al., 1989). In addition, African Americans are less likely to have access to financial and other resources, which makes them predisposed and more susceptible to the influence of adverse life events despite their level of exposure.

Behavior, Social, and Academic Development of African American Men

Taylor (1993) emphasized the importance of teaching social skills to African American men at an early age as consistency between what happens in the home and school can help make up the deficits in the development of social skills among African American men. Taylor also found with the integration of social skills negative and aggressive behaviors of the boys changed significantly, their perceptions of self were broadened, and they showed academic improvement in the areas of reading and mathematics. Walton and Cohen (2007) cited the importance of social belonging and seeing oneself as being connected socially as critical factors in basic human motivation.

Shorette and Palmer (2015) asserted that critical factors in a positive self-concept are determination, independence, and a strong sense of self. However, for African American undergraduates, external environmental barriers must be addressed before they can focus on their personal development. What constitutes academic success is not so much the traditional standard measures (e.g., grade point average and standardized testing), but the student's level of self-esteem, determination, and grit. They highlight the importance of non-cognitive development among students of color, as these traditional measures do not account for diverse populations nor encourage developmental action. Conflicts between personal identity and academic success, the lack of role models, and the need for increased interaction and hands-on engagement are influential factors in student success among African Americans in developmental education (Bir

& Myrick, 2015). To encourage academic and social engagement, Barker and Avery (2012) recommended that institutions create support resources such as same-race interactions and peer mentoring to address the educational and social needs of African American men.

Poor Help-Seeking Behaviors of African American Students

So et al. (2005) asserted that African Americans, in general, are underrepresented in the research and literature on help-seeking attitudes. So et al. stated this void of knowledge is significant due to the debate regarding minorities being surrounded by unique and different cultural experiences. According to their research, African American students rank traditionally low among the demographic numbers regarding seeking mental health treatment for psychological challenges or negative help-seeking attitudes. Factors thought to contribute to this low-rate are mistrust of Caucasian therapists, attitudes toward mental health issues, and a sense of belief or spirituality (Gloria et al., 2001; So et al., 2005).

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI; 2015) suggested that African Americans are susceptible to more psychological distress due to unmet needs and barriers. NAMI also states African Americans, as common among other minority populations are also more likely to experience disparities in the areas of health, education, social, and economic resources, which contribute to poor mental wellness.

As a means of coping with emotions and life changes, African Americans conceal hardship and depression (Neely, 2015). According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2010), African Americans utilize professional mental health services at half the rate of Caucasians. NAMI (2015) stated when compared to the 40% of Caucasians seeking mental health assistance, African Americans only account for approximately one-quarter of the demographic. In addition, African Americans are more likely to seek assistance from their

primary care physician than a mental health professional (Neely, 2015; Pingitore et al., 2001). African Americans, along with other underrepresented groups, tend to utilize faith, prayer, and spirituality as coping resources in lieu of seeking professional mental healthcare (NAMI, 2015; So et al., 2006).

Male Gender Role Conflict

Harris et al. (2011) contended that many higher education studies about African American men fail to understand them as gendered beings. In fact, they rarely explain how their development, challenges, and experiences are connected to masculinities. To better understand the behavior, academic, and social progression of African American men in higher education, it is vital to know how the concept of masculinity plays a role in their development (Harris et al., 2011; Palmer et al., 2014). O'Neil (2015) defined Male Gender Role Conflict (MGRC) as “a psychological state in which restrictive definitions of masculinity limit men’s well-being and human potential” (para. 1). Harris et al. (2011) argued that MGRC stems from an inherent fear of being perceived as less masculine and not being able to live up to the social constructs of masculinity. Among the negative side effects and consequences of MGRC on college-aged men are academic underachievement, poor help-seeking behavior, violent behavior, substance abuse, poor coping skills, and rule-breaking. To account for behavioral patterns among populations experiencing racial discrimination (e.g., African American men), the concept of Cool Pose was introduced by Majors and Billson (1993) to examine patterns and adequately describe how masculinity is expressed among African American men. Harris et al. (2011) utilized Majors and Billson definition of Cool Pose as:

A strategy to cope with oppression and social alienation, which characterize the daily lives of many Black men...Cool pose is expressed through unique styles of speaking,

gesturing, dressing, wearing hair, walking, standing, and shaking hands. These ritualized acts are directed at the dominant culture and other Black men to manifest pride, strength, and control in opposition to White male masculine norms. (p. 50)

While this type of masculine expression is thought to reconcile racial stressors, many of these behaviors pose negative consequences in the realm of education (Harris et al., 2011). These types of masculine expression “encourage behaviors that devalue academic achievement and depress educational aspirations while condoning activities and relationships that rebuff traditional standards of academic success” (Jackson & Moore, 2008, p. 849).

Significance, Role, and History of HBCUs

The significance of HBCUs in the development and education of African American students has been researched and well documented citing high levels of academic achievement, persistence, graduation rates, and student satisfaction (Allen et al., 2007; Tobolowsky et al., 2005). These institutions strive to provide supportive social environments that are conducive to personal and academic development (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Tobolowsky et al., 2005). Allen et al. (2007) explained the integral role HBCUs play in the perpetuation of Black culture, community, and leadership in generations to come. They continued with the idea of education being specific to the culture and is a direct reflection of the views and conditions of its society. Allen et al. stated, “In this respect, HBCUs have been profoundly shaped by the circumstances (historical, economic, political, and cultural) that define Black lives and communities in America” (p. 263). According to Nettles et al. (1999), in the past, HBCUs served as the only means for educational and social advancement for African Americans seeking higher education. However, while this role has shifted, their purpose is just as relevant today as it was in the past century (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). HBCUs are crucial in the accessibility to higher

education for minorities, particularly for African Americans (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Bracey, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Cheng et al., 2015). According to Cheng et al. (2015), 21.3% of all African American students enrolled in 4-year collegiate institutions attend HBCUs. Subsequently, these institutions produce 21.5% of undergraduate degrees conferred to African Americans. Gasman et al. (2015) stated approximately 16% of all degrees awarded to African American men are from an HBCU, and Urban HBCUs account for educating 27% of all African American men enrolled. Therefore, HBCUs located in urban areas appear to have a greater contribution to the degree attainment of African American men.

Researchers have identified six goals of HBCUs. These include the following: (1) the preservation of the historical and cultural traditions of the African American community; (2) servicing the African American community in crucial leadership roles, functioning as a model of social organization; (3) maintain and supply an economic function/budget within the African American community; (4) supply exemplary African Americans who identify social, political, and economic issues characteristic of the African American community; (5) generate alumni who participate in social justice for African Americans; and (6) the production of African American scholars who education the Black community in research and teaching (Allen, 1992; Brown & Davis, 2001; Jett, 2016; Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

HBCU Historical Perspective

The Morrill Land-Grant Act, aka the Morrill Act, Land-Grant College Act of 1862, granted each state 30,000 acres for each of its congressional seats (Bracey 2017; Land-Grant College Act of 1862, 2017). Federal legislation from the United States Congress which provided grants of public land to fund the formulation of institutions specializing in the useful arts of agriculture and mechanics (i.e., A&M colleges; Bracey, 2017; Land-Grant College Act of 1862,

2017; Robinson, 2017; Thelin, 2011). This landmark legislation is described as influential due to its fostering of access to useful public education. It began the trend of government involvement in public policy dealing with the establishment of the land-grant colleges. It has even been referred to as the genesis of democracy's colleges (Thelin, 2011).

While a small number of freed slaves, received the opportunity to attend White colleges in the Northern states, Bracey (2017) argued because of racial discrimination, particularly in the south, African Americans were barred from entering land grant, state colleges, and universities. In an attempt to remedy this issue, Congress passed the Morrill Act of 1890, which mandated states to admit African Americans to existing land grant schools or provide alternative institutions which would service African Americans seeking higher education (Harper et al., 2009; Land-Grant College Act of 1862, 2017; Museus et al., 2012; Robinson, 2017). Bracey (2017) also contended that to comply with new legislation, southern states opted for a segregated higher education system similar to the separate but equal principle of Plessy versus Ferguson. Seventeen HBCUs were founded as a result of the 1890 amendment to the Morrill Act. Many of these schools are still funded in this regard as land grant institutions (Jackson, 2012; Robinson, 2017). Many of the first known predominately Black colleges were established by freed slaves and were affiliated with Christian churches/ denominations (Bracey, 2017). Section 322 of Title III of the Black College and University Act defined HBCUs as:

One that existed before 1964 with a historic and contemporary mission of educating Blacks while being open to all. An HBCU must either have earned accreditation from a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association or be making reasonable progress toward accreditation. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2010, p. 11)

The historic mission and need for HBCUs stemmed from the era of segregation and racial discrimination in education. These institutions were created to address the educational inequities in the higher education system for African Americans prior to the civil rights era (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2010, p. 11). Although HBCUs were founded primarily as a means of allowing African Americans access to higher education, it is inaccurate to assume that HBCUs originated because Black people wanted separate colleges and universities (Bracey, 2017; Jackson, 2012). Contrary to popular belief, HBCUs were not established with racial segregation or exclusion in mind, but for the purpose of equal opportunity and advancement of minorities who were unable to enroll at PWIs on the basis of race (Gasman & Tudico, 2010). Bracey (2017) argued that from inception, HBCUs were not separatist, allowing all eligible candidates to enroll at their institutions because “they have, for the most part, been nonjudgmental” regarding who had access to education (p. 677).

Other groundbreaking legislation which impacted HBCUs included the Equality of Educational Opportunity (EEO), also known as the Coleman Report, which came about during the Civil Rights Movement (Kantor & Lowe, 2017). The EEO had a similar mission of civil rights advocates to examine both the constitutional and legal rights of persons of color. It was the direct result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Jackson, 2012). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated the examination of the equality of educational opportunity, or lack thereof, by race, color, religion, and national origin in the primary and secondary educational system (Kantor & Lowe, 2017). Jackson (2012) stated the mission of the Higher Education of Act of 1965 was to “strengthen the educational resources of American colleges and universities” (p. 24). Its purpose was to address issues at the postsecondary level, such as providing federal financial assistance to institutions and students. Both the Basic

Education Opportunity program and the Equal Education Opportunity program granted impoverished populations and minorities access to higher education via HBCUs (Palmer et al., 2010).

Challenges Faced by HBCUs

Millea et al. (2018) confirmed that retention and graduation rates are now standard metrics for assessing and evaluating the success of institutions of higher education, much of this data are derived and reported from the FTIC population. Students who fail to complete their programs become costly liabilities to colleges and universities. Despite the student academic support services provided by HBCUs, these institutions are still plagued with issues of recruitment, retention, and completion (Hinton, 2014). Ezeala-Harrison (2014) stated although minority enrollment across the country is at an all-time high, a more critical measure of the achievement is the number of this population that graduates from an institution of higher education. At the same time, the national completion rate has improved by 4% in the last few years, the 43% graduation rate is still low in comparison to other demographic groups. Cheng et al. (2015) examined 83 of the HBCUs in existence and found the six-year graduation rate to be 4% lower than the national standard for African American students.

Tolliver and Miller (2018) reported that of the African American students who graduate within six years, only 28% complete from the institution in which they were matriculated. Completion numbers fluctuate based on gender and found that 33% of Black men graduate in six years or less, with 25% graduating from the same institution where they were matriculated (Tolliver & Miller, 2018). Farmer et al. (2016) reported 20.7% of women 25 years and older to hold undergraduate degrees, compared to 31.9% of Caucasian women in the same age range. The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported the six-year graduation rate for African

American women was approximately 45%. Considering the consistent increase in enrollment numbers and stagnant completion rates for African Americans, researchers suggested that empirical study is required to understand better what contributes to this trend.

Harrington et al. (2016) suggested that students at HBCUs are generally less prepared academically upon entering college in comparison to their peers at other institutions, the population presents a unique challenge for HBCUs. One of the most noteworthy indicators of the level of college preparedness is the number of students needing remediation after matriculation. In comparing the average Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for students entering HBCUs versus students entering PWIs, the HBCU student is generally at a significant disadvantage from the start (Nettles et al., 1999). Moreover, HBCUs provide an avenue for underprepared students to catch-up academically while being guided by understanding professors and administrators (Bracey, 2017).

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2014) critics of Affirmative Action and HBCUs, argued that if admission standards (e.g., test scores and grade point average) are lowered to cater to underrepresented groups, it will then reduce student accountability and reinforce only meeting the minimum requirement. The view is these policies do not necessarily benefit economically disadvantaged students and have potentially harmful implications.

Perhaps the most significant challenge faced by HBCUs in comparison to PWIs is the inequitable funding at the federal and state levels (Bracey, 2017; Gasman et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2013). Gasman et al. (2010) and Mitchell (2013) clarified that Title III federal funds from the Department of Education are reserved for institutions like HBCUs to further their mission of educating underrepresented populations. Mitchell (2013) suggested, given the recent economic crisis and restoration, the federal government has decreased federal funding for HBCUs thought

to be attributed to inflation and technological advances. While state funding varies in the amount per state, it does not provide substantial financing either. The issues associated with the lack of funding and reliance on tuition dollars are problematic and have left institutions to their own devices to stay open. Mitchell (2013) argued rather than close their doors, many HBCUs have opted to merge with universities or join university systems as an alternative for financial support. The discrepancies in funding are an issue due to the fact that HBCUs have been successful in their mission to educate traditionally underprepared populations (Gasman et al., 2010). Bracey (2017) stated when federal and state support becomes equitable for all institutions of higher education, the perception and productivity of HBCUs may improve. Bracey also concluded that the need for HBCUs would be relevant until there is full educational equality for African Americans at PWIs.

HBCU Student Population

Jones (2016) noted the HBCU student population is uniquely different from that of PWIs as they admit a significant number of first-generation students from low-income backgrounds. Ezeala-Harrison (2014) pointed out that it is the mission of most HBCUs to provide access to higher education for students who have barriers to collegiate success. Jones (2016) also explained many of the admitted students are traditionally academically underprepared and likely would not have had the opportunity to pursue a college education without options such as HBCUs. Based on the dynamics of the population, students attending HBCUs tend to place less emphasis on institutional rankings than peers attending other colleges and universities. Jones also argued that while institutional rankings reflect the number of students moved through the funnel from application to acceptance (i.e., the acceptance rate, admissions yield, and SAT scores), HBCU numbers are not significantly impacted by their standings in national rankings.

Student Engagement and Satisfaction at HBCUs vs. PWIs

Kuk and Manning (2010) expanded upon Astin's theory of student involvement and educational assessment framework and asserted that components of student engagement incorporate the time students devote to educational experiences and resources an institution uses to create and maintain an environment that promotes student involvement. In consideration of the implications of this theory, Chen et al. (2014) asserted that institutions which "more fully engage their students in educational activities could claim to be of higher quality in comparison with similar types of colleges and universities" (p. 566). Chen et al. suggested that HBCUs create and support a favorable environment for the psychological and social development of African Americans students, which subsequently leads to better grades and lofty career aspirations. They noted that HBCU students are reported to experience more faculty and staff support, connection to their peers and institution, feel more included, and more engaged than PWIs counterparts. Consequently, the increased level of satisfaction is attributed to the perceived warmer and more accepting climate toward African American students within HBCUs.

Palmer et al. (2010) noted their study participants described their HBCU contexts as supportive and caring in the realm of faculty, support staff, and administration. Thus, the level of student-faculty interaction is a major predictor of student satisfaction and success within HBCUs. Students who performed well academically in high school and developed a rapport with faculty generally achieved higher levels of academic success in college. Palmer et al. (2010) also revealed differences in the social aspects of HBCUs and PWIs. Many participants explained that professors are more accessible and attempt to forge relationships with their students. The increased accessibility to successful role models and mentors with shared commonalities were significant factors in academic success and fostered a sense of self-efficacy among HBCU

students. In addition to social interaction with faculty and staff, the study findings suggested that HBCUs supported the creation of peer groups as they served as personal motivators and significantly improved academic performance by stressing the importance of a college education. Chen et al. (2014) concluded that “as a result of the conducive environment at HBCUs, African American students are able to achieve better grades and also have higher occupational aspirations” (p. 566). In addition, they noted, socially HBCU students experience “more support, connection, and feelings of acceptance and become more engaged at HBCUs than their peers at PWIs” (p. 566).

Additional factors which influence, and impact student engagement, persistence, and retention are institutional characteristics and programming, financial barriers, individual behaviors, internal and external motivation, demographic factors, and family characteristics (Millea et al., 2018). Bracey (2017) argued that criticism of PWIs concerning African American students is that “administrators often lack sensitivity to the needs of their Black students” (p. 689). Bracey further asserted the lack of sensitivity is a means of taking the Black student demographic for granted, “even as they pay lip-service to the challenges faced by low-income Black parents and first-generation African-American college students” (p. 689).

Merisotis and McCarthy (2005) highlighted an example of Dillard University, a private university in New Orleans, Louisiana, sought to effectively service their student population by reducing financial barriers and assisting students with managing economic challenges. According to data collected from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for Dillard, 90% of students needed financial assistance, and 52% reported a family income of \$25,000 or less. This information prompted Dillard to increase its annual scholarship aid by \$2.9

million over a 6-year timeframe. Dillard also made significant changes to their recruitment team and practices to include more urban districts and focusing less on the student's ability to pay.

Summer Bridge Programs at HBCUs and MSIs

With the national push to improve academic performance, summer bridge programs have slowly become commonplace in higher education (Anderson, 2017). These programs are intensive multi-week pre-college experiences designed to “bridge” the transition from high school to college, nurture academic and social needs, and provide confidence in the student's ability to be successful in college (Cooper et al., 2017; Noel & Levitz, 1989; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Summer bridge programs may be structured and administered in a variety of ways to cater to specific or multiple populations (Garcia & Paz, 2009).

Summer bridge candidates are those who do not meet all aspects of the traditional admission criteria for an institution but exhibit the potential to be successful in higher education can be conditionally admitted provided they complete a remediation program. Full admission is contingent upon participation and successful completion of a multi-week intensive summer bridge/remedial program designed to prepare them academically for the rigor of college (Palmer et al., 2011). The target population for these programs may be historically underrepresented minorities or students who are at higher risk for abandoning science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields of study (Cooper et al., 2017).

Palmer et al. (2010) found that HBCU undergraduates who participated in their university's summer bridge or remedial education program persisted to graduation. The goal of remediation at the college level is to address the educational gaps among underprepared students. In addition to specialized course offerings, these programs provide necessary academic and social support services (e.g., study skills workshops, tutorial support, counseling services)

(Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Palmer et al., 2010). Undergraduates participating in a summer bridge program are 10% more likely to complete their degrees in a six-year timeframe (Anderson, 2017; Bir & Myrick, 2015). Remediation initiatives such as bridge programs not only contribute to the success of FTIC and first-generation students but also help combat several first-year challenges associated with academic and social adjustment (Anderson, 2017; Kezar, 2000). Cooper et al. (2017) found in comparison to non-bridge students, those students engaging in active learning through bridge programs appeared to be more self-aware regarding how they learned and utilized a variety of strategies to enhance their experiences.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

The theories utilized for this dissertation are Tinto's model of student retention (1975, 1987, 2007), critical race theory (Taylor et al. 2009), Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement and educational assessment framework, Bush and Bush's (2013) African American male theory (AAMT), Eccles and Wigler's (2000) expectancy-value theory of motivation, and Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model. Various components of these theoretical models can be applied to clarify the experiences of African American men, particularly, student experiences (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Voigt and Hundrieser (2008) suggested that many of the theories and corresponding research on retention focus on what institutions are doing wrong if they fail to retain their population. As a result, there is little research on what institutions are doing right that contributes to student success.

Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure

McDaniel and Graham (2001) commented that Vincent Tinto's retention theory was the most widely discussed and researched model of retention. According to Tinto's (1975, 1987, 2007) model, student retention is a result of interactions between a student and the social and

academic systems of the institution. McDaniel and Graham (2001) stated that external factors and characteristics such as family history, individual characteristics, and secondary education influence the student's level of commitment to the institution and graduation. Despite what is known about student retention, Tinto (2007) asserted that most institutions have failed to put into action plans, "which have led to substantial gains in student persistence and graduation" (p. 5). Tinto (1993) also claimed that the key to student success and an effective retention program is the institution's commitment to its students. Tinto added, "It is a commitment that springs from the very character of an institution's educational mission" (p. 146). Tinto's (1993) model states that "to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems" (para. 1). Mallory (2015) discussed Tinto's three components, which attribute to student departure: "academic difficulties, the inability to resolve educational and occupational goals, and failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution" (slide 5).

Critical Race Theory

According to Yosso et al. (2001), critical race theory, when applied to an educational context, seeks to account for racial bias in the American educational system. Its goal is to develop strategies that work to reduce the impact of racism and other forms of bias in education. The CRT literature encourages understanding how victims (e.g., marginalized groups) of systemic racism are impacted by cultural perceptions of race and how they counteract prejudice through representation (Taylor et al., 2009). Jackson (2012) asserted that "the CRT offers a critical lens to study HBCUs, since race plays an important role in the identity of the institutions and the individuals who attend them" (p. 5). Harper et al. (2009) argued that the CRT highlights

the eternal nature of race in society, particularly in American higher education. CRT has also been vital in understanding the bureaucratic nature of institutions of higher education.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement and Educational Assessment Framework

Student engagement is considered to be a major indication of student learning potential (Carini et al., 2006). Alexander Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement and educational assessment framework aids in the understanding of the importance of college student engagement. It also can be utilized by institutions and administrators in the planning and execution of learning communities and environments which are more effective (Astin, 1984). Chen et al. (2014) supported Astin's theory, claiming that the "time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is one of the best predictors of their learning and personal development in college" (p. 567). According to Astin (1984), the theory aims to explain environmental influences on student development using principles from psychoanalysis, learning theory, empirical knowledge, and existing research. Within the theory, Astin defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Highly involved students are said to devote significant energy to their studies, campus life, and campus relationships, while uninvolved students neglect to engage socially or academically. Astin stated the student involvement theory has five basic components:

- Involvement describes the level of energy (i.e., physical or psychological) devoted to various objects whether general or specific.
- Involvement is a continuum in which students may manifest different levels of participation regarding a specific object, while the same student may also manifest various levels of involvement in a variety of objects at different times.

- Involvement includes both quantitative and qualitative features (e.g., hours spent studying, comprehension of reading assignment).
- Student learning and development connected to educational programs are correlated with the quality of the program and the quantity of personal involvement.
- The efficiency of educational policy or practice is associated with its capability to boost student involvement (Astin, 1984).

Bush and Bush's African American Male Theory

Bush and Bush (2013) described the AAMT as a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach, first of its kind, to explain the path and experiences of African American men and boys in society. Before the development of this theory, it was thought that no framework existed, which would account for the development of African American men. This theory accounts for the impact of history (i.e., pre- and post-enslavement experiences) and also attempts to explain the psychological, spiritual, social, and educational development of this population. Bush and Bush continued, citing the theory as a framework and guide for practice. The AAMT has six tenets on which it operates:

- The lives of African American men are better examined via an ecological system approach which assesses their individual and collective experiences, behaviors, and other involvements.
- Being of African descent and male is inherently unique.
- African culture, awareness, and biological factors influence the experiences of African American men .
- African American men are both resilient and resistant.
- Race, classism, and sexism have significantly impacted the lives of African American

men.

- The pursuit of social justice should be the rationale behind studies concerning African American men (Bush & Bush, 2013).

Hossler and Gallagher's College Choice Model

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) explained how factors such as background, aspirations, achievement, intersect and impact the decisions of college-aged students: (a) the decision whether to attend college and (b) the decision to enroll in a specific college. The researchers stated the implications of this model are beneficial for policy formation at both institutions and government level. They describe the model as the decision-making process for college choice.

Within the decision-making process, there are three phases:

- Predisposition - during this period, students make the determination if college is for them and whether they will choose to attend. These decisions may be impacted by external factors such as parental/familial support, socio-economic status, and academic preparation.
- Search - in this phase, students begin to research college life and explore their options for furthering their education.
- Choice - in this stage, the students narrow their focus to specific institutions which appeal to their interest and needs. Through this phase, students eventually decide which institutions they would like to seek admission to and enroll.

Eccles and Wigfield's Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation

Scholars of achievement motivation theory have attempted to expound on why people choose to pursue certain tasks and assess the persistence, performance, and vigor when working on said tasks (Eccles & Wigfield, 2000). To further delineate how motivation impacts personal

choice, persistence, effort, and performance; Motivation theorists have posited various underlying themes. The most notable perspective is the expectancy-value theory. According to Eccles and Wigfield (2000), the assumption is that expectancies and values directly influence achievement choices. Their school of thought argues that a person's choice, persistence, and performance is illustrated by their assessment of how well they can execute a task and the value of the task to the individual. Expectancies and values are thought to be impacted by task-specific notions, like competence and capability, the perception of difficulty, personal ambitions, mental organization of self, and affective memories.

Summary

The literature review served as a foundation to support the need for a study examining the experiences of African American men at HBCUs. The chapter began with a brief outline of persistence and retention variables for African American students, which leaves much to be desired regarding solutions. It continues with a discussion of how the concept of masculinity impacts the social, behavioral, and academic development of African American men. To frame the need for HBCUs, there was a section describing the history, significance, and characteristics of HBCUs. Finally, the review provided a theoretical framework on student retention theory supported by other theories surrounding race and African American men, student involvement, and factors which college choice.

Chapter 3 will detail the elements of the selected research design and methodology for this case study. The chapter will begin by reiterating the problem of practice, the purpose of the study, and research questions. Within this discussion, I explain the rationale for the research design and the method in which the study was conducted. This chapter will identify the sample population and describe the means of data collection and analysis utilized for the qualitative

descriptive collective instrumental study. Chapter 3 will also address the limitations and implications of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to identify persistence and retention strategies implemented at HBCUs that support successful degree attainment of African American men. Chapter 3 will provide a description of the research design and methods that were used in the research case study. The chapter is organized into 11 sections: (a) purpose of the study and research questions, (b) research design and method, (c) population, (d) sample, (e) data collection and instrumentation, (f) data analysis, (g) trustworthiness, (h) researcher's role, (i) ethical considerations, (j) assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and (k) summary.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

To address the issue of low enrollment and retention of African American men in college, the purpose of this study was to examine the persistence and retention strategies utilized by HBCUs which support African American men in successfully completing their degree. This study was framed using Tinto's model of institutional departure (1975, 1987, 2007). The research questions were:

Q1. What academic support services offered at HBCUs contribute to African American men successfully graduating college?

Q2. What social (cocurricular) experiences offered at HBCUs contribute to African American men successfully graduating college?

Q3. In what way do HBCUs encourage faculty, peer, and family relationships to support African American men successfully graduating at HBCUs?

Q4. What suggestions do African American men who have graduated from HBCUs recommend be implemented for further support?

Q5. Why do students choose to go to HBCUs?

Research Design and Method

Framed by Tinto's model of institutional departure (1975, 1987, 2007), this descriptive instrumental case study design utilized interviews from recent HBCU graduates to explore the academic and social experiences of African American men who attended an HBCU and have successfully completed a degree. In an instrumental case study, researchers seek to gather an in-depth understanding through multiple data sources to provide better insight into a particular issue, trend, or theme (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995). These studies focus on knowledge, opinions, perceptions, feelings, and detailed descriptions of behavior and actions rather than just numerical data (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Yin (2003, 2018) suggested that a case study approach in qualitative methodology is best suited for answering the how or why. To understand and interpret the experiences and social interactions among this population seems exploratory and qualitative in nature. Situations, themes, patterns, and trends are generally better demonstrated through a qualitative study. Existing data on HBCUs have been primarily "framed by qualitative research" (Gasman et al., 2010, p. 29).

Qualitative descriptive designs are a combination of "sampling, data collection, analysis, and re-presentation techniques" and are desirable when descriptions of phenomena are needed (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334). Descriptive case studies are appropriate when describing an intervention or phenomenon and how it occurs in a real-life context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). Colorafi and Evans (2016) stated, "Qualitative descriptive studies focus on low-inference description, which increases the likelihood of agreement among multiple researchers" (p. 17). Colorafi and Evans also supported the use of descriptive designs by highlighting the fundamental attributes of the qualitative descriptive approach. These designs allow for a range of theoretical or philosophical frameworks, variety among the choice of any purposive sampling technique,

allows for observations, structured interviews or focus groups, the use of data analysis techniques (e.g., content analysis and descriptive statistical analysis), and to organize the data based on the contingency of a descriptive summary of the contents.

The descriptive design explored the personal history and background, feelings, and social elements which contribute to the college persistence of African American men at HBCUs (Anumba, 2015). Sandelowski (2000) clarified that “descriptions always depend on the perceptions, inclinations, sensitivities, and sensibilities of the describer” (p. 335). An additional purpose of the study was to gain adequate descriptions of the retention phenomenon surrounding HBCUs. A descriptive design seemed to be most appropriate as it allows the researcher to record descriptions, experiences, and feelings instead of sole reliance on statistics.

A quantitative design was not used due to the availability of statistical data on completion rates of African American men. Quantitative data describe if there is a statistical relationship present between variables and also indicates statistically how individuals engage. Qualitative designs examine individual perceptions and provide more insight into the research of how HBCUs contribute to the retention of African American men, whereas a quantitative research design could be used to collect extensive sample data, there are few quantitative studies which examine HBCUs in the specifically related context (Gasman et al., 2010; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Ryan, 2004; Strayhorn, 2010); therefore, a qualitative study was appropriate.

Population

To assess the target population of African American men, nine candidates were identified based on the criteria of having attended an HBCU and having an undergraduate and/or graduate degree conferred by said HBCU within the last five to 10 years. Ten prominent HBCU institutions were represented by one or more of the nine participants in this study (See Table 1

for information about the institutions). There are more institutions than participants listed as some participants had obtained degrees from more than one HBCU or were currently pursuing an additional degree from another HBCU. The nine participants consenting to the terms and conditions of the study were interviewed using a guided interview protocol formulated from the established research questions.

Table 1

HBCU Institutional Profiles of Research Participants

Degree Granting Institution	Setting	Institution Type	Student Population	Graduation Rate
HBCU1	Rural	Public	3,523	31%
HBCU2	Urban	Public	6,171	41%
HBCU3	Urban	Private	9,399	63%
HBCU4	Urban	Public	7,020	38%
HBCU5	Urban	Private	1,236	21%
HBCU6	Urban	Private	2,238	53%
HBCU7	Urban	Public	12,556	48%
HBCU8	Urban	Private	996	39%
HBCU9	Rural	Public	8,940	34%
HBCU10	Rural	Private	1,400	39%

Note. From U.S. News and World Report, 2021 Quick Stats.

Sample

A purposeful sample of nine African American Male HBCU graduates were interviewed for the purpose of data collection. The voluntary sample consisted of nine traditionally college-aged, male, HBCU alumni of African American descent, which successfully completed a baccalaureate or graduate-level degree in the last five to 10 years. I defined African American male as an inclusive term for non-Caucasian men who use this particular language to self-define

and describe their experiences. A few examples of how African American men might identify themselves include Black, bi-racial, African American, multi-ethnic, indigenous, and multi-racial. While the study had a five to 10-year time frame of completion, seven of the nine participants in the sample completed within the last 2019-2020 academic year. Alumni from different HBCUs were selected to avoid bias from any one institution. Some participants had obtained both undergraduate and graduate degrees from an HBCU. While the overall experiences were similar in nature, these participants were able to speak to the differences between the individual HBCUs. Colorafi and Evans (2016) stated, “A hallmark of the qualitative descriptive approach is the acceptability of virtually any sampling technique” (p. 18). To assess their perceptions, perspectives, and feelings regarding their lived experience at an HBCU, the study was guided by the aforementioned research questions and semistructured interview(s) which consisted of open-ended questions regarding their campus and social experiences, utilization of academic support resources, particularly, student success initiatives such as summer bridge programs, male minority initiative, first-year experience programs, peer and faculty support, and their individual motivation for attending an HBCU.

Qualitative research relies heavily on purposeful sampling to identify and select information-rich cases which can produce the best data for the study (Patton, 2015). This is also most effective when dealing with limited resources (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling also involves identifying and recruiting persons who are well-informed of or have experience with the specific phenomenon being examined (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Yin (2018) suggested using a one-phased approach for screening candidates when there are limited candidates available (e.g., a dozen or more).

Within this qualitative case study descriptive design, two purposeful sampling techniques were utilized for the purpose of data collection. Convenience sampling was used to locate the initial research participant, as it was of benefit to the researcher to identify a candidate who was readily accessible to the researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The remainder of the sample was identified via the volunteer sampling technique of snowballing. Once the initial research participant, meeting the outlined study criteria was identified and confirmed, he was used as a resource to locate other potential candidates with similar criteria to participate in the study (Leavy, 2017). While the participants were from different institutions, many were connected via their involvement in one or more campus organizations. This technique was selected as HBCU alumni tend to have strong network connections with other graduates and institutions. In addition, I sought to enrich the study findings by also locating participants outside of the institutions in closest proximity to my location. Using these processes, research participants agreeing to participate in the study engaged in one interview session each.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Using a combined approach, prior to any official data collection, the nine individuals selected to participate in the study were instructed to review and sign a consent document which explained the study, criteria, associated risks, benefits, and other items. The document was provided to each candidate electronically and returned via my secured dropbox. Data was collected through a series of individual interviews and incorporated personal artifacts collected from each participant. The primary source of data was gathered via online, one-on-one interviews. Patton (2015) stated the rationale behind interviewing, is so one can be granted access to the other person's point of view. Thus, "qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful and knowable and can be made explicit"

(Patton, 2015, p. 762). The interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom, an internet-based video conferencing software. The data source contained: demographic information (e.g., age, school, graduation year, etc.), interview questions guided by an established protocol and integrated based on the research questions, and student artifacts (e.g., writing samples, letters, academic memoranda, e-mail correspondence, or other personal documents).

I interviewed each of the nine HBCU alumni individually in one-hour sessions. The average interview length ranged between 45 and 50 minutes long. The interviews were semistructured. A guided protocol (see Appendix A) was created and organized based on the research questions and theoretical foundations which guided each interview. Using a guided interview protocol allows the researcher to develop questions, order those questions in a particular sequence, and discern which areas necessitate greater exploration (Patton, 2015). The interviews conducted were recorded via the same internet-based video conferencing software. The local recording feature of the software allowed me to record video and audio locally to my personal computer. The recorded files were then transferred and uploaded to a secured file storage device. During the course of the participant interviews, I documented detailed interview notes. This process assisted with not only identifying emerging themes and patterns but also cross-referencing participant responses against any possible errors during the transcription process. This was done to improve the validity and credibility of all the interviews.

The secondary data source utilized was artifacts. Following the one-on-one interviews, I requested that each participant voluntarily submit an original artifact or two as an extension of the initial interviews to further assess and understand the HBCU experience for African American men and what contributed to their persistence and completion. Participants submitted documents of their choosing which gave context to social interactions and academic progression

or growth or demonstrated support services essential to persistence and completion. Artifacts aid the reader in understanding information through documented and past experience. In addition, they provide historical context, demographic data, and personal data regarding specific cultures, society, or people (Given, 2008). The artifacts submitted were reviewed critically and utilized to support the research questions further.

The sample population consisted of participants from different regions of the country; thus, face-to-face interviews were not feasible. The collected data was organized and stored in a locked personal repository and backed up on a personal device. Files were also encrypted to prevent unauthorized access. Upon completion of the study, all sensitive electronic data were overwritten and sanitized entirely from the hard drive of the secured device.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, there is not a standardized or preferred method for analyzing data due to the nature of the data and how it is collected (Nixon, 2014; Terrell, 2016). The interview data in this study was recorded to provide a more accurate representation of the interview. Once all interviews were completed, I transcribed each recording electronically via Temi to preserve the record accurately. Dedoose, a web-based data analysis software, was utilized in analyzing all data collected from the one-on-one interviews in this study. This software aided in coding and analyzing the data electronically. It serves as a means of credibility and transparency, as with the software's ability to log data movements, code patterns, and map categories, trustworthiness and plausibility can be established ("Constant Comparative Method," 2012). The semistructured interview responses and participant artifacts were manually uploaded and reviewed to identify themes and commonalities among the research participants. Specific patterns, codes, quotes, and

themes that were closely related to the research questions were then organized into an Excel spreadsheet.

According to Flaim and Speckart (2016), coding qualitative data is a subjective process largely dependent upon the research questions. There is no single best way to code qualitative data and the type of language used to discuss qualitative analysis is not as standardized as statistical analysis (Neale, 2016; Nixon, 2014). In addition, Saldaña and Omasta (2018) noted how coding is not an exact science but rather how the researcher actively interprets the data. There are various avenues in which data could be coded which can make it difficult to determine if the researcher has done it correctly (Neale, 2016). Within the analysis, I conducted a minimum of two coding passes using open line by line and descriptive coding. Descriptive codes describe the data using the topic and descriptive noun, which is also known as topic coding (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016). Examining descriptive codes aid the researcher in the identification of key words to explore the topic of the data.

Neale (2016) suggested the processes of analyzing qualitative data should include “an accepted analytical method (thematic analysis, framework, constant comparison, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and narrative analysis)” (p. 1097). The primary analysis for this study was a constant comparative, phenomenological analysis with an inductive approach. According to Hewitt-Taylor (2001) a constant comparative analysis is a means of analyzing qualitative data by coding collected data into emergent themes or codes. The data is reviewed thoroughly and repeatedly after initial coding until no new themes are apparent. Constant comparative analysis is beneficial in qualitative studies as it can be used with a single method or multiple data collection methods. A phenomenological analysis was employed to tie themes and phrases together better to understand the participant’s accounts of their experiences. This type of

analysis can be used to explain further or describe the phenomena. According to Patton (2015), inductive approaches are among the primary characteristics of a qualitative study. Patton (2015) identified two means of qualitative inductive analysis: the identification and definition of categories established by the person being evaluated and the emergence or development of undefined categories or patterns for which the person being evaluated had not previously labeled.

Given there are multiple data sources, the data was also analyzed and interpreted via theoretical triangulation. Leavy (2017) argued that looking at data through more than one theoretical lens allows for different interpretations to emerge (p. 153). Among the benefits of triangulation are “increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem” (Thurmond, 2001, p. 254).

Trustworthiness

Due to the nature of qualitative research not being designed to control for the validity of results, like quantitative studies, the data must be both thorough and congruent (Leavy, 2017). Terrell (2016) suggested in place of reliability and validity is trustworthiness, which consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Thus, when attempting to establish credibility, the researcher is stating that the results are believable or credible from the perspective of the research study participant. Leavy (2017) noted regardless of the terminology, it speaks to the quality of the overall study and rigor of the methodology, as well as the reader’s perception of your findings (e.g., congruence between the questions, methods, and conclusions). Each component of the research needs to fit together and provide an explanation of what was done and why.

Saldaña and Omasta (2018) argued that the use of multiple sources corroborates the coding and enhances the trustworthiness of the findings, as not all values, attitudes, or beliefs accurately reflect the participants observed actions, reactions, and interactions. Terrell (2016) mentioned three other components of trustworthiness in qualitative research, which are transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Transferability refers to the extent of being able to demonstrate the research findings in other applicable contexts and accomplished via thick descriptions of the research and process. Leavy (2017) referred to thick descriptions as producing vividness, which builds trustworthiness. This is accomplished by rich, detailed information which highlights the essential components for the readers (e.g., setting, dialogue, and interactions). Terrell (2016) compared dependability to reliability in quantitative studies, which is assessed by whether findings are consistent and can be replicated or enhanced by further study. Confirmability is reflected in the neutrality of the researcher's study, and if the findings are unbiased and accurately reflect the sample population. To further establish credibility, I used the following common trustworthiness strategies: (a) peer review/ debriefers - where colleagues examine study data to ensure validity and credibility; (b) triangulation- using multiple data sources to confirm the results of the interview and artifacts; and (c) epoché – where the researcher brackets their feelings in open-minded data collection not to impose personal opinions.

Researcher's Role

Nearly a decade ago, I began a career in higher education, working with a variety of student populations in an advising, counseling, and mentoring context. During this time, I noticed the enrollment and retention numbers for African American men were significantly lower than in other populations. More recently, I was exposed to first-generation at-risk

populations while working at an HBCU. Being directly involved with the university's student success retention initiative piqued my interest in the phenomenon of the invisible Black male and what steps were being taken to retain this population.

As a minority, African American female graduate from a predominately White institution (PWI), this experience opened my eyes to the gaps in my college education and how certain groups are more susceptible to fall through the cracks of the system. Therefore, the intersection of my own experiences as a student and then as university personnel contributed to researching persistence and retention strategies at HBCUs, which aid in African American students completing degrees. In the future, I hope to share these research findings with colleagues at PWI institutions to improve the retention of their African American male population.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations addressed in this study are the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and approval process prior to engaging with any research participant or beginning the data collection process. In addition, to comply with IRB requirements, I prepared an informed consent document which was dispersed to all research study participants. As dictated by the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP; 2016), research cannot be conducted on human subjects without obtaining each participants' approval prior to participation in the study. Within the informed consent, a discussion of the purpose of the research, explanation of the procedures to be utilized, the allotted time commitment for participation in the study, and an explanation of their rights as a voluntary participant with no greater than minimal risk. This qualitative research did not pose any direct or indirect harm to its participants, nor consist of any behavior deemed as unethical. Also, in compliance with OHRP (2016), emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of the study, and consent could be withdrawn at any time. Confidentiality was the top priority.

All participants were assigned general identifiers to protect their individual identities. Any personally identifiable information, as well as identifiable institutional information, was omitted from the study.

There was potential for researcher bias as I did have an existing relationship with one or more of the participants due to current and past employment as an academic advisor, mentor, and former college seminar instructor. To avoid conflicts of interest, the participant was strongly encouraged to disregard the existing relationship and provide honest, unbiased responses.

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

Assumptions are realistic expectations which are believed to be true in research but do not have empirical evidence to support the belief (Patidar, 2013). Assumptions in this study are that the selected participants have an adequate recollection of their experiences and are presenting unbiased perspectives. I assumed participants would be bound to an ethical standard and give an accurate and reliable account of their rationale for selecting an HBCU and their social and academic experiences while attending an HBCU. A broad assumption made was that the perspectives will validate and support the continued need for HBCUs and provide strategies that will aid in better retention numbers for African American male students.

Terrell (2016) defined limitations as “constraints outside of the control of the researcher and inherent to the actual study that could affect the generalizability of the results” (p. 260). There are several limitations present in the current study. This study examined the personal perspectives of a small number of male HBCU graduates. While the reader may have expected to see quantitative data indicating statistically if there is a significant relationship present between HBCUs and degree completion of African American men, the purpose of the study was to discuss the experiences that supported these students’ completion to graduate. Although the

participants are diverse in age, socioeconomic status, background, institution, and field of study, the findings as a result of this study may not extend or be generalizable to other institutions, both minority-serving and PWI. It should be noted that these findings are a result of individual perspectives of their undergraduate experience and are unique to those choosing to participate. The results may not fully encompass the experiences of HBCU students nor reflect the views of African American men at institutions of higher education. The perspectives could also have been influenced by other factors outside of institutional choice and student success initiatives. In addition, regarding the means of data collection (i.e., interviews) may not be an effective means of collecting reliable information given the questions required participants to reflect and recollect past experiences which occurred five-10 years ago. Finally, there are limitations of using an inductive approach as the conclusions are based on an inductive method which can never be proven, but could possibly be invalidated.

Aside from assumptions and limitations, delimitations are “limitations actively put into place by the researcher in order to control for factors that might affect the results or to more specifically focus on the problem” (Terrell, 2016, p. 257). In the context of the current study, the delimitations mirror the criteria required for participation in the actual study. They were limited to the following: (a) participants must be African American and male, (b) participants must have graduated from an HBCU, and (c) alumni must have completed a degree within the past five to 10 years. I defined African American male as an inclusive term for non-Caucasian men who use this particular language to self-define and describe their experiences. A few examples of how African American men might identify themselves include Black, bi-racial, African American, multi-ethnic, indigenous, and multi-racial. I was seeking information directly related to this

specific population in determining how their experiences at an HBCU influenced their degree completion.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive collective instrumental case study was to examine the persistence and retention strategies utilized by HBCUs which support African American men in successfully completing their degree. Framed by Vincent Tinto's model of student retention (1975, 1987, 2007), the results of this research will be used to improve and/or develop retention initiatives targeting African American men.

This chapter described the research methodology and rationale, population and means of sample selection, and how data were collected and analyzed. Data were collected from nine African American men who recently graduated from an HBCU within the last five to 10 years. Using an online, semistructured interview process, these interviews were recorded and later transcribed. All collected data were then analyzed using a combination of qualitative data analysis methods to guarantee credibility and trustworthiness. This chapter also addressed the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation details the results of the case study. Chapter 4 restates the purpose of the study and discusses the findings which emerged from the data analysis process. Chapter 5 includes a review and summation of the study, discussion of the conclusions, and implications of the study as it relates to future research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine through the lens of African American men, the persistence and retention strategies utilized by HBCUs which support them in successfully completing their degree. This chapter is organized in terms of the five research questions initially posed in Chapter 1. This chapter reports the findings as a result of the data analysis conducted. A purposeful sample of nine African American male HBCU graduates representing 11 different HBCUs were interviewed. The voluntary sample consisted of nine traditionally college-aged, male, HBCU alumni of African American descent, who successfully completed a baccalaureate or graduate-level degree in the last five to 10 years. Given there are few studies which examine the perspectives and experiences of African American HBCU alumni on the educational relevance of HBCUs (Robinson, 2017), this research is vital to understanding how these institutions encourage persistence and retention of this population.

A qualitative, descriptive collective instrumental case study was used to identify the persistence and retention strategies utilized by HBCUs which support African American men in successfully graduating from college. Data were collected from the nine HBCU alumni participants and analyzed. The primary source of data within this study was one-on-one, internet-based interviews. The data source contained demographic information (e.g., age, school, graduation year, etc.), interview questions guided by an established protocol, and integrated based on the research questions. The secondary sources of data within this study were student artifacts (e.g., writing samples, letters, academic memoranda, e-mail correspondence, or other personal documents). Participants were asked to voluntarily submit personal artifacts via a secure electronic dropbox which they felt represented their HBCU experience, academic success, growth, personal achievements, and other areas. To protect the anonymity of each of the HBCU

alumni, the participants and institutions were assigned pseudonyms. The assigned participant pseudonyms begin with the word GRAD and are followed by a sequential number (e.g., GRAD1, GRAD2, GRAD3, etc.). The assigned institution pseudonyms begin with HBCU and are followed by a sequential number (e.g., HBCU1, HBCU2, HBCU3, etc.). The transcripts from each interview along with all personal artifacts were reviewed several times and coded for data analysis. As framed by Tinto's (1975) model of institutional departure, the participant data collected were organized to see which recurring patterns and themes emerged.

Institutional profiles were developed to depict the types of HBCUs attended which represent each research participant, as shown in Table 1. The institution data provided in Table 1 were obtained from U.S. News & World Report.

Research Question 1: Academic Support Services

Research question 1 examined the academic support services offered at HBCUs which contribute to African American men successfully graduating college. Findings support that participation in campus retention initiatives which encompass a variety of academic support services impacted the participant's persistence. The following were support services discussed by the participants that were considered to be the most helpful: federal TRIO programs, personalized advising and programming for first- and second-year students, and summer bridge programs. In the examination of the interview content and submitted artifacts, there was a clear unanimous belief that an avenue of student academic support services contributes to African American men successfully graduating from college. In fact, when asked about which academic support services contributed to his degree completion, GRAD8 responded:

If I'm being completely honest, I would honestly say all of them. Only because it's at an HBCU, that I've never felt as encouraged, pushed, and challenged to foster my

educational studies even more. So, I will say that the faculty and staff at an HBCU, will make those academic settings very, very impactful on one's life.

Federal TRIO Programs

Federal TRIO student support services work to increase the college retention and graduation rates through programs to help students meet basic college requirements. Five of the nine research participants mentioned a TRIO sponsored program. TRIO Programs (TRIO) are federal student service outreach programs designed to cater to the academic needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The eight TRIO programs serve “low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, para. 1). Of the eight TRIO programs, participants mentioned two most often when discussing the services offered at their institution: Upward Bound and Student Support Services (SSS). For example, GRAD3 emphasized how TRIO helped and influenced himself and those around him. He was a first-generation student, while not disadvantaged himself, many of his friends, teammates, and peers came from rough neighborhoods, and most came through the TRIO program. He explained it was a program that helped and almost all of his teammates utilizing TRIO made it through in three to four years. GRAD1 provided Figure 1, noting that he was an honoree at the honor convocation which recognized students involved in the TRIO program.

Figure 1*Honors Convocation Notification*

Save the Date for [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED] Honors
 Convocation: Congratulations,
 you are being honored for
 your Academic Excellence! ☆

Inbox



Mar 29, 2019



to ▾



[REDACTED] Ph.D.

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Upward Bound was designed to support participants in their preparation for college. The program focuses on success prior to college and ultimately into higher education. The mission of SSS is to improve retention and graduation rates among the program participants

(U.S. Department of Education, 2020). All SSS programs must provide academic tutoring, assistance with course selection, and assistance with financial aid. Other services such as counseling, exposure to cultural programming, mentoring programs, may also be available via SSS program participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). While traditionally designed to service first-generation and first time in college (FTIC) students, GRAD1, GRAD8, and GRAD9 noted the TRIO staff extended help to whomever needed assistance despite their classification. These graduates also shared similar experiences when commenting on the TRIO staff. Individuals under that department were there to assist whether it be with completing assignments, tutoring, or other needs. GRAD9 mentioned it was a service to all students that was free of charge and assistance in nearly every subject. He also mentioned students could schedule hour timeslots with upperclassmen each week for help and for any updates. GRAD1 mentioned the staff's open-door policy and how students could just walk-in the office. When explaining TRIO's role GRAD8 stated, "They're there to help foster their education throughout the remainder of their time at the school." GRAD9 credited the SSS program on his campus as "one service that really helped him during his time." He reflected on the men within the SSS department at his institution. He described this as "another platform that was utilized to bring students together as a way of encouraging, motivating, you know, just inspiring one other kind of keep going, keep pressing."

The general consensus among all of the nine participants was that each of their institutions provided TRIO type personalized peer and staff tutorials, mandatory and optional study hall, counseling, and other personalized support services. GRAD4 commented on the peers tutoring services at his institution, which he stated was especially helpful with African American male retention as "being that if we were intimidated are uncomfortable with going to the

professor or the student support services, going into a peer tutor definitely seemed more, I guess, appealing or inviting.” It should be noted, not all student support services fell under the realm of TRIO specifically or possibly could have been but were not identified as a TRIO sponsored program at their institution. Some programs were identified as the following: academic advisory club of student support services, center for oversight and management of personalized academic student services, center for academic excellence. However, the goal of each program, office, and center was the same—to support underrepresented populations in persisting to graduation.

Personalized Advising and Programming for First- and Second-Year Students

In the discussion of other support services provided, five of the nine participants mentioned personalized advising, first- and second-year experience programming, and specialized student services via their institution’s athletic department. GRAD3 discussed a student success initiative specifically for campus athletes. The academy was a 10-week program which taught students how to navigate the campus and navigate taking classes with other related content. He also mentioned a male minority initiative geared towards athletes, particularly those on scholarship, similar to study hall. He emphasized the necessity as prior to its existence “that was a terrible thing.” He stated every school should have a program as it helped him recover his scholarship after it was taken away. GRAD6 also supported this idea, commenting on specific services for athletes as well as a mandatory study hall. GRAD3 provided Figure 2 and Figure 3 from the Student-Athlete Study Hall/Mentorship Handbook which detailed study hall rules and a schedule for the athletic academy.

Figure 2

Example of Study Hall Protocol

SUPERVISED STUDY HALL

Study hall is supervised study times with the purpose of helping student-athletes organize their study time more effectively.

STUDY HALL HOURS

Monday

5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

STUDY HALL RULES

- Cell phone use is prohibited during tutoring sessions.
- No tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco, permitted..
- Modest apparel should be worn.
- Food and beverages allowed in the student lounge..
- Study groups are NOT permitted unless a test review or group tutoring session is supervised by a tutor.

Figure 3

Academy and Mentorship Itinerary From Athletic Handbook

Week 1 (Study Hall) September 1, 2014

- Prepare student athletes how to organize for their classes (2 Hrs.)
- Students are required to bring a agenda
- Give students the academic calendar

Week 2 (Study Hall and Man to Man talk) September 8, 2014

- Study Hall (1 Hr.)
- Discussion with sophomore students as guest speakers on the do's and don'ts of the school year as a freshman. (1hr.)

Week 3 (Community Service Event) September 15, 2014

- Help children with after school activities at a local elementary school

Week 4 (Study Hall and Career and Development Day) September 22, 2014

- Study Hall (1hr.)
- Career and Development Workshop (1hr.)
 - expose students to internship and opportunities for the winter and summer

Week 5 (Study Hall and Cancer Awareness Workshop) September 29, 2014

- Study Hall (1hr.)
- Cancer Awareness Discussion TBD (1hr.)

Week 6 (Study Hall and another even TBD) October 6, 2014

- Study Hall (1 hr.)
- TBD (1 hr.)

Week 7 (Study Hall) October 13, 2014

- Study Hall (2 hrs.)

Week 8 October 20, 2014

- Study Hall (2 hrs.)

Week 9 October 27, 2014

- Study Hall (1 hr.)
- Teaching students proper business attire etiquette (1hr.)

Week 10 November 3, 2014

- Study Hall (1hr.)
- Discussion on what it means to be a leader.

Consistent with other participants, GRAD1 also discussed a freshman academy geared toward male students and also a male minority initiative, similar to the services provided by TRIO. He mentioned:

The freshman academy those advisors that you got your freshman year kind of stick with you your entire college experience, and they kind of become your second parents away from home. And they tell you that when you get to Xxxxx, they say, I'm your new mom, or I'm your new dad, and I'll be here with you throughout your journey. And so that was very helpful as well.

This academy offered tutorials approximately once a month. Around midterms or finals, the advisors would host night events welcoming students to join them for snacks and assistance with all subjects. GRAD9 echoed the sentiment by also discussing the extension of support services through its first- and second-year experience programs for freshman and sophomores, which again provided academic support, advising, and counseling. Highlights of the program included working with students, particularly freshman and sophomores, with "learning the ropes" and navigating the first two years of college. GRAD5 emphasized the faculty and staff's attention to detail over time and the one-on-one attention. He also discussed his involvement with tutorials via the tutorial center and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund's Teacher Quality and Retention Program (TQRP) on his campus. In the discussion of his involvement with the sports medicine program, he also discussed study hall and specialized services for athletes. GRAD2 also indicated the presence of such programming at his institution, but admitted he was not as involved with those initiatives.

Summer Bridge Programs

When asked about their participation in campus-specific retention initiatives and the strategies they felt were most helpful, four of the nine participants discussed the effectiveness of Summer initiatives (e.g., Summer bridge program, Science Technology Engineering Mathematics [STEM] bridge program, Upward Bound sponsored summer programming, and Jump Start Summer Program). When commenting on Upward Bound, GRAD9 placed emphasis on the summer programs, as it provided a space and opportunity for students who want to go to college but may not have the grades for college. With guidance and access to intermediate coursework, students were given a chance to be successful. He added, “I think the programs that they have at the university and introduce to the students are pivotal and some of those successes you see are with graduated students.” His discussion included a narrative that without these types of programs, certain institutions would overlook this population of students. He said:

I’m a witness to that, you know, just because the grades may not be good, the ACT score may not be high, it doesn’t mean that I can’t succeed, doesn’t mean that I don’t have potential. And I think with the programs that Xxxxx produces and introduces to the students who are coming in, it gives them that.

GRAD8 provided a similar narrative as he described his experiences transitioning from high school to college and the impact of the summer bridge program:

I felt as if every Black man who wants to go to college, the only way to do it is to get it through sports. So, I ran track and played football, and I said, I’m going to get a scholarship for sports...I didn’t pass a lot because my focus was not in the classroom. It was on sports. So as a consequence, to that, I graduated high school with a 1.9 GPA, but it was at summer bridge...I graduated my mind mentally from being so focused on going

to college, just for sports and focusing on my academics. It was that summer bridge where I got a 4.0 throughout the summer and maintained it throughout my college experience. So, I do believe that they are extremely helpful.

This narrative was partially echoed by the other two other participants, especially those involved in athletics as the pressure to be a college athlete. Maintaining one's athletic eligibility and scholarship was often a distraction from their academic pursuits. This also spoke to the necessity of study hall and tutoring, as GRAD3 recalled outside of athletics there was little time for anything else. GRAD5 also made a similar statement of being “preoccupied with traveling” with the athletic teams.

GRAD4 described his participation in a residential summer bridge program specifically for underrepresented populations who were interested in STEM fields. The program provided elements of what to expect regarding coursework, what it meant to be a researcher, and the transition from high school to an undergraduate, and transition from an undergraduate into a professional or graduate school. He also mentioned that the program while piloted in the summer as a bridge program, would continue for four years for its participants. GRAD4 provided Figure 4, showing his transition from the STEM bridge program to admission into medical school.

Figure 4

Medical School Admission Letter



On behalf of our Admissions Committee, I take great pleasure in offering you an invitation to join the 2020 Entering Class at [REDACTED] School of Medicine [REDACTED]. I truly hope that you will accept our invitation to pursue your medical training at [REDACTED] and look forward to having you join us.

This acceptance is valid for fourteen (14) days from the date of this letter. An acknowledgement of your intent will be required from you along with a deposit of one hundred dollars (\$100.00 - payable by credit card) to reserve your place in the class. The deposit will be credited to your tuition account for the 2020-2021 academic year. You can accept this invitation and submit your deposit by logging into your Activity Page in the CollegeNET portal.

Research Question 2: Social (Cocurricular) Experiences and Engagement

Research question 2 explored the social, cocurricular experiences, and engagement strategies at HBCUs which contribute to African American men successfully graduating college. The participants described specific social events, social contexts, and involvement in student organizations at HBCUs. The following findings discussed by the participants as components of their college experience critical to their social adjustment and college success included: social events and social communities, student organizations, and fraternal affiliations.

Social Events and Social Communities

All nine participants reflected on the importance of social events and how those speak to the HBCU culture and campus climate. Nearly all candidates mentioned the big social events HBCUs are known for, such as Homecoming, step shows, stroll offs, block parties, cultural activities, and sporting events. GRADs 1, 4, 8, and 9 discussed their social experiences revolving around religious faith, including chapel, campus ministry, and faith-based groups and organizations. They felt their involvement contributed to their persistence. GRAD1 discussed how social interaction is key within HBCUs. He commented on how everyone needs to have some type of social interaction, despite being introverted:

...that social aspect of the college life played a good part of me being successful and who I am today, --because when I came into Xxxxx, I was one who said, I'm going to stay by myself. I'm not going to go to parties. I'm not going to make friends anything I'm here for my education and my education only. But then as I got there, I quickly changed my mind because I realized how important it was to have a social life at the HBCU and being at an HBCU is all about being social and those social connections that you make end up being connections that you can also use academically as well. Definitely.

GRAD2 echoed this statement with his comments on student life being a big priority at HBCUs and how social experiences are critical along with alumni reach. He talked about how social experiences are very important because “you are meeting people and seeing differences in people, learning from people and networking to better yourself.”

Socializing with alumni who also are active in campus events provided an additional source of networking and motivation to complete and be successful. GRAD3 stated, “It’s all about relationships, you gotta be social.” He discussed how social experiences helped him and his peers be more disciplined. He talked about how students have to learn to be disciplined and to be social and how to graduate on time while being social. GRAD6 discussed how social events provide a context for networking. He discussed how there is something special about being around people that look like you and share the same motivations which “pushes you to go further.” He commented that it was “easier to identify with other people because they look like you and they face similar problems or know someone who’s faced similar problems.”

GRAD5 discussed how the exposure to others in a smaller campus setting and attention to details over time kept him engaged. He stated that “HBCUs test your logic.” It was the mentality and perspective of those around him which kept him inspired. GRAD7 commented on his big take away the social experiences at an HBCU was learning to code switch, the act of altering one’s speech and mannerisms to fit into a specific demographic, and how to turn it on and off depending on who he was around. He noted the community was very versatile and required understanding.

Student Organizations

GRAD2 mentioned how his institution had a mandate that each student organization must have a minimum number of events to engage the student population. This mandate increased the

awareness for the entire student population and encouraged people to get involved. He said, “I feel like just about everybody that I can, that I’ve spoken to, or that I’ve met on during my matriculation and undergraduate were all involved at like something and they had some type of community because of that.” GRAD8 had the following to say about student organizations and their purpose and impact:

I think they make one focus and never forget the reason why they are at that institution.

The purpose of us being a part of these organizations is to help others fulfill their goals and to be sure that academic excellence is always at the forefront...So I think just being a part of those organizations or those social organizations has really, really kept me focused and kept my feet on the ground.

Within the discussion of student organizations, six of the participants mentioned the Student Government Association (SGA) as a large and influential organization on HBCU campuses. The general consensus was how SGA presents African Americans in a leadership capacity and builds character. GRAD7 mentioned that getting more involved with the student government molded individuals into better people, encouraged critical thinking when handling issues and solving problems, and produced better planners within our community. GRAD9 discussed his involvement with working on campus and how he was in SGA and served as Mr. Student Support Services. Again, GRAD8 discussed how SGA along with his involvement in other organizations kept him focused and grounded.

Fraternal Affiliations

Fraternal affiliations encourage persistence through brotherhood, networking, and providing Black role models. Seven of the nine research participants mentioned the impact of Greek life first and foremost when discussing social experiences. The nine historically Black

Greek letter Fraternities and Sororities, which are better known as the Divine Nine, are housed within an umbrella organization titled the National Panhellenic Council (NPHC). All but two candidates mentioned they were members of one of the historically Black Greek letter fraternities and credited their completion in part to their membership. GRAD8 discussed how he was impacted by fraternal organizations prior to entering into college. He mentioned he had taken part in a program hosted by Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated called the “Leadership Development Institute” for young high schoolers. In this program, the Alpha men help young African American men change their mindset from being focused on trivial things and to ensuring they received an education by going to college. He stated it was through that program he knew for certain he wanted to go to college.

Several of the participants discussed how they were not all that social or engaged prior to becoming a part of a Greek organization. GRAD1 stated, “Getting into Greek life really opens you up and it makes you look at life differently.” GRAD9 had a similar reflection in discussing his first and second years. He added, “Greek life does allow others to kind of feel comfortable.” GRAD 9, a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated, provided Figure 4 and Figure 5 highlighting his involvement with his organization and fraternal accolades.

Figure 5*Leadership Academy Article*

██████████ senior to attend leadership academy in ██████████

██████████ senior to attend leadership academy in ██████████

██████████ is busy packing up and counting down to his departure. This summer ██████████ will be attending the Fifteenth Annual (Omicron Class) Alpha Phi Alpha College Chapter Leadership Academy at ██████████. The senior ██████████ will arrive June 9, and spend seven- days in an intense program designed for young men who have been elected to leadership roles at the various levels of the fraternity.

"It's an honor to attend the Academy simply because it's an opportunity for me to learn more about serving in leadership roles," shared ██████████. ██████████ has served as chair for the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. sponsored Miss Black and Gold Scholarship Pageant at ██████████ and an assistant community service/event coordinator for the organization. In ██████████ he was selected as a MLK Volunteer Service Award recipient.

Several student development theories will be used as the theoretical framework within which this Academy will operate. Such theories include the Student Wellness Model for holistic development, involvement theory, moral development, service learning and many more. "I hope to gain valuable tools that can assist in my every day life and that I can instill in every young man that I come across; I hope to influence good in their lives."

██████████ is a member of the ██████████ Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Choir Psi Phi National Music Society, ██████████ Men Chorale, ██████████ Concert Choir, Student Support Service, Student Ambassadors and Student National Education Association (SNEA).

Figure 6*Alpha Network Hall of Fame Article*

██████ senior inducted into ████████ Alpha Network ████████ Hall of Fame Class
 ████████ senior inducted into ████████ Alpha Network ████████ Hall of Fame Class

████████████████████

Congratulations to senior ████████ on his induction into the ████████ Alpha Network (A.N.) ████████ Hall of Fame Class on January 26 during their district conference. The news came as a shock to the ████████ native, "I'm still in awe that I was inducted, this is truly an honor", expressed a humbled ████████ "I don't participate to be recognized but to show young men and women that regardless of where you've been or what you've done, you can overcome any adversity."

██████ a member of the ████████ of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, was inducted because of his leadership roles and vigorous participation in the Fraternity, and because he attended the Alpha Leadership Academy "Omicron Class" this past summer. For the past two years, ████████ has chaired the Miss Black and Gold Scholarship Pageant and worked alongside his fraternity brothers on several service projects including "DK Goes Homeless" and "Relay for Life". "Activities like these make you grateful for what you have," shared ████████ "It empowers you and encourages other students to get involved in various events around campus and in the community."

While at ████████ has been an active participant of Student Support Services, a member of the Concert Choir, Men's Chorale and Choir Psi Phi. After graduation, he plans to attend graduate school and pursue a career in musical theater. "Good work pays off, it's a great opportunity to show the world that students at ████████ are definitely making strides to be better in everything that we do."

██████ Alpha Network is the brand of the District of ████████. The District of ████████ is comprised of the 22 College and Alumni Chapters, and the more than 400 active members of the Fraternity within the State of ████████. The District of ████████ is division a of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Note. Specific content was redacted for confidentiality purposes.

GRAD2 discussed how big Greek life is on HBCU campuses. He also discussed the differences in Greek life at HBCUs vs at PWIs, highlighting that Black culture is different from that of White culture. He commented, "It really shaped my understanding of what Black manhood is and what it should be and, you know, something to aspire to as well. I suppose I never anticipated that, but I know that that's big." GRAD3 also shared a similar sentiment of

how big Greek life is. He added that many young men are seeking to find an identity and they go looking for that in fraternities. GRAD4 shared:

Fraternity life for me that gave me some sort of idea of balance between, you know, social and educational curriculum. And so that kind of again, gave me something else, another reason to keep my grades up, but also gave me another support system where people actually were invested in my educational progress.

GRAD6 exclaimed he “crossed the best fraternity in the world.” He talked about how it was beneficial to be surrounded by a team of individuals who were not only male, but who looked just like him and were focused on the same goal. He reflected on how seeing others in “our community” being goal-oriented and focused encouraged him to continue on. Like the other participants, he discussed how big Greek life is and when he was younger, he was never really exposed to a group of Black men like that. He continued:

Especially big to the point where they’re actually doing something great in the community and upholding each other to make sure that we’re pushing each other forward. So that’s like, wow. I would definitely say that that definitely helped and molded me and my success for sure as far as moving forward throughout college.

This was similar to GRAD1. His narrative on the impact of being with a group of men who all had different aspects of life, came from different places, got to be together, and learned from their experiences. GRAD1 emphasized:

That kind of helps you become a better male, especially for those who didn’t have a father figure when they were growing up. And that’s where I fall. I didn’t have a father in my life, and so being in this fraternity kind of helped with that aspect because you have

people who are older than you, who kind of take you under their wings and do things for you.

GRAD3 also discussed the father figure aspect as being influential. He mentioned he had an outside figure who was generous enough to pay for his membership into his fraternal organization. While each participant had vastly different stories, the narrative regarding Greek life was the same, fraternal affiliation at HBCUs is big, fosters positive male relationships, and contributes to persistence and retention.

Research Question 3: Faculty, Peer, and Family Support and University Culture

Research question 3 investigated how HBCU's encourage faculty, peer and family relationships to support African American men successfully graduating at HBCUs along with how the HBCU campus climate and university culture impacted persistence. In each of the interviews, participants discussed the following emergent themes: accessibility of faculty, staff, upperclassmen, and administration, male minority initiatives and mentoring programs, and living communities promote peers' sense of belonging.

Accessibility of Faculty, Staff, Upperclassmen, and Administration

In question one, the discussion was focused on the academic support services offered, in addition to these specific services the participants also reflected on the relationships fostered and developed from these services. In addition, all nine participants reflected on the increased presence and accessibility of the college or university administration on campus. Each candidate recalled always seeing the president and executive staff out and about on campus engaging personally with the students. GRAD3 commented this served as a representation of positive role models. GRAD4 reflected on the administrative convocations, which gave students an opportunity to share a meal with the president and talk. Some institutions even had an open-door

policy, as mentioned by GRAD1, 2, and 8. GRAD1 and GRAD8 mentioned that students were so familiar with the TRIO staff they would go to the office just to hang out and socialize.

GRAD1 also discussed his relationship with his residential hall manager. GRAD1 described him as:

The one that will uplift the men as they come through. If they have their pants down, he talked to them and coached them on why you should have your pants up and how you should look for a job interview, and so he did things like that. And he would either even gather us in the lobby and talk with us and encourage us spiritually, and just a regular type of encouragement saying that this is what you need to do in order to succeed in order to graduate.

GRAD9 had similar thoughts regarding his residential hall staff members, as they were a constant source of motivation. He mentioned:

They basically teach you how to conduct yourself how to keep your living environment, the tape, how to keep it family-oriented, you know, how to keep it cohesive. So that one another feels comfortable in, in, you know, I'm navigating through that every day.

GRAD3 reflected on his relationship with his late college mentor, stating he reminded him of his own people and his father. He was always on him, belligerent even about him being presentable and pulling his pants up. He spoke in gratitude about him and how he pushed him:

It was all out of love. And he wasn't afraid of nobody because he had a rough background. But he was just very influential when it came to me, he talked to me about, you know, just wanting to be a leader in education.

He also discussed how other faculty and staff members encouraged him. He stated he made connections which led him into his current career and how they inspired him to pursue an

advanced degree. He credited it to being social and making relationships. GRAD1 also talked about the faculty support within an HBCU and how the professors are like no other, "I think that at most HBCUS that's usually where the professors actually care about the people that are there." He mentioned he felt this support was more important for men than women as men like to feel like they are wanted, and they are needed. GRAD2 also made similar comments regarding faculty, and how they were like mentors because of the one-on-one type of engagement. He stated they "know you personally" and that type of personal identification contributes to students feeling important and feel like they are seen. He added, "That's something in particular, to the HBCUs, well, maybe not all of them, but this one." GRAD6 provided Figure 7 showing how his professor's willingness to refer him for an internship.

Figure 7

Recommendation Email From Professor

8/24/2020 [REDACTED] University Mail - FW: Intern resume for 3D printing concrete

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 22, 2019 11:48 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Intern resume for 3D printing concrete

Good Morning [REDACTED]

Regarding the 3D-Printing Concrete and to follow up with your request, please see attached resume of my student Mr. [REDACTED] very smart student

Thank you,
 [REDACTED]

Best Regards,

[REDACTED]

Associate Professor
 Department of Civil, Architectural, and Environmental Engineering
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED] Fax: [REDACTED]
 Email: [REDACTED]

GRAD1, 2, and 8 discussed how involved or intrusive the professors could be. For example, if you were not in class, the administrators would come knock on your door personally, make you get out of the bed, and walk you to class. GRAD1 mentioned they went so far as if “you didn’t have anything to wear, they would go out and purchase things for you. Just so you could look presentable.” Looking presentable is a part of HBCU culture as it represents Black excellence and professionalism. GRAD2 stated that knowing the faculty cared made him want to go to class and participate. He did not feel like just a number and it made him want to maintain

his studies despite the challenges or difficulties. GRAD6 and GRAD9 mentioned how the faculty and students themselves had a lot of pride in attending the HBCU. GRAD9 stated this contributed to his faculty and peers pushing him into things they felt were beneficial to his development. He had this to say about the faculty and staff:

I think the faculty and the staff there, they feel hope they built courage. They built momentum the building. And because when, especially for me coming in as someone, you know, who was told, you know, you're not going to amount to anything and then to be rejected by colleges because your act score is not equivalent to what they feel they should be. And then you have this university to say, come on, we're going to take a chance on you. It gives you some type of courage to just like, you know, what I can do it, you know, and it's the constant motivation.

GRAD8 mentioned the faculty and staff at his HBCU would make it a point to reassure parents their child would be okay and provided assurance if they did not feel okay, they would ensure they did. GRAD1 stated that what kept him going was the simple fact everybody cared. The faculty, staff, professors, and administrators all showed they cared about the students, but particularly the male students, "Any moment that they got, they always acknowledged the men, and they had the men to stand up and at different programs and say, this is what a male, a man looks like." GRAD7 had a slightly different perspective on faculty, their engagement, and their capacity. In fact, he mentioned that other than study hall and office hours, the faculty was somewhat lacking. He said:

Once you step up the classroom, I'm not sure if that faculty mentoring is truly there or the accessibility to certain faculty members...I feel like maybe that's something that a lot of institutions just forget to have that conversation of reminding the faculty members that

they are also there to mentor as well. Not to just go speak on the curriculum for an hour and a half.

Regarding the incorporation of family as an additional support piece, a few of the participants mentioned how the faculty and staff at HBCUs provided avenues to include the student's parents. GRAD4 discussed that on his campus there were open house/campus preview days or family weekends in which the families of the students were invited to campus. He mentioned this was an opportunity for parents to be introduced to the administrators, mentors, and advisors working with their children. There were also other events such as probates and convocations in which parents could attend. GRAD8 also discussed how the university administration, faculty, and staff would make it a point to reassure parents that their children were safe, being taken care of, and most importantly comfortable. GRAD1 indicated that while the faculty and staff may have been limited due to privacy laws like FERPA, they still made it a point to reach out to parents if necessary:

Because of so many different laws and FERPA and all of that stuff, they couldn't let the parents know what was going on with your grades, but if anytime that you had a problem that was you were doing something that you wasn't supposed to be doing. They did reach out to your parents.

Male Minority Initiatives and Mentoring Programs

Seven of the nine participants mentioned their specific institution placed an emphasis on Male Minority Initiative (MMI) programming, geared at Black men understanding what it means to be a Black man, how to be a man in character, speech, and dress. This was accomplished via mentoring, campus organizations, seminars, and workshops. GRAD1 discussed his involvement with a program titled "My Brother's Keeper:"

We would get men to come out and we would have different seminars, whether it's financial seminars, how to dress seminars. Then we had some where we were doing academics and everything, where we had tutoring nights and stuff as well. And with that program, the goal was to get the men on the campus to come and become more aware of themselves and to kind of get in a mindset of I'm in college now, and I got to put away my childish things and get myself together for my future.

GRAD1 also stated he feels all men should have someone in their life in that capacity. There were so many programs and seminars available because in his words, "we are like a dying breed and there's not many of us anymore." He stated going to an HBCU really showed him how valuable men are. The one thing his institution always did was to make sure they gave their students value. GRAD2 recalled a MMI program titled "Brother-to-Brother" on his campus. The program was more of a peer mentoring piece which again focused on cultural appreciation and Black excellence. He stated he did not remember the names of the other mentoring programming, but said they were present and active on his campus. He stated most of the mentoring was on a private basis, between faculty and students, but was not an established official program. He did mention there was another peer mentoring piece in which new students were paired with upperclassmen as a means of guidance and adjustment. He emphasized the goal as "it was just people helping people." GRAD7 discussed a program at his institution titled "Empowering Afro-American Males." The purpose was to mold and cultivate leaders among African American men on campus. He stated one of the goals was to address the issues of the lack of Black men going to school and completing.

Living Communities Promote Peer Sense of Belonging

All nine candidates had positive and negative commentary on the living communities on campus. Some stated the environment encouraged their persistence. GRAD1 discussed the importance of male-only dormitories in his first semesters. He discussed the family environment and how the residential staff provided additional resources such as life coaching and spiritual encouragement. He talked about the environment of getting to know new people, the fights, and the camaraderie. “There’s a whole lot of guys, which makes it more of feeling like you in a prison or something, because it’s the only guys in there, but once you actually lived there, it became more like family.” While GRAD2 stated he lived off-campus due to living in close proximity, he was also aware of the many social events hosted and offered within the living communities on campus. GRAD3 stated the living community was “ghetto” but was in part due to the melting pot of individuals on campus coming from “not so great” communities and backgrounds. GRAD7 like GRAD3 discussed how many people did not come from the best areas. GRAD5 discussed how there were pros and cons to the living community. He was very introverted, and living in the dorms forced his hand to be social due to the small size. He mentioned everyone would eventually find where they fit in and it “made you a social butterfly.” GRAD6 discussed how his living community was a living and learning community which incorporated study halls and other academic programming.

Research Question 4: Suggestions for Further Support

Research question 4 explored what suggestions African American men who have graduated from HBCUs recommend be implemented for further support. The following emergent themes were the suggestions discussed by the participants which they felt would further support the African American male population: increased alumni support and community presence,

increased consciousness of social justice issues by administrators, proactive and intrusive mindset, additional funding and student incentives, and other suggestions.

Increased Alumni Support and Community Presence

In nearly every interview the primary suggestion for further support was commentary on how the institutional alumni should have an increased presence and be more involved with what is happening at their alma maters, outside of returning for homecoming. They should also provide additional financial support. GRAD1 and GRAD4 discussed the importance and need for alumni, specifically men, to go back to HBCUs. GRAD1 expressed the need for establishing mentoring programs and aiding in the development of internship programs.

I recommend that us as men, we go back to our HBCUs and if they don't have a program or if they had a program and they kind of died out, I recommend that we go back in and establish a mentor type program to where we can mentor these younger men and show them that, Hey, I am from an HBCU... if I can do it, you can do it...I think that will play a good role in them becoming, successful just like we were able to do.

Nearly all of the participants mentioned a desire for more mentoring programs. GRAD1 also mentioned it is the job of alumni to be out in the community pushing students into HBCUs. GRAD8 similarly stated there should be a challenge and charge to alumni to give back after completion. He reflected that while HBCUs have produced numerous generations of graduates, the reason why PWIs are so successful is due in part to not being privately funded and the alumni support their institutions. He said, "It's important that we as alumni give back to our institution because they produce this, you know." GRAD3 had a similar perspective of alumni giving back and mentoring, yet he emphasized alumni and HBCUs should be in the community recruiting:

Number one? I think they need to have partnerships with local high schools. I'm a firm believer in, I love that program when it comes to recruiting people and you know, making that transition better. But I think that's just me, cause I'm an educator, I think, you know, we have a lot of great brothers and women in engineering field. We got a lot of women in the education field. We got a lot of people in the STEM field, entertainment field, but when it comes to like their nurses and doctors and things like that, like y'all killing this. Black women, y'all are like, killing it. Yo, and I really applaud that. Y'all the example for that. I just think that to balance it out, we gotta bring the males into the picture and that starts at a young age.

GRAD7 talked extensively about the community, specifically how the Black community needs work and help. He discussed how people want to see HBCUs and their students succeed, but there is a lack of emphasis. He also mentioned the need to push HBCUs in the rural communities. GRAD4 reiterated the need for not only alumni support, but also financial support through alumni giving. He stated there should be an emphasis on what it means to be an alumni giver. He continued with the focus should be on how alumni can give at different levels around their educational attainment and professional pursuits. He noted, "I may not be able to give at the same level that I will be able to get 15 years from now. That doesn't mean I can't contribute nothing." GRAD1 talked about how as an alumnus it is necessary to step up. He stated, "We have to do everything that we can and give financially to these HBCU so that they can continue to strive in the community."

Increased Consciousness of Social Issues by Administrators

Another common thread in the interviews was the need for postsecondary administrators to have an increased awareness, identification, and empathetic position on the current social

climate. Four of the nine participants stated there was often a disconnect with the administration, particularly on social issues which did not hold “traditionalist views.” GRAD7 stated the disconnect is present at all levels and “it’s everywhere,” but especially with administration and faculty. GRAD8 explained there must be attention and priority given to mental health.

It’s one thing that isn’t talked about in the Black community and as a man, it’s really not something that we like to talk about, but college can be very draining. It can be exhausting. It can be confusing as you’re still trying to discover yourself and your newness.

GRAD2 also talked about the need for “making things mandatory.” He discussed the need for administrators and those in veteran leadership positions to undergo progressive training. He also expressed the need for conversations on sexuality as there was not any ally training on his campus. He also reiterated the need for openness, tolerance, and cultural competency as much of this is taboo in the Black community. He felt this would contribute to more cultural competency on HBCU campuses as students are more comfortable when they feel seen and accepted. He also mentioned the need for more awareness on the current issues surrounding “Black Lives Matter.” He did say that in spite of the traditionalist views held by the administration, the student body was very progressive and inclusive, which made students feel supported by their peers. GRAD4 added that at his institution he felt as if the students were tasked with “informing the way the public viewed Black people in general, and will be tasked with the social burden of what it means to be a Black in America.” He called for the need to “normalize Black culture” in this current time.

Proactive and Intrusive Mindset

GRAD5 discussed in detail the need for HBCUs to be more proactive versus reactive. He discussed the need for more organization as certain issues students face could be avoided or headed off if notified early (e.g., financial aid and graduation requirements). He discussed the issues he had with changes in his degree program which delayed his completion. He emphasized the importance and how HBCUs must have practices which fit the needs of the students. GRAD6 echoed this sentiment in his discussion on how we need to normalize being proactive. He also talked about the flow of information and normalizing the idea that most students will not finish in four years. GRAD6 added a comment on issues with the lack of housing, stating “some things were blown out of proportion relative to other schools.”

GRAD7 discussed the student population at HBCUs, stating that many of the students who attend are not from the best communities and do not have the best vocabulary so there is a need for HBCUs to elevate its students by “meeting the students where they at, you can’t lift them up unless you’re underneath.” He also discussed in detail the need for HBCUs to be proactive in promoting Blacks supporting Blacks. He said:

It’s crazy how you go to an HBCU. They sit here and tell you that Black is brilliant.

Black is powerful, Black has finances, but we still continue to try to mold us to go ahead and work for a company where the people don’t necessarily look like us rather than trying to create our own companies, or reminding us that we actually have our own banks, or reminding us that we have our own companies, our own studios--- that we can actually push further or pour into the students rather than trying to mold them to go work for somebody else that doesn’t look like them.

Additional Funding and Student Incentives

GRAD3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 all mentioned the need for additional financial support for those attending HBCUs. GRAD3 expressed there should be more scholarship funds and more funds allocated to smaller HBCUs. He stated the issue is much of the funding money goes to larger HBCUs and without money and the smaller schools suffer and therefore so do their numbers. He mentioned students choose to go elsewhere because of the lack of money, “money talks in any situation.” He shared an idea which would incentivize students based on their major selection. GRAD4 suggested similar incentives for students interested in STEM fields. GRAD9 emphasized not only the need for more funding, but also the need to pour into HBCUs to see the whole picture. GRAD4 also discussed the financial challenges and burdens faced by HBCU students and how many opt to pick up “side hustles.” He stated:

Although my college is private and we had a great deal of scholarship money, they still had a number of my peers who I witnessed struggling and I witnessed dropout and I witnessed, you know, work full-time jobs as a college student, all sorts of things.

GRAD6 and GRAD2 discussed the challenges associated with funding being cut at HBCUs. GRAD2 mentioned issues with the lack of scholarships impacts persistence and how much of the available money goes to the athletes over academics, which causes students to leave. He also pointed out the increasing agenda of HBCUs prioritizing White students, which while diversity is good, it does not need to take away from the target population. GRAD6 mentioned that HBCUs are “where most of the Black doctors, lawyers, judges, engineers, teachers come from, so to cut the funding would reduce the role of African Americans in those sectors.”

Other Suggestions

While in conversation with the participants regarding what their experience may have lacked, some had additional suggestions for further support. GRAD1 lobbied for HBCUs to push and create more social interaction experiences earlier in the undergraduate process. He stated, “If I’d have gotten out more my freshman year that could have helped me out even more than what it did. Cause my freshman year I was kind of shy and reserved and didn’t really want to do anything.” GRAD4 commented on his school’s lack of rivalry and competition in comparison to other institutions. He stated his institution was “not cutthroat” and it made a huge difference academically. GRAD3 proposed that new policies be put in place for student-athletes as he did not have a life outside of football, which directly impacted his ability to go to class and maintain his scholarship. He stated, “I had no clue that being an athlete was that time-consuming. I think the whole NCAA thing needs to be revamped when it comes to that because you’re, you’re either a student or you’re an athlete. You’re not both.” Finally, GRAD6 suggested changes in the curriculum which would mandate that all HBCU students be required to take an African American studies class. He stated his experiences really taught him about his history and felt it was necessary to provide an anchor to the past.

Research Questions 5: Institutional Choice

Research question 5 inquired why students choose to go to HBCUs? The participants discussed the following emergent themes related to why students specifically select HBCUs over other institutions: smaller size equals more support and creates a family environment, family history and influence, the Black experience, and second-chance institutions and preservation of HBCUs.

Smaller Size Equals More Support and Creates a Family Environment

Nearly all of the participants commented on the smaller campus size and family environment. GRAD1 explained the impact of attending an institution with a smaller size and reflected that often times it is easy for African American men to drift away and not care about academics. With his institution being so small, “it made it easier and allowed the professors to reach out to those men and pull them back in.” GRAD2 had an almost identical statement, including the smaller size made it easier for faculty to identify them, call them out when necessary, and engage personally. GRAD5 reiterated over and over that the small campus size made the HBCU experience “very impactful” and gave it a personal feel. The one-on-one support and attention directly contributed to his persistence. He also mentioned it was very effective, especially for students who were low-income and coming in with no resources. GRAD9 stated what he loved about being at an HBCU was the small size and how they were able to create a family environment. GRAD6 stated it felt like more like a family atmosphere because “most HBCUs are smaller school’s population-wise so you’ve formed a lot of tighter connections and you see a lot more people that look like yourself succeeding.” GRAD7 mentioned it definitely seemed like a family and the family dynamic was pushed as an agenda. He viewed everyone as his brothers and sisters, and sometimes it was about the love and sometimes the love was not really there. GRAD3 talked about the family environment and how faculty and staff members cared:

It was a close-knit family when it comes to like an admin, definitely made sure you were doing what you supposed to do. Like I know for us as athletes, our coaches made sure they popped in our classes, especially if you’re on scholarship money.

GRAD2 commented on the presence of a family environment and how he felt the love. He talked about the emphasis of brotherhood and sisterhood, occasional sibling-like rivalry, Black pride, and how there was Blackness incorporated into the course content. GRAD1 commented that many people select HBCUs because they are looking for an experience similar to home. He also added that being at an HBCU is “like going home to family.” GRAD4 mentioned, “We kind of go because we want a sense of belonging and that you have a welcoming family-like atmosphere at most HBCUS.”

Influence of Family History and Location

Five of the nine participants mentioned a degree of family influence or their close proximity to the institution as their rationale for choosing an HBCU. GRAD1 felt students choose to go to HBCUs because they know friends and family members who attended an HBCU. He mentioned these individuals heavily influence decisions as they can speak to what an HBCU is like. However, he admitted this was not the case for him personally, as he was a first-generation college student. He said, “I’m the first in my family to go to any type of college.” He reiterated again that HBCUs are like “going back into your own family is it’s a place where everybody can succeed.” GRAD2 like GRAD1 also mentioned that many students attend HBCUs because their parents are alumni and encourage them to attend HBCUs. The factor that influenced his personal choice was the location.

I didn’t want to go anywhere too far because I didn’t want to have extra money to take out or to spend, you know, outside of just the major tuition costs and stuff. So that was so close, closer school for me was one.

GRAD7 discussed parental influence, specifically how he was exposed to HBCUs at a very young age. He mentioned his mom graduated from an HBCU and his family led a program

which took minority students from his neighborhood to tour HBCUs during spring break.

GRAD4 admitted that while he did not have any family influence, it is a factor in institutional choice. GRAD5 recounted the influence his family had on his decision to attend an HBCU. He discussed his HBCU journey and how he took a break from school and went back, then he experienced a life-threatening illness which left him disabled. He stated that without his family's influence he may not have finished.

The Black Experience

Many of the candidates indicated that being immersed in all things Black contributed to their persistence. GRAD2 stated that going to a place where it is Black everything, Black love, Black culture, was a big deal for him. He continued, stating:

Well, I can speak to Black male students. I think that the Black students who attend HBCUs today attend that school or they attend these institutions because they want to feel like the majority, and they want to actually experience an enriching environment that kind of fosters a culture and cultivates it and makes them feel proud of who they are and stuff like that. It's kind of like a Wonderland cause like your own special space where you don't have to hide being who you are, you can kind of just be yourself and instead of someone pushing back at you...it's a place where it's, they'll congratulate you, I guess for that.

GRAD9 had a similar narrative that at an HBCU students are in the limelight. He provided a specific example citing the differences in athletics and how students are able to shine at HBCUs versus being enrolled at a division one school. GRAD4 commented on the Black experience and how it is unrivaled. He explained how there is a social life and context that is unmatched and is similar to what students are accustomed to at home in the Black community. He mentioned that

“it also is challenging and stimulating intellectually.” GRAD6 discussed how he attended a predominately White high school and wanted and needed to be around people that look like him. He commented, “I feel like you learn better when you’re not the only Black kid in the classroom.” GRAD7 had a similar experience of growing up in a predominately White community and how he felt many students just want to experience a place where they can be around more Black people. GRAD3 reiterated the same, stating he wanted to attend an HBCU because he went to a White private school and felt as if “everything was 20 times harder for no reason, just because you were Black, it just wasn’t. I wanted to be around my own people again, because I grew up around my own people.”

Second Chance Institutions and Preservation of HBCUs

Several of the participants commented on the necessity of preserving HBCUs and how they serve many purposes in the African American community. GRAD1 posited that HBCUs vital to the success of African Americans, particularly the male community, “because it’s not many places we can go that would do what an HBCU would do for us.” GRAD3 and GRAD7 discussed how HBCUs are seen as a safe haven for many students. GRAD3 commented on how since many students come from very rough areas, stating “a lot of people go there just to escape just from their community sometimes.” GRAD7 admitted he was one of those students that needed to get away. He stated, “I went to an HBCU as more of just a getaway, but I feel like that’s why everybody go to college though, is to get away.” In his discussion he also mentioned there is a very strong and adamant need of HBCUs, but sadly many do not see the necessity nor their role. He admitted that he graduated high school with a 1.68 GPA so finding an institution that said, “you know what, we have a space for you was what I needed.” GRAD9 with a similar story, asserted he views HBCUs as “a place of hope as a place of courage, you know? And

they're given more opportunities." He too stated it was more of a personal matter for him as he was "a former high school dropout who was given a chance in all forms, because my act score was not high. You know, they gave me an opportunity." He wove a positive narrative explaining how HBCUs should be a steppingstone to help catapult its students. He described the institutions as a "visionary into destiny...I see it as being the catalyst for a lot of young people who are coming forward and, you know, they feel like, you know, I have no more options I'm at the end of the road."

GRAD2 and GRAD4 had commentary on how HBCUs are a part of African American history and must continue to exist. GRAD2 stated he was not really aware of the political challenges related to HBCUs and he feels HBCUs are still necessary. GRAD 4 commented in regard to preserving HBCUs that institutions closing is a threat to Black people thriving in America. He argued:

We inherently can go to other institutions and do well, but we will not have the protection of our cultural background. We will not have the protection of our history. And I think that is something that, you know, we won't be able to, you won't be able to make that up anywhere else. It's not something you can get back once it's lost. We will not be able to retain our educational history because it would just be mingled in with, with everyone else's history. There will be no uniqueness to Black culture anymore. No sort of spaces that celebrate what makes us different intellectually. And so, I think inherently that's one of the things, the second thing that I kind of think will be an issue is that we already have struggles be acknowledged when we do something great. And I think HBCUs have been the platform for which we use to celebrate those people.

Summary

Chapter 4 of this dissertation began by restating the purpose of the study. The chapter detailed the findings of the study which were explained utilizing the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Chapter 5 includes a review and summation of the study, recommendations and implications of the study as it relates to practice and future research, and a discussion of the conclusions.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This qualitative descriptive case study explored strategies utilized by HBCUs which support African American men in successfully graduating from college. Framed by Tinto's model of institutional departure (1975, 1987, 2007), this case study design utilized interviews and artifacts from recent HBCU graduates to explore the academic and social experiences of African American men who attended an HBCU and have successfully completed a degree. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to identify persistence and retention strategies implemented at HBCUs that support successful degree attainment of African American men. This chapter provides a summary of the study, interpretation of the study findings and conclusions, provides recommendations for the implementation of these strategies other at institutions to better support African American men, and suggests future studies on this topic. The chapter closes with reflections and concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

This case study employed a qualitative research design. Semistructured, one-on-one internet-based interviews were conducted to identify persistence and retention strategies implemented by HBCUs which support the successful degree attainment of African American men. Participant artifacts submitted on a voluntary basis, which represented their HBCU experience such as academic success, growth, and personal achievements, were used to further support the interview content.

Background of the Study

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines an HBCU as any historically Black college or university that was in existence and accredited prior to 1964, whose primary mission was and is to educate and advance people of color, specifically African Americans (Arroyo & Gasman,

2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Currently, HBCUs make up 3% of all postsecondary institutions (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Jones, 2010; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). There has been much debate regarding the necessity of HBCUs in the 21st century (Bracey, 2017). While minority students are pursuing a college education at record rates, the number of these students who graduate is significantly lower than their Caucasian peers (American Council on Education, 2006; Bir & Myrick, 2015; Brooks et al., 2013; Flores & Park, 2015; Gray & Swinton, 2017; Palmer et al., 2010). More specifically, the number of African American students enrolling in college and graduating is less than 33.1% (Brooks et al., 2013). According to Brown and Sacco-Bene (2018), misinformation and stereotyping in society and academia have contributed to African American men being characterized as “dysfunctional and uneducated, disinterested and disengaged, unfriendly, threatening, less intelligent, and as violent and dangerous” (p. 24). They posited, such platitudes are perpetuated by the educational system and subsequently impact how African American men are perceived in society and academia. However, despite the negative connotations associated with this population, the majority of undergraduate degrees awarded to African American men come from HBCUs. It is essential to understand the variables that contribute to student persistence and retention at HBCUs in order to combat the attrition of African American men.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to identify and describe persistence and retention strategies implemented at HBCUs that support successful degree attainment as perceived by successful African American male HBCU students. A descriptive instrumental case study design utilized data from semistructured interviews with recent HBCU graduates to explore the academic and social experiences of African American men who

attended an HBCU and have successfully completed a degree. An additional purpose of this study is to support the continued need for HBCUs in the American Higher Education System. The research questions in this study supported a qualitative inquiry of African American men who attended an HBCU, were exposed to the targeted support services, and persisted to graduation.

The research questions were:

Q1. What academic support services offered at HBCUs contribute to African American men successfully graduating college?

Q2. What social (cocurricular) experiences offered at HBCUs contribute to African American men successfully graduating college?

Q3. In what way do HBCUs encourage faculty, peer, and family relationships to support African American men successfully graduating at HBCUs?

Q4. What suggestions do African American men who have graduated from HBCUs recommend be implemented for further support?

Q5. Why do students choose to go to HBCUs?

Review of the Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative, descriptive, collective, instrumental case study design was used to identify the persistence and retention strategies implemented by HBCUs which support the successful degree attainment of African American men. Data were collected from the nine HBCU alumni participants and analyzed. The primary source of data within this study was one-on-one, internet-based interviews. The data source contained: demographic information (e.g., age, school, graduation year, etc.), interview questions guided by an established protocol, and integrated based on the research questions. The secondary sources of data within this study were student

artifacts (e.g., writing samples, letters, academic memoranda, e-mail correspondence, or other personal documents). Participants were asked to voluntarily submit personal artifacts via a secure electronic dropbox. The transcripts from each interview along with all personal artifacts, were reviewed several times and coded for data analysis. The coded data were then organized to determine recurring patterns and themes. The emergent themes then became the basis for the narrative analysis and description of the findings.

Summary of Major Findings

The results of this study are summarized by each research question.

Research Question 1. Research question 1 examined the academic support services offered at HBCUs which contribute to African American men successfully graduating college. The findings were the following support services:

- Federal TRIO programs
- Personalized advising and programming for first- and second-year students
- Summer bridge programs

Research Question 2. Research question 2 explored the social, cocurricular experiences, and engagement strategies at HBCUs which contribute to African American men successfully graduating college. The following were the findings:

- Social events and social communities
- Student organizations
- Fraternal affiliations

Research Question 3. Research question 3 investigated how HBCUs encourage faculty, peer and family relationships to support African American men successfully graduating at HBCUs along with how the HBCU campus climate and university culture impacted persistence.

The following were the findings:

- Accessibility of faculty, staff, upperclassmen, and administration
- Male minority initiatives and mentoring programs
- Living communities promote peers' sense of belonging.

Research Question 4. Research question 4 explored what suggestions African American men who have graduated from HBCUs recommend be implemented for further support. The following were the findings:

- Increased alumni support and community presence
- Increased consciousness of social justice issues by administrators
- Proactive and intrusive mindset
- Additional funding and student incentives
- Other suggestions

Research Questions 5. Research question 5 inquired why students choose to go to HBCUs. The findings were the following:

- Smaller size equals more support and creates a family environment
- Family history and influence
- The Black experience
- Second chance institutions and preservation of HBCUs

Discussion and Conclusions of Findings

The qualitative case study identified which persistence and retention strategies utilized by HBCUs support African American men in successfully graduating from college. In an analysis of Tinto's retention model, as it relates to the research data, an overall conclusion for this study is that HBCUs address the attrition of African American men by creating a campus environment

which is sensitive to pre-college entry attributes (e.g., family history and educational background) and provides opportunities for social development, academic improvement, inclusivity, and integration into the HBCU environment. Through their commitment they are able to connect with African American men on a personal, emotional, and cognitive level to improve their persistence. Connelly (2016) argued that institutional experience and integration should be the goal of academic institutions. These goals are characterized by academic achievement, interactions with university personnel, non-collegiate activities, and peer-group interactions. Gasman et al. (2015) reported the success of HBCUs is directly correlated with their structure and approach, African American faculty, engaging and inclusive activities, and cultural curriculum. They further supported the idea that HBCU institutional policies and procedures provide an environment which is sensitive to its students. Similar studies related to HBCUs and the retention of African American men attribute the following components to their success: peer influences, student-faculty and staff interactions, and the university culture/environment (Brown & Sacco-Bene, 2018; Palmer et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2010).

Research Question 1

Research question 1 examined the academic support services offered at HBCUs, which contribute to African American men successfully graduating from college. Harrington et al. (2016) found that students entering HBCUs are generally less prepared academically in comparison to their peers at other institutions. Brown and Sacco-Bene (2018) found that academic unpreparedness is the result of not being challenged prior to entering college and a lack of study skills and time management needed to be successful at the college level. Consequently, based on the findings of this study, HBCUs appear to have personalized support services components to address these issues, including tutoring and providing remediation. Thus, one can

conclude that initiatives such as TRIO, summer bridge programs, and first- and second-year experience programming, were incorporated into the HBCU curriculum to further support students academically.

Slade et al. (2015) provided support of these findings in their research on HBCU retention initiatives. Summer bridge programs address academic and non-academic factors which may pose barriers to success and overall persistence (Slade et al., 2015). Slade et al. found that HBCUs students are provided an array of support services (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, counseling, and social bonding opportunities). Researchers such as Adams (2012) and Kezar (2000), discussed the HBCU support services in further detail whether focused on academic support (e.g., reading, writing, and mathematics), development of study skills (e.g., time management, learning styles, study tactics, and academic expectations), college life, and career and vocational counseling.

Kezar (2000) provided further support of the findings, as retention numbers and academic performance indicate that students in these types of support programs tend to have higher GPAs than students who were not exposed to such programs. Slade et al. (2015) found that in addition to performing better academically, students felt at an advantage being better prepared for their college curriculum and an increased familiarity with the university.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 explored the social, cocurricular experiences, and engagement strategies at HBCUs which contribute to African American men successfully graduating college. Based on the findings there were multiple opportunities for these young men to participate in a variety of social experiences via campus events, joining student organizations, and within the living community. The findings of this study suggest the importance of social experiences as a

means of support and encouragement for African American men to persist to graduation. These experiences were emphasized by each of the participants as key factors in their persistence and overall success. Tinto (1993) supported these findings as he highlighted the necessity and importance of social integration in order for African American students to be successful within a university. Tinto found in sharp contrast to their Caucasian peers, social integration and engagement for African Americans is facilitated primarily via formal associations similar to that present within minority student organizations.

Kuk and Manning (2010) stated that student organizations serve as a means of bridging the educational gap and therefore strengthening retention and persistence. Guiffrida and Douthit (2010) further supported the findings, as they found that students develop a sense of ethnic identity through participating in minority student organizations. Several participants discussed the importance of fraternal affiliations and its impact on their degree completion. Simmons (2013) supported this finding, as membership into Black Greek letter organizations provide platforms for formal social engagement, involvement, and networking, which aid African American men in navigating their educational journeys and persisting to graduation. Furthermore, membership in historically Black Greek letter organizations provide benefits to members such as academic and social support, self-improvement, connection to the community, and leadership development (Gunn, 2015; Harper & Harris, 2006; McClure, 2006). Research also supports how fraternal affiliations improve the quality of campus life in a positive and identifiable way (Green, 2014).

Research Question 3

Research question 3 investigated how HBCUs encourage faculty, peer, and family relationships to support African American men successfully graduating at HBCUs along with

how the HBCU campus climate and university culture impacted persistence. The findings of this study suggest the conclusion that support, engagement, and interactions are essential pieces of the HBCU experience and are essential to the success of African American men. Per the United States Department of Education (2015), having a sense of community and belonging is especially critical for African American men in relation to their persistence rates. Brown and Sacco-Bene (2018) studied how HBCUs support African American men. They suggested in order to establish a culture and atmosphere of family and community, institutions must have two related strategies: constant engagement and investment. They detailed engagement as maintaining close-knit relationships, open dialogues, checking on students, and open-door accessibility. Furthermore, understanding, caring, and listening are necessary to successfully support African American men. These themes were found to be helpful to African American men from the perspective of HBCU institutional agents.

Bir and Myrick (2015) cited that discrepancies between personal identity and academic success, lack of role models, and lack of interaction and hands-on engagement impact student success among African Americans. Goings (2016) found that proactive, positive, and meaningful interactions and relationships with students both within and outside of the classroom were vital to the academic success of African American men.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 explored what suggestions African American men who have graduated from HBCUs recommend to be implemented for further support. The findings of this study suggest the conclusion that despite the existing support services for African American men, they desire additional support from HBCU alumni and surrounding community, financial resources in the form of additional institutional funding, scholarships, and incentives, awareness

and understanding of how social justice issues impact their experience, and for HBCUs to be more proactive and intrusive in their approach. According to U.S. News and World Report (2017), among the 46 ranked HBCUs which provided institutional data for the 2013-2016 academic years, the percentage of alumni who donated was roughly 11%.

Smith-Barrow (2019) provided supported discussion of how federal budget cuts, tuition increases, and the student debt crisis have negatively impacted HBCUs. Approximately 15 HBCUs have reportedly closed their doors since 1997. Smith-Barrow (2019) stated three of every five HBCU students are classified first-generation and low-income. Of the HBCU student population, in excess of 70% have limited financial resources. In addition, private HBCUs saw a 42% reduction in federal funding, and endowments are now 70% smaller than their predominately White competitors (Smith-Barrow, 2019). Mitchell (2013) attributed decreased federal funding to the recent economic crisis. While funding varies in the amount per state, it does not provide substantial support. The issues associated with the lack of funding and reliance on tuition dollars are problematic with institutions attempting to recruit and retain students while also staying afloat financially.

In support of increased awareness and involvement with social issues, Gasman and Esters (2015) stated that activism and civic engagement have always been at the helm of the HBCU mission and serves as a reminder that these institutions produce significant leaders in society who will engage in change. While HBCUs are positioned to be pivotal in the social justice fight, many of today's social justice efforts are often viewed as attempts to cause social unrest through antagonizing and inciting violence. Gasman and Esters (2015) suggested HBCUs have an open platform by creating social media campaigns, hosting national conferences, establishing social justice centers, collaborating with PWIs, and creating new majors.

Research Questions 5

Research question 5 inquired why students choose to go to HBCUs. While there is extensive research on the experiences of African Americans in a variety of educational settings, less is known about the motivational characteristics of students who select HBCUs (Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Johnson, 2017). The findings of this study suggest the conclusion that students (i.e., African American men) select Historically Black institutions for a plethora of reasons: smaller sizes, family environment, family history, the Black experience, escape from home, and the preservation of HBCUs. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice Model explained how factors such as background, aspirations, achievement, intersect and impact the decision whether to attend college and whether to enroll in a specific college. Copridge (2016) argued that African Americans are being funneled through an education system in the United States which was designed to accommodate and support the Caucasian male. Resources were geared toward this specific demographic, therefore it is important to assess college choice through the lens of the critical race theory, as barriers to education still exist for many African American students (Copridge, 2016).

Additional support can be found from Johnson (2017), who interviewed 51 recent HBCU alumni from 20 institutions and found three primary motivations for selecting an HBCU: (a) the inclination to experience a predominantly Black environment, (b) distinct academic programs, and (c) financial reasons. Johnson's study also substantiates the claim that students choose HBCUs as a means of connecting with culture and traditions which are encouraged and celebrated on HBCU campuses.

Gasman et al. (2015) discussed the implications of the urban Black community on educational attainment and success. The majority of African American men in higher education

come from urban regions and to better comprehend their challenges with persisting in college, the context of their background must be acknowledged (Gasman et al., 2015). Per national trends, the urban Black community, particularly African American men, are more likely to be impacted by poverty, violence and incarceration, residential segregation, and unemployment due to workforce discrimination and lack of opportunities. Gasman et al. concluded the urban Black community does not foster an environment for educational success.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study can be utilized by the administrators, department chairs, program coordinators within secondary education systems and institutions of higher education, to identify and implement strategies which better support their student populations. The implications of this study may aid in facilitating discussions on what can be done to close the achievement gap, identify the gaps in their current curriculum, student life programming, and student support services which may not be representative or beneficial as a means of providing better support and resources for African American men. With regard to the issues surrounding African American male students and best practices, I also recommend the following based on the findings:

- Ensure program accessibility to students that emphasize personal tutoring and remediation.
- Diversify hiring and recruitment practices, to include additional numbers of minority faculty at all levels.
- Provide professional development and align training to faculty and staff that accommodates student academic and support needs.
- Create avenues for minority students to draw upon their strengths, personal experiences,

and background as a means of promoting a positive view of self (Gasman et al., 2015).

- Policy makers should partner with local businesses and non-profit organizations as a means of connecting young boys and men of color to support resources in alignment with the *My Brother's Keeper initiative* launched by President Obama (Gasman et al., 2015).
- Policy makers and administrators should continue to develop alumni and community outreach programs with graduates to better support African American male students.

Recommendations for Future Research

HBCUs continue to be an integral part of the educational system for African American students (Brown & Sacco-Bene, 2018; Gasman et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2010). Research suggests much can be gleaned from HBCUs and the means by which they cultivate, support, and uplift their student population (Gasman & Conrad, 2015; Gasman et al., 2015). If institutions of higher education are interested in embodying the idea of an educational environment for every student, they must commit to engaging in more supportive practices, culturally sensitive and inclusive dialogue, and increase sensitivity to external factors. This study examined the persistence and retention strategies implemented by HBCUs, which support the successful degree attainment for African American men. Rich data was obtained via the lived experiences of the study participants and framed through the lens of Tinto's retention theory and supported by theories such as college choice, motivation, and critical race. This study leaves much to be desired on how institutions can better retain African American men. Based on the findings of this study, suggestions for future research are as follows:

- Explore the types of outreach being conducted by HBCUs in their local communities, specifically their involvement and recruitment of African American men.
- Explore the impact of alumni and community support on the persistence and retention of

African American men.

- Conduct a longitudinal study of the effectiveness of HBCUs in the persistence and retention of African American men.
- Conduct a longitudinal study examining pre-college and post-college outcomes from the perspective of HBCU male alumni.
- Conduct a longitudinal study examining how fraternal affiliation impacts the persistence and retention of African American men.
- Examine potential strategies which could be implemented by HBCUs, from the perspective of institutional leadership, in how to better support African American men in persisting to graduation.
- Examine the effectiveness of retention programming and initiatives implemented by Predominately White Institutions vs. Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the retention of African American men.
- Examine the influence and impact of pre-college mentoring initiatives by the Black community, HBCU alumni, and members of Black Greek Letter organizations with middle school and high school students.
- More research is needed to determine how academic institutions, minority-serving and predominately White institutions alike, are contributing to the retention of African American men in higher education.

Reflections and Final Remarks

This study examined the persistence and retention strategies implemented by HBCUs which support the successful degree attainment from the perspective of nine African American men who recently graduated from an HBCU within the last 10 years. Over the course of the

research study, I was intrigued by the dedication and resiliency of HBCUs to their students despite their significant challenges to remain open and operational. I was also pleasantly surprised by the participant's accounts of their time at the alma maters. Admittedly, as a minority, I was always aware of HBCUs, but never considered them as premier academic institutions due to their stereotypes and stigmas. As a researcher, I was forced to confront my own biases and reflect on my own experiences as a minority at a PWI. I also realized my experience was lacking certain support components which would have enhanced my college experience. In addition, I reflected on my own experiences being employed at an HBCU and experiencing similar themes mentioned by the participants, but on the institutional agent end. I walk away from this experience with a profound respect and acknowledgment of HBCUs, and also a better understanding of the "hype" surrounding HBCUs in the Black community. This experience will be at the helm of my leadership aspirations, as I feel compelled to give back to a minority-serving institution, create more opportunities to engage and support minority populations, and take a more active stance on social justice issues within my current PWI environment.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

April 28, 2020



Fetera Henry
Department of Educational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Fetera,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Persistence and Retention Strategies Implemented at HBCUs that Support Successful Degree Attainment of African American Males",

(IRB# 20-058) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Interview Guided Protocol/Questions

Participant Name:

School(s) Attended:

Graduation Year:

Introduction:

My name is Fetera Henry and I am a doctoral candidate in Abilene Christian University's Organizational Leadership Program. Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. As a reminder, the purpose of this research is to identify and describe persistence and retention strategies implemented at HBCU's that support successful degree attainment of African American men. I am interested in your thoughts, judgments, opinions, lived experiences during your time enrolled within a HBCU, and your recommendations for how your population can be better supported

1. What academic support services offered at HBCUs contribute to African American mensuccessfully graduating college?
 - a) Describe the types of academic support that your HBCU provided African American undergraduate students.
 - b) Did you participate in any campus retention initiative such as a bridge program or male minority initiative? If so, tell us about those strategies that were most helpful
2. What social (cocurricular) experiences offered at HBCUs contribute to African American mensuccessfully graduating college?
 - a) Describe HBCU engagement strategies and your involvement with organizations or campus/ student life activities
 - b) Explain how you believe social experiences aided in persisting to graduation
3. In what way did HBCU's encourage faculty, peer and family relationships to support African American mensuccessfully graduating at HBCUs?
 - a) Describe HBCU strategies that emphasized engagement with faculty, peers and family that contributed to your persistence.
 - b) Did the HBCU provide any faculty or peer mentoring programs in which you participated? How effective were these programs?
 - c) Describe the HBCU campus climate or university culture that encouraged you to persist.
4. What suggestions do African American males who have graduated from HBCU's recommend be implemented for further support?
 - a) How do you envision the roles of HBCUs in the future?
 - b) Describe what your experience may have lacked
5. Why do students choose to go to HBCUs?

- a) Describe what factors influenced your undergraduate institutional choice
- b) Discuss how your undergraduate degree from an HBCU has played a role in your professional career.
- c) What are your thoughts about the implications of HBCUs closing and/or HBCUs currently at risk of closure? Did that influence your decision?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Introduction: Persistence and Retention Strategies Implemented at HBCUs that Support Successful Degree Attainment of African American Men

You may be able to take part in a research study. This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you as a potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions that you may have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION: The principal investigator is conducting research on African American men who persisted and graduated from Historically Black Colleges and Universities. You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted for a dissertation at Abilene Christian University. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of your participation in this research is to help the researcher to identify and describe persistence and retention strategies implemented at HBCU's that support successful degree attainment of African American men. The researcher is interested in your thoughts, judgments, opinions, lived experiences during your time enrolled within a HBCU. You were selected as a participant because you are an African American male who recently graduated from a HBCU within a five to ten-year range.

If selected for participation, you will be asked to attend one visit virtually via Zoom with the study staff over the course of a week. The virtual visit is expected to take approximately 30 minutes to 60 minutes of your time. During the course of the virtual visit, you will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

Complete an online interview via Zoom which will be recorded and later transcribed. You will be asked to answer open ended questions about your academic and social experiences being an African American male who attended an HBCU and have successfully completed a degree. You will also be asked to submit 1-3 personal artifacts (e.g., writing samples, letters, academic memoranda, e-mail correspondence, or other personal documents) which support these experiences.

RISKS & BENEFITS: There are risks to taking part in this research study. Below is a list of the foreseeable risks, including the seriousness of those risks and how likely they are to occur:

There are minimal risks associated with this study. The associated risk could include possible breach of confidentiality given the procedures included in the study (e.g., via email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions). However, we have taken steps to

minimize this risk. Although you might find some questions difficult or uncomfortable to answer, you may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

There are potential benefits to participating in this study. Such benefits may include positive implications for the relevancy of HBCUs, particularly to African American men. However, the researchers cannot guarantee that you will experience any personal benefits from participating in this study.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information you provide will be confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Otherwise, your confidentiality will be protected by:

Assigning all questionnaires, research notes, recordings, and artifacts unique codes and storing separately from any names or other direct identification of participants.

Research information will be kept in a private locked personal reservoir at all times. Only researcher will have access to the files and only those with an essential need to see names or other identifying information will have access to that particular file.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

Participants are encouraged to consider the limitations of confidentiality in the online setting. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study is voluntary and will not affect your relationship with the researcher, if any, nor Abilene Christian University. If you choose to participate in this study, you can withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

COLLECTION OF IDENTIFIABLE PRIVATE INFORMATION OR BIOSPECIMENS:

After identifying information is removed, your data will **not** be used for any other research purposes other than those described herein

CONTACTS: If you have questions about the research study, the lead researcher is Fetera Henry, MA. and may be contacted at (xxx) xxx-xxxx, xxxxxx@acu.edu. If you are unable to reach the lead researcher, or wish to speak to someone other than the lead researcher, you may contact Dr. Sandra Harris, xxxxxx@acu.edu. If you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured because of this study, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at (xxx) xxx-xxxx xxxxx.xxxx @acu.edu xxx Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box xxxxx Abilene, TX 79699

Additional Information

There may be unexpected risks associated with your participation in this study and some of those may be serious. We will notify you if any such risks are identified throughout the course of the study which may affect your willingness to participate if study is greater than minimal risk and has the potential for serious events.

Your participation may be ended early by the researchers for certain reasons. For example, we may end your participation if you no longer meet study requirements, the researchers believe it is no longer in your best interest to continue participating, you do not follow the instructions provided by the researchers, or the study is ended. You will be contacted by the researchers and given further instructions in the event that you are removed from the study.

Consent Signature Section

Please let the researchers know if you are participating in any other research studies at this time.

For electronic consent: Please sign electronically below if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. E-sign only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. If you wish to have a copy of this consent form, you may print it now. You do not waive any legal rights by consenting to this study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining
Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining
Consent

Date

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Fetera Henry and I am a doctoral candidate in Abilene Christian University's Organizational Leadership Program. Currently, I am inviting recent African American Male HBCU graduates to participate in my dissertation study titled: "Persistence and Retention Strategies Implemented at HBCUs that Support Successful Degree Attainment of African American Men." The purpose of this research is to identify and describe persistence and retention strategies implemented at HBCU's that support successful degree attainment of African American men. I am interested in your thoughts, judgments, opinions, lived experiences during your time enrolled within a HBCU, and your recommendations for how your population can be better supported. You were selected as a participant because you are an African American male who recently graduated from a HBCU within a five to 10-year range.

Eligibility for Study

To be eligible for participation in this study, you must self-identify as an *African American male*, a graduate of a Historically Black College or University, and must have graduated with undergraduate or graduate degree within the last five to 10 years.

*For this study, I am defining *African American Male* as:

An inclusive term for non-Caucasian men who use this particular language to self-define and describe their experiences. A few examples of how *African American males* might identify themselves include Black, bi-racial, African American, multi-ethnic, indigenous, and multi-racial.

Participation in the Study

Your part in the study will include completing a virtual interview to determine your eligibility. Interviews will be semi-structured, audio-recorded, virtual interview via Zoom. During the screening you will be allowed to ask the researcher any questions that you may have at the time. Our interview will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete. You may also be invited to participate in member checking and a 30-minute follow-up interview over the course of the study to clarify or expand upon your thoughts. Participation is voluntary, and you have the option to stop answering questions and/or stop participating at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email as soon as possible. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions.

Sincerely,
Fetera D. Henry
Doctoral Candidate
Abilene Christian University