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Examining the factors that contributed to the retention and graduation of African American males at the University of Louisville.

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EXAMINING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE RETENTION AND
GRADUATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
LOUISVILLE

By

Kia Marie Pruitt

B.A., Shawnee State University, 1993

M.A., Marshall University, 1998

A Dissertation

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 16, 2013

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There were areas that I could research more or write more clearly and detailed. Oh what a difference a change of attitude makes! From that point on, writing became a joy and not a chore. I am so honored that I am able to say that they mentored me and shaped me into the researcher that I have become. I could only dream of being as sharp and as distinguished as Dr. Amy Hirschy and Dr. Sam Stringfield. When I presented my findings during my dissertation defense, I was extremely confident, because they had prepared me well. I had no fear; only joy and excitement. My mission was two-part: to passionately and confidently defend my study findings and to represent my two dissertation chairpersons well. I must have done well; here I am! Thank you, Dr. Hirschy! Thank you, Dr. Stringfield!

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ABSTRACT

EAMINING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE RETENTION AND GRADUATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Kia M. Pruitt

July 16, 2013

African American males have the highest college attrition rates of all races and genders (Harper, 2006a). Federal reports indicate that 54.4% of White males finish their college degrees, compared with 33.1% of African American males (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The 21.3 percentage point disparity leads many to believe that African American male students may need special attention in order to close the gap.

Understanding how Black male graduates succeeded and avoided obstacles which could have potentially contributed to their attrition will help colleges take a proactive stance and implement strategies to support and safeguard other Black male students facing similar challenges (Warde, 2008). Toward this end, the focus of this study was to investigate the factors that contributed to the success of 15 African American men in obtaining baccalaureate degrees from one mid-sized, urban public university, the University of Louisville.

Employing a qualitative research design framed by a phenomenological orientation, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with African American male alumni who graduated from the University of Louisville between 2007 and 2012. The data were analyzed using Morrissette's (1999) seven stage step-wise approach,

which is specifically designed for studies with a phenomenological orientation. The results of the analyzed data revealed five factors as being significant contributors to participants' successful retention and completion of their baccalaureate degree: 1. having access to monetary resources to attend and persist in college; 2. having a mentor; 3. participating in recognized student organizations; 4. having family support; 5. taking one or more courses in Pan African Studies. Recommendations for institutions of higher education and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 4.5 million African American men ages 15 to 29 represent 14% of the United States male population and 12% of all African Americans in the United States. African American men attend and graduate from colleges and universities at very low rates (Boyd, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006a; Harper, 2006a; Kaba, 2008; Warde, 2008). High rates of death, incarceration, unemployment, and relatively low levels of graduation rates of African American men raise concerns for African American families and the nation's economy (Warde, 2008).

Congressperson Eleanor Holmes Norton (Lester, 2003) noted that many African American men are turning to the underground economy where there is a proliferation of drugs and guns, as a means of survival (Ascher, 1992; Boyd, 2007; Snipe, 2007). A close look at the reasons for this suggests that the decrease of African American males on college campuses, lacking a quality secondary education, unable to find gainful employment, and lacking vocational skills have resorted to illicit means to support themselves and their families. Sadly, this has led to high incarceration rates, unemployment, and high death rates of African American males (Ascher, 1992; Boyd, 2007). Snipe (2007) reported that there were more African American males in prison (840,000) than in college (635,000) in this country in 2006. These high numbers of incarcerated men contribute to the challenge of recruiting African American men to

college. Warde (2007) cited several additional factors which contribute to the challenge of recruiting African American men in predominantly White institutions:

- 1) disproportionately high incidents of homicide of African American men;
- 2) the presence of a Black male street culture, which glorifies violence and disrespect, as well as discourages the pursuit of higher education;
- 3) poverty;
- 4) gross academic unpreparedness in heavily segregated, ill-funded high schools;
- 5) high tuition costs which limits access to education for many poor and moderately income families;
- 6) decreased local, state, and federal financial aid; and
- 7) deeply-rooted racism embedded in the culture and curriculum of institutions of higher education (p. 60).

Despite these factors, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data indicate a slight increase in the number of African American males attending college in recent years. Between 2000 and 2010, the enrollment rate of African American males increased three percentage points, from 7.3% to 10.3% suggesting some progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Among the Black males who do make it into college, however, two-thirds drop out, leaving only one-third to persist to graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

African American males have the highest college attrition rates of all races and genders (Harper, 2006a). Federal reports indicate that 54.4% of White males finish their college degrees, compared with 33.1% of African American males (U.S. Department of

Education, 2012). The 21.3 percentage point disparity leads many to believe that African American male students may need special attention in order to close the gap.

Within the African American student population, African American women outpace African American men in college completion. In 2010, the graduation rate for African American women was 44.8%, compared to 33.1% of African American men. This should concern all Americans, as high attrition rates detract from the economic health and well-being of the entire nation (Boyd, 2007; Seidman, 2005).

Nora, Barlow and Crisp (2005) examined national data and found that Black students, as compared to students in other demographic groups, experience the greatest retention failure in the transition from year two of college to year three. The difference was pronounced enough that the researchers called for further examination of this issue. They speculated that their finding “may suggest that common factors may be interacting with institutional experiences at different levels, influencing persistence rates differently among the groups” (p. 146).

At the University of Louisville, the six-year graduation rate of all first-time, full-time bachelor-degree-seeking students who entered the fall of 2005 was 51%. The graduation rate of White students was 52%, compared to 45% of African American students, and only 40% for African American men. These data highlight the importance of the questions at the center of this study.

Prior research focused on the graduation rates of African American male college students has tended to approach the issue from a deficit perspective, emphasizing drop-out rates and noting the causes of Black male attrition (Boyd, 2007; Cameron & Heckman, 2001; Warde, 2008). However, an emerging trend is to highlight the strengths

witnessed in the significant number of students who persist and graduate (Cuyjet, 2006a, Harper, 2005; Snipe, 2007; Warde, 2008). Understanding how Black male graduates succeeded and avoided obstacles which could have potentially contributed to their attrition will help colleges take a proactive stance and implement strategies to support and safeguard other Black male students facing similar challenges (Warde, 2008).

Toward this end, the focus of this study is to determine the factors which contributed to the success of African American men in obtaining baccalaureate degrees from one urban university.

In this study I will build upon prior research that highlighted student involvement in academic and social activities influences on African American males' successful retention and graduation. I will then focus on questions which specifically address the success of African American males in one mid-sized urban public university, the University of Louisville. The remainder of this dissertation will flow as follows. Chapter 2 highlights the theoretical framework for this study and presents a review of the literature surrounding college student retention for the college student population, including African Americans.

A description of programs which have been noted for contributing to Black male achievement closes out the chapter. In Chapter 3, the methodology (qualitative, phenomenological research design) for conducting the study is explained. This includes detailed explanations of the subject-sample, procedures, timelines, objectives, tools and statistical analysis, as well as analysis of the data collected. Chapter 4 presents analysis of the data collected and study limitations. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the

study, makes recommendations for student affairs administrators and implications for future research. Study limitations are also presented.

Definitions

The terminology used in this study, which is unique to the topic of college student retention are defined as follows (Hagedorn, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007):

Attrition: students' failure to re-enroll at an institution in consecutive semesters.

Black misandry: exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors (Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2007, p. 559).

Dropout: a student whose initial educational goal was to complete at least a bachelor's degree but who did not complete it.

Matriculation: a student's enrollment to and attendance in a college or university as a candidate for a degree.

Persistence: the desire and action of a student to stay with the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion.

Retention: the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation.

Withdrawal: the departure of a student from a college or university campus prior to graduation.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The articles reviewed in this chapter were identified through a search of the following databases: *Academic Search Premier; Business Source Premier; Communication & Mass Media Complete; Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC); MasterFILE Premier; MasterFILE Select; Professional Development Collection; PsycARTICLES; Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection; and TOPICsearch*. The following key words and phrases were used singly or in combination to search for and locate recent, relevant studies: *academic, achievement, Black, Astin, attrition, college, engagement, ethnicity, family, fraternity, gender, graduate, higher education, male, mentor, persistence, race, religion, retention, self-determination, spirituality, social support, student, success, Tinto, and theory of involvement*. This search process resulted in the identification of numerous articles and books. These sources were then narrowed to include only the most recent, relevant information regarding the topic. Literature relating to the topic of retention of African American males published within the last ten years was given priority over those published earlier. Literature which was published earlier was only included if the information was vital to the topic and the information could not be found in more recent publications. Older sources which related to the topic of retention, but did not focus specifically on African American males were excluded. The literature was then reviewed and analyzed. This

included grouping the sources into categories and noting major trends and patterns.

Finally, the literature was synthesized, prior to writing this review.

An overview of several of the key models of college retention theory follows, starting with Vincent Tinto's model of institutional departure and student persistence (Tinto, 1975, 2000, 2005a, 2005b). This is followed by a discussion of Astin's theory of involvement (Astin, 1971, 1984; Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000). Some of the salient features of the college retention models are separately considered for their relevance to this study. The review then proceeds to a consideration of the literature on Black male college students and efforts to determine how best to serve them in their pursuit of four-year college degrees.

The importance of social organizations and relationships are considered, including the recent literature on Black male participation in fraternities, student organizations, and athletics. How scholarships enable Black males in their pursuit of degrees and the role financial aid may play in increasing Black male institutional commitment are also delineated. Additionally, studies on the positive effects of mentoring are discussed as well as the significance of family and peer relationships to the Black male college student's experience. The impact that spirituality and religion have on Black male college students on coping strategies and persistence is also noted. Finally, the review concludes with a brief discussion of some programs designed to encourage Black male college student success.

Conceptual Framework

The major theories which frame this study derive from Tinto's (1975, 2000, 2005a, 2005b) and Astin's (1971, 1984; Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000) theoretical postulations that the level of students' involvement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities on campus influences student retention.

While there is a significant amount of research on the problems of college attrition, there appears to be a gap in the literature with regards to the factors which contribute to the successful completion of college for Black men (Cuyjet, 2006a; Harper, 2005; Snipe, 2007). Retention literature indicates that student's perception of belonging and their involvement in extra-curricular activities contribute to their motivation to persist (Seidman, 2005). Bean (2005) further asserted that students' interaction with their institutional environment affects their intent to persist. Based on Tinto's (1975, 2005b) and Astin's (1984) theory that student involvement contributes to college retention, this study seeks to ascertain the factors which contribute to the retention of Black men in college.

Detailed descriptions of the retention theories which frame this study follow, because it is important to gain a thorough understanding of the theoretical contributions to the field, prior to assessing the factors which support the successful retention and graduation of Black men.

College Retention Theory

Tinto and the Model of Institutional Departure

Tinto's (1975, 2000, 2005b) theory on student departure is the most studied, analyzed, and cited in the area of student departure and retention (Seidman, 2005). It is

almost impossible to read the literature on student retention without encountering the work of Vincent Tinto. His name and his theories are frequently invoked by other researchers working on student retention issues, and he has made a singular contribution to the field. Berger and Lyon (2005) called Tinto's "interactionist theory of student departure . . . one of the best known, and most often cited, theories" on the subject (p. 19).

Expanding upon Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, to explain student departure, Tinto posited that students' decision to leave college is effected by their perception of their experiences in college (Seidman, 2005). Tinto (1975) postulated that academic and social integration influence a student's commitment to the institution and to the goal of college graduation. Tinto (1975) further indicated, "The greater the students' level of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the focal college or university" (p. 110).

Tinto combined psychological and social-organizational principles in his theory that student retention in college stems from the interplay of a variety of forces including the student's pre-enrollment background and beliefs, the student's attitude and feelings about the institution, and the student's commitment to graduating from the degree program. These forces are shaped by a variety of other significant factors, such as the degree to which the student experiences social and academic integration into the college life.

Given the interaction among these forces and the potential for student experience to change, Tinto framed student departure as a longitudinal process. It is arrived at over time, and the ultimate decision to leave reflects the culmination of these forces working on each other, and on the student (Braxton & Lee, 2005). Seidman (2005) summed up

Tinto's retention model saying, it "posits that individual pre-entry college attributes (family background, skill and ability, prior schooling) form individual's goals and commitments; the individual's goals and commitments then interact over time with institutional experiences (the formal and informal academic and social systems of an institution" (p. 296).

Tinto's (2005) interactionalist model of student departure postulates that academic integration is comprised of both structural and normative features. The structural refers to the expectations associated with the institution itself -- the rules and standards of the college or university. The normative features of integration refer to the student's recognition and acceptance of the normative standards of the institution. Social integration, as opposed to academic integration, captures the degree to which the student feels comfortable working within the social subcultures of academic and student life. The interactionalist model proposes that the more integrated a student feels in the academic life of the institution, the likelier the student will be to commit to graduation from the institution. Further, the greater the degree of social integration, the likelier is the potential for fostering in the student feelings of commitment toward the institution and therefore toward their own graduation. Persistence in college is thus connected with higher levels of academic and social integration, and Tinto posited that the two forms of integration support and enhance one another.

Among the factors impacting student academic and social integration and their institutional commitment, Tinto identified individual characteristics such as family influences, personal interests, and pre-college academic experiences (Braxton & Lee, 2005). Students' initial commitment to the institution and to the idea of graduation is also

identified by Tinto as having a significant impact on student retention. To this end, Tinto proposed the inverse of this relationship, the institution's commitment to the student, is a critical "condition for student success," (Tinto, 2005a, p. 321). For Tinto, institutional commitment to the student entails finding meaningful ways to offer incentives for student engagement and to provide supports (formal and informal) for struggling students and create involvement. Critical to this is having expectations of students and outlining the institutions values and objectives so that students have a clear sense of what is being asked of them when they commit to a degree program. In turn, Tinto argued, expectations "validate" students' participation at the institution, creating a form of buy-in to the work of the institution (p. 322). Feedback is another critical element of this relationship, Tinto stated. Schools must maintain open communications with students and let them know when they're slipping off course or failing to meet expectations. When feedback is provided immediately in the classroom, with learning portfolios for example, faculty members have the opportunity not only to identify where students are struggling, but they also have the chance to improve curriculum delivery through the student feedback to them.

Tinto (2005a) cited Astin's (1984) theory of involvement when he observed that the features of his interactionalist model, academic and social integration, reference the fact that student involvement is a critical condition for student success. Research findings demonstrate that students who are genuinely involved in the academic and social life of their institution are likely to persist in their education, despite obstacles, and graduate from their degree program (Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000; Tinto, 2005b; Veenstra, 2009). Tinto prioritized classroom involvement as the first link in the chain, noting that

engagement in learning is a hook that can catch new students quickly, and will allow for communities between students and with faculty to be created, leading to greater opportunities for social integration (DeMaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Tinto, 2000).

Astin's Theory of Involvement

Alexander Astin has been engaged in the study of college student retention since the late 1960s. He and his colleagues at UCLA analyzed national data drawn from colleges and universities and tracked student participation and academic outcomes (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Astin (1984) determined that the characteristic that tracked most consistently and influentially with retention was student involvement. The students likeliest to graduate were those who demonstrated the highest levels of social and/or academic involvement in their institutional life.

Student involvement has been described by Astin (1984) as a measurable factor that captures the “amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 297). Astin’s (1971, 1984) theory of involvement turns on several points. The first is that involvement can be considered from a general perspective (e.g. interest in campus life) to specific involvement (completion of a homework assignment). Astin further posited that involvement occurs on a continuum which is particular to each student. He observed that involvement could be both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Astin argued that student achievement was directly impacted by the degree and quality of student engagement in any given effort or activity. Lastly, Astin contended that institutional programs created to improve student outcomes could only be as successful as the level of commitment made to increasing student involvement in the

effort. In other words, improvement efforts that did not focus on increasing student involvement were unlikely to yield meaningful improvements in targeted achievement goals.

A study conducted by Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda and Yee (2000) explored the potential for enhancing student learning through increased involvement by exploring the effects of a service learning program on the engagement and learning of participating students. Specifically, the researchers were interested in whether students experienced a learning difference when they engaged in a course-directed service activity versus engagement in a volunteer or community-service capacity. They conducted a quantitative analysis of data provided by over 22,000 college students responding to surveys conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). They concluded that service-learning programs provided a powerful context for which students could consider their learning experiences through their engagement in service activities. While Astin et al. found that involvement in volunteer and community service also had salutary effects on student performance, the directed engagement provided through service-learning connected students with faculty in a way that supported their reflection, comprehension of issues, understanding of how learning was impacted by active engagement while feeling empowered by having a “shared mission” with their instructors and peers. The implication of the Astin, et al. study was that active involvement supported by the institution could have a strongly beneficial impact on student achievement (see also Astin & Sax, 1998; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

Astin is also credited with insisting on the clarification of the term *drop-out*, observing that it is subject to inaccuracy in outcome reporting since so many individuals

who dropped out before graduating in a four- or six-year period may return years later to complete a degree program, thereby disqualifying them as drop-outs. Further, a number of students leave the institution they first enrolled in, and end up completing their degree at another institution. These cases can also skew reported results. Hagedorn (2005) referenced a statistic reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), showing that 23.2% of the 1995-1996 class of first-time freshmen, dropped out of their first college program, to transfer to another college program within a six-year period. As Hagedorn observed, this movement produced a relatively low retention rate for the original college of 55.3% over that time. However, when the completion rates of those students who did graduate from the program they transferred to were factored in, the original college's retention rate increased to 62.7%.

In accord with Tinto's (1993) and Astin's (1984) denotations that involvement influences retention, Bean (2005) posited that student involvement leads to satisfaction which in turn, influences students' decision to remain in college. Cuyjet (2006b) concurred that this also holds true for Black college students. In studies of Black males attending predominantly White institutions, Harper (2004; 2006a; 2009b) found that Black male students engaged in formal social and academic activities that extended beyond the classroom were more likely to develop a positive racial identity, and thus persist to graduation. Based on his findings, Harper (2009b, p. 700) contended that it is critical that Black male college students become "actively engaged in purposeful activities both inside and outside the classroom." If Black male students are not engaged, they feel disconnected, and this leads to their decision to drop-out. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine why Black men leave college. Bonner and Bailey

(2006) offered that feelings of isolation, along with a perception of the college experiences being antagonistic, often contribute to Black men leaving college. In concert, Rogers and Summers (2008) observed that a serious issue for Black men in college is their experiences of isolation and that the negative impacts resulting from isolation contribute to their departure. This supports the notion that Black male students' involvement in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities increases their likelihood of persisting to graduation. Engagement in campus activities are known to engender a sense of belonging and increase institutional commitment, thereby promoting academic success and retention (Bean, 2005; Harper, 2008; Seidman, 2005).

Research on Student Retention

Seidman (2005) stated that a “strong, vibrant varied and expanding national economy depends in part on the educational attainment of its citizens” (p. xi). There is little debate that ensuring that America educates and graduates a knowledgeable and skilled population is critical to the country’s future. Where a high school diploma was once the benchmark for preparedness to enter the workforce, the technological demands of the market today require a better-educated pool of workers (Wise, 2004). Cabrera, Burkum and LaNasa (2005) stated that a college degree is “the gatekeeper to myriad social and individual benefits, ranging from income, employment stability, and occupational prestige to engagement in civic and political activities,” (p. 155).

Federal and state governments have acknowledged that education is important to the vitality and success of the country. Therefore, federal and state governments have practically mandated the accessibility of higher education for all of their citizens

(Seidman, 2005). Although access to college is becoming universally available to all, many students who start their higher education program leave before they obtain their college degrees (Astin & Osegura, 2005; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2006a; Snipe, 2007).

Despite federal and state government mandates, the statistics suggest that the United States is not excelling on the educational front. Astin and Osegura (2005) observed a trend toward six-year degree completion. They reviewed data for over 50,000 undergraduates enrolled in four-year college and university programs. They found that only 36% of the students completed their bachelor's degree work within the standard four-year period. However, the degree completion rates increased dramatically (by 22%) when the consideration of graduation rates was extended by two more years, so that students had six years to complete their required degree work. Astin and Osegura also reported that the highest six-year completion rate (80% of students) was tracked for private universities, while the lowest six-year completion rate was seen for public colleges (47%).

The evidence that greater numbers of college students eventually do achieve their bachelor degrees than a snapshot look at four-year enrollment-to-graduation rates would indicate is encouraging. One concern, however, is that the additional year or two that 22% of the students require in order to realize their degrees represents a tremendous resource drain on the higher education system and the individual/family. Given that the system is predicated on a four-year program completion plan, funds and facilities are allocated, faculty are retained, and new students are enrolled on the assumption that turnover will occur within that period of time. Astin and Osegura (2005) noted that many schools are now experiencing lower rates of retention while simultaneously seeing

an increase in time-to-degree rates among their student populations and that these trends are stressing schools that are already overcrowded and underfunded.

It is important for both the health of America's tertiary education system and the nation's economy, that efforts be directed at strengthening student retention and providing the supports necessary to help students realize their bachelor degree work within the targeted four-year period. Research regarding college student retention as it relates to assisting students in their endeavor to successfully graduate from college, is discussed more fully next in this review. This will be followed by a comprehensive review on the issue of Black male college student retention, because it is necessary to note that the playing field of higher education has not been a level one in terms of support and retention for certain demographics of students. In order to improve retention and time-to-degree rates for the nation's Black male undergraduate population, it is necessary to examine the ways in which these men may be hindered in their pursuit of their academic path and to identify features of support that can improve their chances of realizing academic success in a timely fashion.

Factors That Impact Student Persistence

Before considering the specific research on college experience and retention issues for Black male college students, it is beneficial to briefly consider and review some of the recent, relevant literature on college retention overall. While aspects of the Black male experience are undoubtedly specific to this group, the evolving theories concerning college student retention apply across populations and the emerging practices to support student engagement and achievement are critical to this consideration.

Moreover, Bean (2005) noted that factors which impede student persistence and completion are consistent in their potential for impacting all students, regardless of demographic characteristics. It is useful then, to discuss some of these factors (i.e., financial issues, social supports and academic supports) in order to establish a common language that relates to the retention theories and models outlined above.

Student Persistence

Student persistence is commonly cited in the college retention literature as a fundamental feature of student success. Tinto (2005b) stated that helping students develop persistence is a necessary aspect of the research devoted to helping institutions create policies and systems of support. Nora, Barlow and Crisp (2005) observed that much of the research on college student persistence has been focused on the freshman year, understandably so as this is the period of highest rate of student attrition. However, they cited statistics demonstrating that a significant number of students who persist after the first year of college, nonetheless fail to persist later down the road, leaving school in their second and third years and, even on occasion, into their fourth year. Nora, et al. identified factors noted by Tinto (2000, 2005a, 2005b), Astin (Astin & Oseguera, 2005) and Bean (2005, p. 216), as well as other researchers, as having a clear impact on student persistence. Among those the factors they noted were students' pre-college academic behaviors and experiences, socioeconomic status, academic ability, commitment, academic and social experiences (level of integration) and what they termed "environmental push factors" or factors which pull students away from college and *push* them from deciding to return. By example, they noted that students who commuted to a

college campus, rather than lived on campus, had lower persistence rates. Bean (2005) and Dubrock (1999) further noted that students who lived on or near campus or had on-campus jobs which permitted them *to be in close proximity* to the academic environment were more likely to persist beyond the first year.

Financial Considerations

The cost of a four-year college education, even in well-supported public universities and colleges, is extremely high. NCES statistics report that the annual cost of college (tuition and fees plus room and board) for the 2010-2011 academic year ranged from \$15,605 for a public four-year college to \$31,975 for a private, not-for-profit four year institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Between 2000–2001 and 2010–11, prices for undergraduate tuition, room, and board at public institutions rose 42 percent, and prices at private institutions rose 31 percent, after adjustment for inflation. However, the recognition that the conference of a college degree is associated with an array of advantages that accrue to both the individual student and to society at large means that the commitment of resources that enable students to learn and graduate is a priority for the government and for many educational institutions. Financial assistance is a necessary aspect of the college education equation and students who fail to complete their education through graduation invariably present a drain on the school's financial resources, either directly, in terms of aid money contributed to a degree that is not realized, and recruitment costs, or indirectly through expenses associated with faculty and structural commitments (see also, Kim & Otts, 2010).

On the flip side of this issue is the fact that high tuition rates can make it particularly difficult for students to persist in school, especially if they have to take on employment to support themselves while they are pursuing their education. In 2010, NCES statistics demonstrated that 40% of full-time and 75% of part-time college students, ages 16 to 24 were employed. Among full-time college students, 17% worked 20 – 40 hours per week. The percentage of these students who worked 35 or more hours per week increased 6% between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This figure, coupled with the fact that low-income students are at greater retention risk than other socio-economic groups, suggest that financial considerations play some part in student persistence (Astin & Osegura, 2005).

However, some researchers contend the impact of finances on student retention is far from conclusive. Cameron and Heckman's (2001) application of an "econometric model" (p. 465) to educational attainment data led them to conclude that while family income is relevant, "it has its greatest influence on forming the ability and college readiness of children and not in financing college education" (p. 492). They also disputed the notion that education costs impact minority racial group retention in school. They argued that when factors related to family background are controlled for, "minorities are more likely than whites to graduate from high school and attend college" (p. 492). It is worth noting these findings but also important to keep in mind that many of the researchers working in the field of college retention today consider the potential for financial concerns to meaningfully impact students' ability to persist toward degree attainment (Supiano, 2011).

Social Supports

As one prong of Tinto's integration system (along with academic supports), social supports for students can cover a range of formal and informal structures and interactions. Factors related to family, such as economic background, parental expectations and encouragement, and pre-collegiate relationships with peers and teachers and community appear to inform students' attitudes and beliefs about college and their ability to succeed. Social interactions with college student peers, either informally in class or outside class at social events or through formal social interactions such as group membership, fraternities and sororities, and clubs, strongly influence students' engagement with and participation in the college environment. The more involved the students are, the better integrated the social supports in their college experience, the likelier their ability to persist in their education and complete to degree, as the research suggests (Bean, 2005; Berger & Lyon, 2005; Braxton & Lee, 2005; Tinto, 2005a).

Academic Supports

Bean (2005) identified academics as the immediate system through which the institution reaches the student. Institutions facilitate academic integration when they provide students with appropriately challenging courses that are in keeping with the institution's commitment to its own goals and educational values. Ensuring that faculty members are properly trained and receive the necessary professional development to remain attuned to shifting student concerns is a facet of supporting academic integration.

On an immediate case-by-case basis, institutions can provide struggling students with specific academic support in the form of remedial education or assistance and with

mentoring or tutoring programs (Tinto, 2005a). These serve as formal mechanisms to help catch the student who is not well-integrated academically and to bind them more meaningfully to the institution through committing resources and attention to their academic improvement). Darlaston-Jones, Cohen, Drew, Haunold, Pike, and Young (2001) referenced research that almost 15% of students who leave school report feeling that the institution's staff was "uncaring and indifferent to the needs of students," (p. 2). Colleges and universities that devise systems for providing necessary academic supports for their students may substantially improve student academic integration and thus increase student persistence.

Retention and Black Students

The literature on college student retention is the necessary context for the specific consideration of the issues centering on the retention of Black males in college, and particularly in four-year institutions. Before focusing on the retention issue as it pertains specifically to Black males, a snap-shot of how the African American student population is fairing is necessary. The greatest gender distribution variance according to race is seen between Black males and females, with twice as many Black women enrolled in college as their male counterparts (Hicks & Miller, 2006; Hutchinson, Raymond & Black, 2008; Kaba, 2005, 2008; Kewal, Gilbertson & Fox, 2007).

Within the African American student population, African American men may have experiences distinct from African American women, because African American women outpace African American men in college completion. Whereas nearly one half of Black women matriculating into college graduate and earn college degrees, only one

third of their male counterparts do the same (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In a comprehensive report on the outcome rates for Black males enrolled at public universities, Harper (2006a) found that over two-thirds of Black males who enroll in a four-year college program do not complete to graduation within even the expanded consideration of the six-year bracket. Current NCES data support Harper's 2006 findings (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This figure represents the lowest completion rate across race, ethnicity, and gender among all student groups.

Retention and Black Male Students

National data indicate that Black males are the most vulnerable to college attrition among all student populations. The national college graduation rate for Black men in 2010 was 33.1 percent compared with 44.8 percent for Black women. The national graduation rate for Hispanic men was 41.1 percent and of Native Americans and Alaskans 33.8 percent. White males graduated nationally at a rate of 54.4 percent, while Asian and Pacific Islanders had the highest national graduation rate at 60.6 percent. The overall graduation rate was 57.3 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Bonner and Bailey (2006) stated that many Black males encounter an educational system that is "at best chilly and at worst hostile" (p. 24) to them. These researchers contended that many young Black males see themselves as targeted by educators and policy makers through the prism of presenting or encountering obstacles to learning, rather than regarded as having the potential for great success (see also Campbell & Fleming, 2000; Pinel, Warner & Chua, 2005). This may in part explain why White males enroll in college at a rate 7.2% higher than their Black male counterparts (U.S.

Department of Education, 2012). The difficulties are implicit at the outset with statistics showing that Black males constituted only 10.3% of the college enrollments in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This figure is troubling, however, it is somewhat better than the 7.3% figure recorded ten years prior, suggesting that minimal progress has been realized for this specific cohort of college students.

Black males produce among the highest attrition rates in proportional terms of all race and gender groups (Harper, 2006a). The disparity is such that Schmidt (2008) stated that “overall college performance of Black men is so poor that some college officials and advocates for Black students are reluctant to even talk about the problem, for fear that doing so will further stigmatize Black men and make things even worse” (p. 1). This is a disturbing statement, as failure to discuss the issue may mean that the problem will continue going unaddressed.

Bean (2005) theorized that the causes of attrition may not be due to race or ethnicity, although they may sometimes appear to. Rather, the influences on Black men’s intent to stay in college are diverse, but college retention theory provides some guidance for considering these influences. This enables the conversation to move away from a race-based explanation to a consideration of factors which more consistently may impact, currently, one group of students over another. An accurate analysis of the problem must make an effort to distinguish such trends from the root of the problems, or causes, of student attrition. One study found that the common factor found for colleges that had increased the achievement of their minority students was the schools’ “attention to the issue and their willingness to measure the effectiveness of various interventions” (Schmidt, 2008, p. 3).

Cuyjet (2006b) challenged higher education institutions to become broader-minded in their consideration of the experience of Black college males. He contended that certain fundamental cultural expectations differentiate Black males from other collegiate populations and that centuries of oppression and inequality have produced conceptions of African American masculinity that differ from the dominant culture White construct of masculinity. By example, Cuyjet offered that clothing styles, musical tastes, emphasis on certain possessions like cars, and slang or speech patterns that are commonly associated with Black male culture are often viewed as “aberrant when in fact they are structured demonstrations of masculine achievement recognized among African American men” (p. 239) who have traditionally had restricted access to traditional forms of masculine achievement (in terms of professional prestige and job promotion). These differences can produce a lack of understanding between institutional culture and its representatives and Black males. This can lead to Black males feeling judged or alienated from those who should most directly be supplying support and encouragement within the college environment. These feelings, in turn, can lead to lower institutional commitment, lower social and academic integration, and eventually, increase attitudes and beliefs associated with intent to leave.

Harper (2004) examined this question of the Black masculinity construct from the perspective of 32 high-achieving African American men he surveyed. He reported that these men reported no conflict in their masculine identities and that they felt well-supported by their Black male peers. This held true even for the single openly gay man interviewed by Harper. Consistent with Tinto’s theory of integration and Astin’s theory of involvement, the successful Black male college students in Harper’s study were

actively engaged in formal social and academic activities (such as clubs and campus organizations) that extended beyond their classroom engagement. This was a salient difference between them and their less successful Black male peers who reported spending free-time relaxing or engaging in romantic or recreational pursuits.

Interestingly, Harper's high-achieving subjects also reported largely selfless motives for pursuing success. They reported their commitment to succeeding inspires other African Americans to realize their goals.

Harper (2009b) contended that it is critical that Black male college students become actively engaged in "educationally purposeful activities, both inside and outside the classroom" (p. 700). This is consistent with Tinto's and Astin's arguments favoring service-learning (or course-based) activities that foster social and academic integration through directed action. The role of the institution in devising and supporting such programming is clear and provides colleges a proactive measure toward finding solutions that encourage and enable Black males to develop persistence within the college environment. One element of this institutional commitment to Black male students is the recognition that faculty interactions and classroom experiences at predominantly White institutions may need to be rethought and improved in order to more effectively reach and serve Black male scholars (Bailey, 2006; Chavous, 2002; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; DeMaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Quaye & Harper, 2007).

Black Male Attrition Affects Economics

Educational attainment affects economics. A college degree provides access to economic stability (Cabrera, Burkum, & LaNasa, 2005). With two-thirds of Black men

dropping out from college nationally, however, the implications are that this will put an economic strain on the Black community specifically, and on society as a whole.

There is substantial evidence that an earnings differential exists between Whites and Blacks, with Blacks earning demonstratively less than their White counterparts in the labor market (DeAnda & Hernandez, 2007; Ellis, 2004; Harper, 2009a). Harper (2006a) reported that White males report 10 times the rate of degree awards as do their Black male peers. These disparities contribute to a host of inequities. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics released a report in 2006 showing that Black males with four-year college degrees had a median annual income of \$41,889, compared to White men (\$55,129) with the same credentials (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In the same year, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics published that Whites were 11 times more likely to hold managerial and leadership positions than Blacks or Latinos (Umphress, Simmons, Boswell & Triana, 2008). As late as 2011, the statistics had not changed, with Black men, still, on average, earning 75% of their White male counterparts (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

African American Males and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

The issue of Black males underachieving in college is prevalent in both Predominately White Institutions (PWI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). A brief discussion on Black male performance in HBCUs is discussed next, although the focus of this study is on Black males' performances in a PWI.

The presence of HBCUs within the American educational system is significant in part because these schools were created to help Black students achieve by reducing or eliminating the potential for discrimination in classes and campus organizations. To some

extent, these schools have fulfilled this objective and continue to provide much-needed service (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). However, even within HBCUs, Black men are underachieving. At HBCUs as at PWIs, Black males are disproportionately underachieving, with African American males HBCU average six-year graduation rates below 30% (Mortenson, 2005; Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2010). This significant underperformance of Black males is an indication that they are struggling to adapt to college.

Palmer, Davis and Maramba (2010) offered three reasons to account for why Black men are struggling to succeed in HBCUs. First, Black men have been discriminated against from the time they were young in the American education system. Therefore, by the time they attend college, many may already be discouraged. Next, HBCUs are similar in structure and design to PWIs. Finally, Black males have been historically put into lower learning classes in the American education system, in primary and secondary schools. By the time these males matriculate into college, they are at a significant educational disadvantage. Considering all these factors, by the time Black males arrive on the college campus, whether enrolled in HBCUs or PWIs, many are already discouraged (Cuyjet, 2006a; Mortenson, 2005; Snipe, 2007). This information regarding the performance of Black males in HBCUs is relevant, because it demonstrates that Black men are not just doing poorly in PWIs, rather there is a larger issue.

Since 85% of college-going Black men are enrolled in predominantly White college and universities (Reddick, 2006), it is this environment that this study is most immediately concerned with in terms of its potential impact on Black male student persistence and graduation.

Factors That Impact Black Male Students' Persistence

While there are factors that have the potential to impact the retention of all students, there are some factors which are unique to Black male students. Numerous students arrive on the college campus academically unprepared for various reasons. However, Warde (2008) offered that many Black male students matriculating onto campuses are grossly unprepared due to having previously attended inferior P-12 schools in terms of academic preparation. Aside from academic unpreparedness, Cujyet (2006a) asserted that the experiences of Black men are less than favorable, compared to other students. Harper (2006a) contended that Black males have been overlooked in the educational process, compared to their White student counterparts.

Internalized Feelings of Inadequacy

Based on the premise that Black men have unique needs which have been overlooked, Hall and Rowen (2001) conducted a study to determine the rationale for the decline in enrollment and graduation. From their study, they concluded that Black men were valued less by college faculty and staff than their White college student counterparts. Additionally, college faculty and staff had lower expectations for Black male students. Some Black male students internalized these lowered expectations as not being capable to succeed, which impacted their decisions to leave college before obtaining their degrees.

Aside from having lowered expectations, some college faculty and staff view Black men as threatening, thus treating them differently from other students (Cuyjet,

2006a). In general, the image of the Black man as a threatening figure “has been so institutionalized in American culture that most Black males perceive themselves as being part of a permanently marginalized population” (p. 17). This perception that Black men are threatening becomes internalized to the extent that Black man feel “less than” and matriculate onto the college campus with a psychological disadvantage. These negative feelings turn into de-motivation, which is reflected in poor academic performance and influences their decision to drop out of college (Cuyjet, 2006a).

Cuyjet (2006a) offered that one way Black males cope with their internalized feeling of inferiority is by seeking out activities such as sports which are culturally acceptable by African Americans (and other ethnic groups) as a means of establishing manhood. While engaging in sports is a means of integration, the extra time and energy dedicated to sports often interfere with academic pursuits, thus hampering their chances of retention.

For Black men who “come from a high school background in which academic success was devalued, the problem of devoting adequate time to studies is exacerbated” (p. 18). Therefore, helping Black men become involved with activities which enhance their opportunities for leadership, strengthen their racial identity, and enrich their academic experience will increase their chances of persisting to graduation (Cuyjet, 2006a; Harper, 2006b; Harper & Harris, 2006; Messer, 2006; Warde, 2008). Since sports play an important role in the masculine development of Black men, those who choose to participate in athletics may need to have additional academic supports in place, such as mentoring and tutoring, to aid in their retention.

Black Misandric Experiences

In comparison to White students, Black students are far more likely to encounter racial hostility and stereotypical attitudes (Fries-Britt, 1997). Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano (2007) introduced the concept, “*Black misandry*,” which they defined as “exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors” (p. 559). In their study of African American men from four universities, through the use of focus groups, they found that Black misandric beliefs abound in both social and academic arenas of the college campus, thus negatively impacting the collegiate racial climate and the manner in which college administrators respond. Moreover, Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) contended that Black males’ effort to resist and succeed against Black misandry has been tremendously ignored and underreported. They further purported that Black males’ exposure to misandric behavior (constant anti-Black male oppression) leads to fatigue, causing physical and psychological emergencies. This stress alone is enough to cause some Black males to drop out of college. Snipe (2007) offered that many Black men feel an intense sense of isolation, as they tend to feel left behind and are forced to take a defensive posture when facing personal threats and attacks on their psyche. He further indicated that there is a need for spiritual healing among Black men in order for them to press beyond the intense feelings of alienation and become successful. With such pervasive issues as stress and feelings of personal threat facing Black men, it is little wonder that keeping them interested in academics has become a challenge.

Racial Identity

Given America's long and troubled history regarding race relations, it is not surprising that the matter of racial identity is a factor in the discussion of Black male college achievement. Harper and Harris (2006) noted that Black males who are engaged in activities which reinforce positive racial identity have greater chances of achieving academic success and retention.

Shaun R. Harper has written extensively on the subject of Black male college retention and achievement (2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Harper (2009c) employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) as "a conceptual lens used to examine racism, racial (dis)advantages, and inequitable distribution of power and privilege within institutions and society" (p. 31). A feature of CRT is the idea of "interest convergence" (p. 31). Harper described this as the mechanism by which members of the dominant culture determine that an improvement or assistance to the inequities experienced by, in this case, Black males, provide a beneficial effect for them. In other words, it is positive action carried out for selfish ends -- interest convergence.

However, interest convergence in the case of Black male college student persistence need not be futile. The high rate of attrition among Black males represents a financial loss for institutions (Kim & Otts, 2010; Schuh, 2005). It also represents a failure in educational mission for schools charged with closing the achievement gap and eradicating the inequities that continue to plague most American systems. It is in the various stakeholders' best interests to devote the attention and resources necessary to expand the number of Black male college graduates.

Racial Identity and College Success

Campbell and Fleming (2000) drew on Cross's (1971) theory of racial identity to outline four stages of attitude that inform an individual's sense of sharing a common racial heritage that is exceptional in its differences with other racial heritages. In regards to Black racial identity, Campbell and Fleming noted the first stage of attitude is the "pre-encounter" period in which the dominant racial group (in the U.S., persons of European descent) is idealized and the minority racial group (Black) is considered inferior. This "internalized oppression" can have devastating psychological consequences for those stuck in this phase (Harper, 2006c, p. 338). Campbell and Fleming observed this is the most poorly integrated of the racial identity stages, producing self-loathing and a sense of futility in the minority member who adheres to this perspective.

The next stage is the "encounter" one in which external racism is encountered and recognized, and leads to the next stage of "immersion/emersion" in which the minority member rejects the experience of dominant culture racism and wholly embraces a concept of minority culture identity. This can produce an attitude of reverse discrimination in which members of the dominant culture are dismissed as inferior. The final stage of racial identity is considered to be the internalization of positive attitudes concerning dominant and minority cultures, a pro-Black and pro-White perspective (Campbell & Fleming, 2000, pp. 7-8).

Campbell and Fleming (2000) conducted a study of racial identity attitudes and fear of success in academic achievement among 141 Black male college students attending a predominantly Black university. The quantitative analysis relied on data from several questionnaires which were assessed using correlation-based strategies. As they

had hypothesized, the Black males who were identified as possessing the most poorly integrated racial identity (pre-encounter) also reflected the highest scores on the fear of success measure.

Males who were at the encounter stage of racial identity demonstrated lower levels of fear of success, while the internalized group of Black males demonstrated the lowest rate of fear of success. The researchers also found that there was an inverse relationship between the fear of success scores (which tracked with the racial identity attitudes) and positive study habits. African American males' study habits improved with the racial identity stages (and dropping fear of success rates) with the notable exception of students identified as exemplifying an immersion/emersion attitude. These students, who did not report a high fear of success rate, nonetheless demonstrated poor study habits. Campbell and Fleming surmised that the poor study habits might reflect a rejection of behaviors perceived to be consistent with the dominant White culture. In other words, the immersion/emersion cohort of Black college students may have resisted academic success, regarding achievement as a sell-out to White culture.

Researchers working on the subject of Black male persistence note that there can be no one size fits all approach for assessing and addressing the needs of Black male college students (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Recent studies indicate that young Black males in college offer a variety of perspectives, many grounded in their different experiences in both pre-collegiate and collegiate life (Duncan & Johnson, 2007). Harper (2009b) and Cuyjet (2006a, 2006b) observed that research that focuses only on the Black males who do not complete to graduation tends to focus on a pathology narrative that emphasizes obstacles and disadvantages (Harper, 2006d), rather than determining and

highlighting the particular strengths and coping strategies utilized by Black men who persist to college graduation (Harper, 2005).

Well-meaning as efforts to address the pathology narrative may be, they risk reinforcing negative stereotypes and may produce a sense of futility from the institutional perspective that *the problem* is just too unwieldy to address. Harper (2006d) observed that while it is necessary to examine and root out institutionalized inequities that may disadvantage Black and other minority students, it is “arguably more instructive to look for insights into ‘what works’” (p. 14).

Contributors to Black Male Achievement in College

The remaining sections of this review consider factors that may positively contribute to Black male achievement in college. This is particularly important in this dissertation, because the focus on strengths that lead to academic success and graduation are more actionable than those derivable from a deficit perspective. This culminates in a summary of some of the recent programs devised by institutions to provide useful supports to Black male college students that may contribute to persistence. Considering the ways in which Black men connect with their academic institution, with their fellow students and with faculty, and finally and most important perhaps, with each other, provides a roadmap for the discussion of solutions to resolve the disproportionate loss of Black male college students before they achieve their degrees.

Fraternities

One way in which students have traditionally forged connections to their institution is through membership in a campus-based fraternity or sorority. These organizations represent a clear example of social integration opportunity, binding students to the membership organization and through that organization's participation in campus functions, binding the student to institutional life. Fraternities and sororities have long battled charges of exclusionary practices and discrimination. To some degree, this effect is implicit in the selection process that precedes an invitation to membership, and this is true for any exclusive membership organization. But it was these exclusionary practices engaged in by White Greek-letter organizations that produced the rise of Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) (Jones, 2004) and, as Harper and Harris (2006) and McClure (2006) contended, these BGLOs have served an invaluable function in providing much-needed support and community to otherwise often alienated and disenfranchised Black students on predominantly White campuses.

Harper and Harris (2006) identified the benefits of BGLO membership for Black males as ranging from reinforcement of positive racial identity to leadership development. They cited studies showing that Black males who belonged to BGLOs were more actively engaged in campus life across the boards, participating in their fraternity-sponsored events and also taking pride in representing their fraternity in larger, campus-wide activities. Fraternity membership also appears to track with these men assuming leadership positions and developing skills to support functions associated with group leadership (Jones, 2004; McClure, 2006).

It is important to note that academic achievement rates for BGLO members have been shown to fall somewhat below those of their non-BGLO peers. This finding is

consistent with membership of many predominantly White Greek-letter organizations as well (Santovec, 2004). However, participation in Greek letter organizations does lead to high levels of social integration which may influence student achievement and persistence for some students.

Student Organizations

As with fraternities, student organizations provide an opportunity for increasing student involvement through social and, sometimes, academic integration activities. This can be a critical key for some Black male students (Harper, 2006b). Researchers have noted that Black students generally, and Black males especially, may feel alienated or isolated at predominantly White institutions (Brown, 2006).

Harper and Quaye (2007) reported findings from a qualitative study of 32 Black male students drawn from the populations of six large Midwestern public research universities. Administrators at each of the schools were asked to identify high achieving Black males, identified as having GPAs above 3.0 and, among other things, having established reputations as engaged participants or leaders in campus organizations. Each student was interviewed at least three times by the researchers (each student had one two-to-three hour face-to-face interview, with the subsequent interviews being conducted by phone). The researchers found that while some of the men held leadership positions or actively participated in organizations that were predominantly White (reflecting the demographic breakdown of the participating universities), the majority of the men were engaged primarily in Black and minority student organizations. They observed that every one of the student leaders they surveyed cited the desire to improve the conditions for

other Blacks (both on campus and in society at large) as a primary motivation for their achievement ambitions.

The researchers also noted a slight distinction in how students described their involvement in predominantly Black organizations versus predominantly White ones. Those engaged in Black organizations reported their belief they could affect greater change on issues specifically speaking to Black and other minority students by working with groups that had these concerns as their focus. The students engaged in predominantly White organizations reported a commitment to helping diversify groups by bringing a greater, positive, Black presence to these organizations. Both groups of Black males conceived their organizational participation through the prism of improving conditions for other Black students and for minority groups in general. Harper and Quaye (2007) noted that some of the Black men they interviewed were encouraged by the opportunity campus organization participation afforded them to meet and work with peers from a range of backgrounds, religions and nationalities. Several of them identified the potential for establishing a network of like-minded (if racially and culturally different) high-achievers that could be connected to across a lifetime. In essence, these men were creating social capital through the building of these relationships (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Harper and Quaye concluded that these high achieving Black males were actively engaged in their institutional life, and that this engagement appeared to strengthen their sense of Black identity even as it opened them to other viewpoints and experiences they reported as valuable.

Athletics

The percentages of Black male undergraduates engaged in Division I sports through their college program is high. Harper (2006a) reported that Black men comprise over 30% of these high level college athletes; more specifically 54.6% of the nation's Division I football players, and 60.8% of the Division I men's basketball players are Black. Despite representing a large proportion of Division I athletes, Black males are significantly less likely than their White athlete peers to graduate within six years. Harper reported that while 63% of White football players graduated within six years, only 47% of the Black football players achieved their degrees in this time. The figure is even lower for basketball players with 52% of White males graduating and only 39% of Black basketball players graduating. Such statistics have led many researchers to express concern that schools are building their high revenue-producing sports programs on the backs of Black male athletes whose learning and degree attainment are often sacrificed to the rigorous demands of training and competition (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007).

However, other researchers have adopted a positive outcomes perspective on the potential for athletics to facilitate college degree attainment in Black males, by focusing on the "small but consistent" number of these men who have completed their degrees successfully (Messer, 2006, p. 155). Messer referred to data showing that Black male athletes graduate at a proportionately higher rate than do Black males who did not participate in athletics. In his consideration of the literature on Black male athletes, Messer related the salient features of these students' persistence to academic supports, in the form, for example, of mentoring, tutoring, and development courses, as well as financial supports through scholarships and student aid. Another significant feature characterizing academically successful Black male athletes was the presence of strong

family and community supports. Messer identified academic and social integration as contributing greatly to student wellbeing and success.

Harper (2009c) suggested that it is in the area of athletics that the convergence with the literature on two-year and four-year colleges and the processes of school transfer most frequently occurs, at least in terms of the conversation on Black male college students. He observed that research indicates that Blacks are more likely to envision a professional career in sports than are Whites, and that for Black athletes enrolled in two-year colleges, the necessary step forward on this path is to transfer to a four-year college or university where the trajectory to professional leagues is more likely.

However, Black males enrolled in community colleges have a significantly lower transfer rate to four-year colleges than do their White male peers (Pope, 2006). Drawing on critical race theory and interest convergence, Harper contended that it is in the higher education system's best interest to facilitate as many transfers as legitimately possible to improve the "dismal transfer rate for community college students in general" (p. 34) and to improve the educational outcomes for the minority student populations.

Scholarships

One of the great benefits of participation in school organizations, fraternities and athletics is the potential to convert such involvement into scholarship support. College and university athletic programs tend to be well-endowed and so scholarships extended to talented athletes are common (Messer, 2006). High-achieving Black male scholars that Harper (2006b) interviewed cited the availability of funding support based on their involvement in various organizations, particularly if they assumed leadership positions.

In fact, Harper stated that among the 32 Black college men he interviewed for his 2006(b) article, those students received more than \$489,000 in merit-based scholarship monies. Studying the effect more closely, Harper concluded that it was not simply the men's involvement in these activities but the "relationships cultivated" with faculty, administration and community leaders who were engaged in granting these scholarships that produced the financial advantages.

There is some evidence that financial support encourages institutional commitment among Black male students. Burley, Butner, Causey-Bush and Bush (2007) reported that their study of Black alumni of a predominantly White university indicated that graduates who had received financial aid were more likely to report very positive feelings about their school experiences. Thus, financial aid appeared to be one mechanism by which schools fostered positive relationships with their Black students.

Mentoring

One of the most frequently cited themes in the research on retention efforts directed toward Black male college students is the positive impact of mentoring (Warde, 2008). Mentoring can counteract a number of obstacles and can position individuals to pursue and achieve their objectives despite significant odds (Brown, 2006; Ishiyama, 2007; Watt, 2006). Sutton (2006) referred to a number of studies that have established that mentoring programs have resulted in significant retention gains among populations of students identified as academically at-risk. Mentoring is one way to construct social capital, the concept that individuals can access various social, economic, and political

benefits when they have the ability to draw on networks of relationships that connect them to opportunities (Harper, 2008).

Reddick (2006) reported on a group of four Black professors working at a predominantly White research university who embraced the opportunity to mentor Black college students. Reddick observed that three of the four professors had been educated at a historically Black college or university and each of these individuals cited their experience at a predominantly Black school as instrumental in their commitment to mentoring Black students at the university where they were employed. Each of Reddick's subjects discussed the importance of shaping supportive networks to assist Black students as they made their way through their education.

There are a variety of ways that mentoring can be realized. Sutton (2006) made a distinction between two approaches, instructional mentoring and developmental mentoring. In the instructional mentoring relationship, the mentor often provides hands-on guidance and affirmation. Sutton stated that an instructional approach to mentoring observes a hierarchical dynamic with the mentor as *teacher* and the mentored as *student*. While benefits have certainly derived from such relationships, Sutton argued that instructional mentoring can leave the mentored student in a position of continually seeking affirmation from the mentor, rather than learning to construct internal systems of support that can carry the mentored student forward. A developmental mentoring relationship is one that fosters a sense of collaboration between the mentor and the mentored student. The mentor guides the student through practices related to self-assessment and self-reflection, while suggesting alternative approaches for the mentored

student to consider. The goal is to prepare the student to assume the role of mentor for himself.

One of the recommendations that Harper (2004) made was that schools formalize efforts to use such young men as mentors for their Black peers. Specifically, Harper suggested that if these young men “candidly share their perspectives on manhood [it] may broaden the scope of masculine attitudes and behaviors that are deemed acceptable by and garner respect from peers” (p. 103).

Family and Peer Relationships

As Bonner (2003) observed, the family as a source of support for high-achieving students has been firmly established in the general educational research literature, and this holds true for Black American families as well (see also Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry & Kelley, 2008; Flowers, 2007).

Thornton (2004) sought to assess the value orientations of Black students enrolled in a predominantly Black university based in the South. Students were surveyed as to their interests and activities and their expectations for themselves in their post-graduate lives. The students overwhelmingly identified spirituality and family as the core values of their lives. For the Black male students, 40% identified religion as a central influence and interest (compared to 42% of women) while 35% of the men expected family to be a key priority going forward (36% of the Black women similarly valued it).

The code of cultural and social expectations that guides the shaping of personal identity is complex. Black men may be especially susceptible to a belief that they must be self-contained to be perceived as strong; that weakness is implied in asking for assistance.

Cuyjet (2006a) identified a cluster of behaviors referred to as the “cool pose” (p. 16).

While not all Black men observe cool pose attitudes, a general awareness of this attitude, may have shaped what Cuyjet stated is a resistance to collaborating with others or asking for help when encountering obstacles that is seen as fairly typical in Black male populations.

However, this is not to suggest that Black men do not draw on their relationships for strength and tacit encouragement. Through his research with 25 Black males enrolled at a predominantly White university Brown (2006) observed that peer relationships were critical to the students’ achievement pursuits. The students identified a lack of positive peer relationships as contributing to college attrition for Black males.

Spirituality and Religion

Numerous studies across psychology, education, sociology, medicine, and other disciplines have explored the significant role that religion plays in experience of many Black Americans (Chiang, Hunter & Yeh, 2004; Washington & Wall, 2006). Blacks maintain relatively high levels of church attendance and often cite spirituality as a key coping mechanism for dealing with life stressors. In many Black communities, the Church, Temple, and/or Mosque are identified by African Americans as their most trusted institution. A good deal of Black social interaction arises from religious organization participation. Thornton’s (2004) study of Black college students found that they selected religion as the most influential value in their life and the one they anticipated remaining central to informing their decision-making in the future.

Watson (2006) conducted a study on 46 Black male freshmen and sophomores enrolled in three private, historically Black, Southern colleges, located in the “Bible Belt,” within two hundred miles of each other (p.117). All three colleges were religiously affiliated, thus influencing the culture of the institutions. The men were asked to complete a 23-item Likert-type instrument assessing views of their spiritual beliefs, religious practices and educational experiences. Watson reported that the Black male college students evinced a strong sense of racial identity and reported pride in their heritage. The next strongest statement reported by the men was their active engagement in some sort of spiritual, reflective practice, be it attending religious service, or simply engaging in private prayer. Watson observed that the rate of response on this factor was dramatically higher than is typically seen in empirical research involving the larger community of college students.

Given the students’ responses, which illustrated the significant role that spirituality and religion played in their sense of identity and in their commitment to achieve, Watson (2006) concluded that it was incumbent on colleges and universities to find ways to support religious institutions and organizations on campus in order to facilitate the well-being of Black male college students, among others. Watson observed that the challenge may be that many schools view their mission as secular. While there is nothing inherently wrong with that vision, the degree to which it may lead to minimization of the role of religion in the lives of some students (and particularly for populations that are typically disenfranchised) should be assessed and safeguarded against.

Riggins, McNeal and Herndons (2008) noted the wealth of literature demonstrating the centrality of religion or spirituality in the lives of many Black Americans. They sought to determine whether a connection between spirituality and academic achievement existed within a sample of Black male college students. They replicated a study conducted by Herndon (2003, as cited by Riggins, McNeal & Herndon, 2008, p. 79) and surveyed 13 Black males between the ages of 19 and 26 who were enrolled at a four-year Southern historically Black university. Riggins et al. identified three primary themes -- the use of prayer as a coping strategy, the role of spirituality in their social constructs, and the social support that came through affiliation with a religious institution. The researchers noted that despite a great emphasis on the role of religion and a sense of the presence of God in their lives, the Black male college students evidenced high levels of internal locus of control which has been identified as one of the keys to student persistence and achievement (Bean, 2005; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Hagedorn, 2005).

Programs Designed to Support Success

Recent literature suggests there are a number of promising programs at institutions across the country, that seek to enable persistence and degree completion for Black male college students (Ellis, 2004; Harper, 2005, 2006b, 2006d, 2009a; Jones & Hotep, 2006; Whiting, 2009; Wyatt, 2009). Several are discussed here to illustrate ways in which retention theory and the research on Black male college student achievement are being applied in creative ways to engage and support these men in their pursuit of their academic degrees.

Schmidt (2008) reported that the African American Male Initiative begun in 2002 by the University System of Georgia now has 25 programs focusing on supports targeted to Black male students and in operation at 19 of its member institutions. Among the programs provided through the initiative are such official academic supports as outreach and mentorship. The University System of Georgia recently credited the initiative with increasing enrollment of Black men by almost 25% in the five year period between 2002 and 2007.

The Black Man on Campus (BMOC) Project was implemented a decade ago on the predominantly White campus of Bowling Green State University (OH). The three tenets of the project are to ensure “culturally relevant classroom experience fostered through a 101-style course”, a mentoring program that pairs Black male faculty or staff with Black male students, and involvement in a “weekend rap session related to success in college for African American men,” (Bailey, 2006, p. 275; see also Quaye & Harper, 2007). Other variations of the rap session were reported on by Hill (2006) and Laster (2006) who identified the benefits of such sessions as providing Black male participants the opportunity to share and bond with peers who could be experiencing similar challenges in their academic pursuits. Bailey observed that the results for BMOC have been mixed. Participating students overwhelmingly reported valuing the 101-style course providing culturally relevant classroom instruction. However, the mentoring component of the project proved problematic, in large part because there was not a sufficient number of Black male faculty or staff to serve as mentors for all the participating students. Additionally, first to second year retention rates for the students participating in the BMOC in their freshman year were actually lower than their Black male peers who did

not participate in the programming. The GPAs for the BMOC students were initially higher than for their peers, but this advantage was only maintained for one semester before they fell back to levels consistent with their peers. The mixed track record suggests that elements of the BMOC support plan may be very relevant to supporting Black male achievement. However if the supports are not genuinely in place or cannot be sustained over time, the implication is that the supports may not produce meaningful change.

The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) was founded two decades ago at Georgia Southwestern State University, a predominantly White institution. The program, which is now found on a number of campuses across the country, emphasizes “values-based leadership” and encourages members to participate in their college and larger communities through such organizations as Habitat for Humanity and Big Brothers and Sisters (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006, p. 258). SAAB also incorporates a developmental mentoring program for its Black male college students that operates in one of three ways: Black male college student peer-to-peer (see also Watt, 2006), Black male college student mentor to Black male high school student, and college advisor/faculty mentor to Black male college student (Sutton, 2006).

Programs like the Collegiate 100 (Mattingly & Humphrey, 2006), an affiliate of the national organization the 100 Black Men of America, Inc., the Black Men’s Collective (Catching, 2006), and the Meyerhoff Scholarship program (Baker, 2006) focus on mentoring and tutoring by capitalizing on the willingness of successful Black males to step in and actively serve as role models and advisors to Black male college students. These programs reflect the growing commitment of higher education institutions to build

on the strengths that high-achieving Black male college students have demonstrated in their persistence to realize their college degrees. There are a number of factors which play meaningful roles in contributing to college success for these students. Research suggests the direction for developing practical solutions to meeting the challenges identified in this chapter.

Conclusion

Over two thirds of the Black men who enroll in college do not persist through graduation (Harper, 2006a). Such high attrition rates challenge educational economies (Kim & Otts, 2010; Schuh, 2005) and they challenge the economic well-being of the nation (Cabrera et al., 2005; Seidman, 2005). Various obstacles that Black men may encounter in their pursuit of degree completion (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Pinel et al., 2005) range from a legacy of racism that marginalizes the cultural and historical experiences of this population to a lack of necessary structural supports such as financial aid and adequate primary and secondary school academic programs (Bean, 2005; Campbell & Fleming, 2000). Many researchers have noted that there has been a tendency to approach the Black male's experience from a deficit perspective, focusing on the disadvantages encountered as a result of entrenched racism, economic and educational inequities, cultural attitudes and assorted other factors (Cameron & Heckman, 2001). However, a deficit approach to the question of Black male retention may insidiously contribute to the problem by reinforcing negative stereotypes (Harper, 2006d). An emerging research trend is focused on the strengths in the students who do persist and achieve their degrees (Cuyjet, 2006a, 2006b; Harper, 2005).

The literature discussed in this review highlights some of these strengths, and places them in the context of college retention theory. Current research is particularly likely to be based on the models proposed by Tinto, Astin, and Bean. Among the salient contributors to Black male college student achievement appear to be connection to social organizations such as fraternities, student groups, and athletics. There is compelling evidence that spirituality is a key predictor of persistence in these young men, as are family and peer support.

Some of the programs currently on campuses around the country reflect a belief in the salutary powers of mentoring. Research suggests that communities of support that seek to integrate these Black males both academically and socially can have a powerful and positive impact on these students' capacity to persist in their education and achieve their educational goals.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Using Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement as the framework, this phenomenological qualitative study examined the factors which contributed to the successful retention and graduation of African American males at the University of Louisville. This chapter discusses the research design and the rationale for a qualitative design. The chapter then describes the context of the University of Louisville, sample size, participant recruitment, and human subjects' protection. Next, the proposed data collection process is described, followed by a brief discussion of the role of the facilitator and interview protocol, data analysis, trustworthiness, and how I address issues of potential researcher bias. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study, and the study time line.

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the meanings people have constructed regarding their experiences (Merriam, 1998). Further, qualitative researchers utilize various forms of inquiry to understand the meaning of social phenomenon with as little disruption of natural settings as possible (Merriam, 1998). Similarly, Creswell (2007) defined qualitative design as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Rossman and Rallis

(2003) purported that such studies address participants' understanding of a phenomenon together with the beliefs and values they bring to bear as they attempt to understand it (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). Strauss and Corbin (1990) claimed that qualitative methods can be used to help us understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known, as well as help to acquire new perspectives on things about which much is already known in ways that quantitative analyses cannot.

The phenomenological orientation of the qualitative study does not need to confirm or refute hypotheses (Morrissette, 1999). Rather, the words spoken by the individuals are the data collected. By concentrating on the spoken words of the participants in the study, the results of the analysis emerge solely from the participants rather than from the researcher's preconceived notions or biases (Morrissette, 1999). Similarly, Maxwell (1996) noted that the strength of qualitative research is its inductive nature, focusing on specific situations or people, rather than words or numbers. Glesne (2006) noted that a qualitative approach is best suited for topics which are sensitive in nature or those about which little is known. Additionally, for researchers who desire to explore lived experiences from the perspective of those who lived it, a qualitative research design is best suited (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005).

Finally, qualitative research, according to Glesne (2006), seeks to understand and interpret the way various participants in a research project construct the world around them. The qualitative researcher herself, then, becomes the main instrument of research, "as he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants" (p. 5). The sample is typically "nonrandom, purposeful, and small" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). Final

write-ups are “descriptive in nature with only minor use of numerical indices” (Glesne, 2006, p. 5).

Research Design

This qualitative study was conducted by utilizing one-to-one (individual) interviews framed by a phenomenological orientation to have 15 African American male graduates describe the key factors that contributed to their successful completion of a baccalaureate degree from the University of Louisville. This research method was tailored to the research objective because the study sought to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of those who experienced it (Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Individual interviews provide an opportunity for participants to express their perspectives on their experiences and provide expansive and detailed descriptions of their experiences as undergraduate students (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 1990). Additionally, individual interviews in an informal setting provide members outside the majority group, such as African American males, the opportunity to share their experiences using their own vernacular (Patton, 1990). This researcher conducted interviews while recording responses on a tape recorder.

Context: The University of Louisville

The University of Louisville is a public, moderately large, urban research university. As of the fall of 2011, the University of Louisville enrolled 15,597 full-time, undergraduate students. Of that number, 1,859 were African American, 12,068 were White, and 1670 were classified as “Other.” Among the African Americans, 40% were male.

Sample

Participants of the study were African American male graduates from the University of Louisville. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit the participants. Creswell stated that “purposefully” selected participants are chosen as those who can best answer the research question (Creswell, 2002; Curtis, Smith & Washburn, 2000). This researcher was not concerned with random sampling, because “qualitative researchers neither work with populations large enough to make random sampling meaningful, nor is their purpose that of producing generalizations” (Glesne, 2006, p. 34). However, this researcher was concerned with selecting participants purposefully, because such participants provide information-rich data which enables the investigator “to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

The sample for this study was drawn purposefully. Patton (2002) identified criteria based sampling as a method to acquire a purposeful sample. He enumerated sixteen different types of purposeful sampling. Of the sixteen types of purposeful sampling, the criterion sample strategy was utilized for this study. According to Patton, in criterion sampling, the researcher decides upon certain criteria and chooses participants that meet those criteria for the study.

All study participants met four criteria: (a) African American male (homogenous sample group) (b) who graduated from the University of Louisville between 2007 and 2012, (c) ranging from ages 22 to 29, and (d) who were at some point of their academic careers, full time college students. Ages 22-29 were selected, because traditional age

college students are 18-22, hence these were recent graduates with the most immediately relevant experience of college.

Six years is the standard time-frame to track college student completion rates. Given six years to graduate, this population would be 22-24. Since the researcher's criterion is that this sample must be recent graduates, this suggests that these students would be approximately ages 22-29.

The sample consisted of 15 African American male graduates. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) stated that samples for qualitative studies are much smaller than quantitative studies, because qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not making generalized hypothesis statements. Additionally, qualitative research is labor-intensive; therefore, analyzing a large sample can be impractical (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) asserted that more data does not necessarily lead to more information, since what is important in qualitative research is data saturation. Qualitative researchers continue to collect data until data saturation is reached.

Charmaz (2006) asserted that saturation can be reached within a small sample size, provided that thick-rich descriptions (in terms of qualitative data) are provided. Further, unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers analyze their data throughout their study (Merriam, 1998). Saturation is achieved when the researcher is no longer hearing or seeing new information. However, there are guidelines for sample sizes in qualitative research. Phenomenological studies must have a sample size of at least six (Creswell, 2002; Morse, 2000) and usually not more than 50 (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003).

Participant Recruitment

The researcher enlisted the assistance of the Vice President for Alumni Relations who serves as an officer for the African American Alumni Council and requested his assistance in identifying study participants. Recruitment advertisements (a letter of introduction and a description of the research project) were given to the Vice President in an electronic format. Advertisements were sent to prospective participants as an email request via the Alumni Association, asking for the participation of African American male graduates who meet the criteria mentioned above. The advertisement requested that interested students who met the study's eligibility requirements contact the author. Upon contact with interested participants, the researcher obtained a consent form from study participants to partake in the study.

During this recruitment process, only ten participants agreed to participate in the study, therefore the researcher utilized snowball sampling by requesting that study participants recommend other Black male graduates that they knew who met the study criteria, to participate in the study. Study participants referred this researcher to five additional participants who agreed to participate in the study. Although this researcher originally anticipated a sample size of 20 participants to ensure saturation, only 15 males who met the study criteria agreed to participate. Since a sample size of 15 is consistent with the guidelines set forth by Creswell (2002), Morse (2000), and (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003) for phenomenological studies, this researcher settled upon a sample size of 15. More importantly, this researcher concluded that saturation had been reached at 10, so sampling was discontinued at 15. Moreover, the snow-ball sample yielded 14 out of 15 non-athletes. Only one participant indicated that he had been an athlete throughout his

entire undergraduate career. This was an unanticipated theme which emerged from the sampling method employed in this study.

Human Subjects Protection

The study proposal was submitted to the University of Louisville Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the Human Subject Protection Office. The approval letter is included in Appendix A. The release form/consent letter, instruments, and lay summary outlining who the researcher is, the purpose of the research, and the participants' role were submitted to the IRB for approval prior to conducting the study (Glesne, 2006). The study received exempt status and was approved by the IRB November, 2012.

Data Collection

In a qualitative research design, data collection and data analysis is a simultaneous process (Merriam, 1998). After obtaining consent from participants to partake in the study, the researcher obtained a signed release from each participant and gathered demographic information. This information is important since it is likely to have impacted the students' experiences as college students, as well as determined whether or not they remained in college. The consent form was approved by the IRB, prior to data collection.

The method of data collection for this study was individual, semi-structured interviews. Interviewing allows the researcher to gather a significant amount of data within a 60-minute to 2 hour time period (Patton, 1990; Glesne, 2006). Each interview lasted between one and two hours (Glesne, 2006). Morgan (1997) proposed that setting

the length at 90 minutes, but suggested that telling participants to plan on two hours is the best approach.

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to ensure that the questions were fully covered in one-on-one interviews (see Appendix B). At the close of each interview, participants chose a pseudonym that they used for this study (Morrissette, 1999).

Role of the Facilitator

The researcher arranged and conducted interviews. When conducting interviews, the researcher must be able to both conduct the interview, and note discussions (Morgan 1997), but often this is challenging (Glesne, 2006). To compensate for this challenge, the interviewer utilized a tape recorder to record the discussion (Glesne, 2006).

This researcher conducted many interviews in a private conference room on campus within the Cultural Center, because the Cultural Center is a place which provides services specifically for African American students. Therefore, this space was hypothesized to be perceived as welcoming for the graduates. Other interviews were conducted in a classroom in the Education building on campus, because the Education building houses the doctoral program with which the researcher and participants were familiar.

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interview questions were devised to address the research question: *What are the factors which contributed to the retention of African American men who have successfully obtained a baccalaureate degree from the University of*

Louisville? The protocol consisted of twelve, open-ended questions. Asking open-ended questions supports the discovery of new information and ensures that the responses are open-ended (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). Open-endedness allows the participants to provide as much detailed information as they desire and also enables the investigator to ask follow-up probing questions (Creswell, 2007). The researcher began each interview with a “grand tour” question (Spradley, 1979). This is a request for the respondent to verbally take the interviewer through a place, a time or a sequence of events. “Grand tour questions set the tone and help establish rapport between interviewer and respondent” (p. 84). They also tend to be less vague by asking respondents to recapture time, place, feeling, and meaning of past events by imagination. The interviewer began by asking:

1) *How is it that you came to select the University of Louisville?*

Next, the follow-up question is an easy-to-answer question. According to Glesne (2002), the answer to the follow-up question allows a smooth transition into the area in which the interviewer is particularly interested. In this case, the area of interest regards African American male students’ experiences on the campus at the University of Louisville.

2) *When you entered the University of Louisville as a college freshman, what did you imagine your college experience would be like?*

The interviewer chose these foundational questions because they provide a platform from which to springboard and allow time needed to promote rapport (Glesne, 2006). These foundational questions also helped the researcher to note the participants’ pre-college experiences. Additionally, the interviewer was interested in learning about the process of going to college and what that experience had been like, as well as provide reflective self-perceptions of why each student had pursued the path he had.

The next set of questions was developed by allowing the conceptual framework/theoretical framework to inform the questions or frame the study. Some answers to the questions led to the development of other questions, along the way, as respondents were interviewed. The next set of questions includes:

3 a) In what ways were you prepared for college?

3b) In what ways were you underprepared for college?

3 c) What did you do to prepare for college?

4) What challenges, if any, did you have staying in college, and how did you work through them?

Tinto (2005a) suggested that students who do not feel integrated into campus life are likely to leave college (drop-out) and not persist. These questions sought to ascertain the level of the student's initial commitment to the institution and persistence, in the face of challenges. Astin (1984) suggested that student's initial commitment to the institution influences persistence. Tinto (2005a) stated that initial commitment, along with student's pre-entry characteristics and experiences in the academic and social life on campus over time, impact persistence.

5a) Which student groups or activities, if any, did you join while attending the University of Louisville?

5b) What were your experiences like in those organizations?

6) What role did friends play in your decision to remain in college?

7) What role did college professors play in your decision to remain in college?

8) What role did college staff play in your decision to remain in college?

Questions 5-8 were derived from Tinto's (2005a) interaction theory which stated that the more integrated a student feels in the academic and social life of the institution, the more committed the student will be to the institution. Tinto suggested that academic integration (interaction with faculty and administration and adhering to standards and expectations of the university), and social integration (students' involvement in activities on campus) work together and enhance each other. Astin (1984) further asserted that student involvement is a critical condition for student success. These questions ascertained the impact of academic and social integration on the participant's persistence. In terms of academic integration, Tinto (2005a) viewed classroom involvement as the first link in the chain of retention, because it forges community between students and faculty. This community eventually leads to greater opportunities for social integration, because the relationship validates students and enables them to "buy-in" to the expectations of the institution (DeMaris & Kritsonis, 2008, Tinto, 2005b). Research confirms that students who are actively engaged in the academic and social life of their institutions are more likely to persist to graduation, despite facing barriers or challenges (Tinto, 2005b; Veenstra, 2009). Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda and Yee (2000) concurred that the students who had the highest level of social and/or academic integration were the ones most likely to graduate from college.

9) What role did financial aid play in your decision to attend and remain in college?

There is some evidence that financial support encourages institutional commitment (Burley, Butner, Causey-Bush & Bush, 2007). Tinto (2005a) discussed that institutional commitment impacts student's persistence. Tinto further suggested that in order to bolster institutional commitment, institutions needed to provide services which

demonstrate their dedication to students. An institution's commitment to students is a "critical condition for student success" (p. 321); therefore, it behooves universities and colleges to offer formal and informal supports. Financial aid is one mechanism by which schools provide such support and foster positive relationships with students (Burley, Butner, Causey-Bush & Bush, 2007).

10) What role did mentoring play in your decision to remain in college? Please describe any mentoring you received, and your mentors.

There is compelling evidence which suggests that mentoring counteracts obstacles and increases retention (Sutton, 2006; Warde, 2008), because the social interaction between mentor and mentee fosters a sense of commitment to the institution and to the goal of graduation. Tinto (1975) stated the greater the level of academic and social integration, the greater the level of commitment to the school and to the goal of graduation from college. Mentoring can be both qualitative and quantitative (Astin, 1984) and is particular to each student. Study participants' level of social interaction which takes place in the mentoring relation may have impacted their decision to remain in college.

11) What role did family play in your decision to remain in college?

Family support is what Tinto refers to as a "pre-entry college attribute" (Seidman, 2005). Pre-college entry attributes (e.g., familial influence, personal interests, and pre-college academic experiences) form individual's goals and commitments, which interact with institutional experiences over time, and in turn impacts retention (Tinto, 2005b). Investigating participants' level of familial support helps the investigator to ascertain the extent to which pre-entry college attributes contributed to their retention.

12) What people or experiences most contributed to your successful completion of college?

Questions 9-11 were asked because the literature review highlighted financial aid, mentoring, familial, and faculty/administrative support as contributing factors for retaining African American men in college. Question 12 sought to answer the research question directly. Further, participant's pre-entry characteristics often help them overcome challenges (Tinto, 2005). The last question informed the investigator of such pre-entry characteristics.

During question development, the interviewer wrote questions, checked them against the research topic and allowed the research question to inform the interview questions. At times, logical ordering of the questions was changed by the psychological order that emerged from the respondents' answers (Glesne, 2006).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to collected data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Glesne (2006) stated that data analysis involves organizing what the researcher has "seen, heard and read, so that she can make sense of what she has learned" (p. 147). To do so, involves categorizing, synthesizing, searching for patterns and themes, and interpreting the data which the researcher has collected (Glesne, 2006). As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested, data analysis should proceed from noting patterns and themes, to arriving at comparisons and contrasts, to devising conceptual explanations. For this study, the collected data were analyzed using Morrissette's (1999) seven stage step-wise approach, which is specifically designed for

studies with a phenomenological orientation. This approach to analyzing data guarantees that the analysis proceeded directly from the spoken words of the participants. It also ensures that data analysis proceed from noting patterns and themes (Morrissette, 1999). As patterns and themes emerged, the researcher was able to clearly capture the experience of the interview participants (Glesne, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Morrissette, 1999).

The seven steps of Morrissette's analysis model used for this study included:

- 1) Step One: Immediately after the interviews, the researcher listened carefully to and reviews the audio-taped conversations. This kept the data fresh in the researcher's mind. Particular attention was given to the tone of voice and meaningful metaphors. This also enabled the researcher to recall body language.
- 2) Step Two: The researcher transcribed each interview from the audio-recorder into a written protocol. This enabled the researcher to become fully immersed in the data.
- 3) Step Three: After the transcription process, the researcher read the transcribed data several times. The significant statements contained in the typed protocol were then highlighted, paraphrased, and assigned a theme, after which they were placed in a tabular form labeled, "First Order Thematic Abstraction."
- 4) Step Four: The researcher clustered the identified participant's themes from the first order thematic abstraction and gave them a general description. Next, they were placed in a tabular form labeled, "Second Order Thematic Abstraction."

The general description assigned to the theme represented the essence of the experience of each participant's experience.

- 5) Step Five: Each participant's significant statements were identified and bracketed. This synthesizing process, "otherwise known as within person analysis, involves reflecting on and summarizing participant's experiences to provide an overall picture" (Morrissette, 1999, p. 4).
- 6) Participants' bracketed significant statements were then synthesized. This step entailed reflecting upon the diverse themes that emerged from each individual protocol.
- 7) The researcher presented the clustered themes for all participants in a tabular format (See Appendix H). This provided a visual reference to specific themes.

Finally, the results of the data analyses were reported in chapter IV.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is often questioned by quantitative researchers, because the concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in qualitative research (Silverman, 2001). In order for a study to be considered "valid" or trustworthy, it must demonstrate high quality (Glesne, 2006). According to Glesne, trustworthiness or research validity is an issue which should be considered during both research design and data collection. Merriam (1997) stated that there is always a question as to whether qualitative research findings are consistent with reality.

Additionally, there is a question of reliability. Just like quantitative research, qualitative

researchers must address if the study can be replicated. In qualitative research, the issues of validity and reliability are addressed in the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 1998). Guba (1981) explained four criteria for quantitative study. He asserted that qualitative research can address these criteria, as well (Silverman, 2001). These four criteria are described as a) credibility (in preference to internal validity); b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalizability); c) dependability (in preference to reliability); and d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity). In this study, the issue of trustworthiness were addressed by providing detailed data, thick, rich descriptions, an audit trail, and member-checks.

Credibility

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative researchers must address the question: “How congruent are the findings with reality?” One way to address this is to provide opportunities for scrutiny of the project by peers, colleagues, and academics. Peer scrutiny allows the assumptions of the investigator to be challenged by those who are not as attached to the study. Member checks were utilized to ensure credibility of this study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) purported that the single most effective means of bolstering credibility of a study is to utilize member-checking. During member checks, the researcher emailed interview transcripts to all participants. Nine out of fifteen participants (60%) responded to the email. Seven participants (47%) verified that their words and experiences were accurately captured. Two participants requested that modifications be made to the transcriptions to accurately capture their words and experiences. Corrections were made and documented, then resent to participants for verification (Glesne, 2006).

Once the research participants confirmed the corrections, the researcher noted the changes.

Transferability

Merriam (1998) noted that external validity refers to the manner in which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. Since the findings of a qualitative study are specific to a small number of research participants, it is difficult to assert that the findings can be applicable to other situations. However, Lincoln and Guba (1989) suggested that it is the investigator's responsibility to provide sufficient contextual information so that the reader can make such a transfer. The researcher provided detailed data about study participants and rich, thick descriptions of the study findings in order to make clear the extent to which transferability might be possible and might be bounded.

Dependability

Reliability in qualitative research is similar in meaning to that of quantitative research in terms of determining if the study can be replicated. Quantitative researchers utilize techniques to show that if the study were repeated, with the same methods and same participants, similar results would be obtained. This reflects the dependability of the study. However, it is impossible to reproduce social phenomena or the original conditions under which the data was collected (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Addressing the minutiae of what is done in the field addresses the dependability or reliability of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). In order to assure dependability and increase

reliability, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of how data was collected, how interview protocol were coded and categorized and how data were analyzed (Merriam, 1998).

Confirmability

Patton (2002) associated objectivity in science with the use of instruments that are not dependent on human skill and perception. He recognized, however, that this is difficult, since instruments are designed by humans. Therefore researcher bias is unavoidable. The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Steps must be taken to ensure that the findings of the study are the result of proper analysis of the data, rather than characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A key criterion for confirmability is the researcher's admission of her own predispositions. In order to guarantee that the research was objective, the researcher utilized member checks and provided an audit trail.

In summary, four methods were employed to ensure trustworthiness of this qualitative study. First, member checks were used to ensure the congruence of the study results with the viewpoints of the participants. All participants were provided interview transcripts and a summary of the findings to guarantee that their ideas were correctly reflected and represented in the study. After substantive feedback, corrections were made to reflect the accuracy of participants' statements. This helped to verify credibility and confirmability of the study. Next, the dissertation advisor examined the research product and audited it. Third, the researcher provided detailed data about the study participants,

and rich, thick descriptions of the study findings so that readers could “enter the research context” and notice how closely narratives complement the data analysis (Glesne, 2006, p. 38). This enables readers to gather the essence of the interviews and helps them to discern the study’s transferability. Finally, In order to eliminate researcher bias and guarantee objectivity, the researcher allowed the data to “tell the story.” This ensured the confirmability of the study.

Guarding Against the Potential for Researcher Bias

All research is subject to biases (Glesne, 2006). This researcher, who is an African American female, has three African American sons and one daughter who are undergraduate students at predominantly White institutions. Throughout data collection and analysis the researcher consistently reflected upon her own subjectivity. The researcher strove to remain aware of any potential researcher bias and allowed the data to “speak for itself.” Following the suggestion by Glesne (2005) this researcher kept a separate journal of the researcher’s own thoughts regarding the interviews and interview process, writing both before and after interviews and observations, the researcher was able to address pre-conceived opinions and reflected upon her own subjectivity.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter represents the research findings. The chapter begins with study participant descriptions. Next, the chapter provides a presentation of the findings based on the identified themes and categories. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion about unanticipated findings.

The following paragraphs provide a quick snapshot of each study participants. Each participant is identified by a pseudonym.

Larry

Larry is a 24 year-old African American who graduated with a degree in Pan African Studies. Larry had previously been an engineering major, but transferred into Pan African Studies after taking a course in the department and discovering that the program was a better fit for him. Larry was a Porter Scholar (student recipient of a University of Louisville academic scholarship, awarded to promising African American students). Larry was involved in several student organizations, including the Porter Society, an academic honor society, Student African American Brotherhood, Muhammad Ali Scholars, Phi Beta Sigma, Resident Student Association, Student Activities Board and C.O.N.E.C.T. (The Caring of New students Experiencing College Transitions) Peer Mentor. Larry lost his scholarship when his grade point average dropped from a 3.0 GPA

to a 2.5; however he was able to acquire low-interest student loans to defray his educational expenses.

Kofi

Kofi is a 23 year-old African American who graduated with a double major in Pan African Studies and Business. Kofi was a Porter Scholar who also had a Cardinal Covenant scholarship (for low-income University of Louisville students who meet a 2.5 High School GPA and 20 ACT composite score standard). Participating in recognized student organizations was something Kofi stated was critical to his decision to remain in college and graduate. He listed the following organizations as the ones of which he was a member: Student African American Brotherhood, Muhammad Ali Scholars Society, Porter Society, African Student Union, and the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (L-Samp; a program for African Americans in the STEM disciplines). He also wrote for the *Black Hawk*, a journal publication at UofL.

Juan

Juan is a 24 year-old African American who graduated with a degree in Pan African Studies. Juan was a Porter Scholar who was involved in the Student African American Brotherhood, Association of Black Students, where he served as Vice President, the Porter Society, African American Male Initiative, Collegiate 100, and the NAACP where he served as the political action chair.

Vennie

Vennie is a 23 year-old African American who graduated with a degree in Communications. Vennie started college as a Porter Scholar, but lost his scholarship after struggling to maintain a 3.0 G.P.A. after the breakup with his girlfriend. Vennie acquired loans and received financial assistance from his parents to help him with his college expenses. He participated in Conquerors for Christ, Student African American Brotherhood, and the Association of Black Students.

Demetrius

Demetrius is a 22 year-old African American who graduated with a degree in Communications. As a Porter Scholar, he was involved in the Porter Society, as well as Student African American Brotherhood, Association of Black Students and served as President and Vice President for Iota Phi Theta Fraternity.

James

James is a 26 year-old African American graduate who comes from a family of educators, “educated since the Emancipation Proclamation.” James graduated in 2008 with a degree in Psychology and later with a master’s degree. The Porter Scholar was involved in Collegiate 100 where he served as a President, Association of Black Students, and Student Government Association. James also was an academic tutor, a student orientation leader and a resident advisor. He also ran track all four years of college.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is a 27 year-old African American-Latino who graduated with dual degrees in Pan African Studies and Spanish. Jeremiah was a Porter Scholar who was involved in numerous student organizations including the Porter Society, Collegiate 100, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. In addition to those organizations, Jeremiah was involved in the Spanish club and a salsa dance group.

Sergio

Sergio is a 23 year-old African American graduate with a degree in Sports Administration. Sergio was not a scholarship participant, but opted to take out student loans instead. He participated in Collegiate 100, Student African American Brotherhood, and Black Diamond Choir. Sergio was also a resident advisor and student orientation leader.

Kelvin

Kelvin is a 29 year-old African American who graduated with a degree in Art. As an out-of-state student, he did not qualify for scholarships designed for Kentucky residents, such as the Porter Scholarship or Cardinal Covenant Scholarship, so he paid for his college tuition and expenses with student loans. Kelvin participated in Student African American Brotherhood and the art club.

Kwame

Kwame is a 24-year old African American. He graduated with a degree in Pan African Studies. He also earned a master's degree from the University of Louisville.

Campus involvement was something Kwame described as something necessary for him to “grow and gain confidence.” He was a Porter Scholar who participated in the Porter Society, Student African American Brotherhood, where he served as president, Arts and Sciences student council, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Sigma Alpha Lambda Honors Society, Association of Black Students (Vice President), and Student Government Association. Kwame was also a C.O.N.E.C.T. peer mentor. He was a university honor student for all four years of undergraduate college.

David

David is a 29 year-old African American graduate with a degree in Music. His college expenses were paid through a United States Air Force Reserve Officers’ Training Corp (ROTC) scholarship. He was an academic tutor, and student orientation leader. He also participated in the Resident Student Association as a resident advisor and marched in the University of Louisville marching band.

Travis

Travis is a 22 year old African American graduate with a degree in Spanish. His education was paid for with a partial scholarship, college work-study and student loans. He participated in Student African American Brotherhood, African American Male Initiative, Man of Peace, and the Spanish club.

Max

Max is a 22 year old African American. He earned his degree in Communications. He was a Porter Scholar who participated in the Porter Society. He also participated in Student African American Brotherhood, and African American Male Initiative.

Muhammad

Muhammad is a 23 year-old African American graduate who earned a degree in Biology. He participated in Minority Association for Pre-medical Students, African American Male Initiative, Student African American Brotherhood and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity. As a Porter Scholar, he also participated in the Porter Society.

Seth

Seth is a 23 year-old African American who earned a degree in Sports Administration. He served as an officer in the Student African American Brotherhood and participated in the African American Male Initiative. He was also a Porter Scholar.

Results of the Data Analysis

The results of analysis of the phenomenological qualitative data describe the thematic structure of 15 African American males' experience of persisting in and completing a baccalaureate degree from the University of Louisville. The analysis of the face-to-face interview transcripts reveal that the structure of this experience consisted of five major themes: 1. having access to monetary resources to attend and persist in college; 2. having a mentor; 3. participating in recognized student organizations; 4.

having family support; 5. taking one or more courses in Pan African Studies. Each of the five themes is demarcated by quotations taken from participants' one-to-one interviews.

Theme 1: Having Access to Monetary Resources to Attend and Persist in College

Having the resources necessary to pay for tuition, room and board, books and other living expenses was critical in terms of enabling participants to attend and persist in an institution of higher education for all fifteen participants. Eleven of the fifteen research participants (73%) had been recipients of the Porter Scholarship, a University of Louisville academic scholarship, named in honor of long-time African American Louisville resident and entrepreneur, Woodford R. Porter (deceased). The scholarship is awarded to promising African American undergraduate students attending the University of Louisville. In the following statement, Kofi discussed why his full tuition scholarship was critical to him being able to enroll in and graduate from college:

I would not have attended school had they not offered to pay for it. Initially, I didn't want to go to college. I couldn't afford it. But I got scholarships to pay my way through school. All I had to do was keep up my G.P.A. My parents had prepared us academically to maintain good grades in college; we just didn't have a lot of money, so I knew I'd better stay on top of my grades. I said, 'I can keep up my GPA so I can get school paid for.' So that's what I did! And I'm glad I did, even though initially, I didn't even want to go to college, since I didn't have the money for it. In the end, I graduated with a double major [in Business] and Pan African Studies and a minor in International Business. (Kofi)

Similarly, Jeremiah attended and persisted in college, because he did not have to worry about money to pay for it. He shared how having a scholarship gave him an opportunity of a life-time in terms of gaining a college education, traveling abroad, and fulfilling his dream of becoming a college student personnel professional.

I came to college, because I was offered a full tuition scholarship. My parents didn't have a lot of money, and in fact, they didn't come from this country. One is

from the Caribbean, and the other from South America. Although my parents made sure I did well academically, they didn't have the money to send me to college. I wanted to go to college and I chose the University of Louisville, because they offered a full ride academic scholarship. Initially, I wanted to go to Morehouse College, but I would have had to come out of pocket to pay for much of it. The University of Louisville provided me with an opportunity to come to college, tuition free...I was like, 'Oh! I gotta go!' All things considered, Uof L was my best bet. My dad told me to take advantage of the opportunity and I followed his advice. I'm glad I had the scholarship to go to college, because once in college, I kept up my grades and was able to travel abroad to Costa Rica and Trinidad. That was so important to me, you know, to travel out of the U.S., because I was able to explore my Jamaican and Latino-African heritage in my travels and gained a sense of myself. I can say emphatically that my college and study abroad experiences helped me with cultural and racial identity... For me, the key to success is understanding the value of learning about self... I graduated from college and went on to attain a master's degree. Now, I work in student affairs and provide the same service that many of my mentors gave me when I was in college. (Jeremiah)

In a similar vein, Kwame, whose parents are refugees from South Africa recounted that he attended and persisted in college, because he had the financial means to afford it by way of an academic scholarship. Although he was academically prepared for college, he was considered financially "at risk" because he came from a single family home, headed by his mother.

I am considered "at-risk" you know, because both of my parents are refugees from South Africa. In addition to that, when my parents split up, I became a child of a single-parent household, poor and broke. All these things...being a Black male, poor, and a child of refugees put me in the at-risk category and not likely to graduate. What worked in my favor is that both of my parents are college educated, right? So they pushed me academically. Having good grades and discipline put me in a good position to earn an academic scholarship, which was great, because even though my parents later went on to earn their college degrees, they were separated. This left my mom's household without much money... Getting a full-tuition scholarship afforded me the opportunity to go to college. Other schools were not offering scholarships. With money on the table, I could attend college, right? And without the worry of money to pay for school, I was able to stay and graduate. (Kwame)

While many participants took full advantage of the full tuition scholarships, some reported that the academic rigors of college presented challenges to keeping up a 3.0 or better G.P.A. Juan describes how nearly losing his scholarship caused him to have an epiphany regarding the importance of a higher education that he had previously taken for granted:

I'm from Louisville. I've always had very good grades, because I came to college prepared. In middle school and high school I had very rigorous curricula. So when I was offered a full-ride scholarship, I gladly took it and came to UofL 'cause, you know, they gave me the most money. I maintained a 3.5 G.P.A., until the end of my sophomore year. At that time, I dropped down to a 2.9 G.P.A., which might not sound too bad to most people, but for a scholar, trying to keep his scholarship, it's too low. You've got to keep your G.P.A. up to a 3.0 in order to stay funded. End of my sophomore year, yep, that's when I lost my scholarship. Once the dollars stopped, I woke up. I was like, 'you don't have a way to pay for this; your parents are broke!' (Laughs). Boy did I get my behind in gear. Got my grades up. I had a chip on my shoulder. I was around a lot of great men who were doing a lot of great things on campus. I felt like if I'm not doing well...if I fail or drop out of college, because I lost my scholarship, then I'm a failure. I pushed myself and by the end of the next semester, I got my G.P.A. back up and got my scholarship back! I'm so grateful for that scholarship. Without it, I could not have completed college. Man, that would have been a tragedy...for me to end up back home and letting down my folks! (Shakes his head). (Juan)

Likewise, Larry who received a scholarship, lost it after allowing his grade point average to slip from a 3.0 G.P.A. to a 2.5 G.P.A. Larry thought he would have to drop out of school, but found an alternative method for paying for his college education. That method for him was in his words, his "saving grace" in the form of student loans.

My family didn't have a lot of money. In fact, my mother was a single parent. When my dad left we were in financial limbo. For real, we were lost. No money. How would I go to school? Luckily, I got a full-tuition academic scholarship to go to school, but I lost it due to not keeping up my grades in the school of engineering. I thought I was going to have to quit, even though I had a 2.5 G.P.A. But you need to maintain a 3.0 G.P.A. to keep your scholarship! I took out loans. I took out more than the tuition amount, but it was so I could live on. You know, so I could live, eat, and get back and forth to school. I didn't take out a whole lot, though. Enough. I was a very modest spender. Some people might think taking out loans does not make sense, but if that is the only means to afford a college

degree, in my opinion, it's worth it. Loans for me, was my saving grace. I can always pay them back, you know? What's the alternative? No degree? I prefer to earn a degree and pay the money back... Without loans, I could not have graduated. (Larry)

For one participant, David, the funding for his college education came from participating in Reserve Officers' Training Corp (ROTC), a college-based program for training commissioned officers of the United States armed forces. In the following statement David describes how important this source of funding was to his college education, and later, to his career:

My biggest challenge to staying in school was meeting the financial obligations of college. As a non-resident student, my tuition was about three times the amount of a Kentucky resident. I ended up joining ROTC the spring semester of my freshman year. I got a scholarship by participating in ROTC and nearly ten years later, I'm a Major in the U.S. Air force. My full scholarship through the ROTC played a big role in my college success, because with a full scholarship, there was no need to worry about funds. I'm not sure how I would have been able to afford college without it. The scholarship took the financial burden away from me, but graduation was my motivation to finish. (David)

While, eleven out of 15 participants (73%) attended college on scholarships, five of those 15 students (33%) reported that at some point in their undergraduate careers they had to take out student loans to help pay for college. Two of those five students attended college solely on student loans. As out-of-state residents, Sergio and Kelvin did not qualify for the Porter Scholarship or Cardinal Covenant designed for Kentucky residents. They opted to attend college on student loans, because their desire to acquire degrees from the University of Louisville "outweighed any negative draw-backs associated with acquiring student loan debt." (Kelvin) In the following statement, Sergio explained why having student loans were pertinent for him in order to attend and graduate from college.

I always wanted to go to the University of Louisville, because I'm a huge [University of] Louisville fan. Plus, Louisville had a great sports administration program. I'm from the South, so it made sense for me to go to a school with a

good athletic program that was close to home. I wanted to go to Louisville so bad, that it didn't matter that I didn't have the money to go. I qualified for loans. My family didn't have money and I didn't qualify for the [Kentucky] scholarships that my friends got, but I really, really wanted to go to U of L. Once I got there, I saw that U of L had [retention] programs for Black men, so I knew I had made the right decision...A lot of people say you should graduate from school without debt, but what are the chances you can graduate from college as a Black man from a school that's dedicated to graduating Black men? It didn't matter to me that I had to get loans. I'm just glad I had that option, because I graduated within four years with a degree in my chosen field from the college of my choice. I met a number of Black men on campus who were around my same age that worked as student leaders and resident assistants. They made sure I succeeded. Now, I'm working in the same type of role here in my home-town. I'd like to think that spending my money to go to U of L was well worth my investment. (Sergio)

Theme 2: Having a Mentor

Having a mentor refers to a person or organization that participants acknowledged as playing a critical role in helping them negotiate their way through college. All of the participants (100%) identified the mentor as somebody who helped them at a crucial point in their journey toward obtaining their baccalaureate degrees. For one participant, Juan, there was no one person, but a few African American males who helped him persist through college.

Some of my mentors came from staff, such as the admissions office advisor and the advisor of Collegiate 100. Those were both headed by Black men. These men kept me grounded. I saw these young black men in front of me who were accomplished and focused. I wanted to be like them. All of my mentors gave me social and emotional support...I can say for sure that these strong, Black men contributed to my resilience. Being around them gave me drive and ambition to finish college and then get a job that would help me become the men they had been for me. (Juan)

Larry, a 24-year old graduate recounted how an acting dean who was from his hometown recruited him to college, and then surrounded him by other African American

males on campus. These African American males served as his mentors and pushed him to succeed.

The [former] Acting Dean of Students at UofL had asked me to consider coming to college here in Louisville, so I came. He was from my hometown in Boston. We knew each other back home in my hometown, before he came to UofL to work in student affairs. He had stepped into my life when my dad left and became a mentor for me. So when he told me to come to this university, I came. Once I got into the college, he encouraged me to link up with other Black men to support me, like a resident director, who was a young, Black male. He later went on to become a director of the cultural center. He helped me with resumes and was someone I could talk to because he was young. And then there was the professor in Pan African Studies who followed me through my entire college career and told me I better not fail...All these Black men contributed to my decision to stay in college, basically, because they looked like me, knew my story as a Black man, and encouraged me to stay on the right path. (Larry)

Having multiple Black males as mentors is a prevailing theme for many of the participants. Black male administrators, staff and graduate college students seemed to be as critical to their success and decision to graduate as Black male college professors.

Vennie described how there was not just one Black male who inspired him to remain in college and graduate, but many.

I can say that at least three guys were great mentors for me. One guy is a professor in the Pan African Studies department. The other is the advisor to the Student African American Brotherhood. And then there is ____ who is a graduate student in the Pan African Studies Department. He is like an older brother. I mean, dude is about 40! But he was able to keep me on the right path. He always told us younger brothers what we needed to do. But he didn't stop there. He told us when we are doing wrong. All these brothas [Black men] pushed students. They never let you give up. It's like you are accountable to them and when you have to give an account to someone for your behavior and your success, you do what is expected of you...When I was struggling to keep up my grades after a breakup with my college girlfriend, the love of my life, these three men kept me focused and told me I could not quit. Quitting was not an option. I refused to let it be said that I failed them. So I didn't. I pressed through the pain and the struggles until I graduated. But I tell you, it was hard, especially when your own dad is disappointed in you, because you kept messing up in school. I guess you can say these guys were like a dad to me. They say it takes a village, so in a sense...in a sense; they were like a village of fathers for me, pushing me, like, like, a dad would. (Fights back tears). Man, I can't go on with this. (Breaks). Let's just say, if

it wasn't for these three men, I probably would have quit school and been another statistic. But I didn't, I kept going. Now, my dad is very proud of me. I can't tell you how good that feels. (Vennie)

Demetrius mirrored that having Black male mentors to hold him accountable for his own success helped him to persist and graduate. Furthermore, these mentors, having high expectations for Black male students, according to Demetrius, made them feel that succeeding in school and graduating were their only options.

The [former] director of the cultural center and the [former] assistant director of minority recruitment in the admissions office are both brothas. These brothas were successful Black men who stayed with us young Black male students and made sure we were on our A-game...getting good grades in school. They made no excuses for us, and didn't allow us to make any excuses for failures or why we could not graduate on time. There was no way I was about to fail those brothas. They thought too highly of me and expected me to succeed. (Demetrius)

Seth mimicked that he had multiple Black male mentors, but discussed that one mentor stood out as someone who played a very vital role in his decision to remain in college. This mentor, the advisor of the Student African American Brotherhood, not only served as his advisor and mentor, but confidant and friend during his college years at the University of Louisville.

I had many Black male role models, but the most important mentor was my SAAB [Student African American Brotherhood] advisor, because he is a Black man who I saw nearly every single day. He is a successful Black man who was a successful entrepreneur before he got into student affairs...someone that we had a tremendous amount of respect for. We would go into his office and see him working. We also would see him on campus studying for his PhD. I was like, Okay, I know what I need to do to succeed...stay focused, like him. My SAAB brothers would go into his office and hang out and crack jokes on him, because to us, he was some old cat, in his 40s, still studying. But we did it in fun. We loved that guy! We'd go into his office and hang out with each other and with him. We could go there, relax, and shoot the breeze. And if we were distressed about school, we could talk to him about it. He is such a passionate guy...passionate about advising and mentoring young Black guys. He would always ask us about our grades... We could tell that he really cared about us, because he would ask us

about our families. He'd always listen to us and give us advice... We would talk about relationship problems and things like that. Things we couldn't talk to other people about. We hung out outside of his office, too. We would go to the gym and talk about what was on our minds. He and my SAAB brothers really supported me. During freshman orientation, they told us to get involved in college. So I got involved in SAAB. Without SAAB I would not have stayed in college. If I had not joined them, going through all I had been through..struggling when I almost lost my scholarship, depressed when I had problems with my father...I would not have graduated. He did more than helped me graduate. He became a very close friend to me, until this day. (Seth)

While many participants stressed that African American student affairs administrators, advisors, and graduate students contributed to their decision to remain in college, do well academically and graduate, others shared that African American professors contributed to their success. Sergio expressed, "There were key African American men who contributed to my decision to remain in college and succeed. My major supports were Black professors in Sports Administration; the department from which I graduated."

For Juan and Kofi, Black male professors in the Pan African Studies Department held them to high standards and gave them tools they needed to become role models as they persisted through college. The following statements sum up their experiences.

I asked [a faculty member] from the Pan African Studies Department to be my mentor. I worked hard in his class to get A's because he expected me to. He would call me out in class and point to me and say things like, "That boy...he better get an A! Running 'round here with my name on him as my mentee...he better get an A! I expect nothing less!" He didn't do it to embarrass me. That's just his character. And guess what? I got A's in his classes, because he did not play! Sometimes, I'd go to his office, just to hear him tell me how great of a man I was and how he expected me to be as great as he. I started hanging out with him and in the department, even when I didn't have classes there. Hanging out in that department gave me a sense of self. From that department, I got emotional and social support which fortified me and gave me the tools I needed to become successful. (Juan)

Kofi, a 23-year old graduate chose his mentors early in his college career at the urging of his peer. In the following statement, he echoed Juan's experience of choosing professors of Pan African Studies to mentor him:

My mentorship experience...it goes straight to the Pan African studies Department. The end of my freshman year, a friend encouraged me to get a professor as a mentor. I took a Pan African Studies class and enjoyed it. I really liked the way the professor taught in class. And I was impressed by his presence, so my friend said I should ask him to be my mentor. I did. This professor not only made sure I did well in his class, but he kept up with me after class, inviting me to his office and even out to dinner many times to discuss my grades, my future plans and my life, in general. Then I took other PAS classes and saw these Black men who looked like me. The chair of the PAS department also became a very important role model and mentor. I made sure I visited him during his office hours, asked him questions about courses, about issues in the Black community, and about how I can utilize my education and skills to help my community...A part from classes, I went to his speaking engagements in the community and even got to know his family. That was important for me...to see him not only as a professor, but as a community leader, father, and husband. As a Black man, you don't get to see too many Black men achieve. In PAS I got to see examples of strong, educated and intelligent Black men. Their presence is powerful and then when they speak, it confirms who you are as a Black man. These professors had information on Black people and understood Black people. That meant a lot to me. (Kofi)

Kofi elaborated how the "PAS community affirms a Black man's being."

PAS is like having a community inside a community. Being a Black man, you feel excluded in society and in institutions. Aside from maybe HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities], having a Black community is important; it affirms you and your essence or your 'being' as a person of color. (Kofi)

Kofi also shared that while Black men served their purpose in terms of encouraging him, having an African American female role model to support him was crucial, as well. For him, having a female role model as a mentor reminded him how critical of a role women play in the development and success of Black males in society.

I also had a Black woman from the business department as a mentor. She wouldn't let me give up. She encouraged me. She was like a mother figure which I think was very important, especially living in a society which seems to devalue women. In my community, though, women are the teachers and nurturers of men, so I appreciated every single word and push from my academic advisor. When I was discouraged and ready to drop out and give up, she understood. She said, "No. You are not quitting! You're too close." Even as a freshman, she said, "Well, you are already here, so do what you gotta do to get done." Each year, she said, "You're closer; you might as well finish, now." She talked me into finishing just that one last semester. She said that every single semester until I finished college. (Kofi)

Although many of the participants expressed how important it was for them to have African Americans as models and mentors, others, such as David, Larry, James, and Jeremiah stated that race was not the most important contributing factor when selecting a mentor, but having someone who cared about them who had a vested interest in their success. Many of these mentors, in Jeremiah's words, "took a by-any-means-necessary" approach to ensure students fulfilled graduation requirements and marched across the stage.

I received mentoring from my ROTC instructors to ensure I kept my grades up and met Air Force standards. These were people I could talk to; to seek guidance. They wanted to see me do well so they ensured that I stayed on the straight and narrow. It didn't matter to me if they were African American or not. Actually, only one was African American. The majority of them were White males. What mattered was that they wanted to see me succeed, not their ethnicity or color of their skin. (David)

I had this one White male mentor and professor in PAS. who always supported me, even though he was a White male. (Smiles). I know that's interesting. But it's the truth. In class, when I'd offer a comment regarding racism, people would get mad, but Dr. ___ would say, "Well, he's right." He knew his stuff...he understood the history of oppression as it relates to people of color and he made me feel comfortable acknowledging that in class. (Larry)

One of my most important mentors was actually a White woman. She is the Director of Admissions. She stayed on me while I was in school and hired me as a student worker early in my college career. She also told me about the job opening

and when I applied, I got it. That job as a student worker led to a permanent position once I graduated from college. She provided serious emotional support and mentorship for me. Didn't matter to me that she was White or a woman. She inspired me to keep my grades up so I could graduate and qualify for a job working in student affairs. (James)

Jeremiah, a 27-year old student affairs professional, recounted how the same woman who mentored James helped mold him for his current position. In his words, "it may seem odd to have White female mentors, but I had two. Of course I had some Black male mentors, too, but these two women were also essential in terms of my development and success. It didn't really matter to me that they were White or women. They helped shape my ideas and prepared me for my future." Jeremiah elaborated:

Two of my most important mentors were White woman. First, there was the Director of Admissions who hired me as an orientation advisor during my undergraduate career in college. She made sure I kept my grades up, because in my opinion, she was considering me and preparing me for a higher position within her department. As you know, I'm now an assistant director of admissions. She would always ask me about my grades and my emotional well-being...My other mentor was my Spanish teacher. A White woman who identified herself as a lesbian. She made learning fun. She had me to write a paper on the Moors. This gave me a sense of cultural identity and helped me to see that Moors were Blacks who had contributed to the world.

Jeremiah continued to verbalize how his mentors helped cultivate his development as a Black male. In his words, this "not only contributed to his decision to remain in college and graduate, but assisted him with knowing what he would do later on in life as a college graduate and professional."

The class I took with my Spanish professor who instructed me to write on the contribution of the Moors, and the classes I took with a professor in PAS changed my entire perspective in life. My PAS professor was very instrumental in shaping my ideologies to the extent that it contributed to my life's work and paradigm shifting. It is instrumental in how I designed programs in my current job. What my PAS teacher did for me, other than encouraging me and making sure I did well in school, was introduce me to a radical theory class called the Pedagogy of the Oppressed. That changed my entire life. These were two very important professors...one White female and one Black male. Their course work and

instruction taught me about the contribution Blacks and Moors, who you know, were also Blacks made in our society. Man, that made me feel good about being a Black man. And when a Black man feels good about himself, he will succeed in college, in his family, in his career and in his community... I'd like to consider myself a successful Black man today, thanks in great part to the mentors I had in college, which by the way are still very close to me as mentors and friends, today. They took a by-any-means-necessary approach to making sure I got it. Now, I have a strong sense of self. I understand the past and present and future as an African American/Latino. The classes I took in Pan African Studies and in the Spanish Department helped me understand self, coming from a so-called mixed African /Latin background....The key to success is understanding the value of learning about self. (Jeremiah)

Peer mentorship.

While many participants acknowledged that professors, graduate students and college staff served as mentors for them, others stated that their peers played a critical role in helping them negotiate their way through college. Twelve out of 15 participants (80%) identified that having peer mentors was critical to their success. Some of these peers were males who had participated in student organizations, such as fraternities. Others were males who participants had identified as mentors, because they shared the same commitments to serving their community and graduating from college.

In the following statement, Juan describes how peer mentorship was critical to his success:

For me, my peers were friends who were already doing their master degree programs, working on their Ph.D.s or other professional degrees. The average age of my friends was 28. They encouraged me to push through and get my bachelor degree program. At one point, I thought that was good...to have peer mentors...men in their 20s doing great things, but in another sense it wasn't good, because I was like, 'how come I don't have my Ph.D.?' Then I had to realize that I was only 21! I felt like I couldn't see the forest for the trees. But these guys and those closer to my age who were also doing great things assured me that I would make it. I had to make it, because they depended on me to do it. They were not afraid to admit their short-comings. They said, "Dude, we failed so much. You just were not around." (Laughs). After that, I got a little more comfortable. (Juan)

Juan continued to describe how his peer relationships were vital to his achievement pursuits. Having peers to model for him what successful leaders looked like inspired him to reach the expectations they set forth.

I was around a lot of great men who were doing a lot of great things. I felt like if I'm not doing it, I'm a failure. Some of my friends who had been RSO presidents were doing great things, like digging wells in Africa, so I couldn't let them down. When I became the president of my fraternity, I made sure our fraternity didn't keep up an old tradition of partying. I made sure our focus was on community service. Having such great friends as mentors was a blessing and a curse at the same time. I had many failures [as an RSO leader], but I eventually learned how to balance. Having mentors to look up to really helped me to push myself to do well.

James and Demetrius offered that memberships and participation in organizations which uphold a tradition of academic excellence, leadership and service for African American males tend to play a vital role in helping Black men graduate.

My alpha brothers [fraternity brothers] played a huge role in making college comfortable for me. Just knowing they were there for me was a major encouragement. Remember, my family comes from a tradition of Alpha men. All the men in my family are Alphas. We have a tradition of being successful Black men. It is expected of each and every one of our family men and fraternity members to graduate with a record of academic excellence. (James)

My Iota fraternity brothers kept me grounded and held me to a high standard. I had to do well in my classes in order to remain in the fraternity and to hold office. It did not matter what other fraternities were doing; we had to all serve in the community, have leadership roles and make good grades... There was no time for partying. I maintained that tradition during my presidency my senior year. I know that fraternities have a reputation of partying, but our fraternity is relatively new. We wanted to create a tradition of excellence for Black men. Gotta uphold the motto. Our motto is that we are building a tradition, not resting upon one. (Demetrius)

Some participants stressed that having a peer relationship with a male in a leadership role who was close to their age gave them the opportunity to have someone to

look up to while simultaneously allowing them to confide in them as a confidant. Sergio shared his experience as an example.

In addition to those [aforementioned mentors] were the African American young men who helped to recruit me. They worked in the admissions office. At the time, they were just student volunteers who assisted with the orientation of incoming freshman (SOSers). These guys were close to my age. Maybe a year or two older. Those guys really helped me through college. They encouraged me, talked to me about my problems, and celebrated my successes with me... What was great about them was they were young Black men who understood my experiences as a young Black man just trying to make it through college... They got me involved in SAAB and Collegiate 100. Watching them and joining extracurricular activities with them strengthened our brotherhood and definitely helped me to graduate and become a successful man, myself. I patterned my life after them and now, I work in student affairs just like them. (Sergio)

Theme 3: Involvement in Recognized Student Organizations (RSOs)

Being involved in RSOs really helped me stay focused, because the involvement helped me feel connected to college. Once I became involved, I knew I wouldn't let anything hold me back. (Muhammad)

There was a consensus among participants that as important as having resources and mentorship was to their academic success, participation in recognized student organizations was just as significant in terms of helping them stay in school and maintain their commitment to graduate. All (100%) of study participants stated that their involvement in extra-curricular activities was critical to their success. As one participant, Kwame, a twenty-four year old, 2010 graduate, and recently hired college student personnel professional explained, "participation in student organizations give many Black males a sense of belonging and connectedness to campus which then motivates them and gives them the drive to excel in academics and graduate."

A younger participant, Travis, 22, concurred, but offered in addition, that participating in student organizations makes it easier for males to surround themselves

with positivity rather than giving into peer pressure to hang around peers who might negatively influence them:

Participation in student organizations gave me an excuse to not hang around my old friends. I could say I had to do something. They would say, 'Man, you're acting brand new' but luckily, I had RSOs and campus programs as outlets. Things could have gotten bad for me had I not had outlets. Working in them [campus organizations] forced me to schedule my time and have positive things to do, rather than hang around guys who might have steered me in a direction I didn't want to go. (Travis)

Sergio, a 23 year old graduate added that participation in student organizations enabled him to build a support network of males who shared his vision of academic excellence and graduation. For him, it was important to have a sense of community on the college campus:

When you surround yourself with brothas who are doing well and who are positive, you improve yourself and your community. This helps you and provides you with a strong support system. By participating in organizations like SAAB and Collegiate 100, I was able to build a strong support system for myself, out of 22,000 students. That's what helped me to get through college and graduate. (Sergio)

Larry, who recently relocated to Africa, described how his participation in a recognized student organization gave him the opportunity to travel abroad. That travel abroad experience led to him taking a leadership role in a community in Senegal, upon graduation.

I was very involved in college. If you do one thing [activity], you are gonna do something else. I thought everyone did it [became involved in campus]. Participating in campus activities helps you not to feel isolated. One of the most important things I did was to participate in a travel abroad opportunity. When I went to Senegal, I went into the villages and sat in on meetings with elders in the village and the young. I learned about injustices like female circumcision which occurs overseas. Now I work in community programs here in Louisville. When people say you can go anywhere, now I see it. Had I not had that experience, I would not have found my purpose...to go to Africa and help people work towards solutions. Had I not gone, I would not have believed that I could purchase a ticket and just go! My horizons expanded. I would have never thought about going.

Now, buying a plane ticket is a reality for me. Traveling abroad...opportunities...the world opened up to me. I gained that experience from my travel abroad program in college. This year, my wife and I are moving to Africa! (Larry)

In the following statement David explained how participation in a college program not only helped him to graduate, but helped him to achieve his career goals:

I think the biggest contribution to my completion of college was getting involved and taking ownership of my future. I stayed active in campus life by being a part of the college orientation team, being a resident advisor and being involved in ROTC. I had responsibilities within these programs that I wanted to see through to the end. If I quit college I wouldn't have been able to see the impact that I had in these programs and the university as a whole. By participating in ROTC I was able to see the light at the end of the tunnel that we call college. Knowing that I would have a career after college helped me to stay focused on the goal of graduation. By participating in ROTC, I was able to later join the Air Force. (David)

Juan, James, Demetrius, Kelvin, Max and Kwame described how their participation in student organizations specifically designed to aid in the retention and graduation of men of color, such as the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) and Collegiate 100 was very critical to their academic success and acquisition of their college degrees.

I was heavily involved in student organizations in college. The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), Porter scholars, Phi-Sigma Theta, African American Male Initiative (AAMI), NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the Association of Black Students (ABS). I served as the political action chair for the NAACP, and was Vice President of ABS. My experiences in these organizations were great. I learned leadership development, accountability, how to be a role model and how to succeed...Overall, I'd have to say it was my family, my mentors and my involvement in these organizations that gave me what I needed to succeed. But the thing that contributed most to my resiliency was my SAAB brothers. My SAAB brothers are my family. They kept me grounded in college and they still do to this day. After all, we are our brother's keeper. (Juan)

Juan added that the reasons he and many of his African American male colleagues decided to join and participate in organizations specifically targeting men of color was to

provide a buffer to feelings of isolation due to experiences of racism, and also to form a community which encouraged them to succeed regardless of any perceived obstacles.

As a Black man, you have the weight of the world on your shoulders. That can be overwhelming. Racism is definitely there [on campus] but when you are ambitious as my group of [SAAB] brothers, you don't dwell on it. We were able to get involved in predominantly Black RSOs so that puts barriers to the racism and discrimination, but when you involve yourself with all Black men, you might not experience racism on the same level as Black men who go to PWIs who do not involve themselves in RSOs with other Black men... Yeah, racism and discrimination are definitely there, but there are ways to protect yourself from it.

James, a 26 year old, 2008 graduate described how participating in Collegiate 100 provided him with a peer mentorship experience with other African American males which became an "inseparable bond."

Collegiate 100 is a very close group. It is a phenomenal organization, because it provides leadership development and mentorship experiences which helps men in the organization to form an inseparable bond between them. I guess you could say Collegiate 100 is like the step-brother to SAAB. (Laughs). Don't get me wrong, we have the same mission, but some people see us as rivals when we really aren't. We are both committed to graduating Black men. But whereas SAAB doesn't require a specific GPA, Collegiate requires a strong GPA and has stringent qualifications to join. That's what got me into the organization, but the strong bond between men who have the same goal of striving for excellence everything we do, is what kept me there. (James)

One of the youngest participants, Demetrius relayed that participation in SAAB helped him become involved in campus student life; an achievement that was important for him and critical to his academic success, because he had been previously introverted.

I became really involved in college, which was new for me, because I had always been a shy and reserved person. But then I joined SAAB. During orientation, we had mentors in what is called a C.O.N.E.C.T. program. These mentors set up appointments with incoming freshman and follow you and build relationships with you your freshman year so that you stay connected to campus. These are all African American mentors. Well, they encouraged me to join SAAB. I already knew two or three guys who had been in SAAB, so I knew this would be a good fit for me. SAAB brothers encouraged the young incoming freshman and stayed with us until we graduated. They played ball with us, laser tag, video games...you

name it. And these were all juniors and seniors getting involved with freshmen. That was pretty powerful! (Demetrius)

Like Demetrius, Kelvin, a 29 year old graduate shared how he became involved in the SAAB organization which “kept him engaged in college.” Likewise, Max presented that engagement in an organization with males who shared the same goal of graduating boosted his drive to graduate.

In the art department where I took classes, there were no people who looked like me. And there were hardly any males around. The classes were predominantly comprised with White females. And there was only one Black teacher on faculty. One day I met a guy who was involved in SAAB. I joined the brotherhood because I felt isolated as the only black male in my department. In the brotherhood, though, there were a lot of us. We were all focused. There are no stipulations or GPA to join. You just had to be a Black man trying to graduate. I needed that support, you know, because I grew up without a father. And there was no one that I knew on my mother’s side or father’s side who had gone to college. SAAB was a source of support and brotherhood... We studied together, discussed life issues together, such as self-image, career, and marriage. We also hung out together. I graduated from college about five years ago, and we are still, to this day very close. My SAAB colleagues and older SAAB brothers kept me engaged in college. That definitely helped me to hang in there and graduate. My favorite thing about SAAB is that we believe in our motto: ‘I am my brother’s keeper and together we will rise.’ The other part to that is ‘saving lives and salvaging dreams.’ We would recite that at every single SAAB meeting. We take that to heart and live it, every single day. I still go to SAAB meetings, because it is my mission to uphold our motto. Without those cats, I wouldn’t be where I am, so it’s my job to give back. (Kelvin)

The biggest thing that contributed to my success was SAAB. I became a part of SAAB, because everyone on campus who was involved in SAAB was on track. They had their head on their shoulders and they either graduated or were on the road to graduating. That was a major encourager and pushed me toward my goal of walking across that graduation stage. Why? Because before I got involved in SAAB, I didn’t even know what I wanted to do with my life. I hadn’t even declared a major. But when I got around all those brothas who knew what they wanted in life, I got my act together, declared a major and got out there and graduated. (Max)

Kwame suggested that the power of SAAB was the organization’s ability to create a “strong peer group where Black men could study together, kick it on weekends together

and support and encourage each other through life's issues.” He stated that having meetings on campus once a week where they dressed up, recited the SAAB mission and Black National Anthem “inspired them to live by (their) mission, ‘I am my brother’s keeper and together we will rise’ and helped (them) graduate.”

Theme 4: Having Family Support

For many students, having family as a source of support was critical to their perseverance in college. They highlighted that support prior to and during college significantly impacted their ability to persist in and graduate from college. Thirteen of fifteen study participants (87%) indicated that family support included preparing them academically, socially and emotionally for the academic rigors and socio-emotional challenges associated with attending college, prior to their arrival on the college campus, as well as providing them with emotional and financial support while attending college. The following quotes highlight how participants’ families played a critical role in their academic preparation, college success and acquisition of their college degrees.

Family was critical to my success. I had to do it, because my sister did it [graduated]. I also had a commitment to my family and community. In the Black community, family is broken down into three parts: immediate family, church, and community. All of them were critical. My family gave me the tools I need to success, such as making sure I was prepared academically. The church gave me gift cards and a little money here and there to support and encourage me. In the community, there was always someone to make sure you did your ACTs, college applications, financial aid forms every year and kept your grades up. You felt like you were doing this for everyone...family, church and community. There is nothing like going home and hundreds of people are celebrating your success as a college student! It is an incentive to continue even though they didn't have academics in their own families! (Larry)

I was prepared for school because I had a strong foundation as a child. Before college, I was fortunate enough to go to school that my family created. I had great teachers. They included my parents, even though they were divorced, my aunts, uncles and grandmother. My mom is a psychologist and my dad did three years in

a computer engineering technology program in college. My aunt had a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in business, and my uncle, her husband had a doctorate degree in engineering. My grandmother had a master's degree. They all taught at our family school. My family well prepared me for college... They told me I had to go to college and finish college for my race. For my people. This wasn't about me. Ultimately, family is the reason I entered college, and it is the reason I finished. (Kofi)

My family contributed to my resiliency. Our house was close to campus, even though I lived off campus. I was able to go home when things got rough and just chill out. My family was very supportive, so I didn't really think about quitting. But when I needed a break, my family let me know it was okay to come home and take a break. One semester, I took the entire semester off... just to relax and chill. My family told me that this journey was about me, and not to worry about anybody else. They said, "It's YOUR race; you gotta finish it and finish it the way you want to. Don't worry about how everyone else is doing it." (Juan)

In the following statement, David asserted how his family's expectations for him to graduate, though unspoken, gave him motivation to persist in college. Being the first to attend college increased his motivation and affirmed for him that graduating from college was something he had to do to show his appreciation for his family.

I am a first generation college student. My family academically prepared me for college, by ensuring that I took college prep classes throughout high school. They also enrolled me in the Upward Bound program. They taught me that my opportunities were endless and that I could have been anyone I wanted to be. Although there was nothing said to me directly about going to or staying in college, I felt the pressure to remain in college for my family, as a first generation college student. I had to do so... after all they had done for me. I think the self-perceived pressure played a great deal. (David)

For James, graduating from college was a part of family tradition. His experience coming from a family of college graduates propelled him to "do well academically while in college and graduate in order to continue (his) family legacy." James expounded:

I'm much disciplined because of my family culture. College was expected. We have a culture of education. That is our family tradition. We don't know anything different. Speaking of tradition, my entire family is Greek. My dad, grand dad and brother are all Alpha men [Black Greek Fraternity]. It is our tradition. My dad and mom are educated. I can go back to my dad's side... all the way back to emancipation and all my dad's side were all educated and educators. For my

brother and me, graduation from high school was just another day...like graduating from kindergarten. But you have to understand that my father is a college professor and my Mom used to be a high school teacher. My dad's father was one of the first African American principals in Kentucky. My great-great grandfather was the first dean of students at the institute that my family created for African Americans to receive a college education. Education for my brother and me was what we were supposed to do. My mom took me out of private school and taught me according to my learning style. She taught me and tutored me and taught me study habits and discipline. So when I came to college I was very prepared. I went on from undergraduate college to get a master's degree and I will be leaving soon to get my PhD...That's just what we do. My family is proud, but that is what is expected of me. My brother succeeded before me, but so did the rest of my family, especially on my dad's side. Ever since emancipation. This is what we are known for. My graduation from college was my contribution to my family's legacy. This is what we do. (James)

Sergio also acknowledged that his determination to graduate from college was his contribution to his family's legacy of being college educated. For him, being a college graduate was not just an achievement for his family, but also for his community.

When I went off to college I had good time management and good discipline, because of my course load and course work in high school. It stemmed from my upbringing. My parents taught discipline. Also, I was already social in high school so I transferred those social skills I had acquired early in life and brought them to college. This is just something my parents taught me. When you have enough family-oriented people scattered throughout the states and communities all over the world, you will succeed. I am the youngest in my family. I was always expected to succeed. I have a brother who is a dentist, a brother who is an engineer, and a sister who works for the federal government. They did well, so I had to do well. It's in our bloodline. Our parents expected it of us. Our family encouraged us to get advanced degrees. They let me know that I had others looking up to me. I wasn't just a role model to peers and colleagues in college, but also to younger family members. I said to myself, hey, you have people looking up to you. Keep pushing, regardless of the hurdles you have to jump over...to build a stronger African American community. My family instilled that into me. (Sergio)

For many students, like Seth, a 23-year graduate, giving back to their family for the support and encouragement they received while in college was their motivation for getting through college and graduating. Seth described why this was the case for him.

My family was so important, I mean in a lot of ways, but mostly in terms of helping me. Know what I mean? I had to graduate. My family was poor, but they made a way for me to get there and stay there. They sacrificed their own success to get me through college. Like, there were things they could have done with their money and time, but they were there to give me money and stuff like food when I needed them in college. You know how it is when you are a college student. You know, you need money for tuition, books and stuff, but you also want a life. My family understood that and used their hard earned money to make sure I even had money to go out with friends and kick it. Yeah, I admit, some of the money I used to take the ladies out, but hey, I was young. They knew that I didn't use money just for school. But they still gave me what I needed. I had to graduate and get a good job, so I could pay them back. They encouraged me the entire way through school. I had to graduate. I wanted to make a way for my family. (Seth)

Theme 5: Taking One or More Courses in the Pan African Studies Department

At least two-thirds (ten out of 15) of the participants (67%) had taken one or more courses in the Pan African Studies Department. Kofi, Jeremiah, Travis, Juan and James echoed the sentiments of many participants in regards to the importance of taking P.A.S. courses as it related to their racial identity and resiliency in college. Many of them stressed how their resiliency boosted their commitment to graduate from college.

PAS is important, because in many other classes, you feel isolated. They don't say, "hey Blackie, this is how we feel about you, but they speak in codes in their books. For example, when they talk about the economy booming they don't talk about why labor, capital and supply matter. Supply of what? Who were the laborers? They built their wealth on the backs of slaves. And continue to steal resources from Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East and pump it into Europe and America. This stuff discourages you from wanting to finish college. Stuff about how they enslaved your people and steal from your country of origin to make them rich. And then they launch wars to steal these resources and tell them if they want to rebuild, they have to borrow money from their oppressors. You have to read this stuff in their books. And they wonder why Black men are angry? Who were the first people they traded in their markets? African slaves. Slaves were the stocks. Get it? The other day I read a section from my book...see, here it is. It says, "White people are often paid more than others to work in Black neighborhoods as an incentive to hire them. They are paid more, because they don't like working around Black people." When you have to see stuff like that in their books, in Economics, it makes you angry, because they are so blatant about how they feel about us. This is why I had to go to Pan African Studies Department. To get solace and sense of well-being. And to get the

strength I needed to cope. To get through the pain of reading things like this in my college books. It's tough, man. (Wipes tears). But ya gotta do what you gotta do to get through and graduate, because a college degree, as my Momma puts it, gives you access and provides a level playing field for you to get into high places and make some changes. (Looks at researcher intently). You gotta research how Black leaders have stated that when you expose Black children to historical contributions of Blacks to society, they exceed in school. Look it up and include it in your dissertation. I knew this because my parents exposed me to Black educators and philosophers, but classes in Pan African Studies confirmed this for me. I am a witness. I can testify that this is true, because once I took classes in Pan African Studies, I was fortified. Got stronger. And determined to take the hits and get through college and finish. (Kofi).

Larry described how a particular professor in the Pan African Studies Department modeled for him the type of man he wanted to be. After taking a few of his classes, he developed a strong identity as a Black man. The sense of security led him to participate in student organizations and enabled him to feel more connected to the college campus.

Taking classes with [a specific professor] in the PAS department helped me to develop a strong sense of self. Here I was taking classes with this well-educated, successful brother who looked like me and had information about my ancestry...there was no way I could fail. After taking his classes, I felt more secure about who I was as a Black man. I wanted to be like him, so I did what I needed to do to become like him. I read. I studied. I dressed up like him and took leadership roles on campus, so that he could be proud of me. That did a lot for me. I had to reject and negate the stereotypes that many people had about Black men, due to what they see on television, and present myself as an educated brotha like my professor. I think taking his classes gave me everything I needed to become a man. Taking his classes led to me changing my major to Pan African Studies. After I did that, I was good to go. My grades got better and I just felt better about being a man. I held my head higher and began not only to serve on campus, but in my community. Whereas before I had been a bit quiet, suddenly, I became outspoken about injustices and began working closely with disenfranchised people on campus, in Louisville, and abroad in Senegal, when I went there during a college break. (Larry)

Travis, Juan and James provided insight into how taking courses in Pan African Studies contributed to their racial identity development in a way that inspired them to bring up their grade point averages and reinforce their will to succeed. Success for these

men was equated with doing well in school, graduating, and/or acquiring leadership positions in their career.

Before I took PAS classes, I was struggling academically and I really didn't want to be in college. I just went to classes and went home. But then I took one PAS course at the urging of one of my friends. After that one class, I took many more. Those classes transformed my life! I gained a sense of identity because I gained knowledge of self. From there, I went on to work at the cultural center, because it made sense to continue to be around people who had a vested interest in my success. I figured since I didn't have a bunch of male role models growing up, I would continue to surround myself with Black men who were successful, like those in the Pan African Studies Department and in the cultural center. I wanted to be a role model like them. And I'm doing this for my daughter, so that she could see positive men doing well in their lives. Participating in the PAS department brought my GPA up from a 2.0 to a 3.5 GPA. How do I know it was the PAS courses? Because being in that department, around those powerful Black men who were teaching me about myself and my people and all we contributed to the world, gave me incredibly high self-esteem and changed my attitude, thought processes, behavior and will to succeed. (Travis)

I asked [a professor from the Pan African Studies Department] to be my mentor. I worked hard in his class to get As because he expected me to. Getting As in his class inspired me to bring up my grades in other classes. Hanging out in that department gave me a sense of self. From that department, I got emotional and social support which prepared me and gave me the tools I needed to graduate from college and become a successful man who now works as a leader in an organization which helps African Americans, Latinos, and other disenfranchised people to go to acquire degrees and get jobs. (Juan)

Based on my family culture and tradition, I would have graduated anyway. But there are extra things I did to ensure my success. I took a few Pan African courses. Taking those courses confirmed for me that I was on the right path and they affirmed me as a Black man. But as I said, I would have graduated any way. Still, it was great to take course with Black men who were like me and the men in my family. (James)

Kwame described how taking an introduction course in Pan African Studies led to him taking additional courses and eventually majoring in Pan African Studies. This in turn led to his decision to work in student affairs, while simultaneously contributing to his community.

I took an introductory Pan African Studies course with a White professor. I enjoyed it so much that I decided to take other courses. During that experience I came into contact with the late, great chair of the Pan African Studies Department and Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dr. J. Blaine Hudson had never seen or heard of a Black Dean at UofL before him. He was over the Saturday Academy. That's where he would go into the community and lecture. The first time I went, he was giving a phenomenal lecture on Frederick Douglass. I was wowed. I had gone to receive extra credit, but after that experience, I went nearly every Saturday. I couldn't believe that a Dean would give so much of himself...going into the community where old people and their grandchildren were being educated on Black history. Education is about taking what you know and giving back to your community. There were people there taking notes. I was impressed. That resonated with me. At that point, it was an easy decision to go into PAS as a major. Then, I watched the Dean give talks during the Brown Bag Luncheon series on campus. Dean ___ would come down from his office, from all his duties as a Dean, a department chair, and professor and talk with the students. As Dean Hudson and President Ramsey progressed, I saw retention progress. So I studied Dean Hudson's history. I wanted to be like him someday. I think of him often. I can't believe he died. I want to leave a legacy like him. That's why I went into College Student Personnel and earned a Master's degree. In my spare time, I mentor young Black males, because I feel responsible for helping them stay in college. I haven't decided if I will get my PhD in CSP or Pan African Studies, but I know I want to leave a legacy like Dean Hudson and make an impact on students like him and President Ramsey. (Kwame).

In conclusion, the data analysis yielded five themes which contributed to the retention and success of 15 University of Louisville African American male graduates. Success for these males is equated to persisting in college and acquiring their baccalaureate degrees within six years of enrolling in college. These males' experiences are consistent with the research findings highlighted earlier in the literature review of this paper. One unanticipated finding worthy of further study, however which emerged from the data but was not highlighted in the literature review section of this paper, was that participation in one or more classes in the Pan African Studies department may contribute to the retention and graduation of African American males.

Another unanticipated finding was that while many participants received partial or full scholarships to defray their educational costs, many of them lost their scholarships, once their GPAs slipped below scholarship requirements. Some participants recovered their GPAs and regained their scholarships, but others did not. Students who did not regain their scholarships acquired student loans to cover educational expenses. These unanticipated findings and their implications for future research will be further discussed in the next section of this paper.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study, makes recommendations for leaders in higher education and provides suggestions for future research. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study and the research design utilized to answer the research question. Next, the chapter provides implications and recommendations for leaders in higher education. Finally, the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research. Study limitations are also presented.

This qualitative study utilized individual, semi-structured interviews framed by a phenomenological orientation to answer the research question: *What are the factors which contributed to the retention of African American men who have successfully obtained a baccalaureate degree from the University of Louisville?* The collected data were analyzed using Morrissette's (1999) seven stage step-wise approach, which is specifically designed for studies with a phenomenological orientation. The results of analysis of the phenomenological qualitative study describe the thematic structure of 15 African American males' experience of persisting in and completing their baccalaureate degrees from the University of Louisville between 2007 and 2012.

The analysis of the face-to-face interview transcripts reveal that the structure of this experience consisted of five major themes: 1. having access to monetary resources to attend and persist in college; 2. having a mentor; 3. participating in recognized student

organizations; 4. having family support; 5. taking one or more courses in Pan African Studies.

Recommendations for Practice

Institutions of higher education are charged with creating and implementing programs, policies and practices to aid in the retention and graduation of African American males. Based on the findings that emerged from this study, several recommendations are highlighted in this section. Recommendations for practice are presented for college administrators, college student affairs administrators, faculty, high school administrators and counselors, parents, community organizations and policy makers.

College Administrators

Locating a large sample of African American male alumni to participate in the study presented a challenge, because limited records of African American male graduates have been kept at the University of Louisville. One recommendation is for administrators to maintain updated records of African American male graduates. These records will allow administrators to stay abreast of up-to-date graduation rates. Another recommendation is to create and maintain a system which tracks the academic progress of this special population. Tracking the progress of African American males could make it easier to for college administrators to identify males who may need extra support such as academic or financial aid.

Financial assistance is a necessary component of the college education equation. Without it, African American male students run the risk of dropping out of school. Some participants shared how they became concerned that they would not be able to remain in school, once scholarships were revoked, due to their GPAs slipping from the required standard. Dropping out of school not only puts African American men at risk of not having access to a myriad of career and financial opportunities, but also presents a drain on the school's financial resources and on the economy, at large (Cabrera, Burkum & LaNasa, 2005; Kim & Otis, 2010). This is why receiving scholarships was important for study participants. Financial assistance, such as scholarships and work-study opportunities helped defray their educational costs and gave them peace of mind. As one study participant, Jeremiah commented, "not worrying about how to pay for school made it easier to focus on academics." In addition, there is evidence in the college student retention literature that financial support encourages institutional commitment among Black male college students (Burley, et al, 2007). Institutional commitment subsequently influences students' graduation from college (Tinto, 1975).

Towards this end, student affairs leaders should ensure that Black male college students maximize opportunities to receive financial support. As Burley, et al. (2007) found in their study, Black graduates from a PWI who had received financial aid were more likely to report positive feelings about their college experience. Thus, financial aid appears to be one means by which institutions of higher education can promote positive relationships with their Black male students. This was reflected in many of the participants' expression of appreciation for the financial assistance granted to them by their alma mater.

Ensuring that African American males have the necessary resources to pay for educational costs should be a priority for college administrators. If institutions of higher education are to retain and graduate larger number of African American males from college, they must be prepared to provide them with academic-based, need-based, and/or athletic scholarships to defray tuition and other educational costs associated with attending college (Alexander, 2001; Anderson, 2006). All of the participants reported that they would not have been able to attend college, let alone persist to graduation, had they not had access to resources, such as scholarships, federal grants, work-study positions, and/or low-interest rate student loans. Therefore, college administrators should aggressively raise funds via the private and public sector to help finance at-risk college students such as African American males.

Whereas many participants indicated that they received scholarships to pay for college expenses, at least five participants relayed that their college expenses were paid either partially or solely using college student loans. Although student loans have to be repaid, study participant, Larry, a 24 year-old, expressed appreciation for having loans, as they were his “saving grace” enabling him to remain in college and graduate, after he lost his scholarship when his grade point average slipped below a 3.0. For him, having an option to get a student loan was a welcomed opportunity; otherwise, he would have had to drop out of college. In his words, “What’s the alternative? No degree? I prefer to earn a degree and pay the money back.”

Although many participants like Larry received partial or full scholarships to defray their educational costs, many of them lost their scholarships once their GPAs slipped below scholarship requirements. Some participants recovered their GPAs and

regained their scholarships, but others did not. Students who did not regain their scholarships acquired student loans to cover educational expenses. The implication for college administrators is to create and implement academic support programs to help this population keep up their grades and maintain their scholarships. Additionally, college administrators and development officers should seek additional funding opportunities in the form of scholarships from community and/or faith-based organizations to help retain African American males who are in danger of withdrawing from college, due to their GPAs slipping below scholarship requirements. As Larry recounted, his church and other community organizations gave him both pecuniary and non-pecuniary gifts to subsidize part of his tuition costs and other costs associated with attending college, such as food and educational supplies when he lost his scholarship and was faced with the possibility of having to drop out of college. For him, “The African American family is divided into three entities: immediate family, church, and community [people and organizations]...When I was faced with the possibility of having to drop out, the church and community helped pay my bills, gave me money, food cards, and clothes to make sure I stayed in college.” This helped him to remain in school and also to reduce the loan amount that he requested from the federal government.

While it may not be ideal for students to acquire student loans, if students lose or do not qualify for scholarships, or if other sources of funding are not available, loans are a very viable option. Since funding school is necessary in order to acquire a college degree, students are faced with the dilemma of how they will pay for college. There is little debate that a college degree provides access to opportunities such as jobs, political aspirations and wealth (Cabrera, Burkum & LaNasa, 2005). Therefore having the

necessary resources to pay for college is critical in terms of enrolling in, persisting and graduating from college.

Just as having access to monetary resources was a major contributing factor that positively impacted participants' decision to persist in and graduate from college, having access to faculty, student affairs personnel and college administrators which served as mentors was critical for participants' success. All 15 study participants (100%) reported that they were mentored by one or more persons during their college experience. This is consistent with the research literature as it relates to mentorship and Black male college students (Warde, 2008). A number of studies have established that mentoring programs, whether on-going or ad-hoc, have yielded noteworthy retention gains among populations of students identified as academically at risk (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2008; Sutton, 2006; Warde, 2008).

Toward this end, institutions of higher education leaders and administrators should make retaining at-risk students, such as African American males, a part of their overall institutional mission. Institutions of higher education administrators should include this in their mission statements and provide trainings to foster staff buy-in to the mission. Additionally, they should ensure that faculty, student affairs and academic affairs staff are aware of and responsive to the needs of African American males. This can be done by educating and training faculty and staff for the task of mentoring African American male students. Incentives should be implemented to encourage faculty and staff to respond to the needs of this special student population and to ensure that they are compensated for their mentoring services.

Study participants recounted that having a mentor strengthened their racial and masculine identities and simultaneously equipped them with emotional resources needed to counter-attack or cope with negative experiences perceived as racist or discriminatory. There is a large body of evidence to suggest that mentoring can counteract a number of obstacles and can position individuals to pursue and achieve their objectives despite significant odds (Brown, 2006; Ishiyama, 2007; Watt, 2006). Without question, mentoring relationships impacted participant's resiliency and ability to endure challenges associated with being a Black male at a PWI.

While all of the study participants communicated that their mentorship experience positively influenced their persistence and resolve to graduate, many of them (80%) offered in addition that peer mentorship tremendously impacted their persistence. Peer relationships are critical to students' achievement pursuits (Brown, 2006). Harper (2006) asserted that supportive same-race peer relationships, resulting from Black male student participation in Black student associations, Black Greek fraternities and/or through peer relationships instill a sense of racial solidarity, camaraderie, and support. Likewise, Brown (2006) found that peer relationships were critical to the persistence and retention of African American males. As a result of these study findings reported in the student retention literature, one of the recommendations that Harper (2004) made was that schools formalize efforts to use young men as mentors for their Black peers.

Since programs such as SAAB (as well as Collegiate 100 and AAMI) seem to be successful in retaining African American males in this study, and since they are aimed at helping Black males to negotiate their way through college, leaders in institutions of higher education should ensure that these programs are implemented on their college

campuses. Additionally, leaders should be intentional in their recruitment of directors who have a mission to support African American males. Finally, efforts to raise funds must be intentional and set as a priority in order to ensure that these programs remain in existence on campus.

In concert with Tinto's (1975, 2005) and Astin's (1971) theoretical postulations that the level of students' involvement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities on campus influences student retention, study participants cited involvement in recognized student organizations as a major factor contributing to their retention and successful acquisition of their baccalaureate degrees. All fifteen participants named two or more campus organizations of which they were active members and many of them listed significantly more than two. As one participant, Larry stated, "if you [participate in] one thing, you're gonna do something else."

The consensus among participants was that involvement in student organizations engendered a sense of belonging and connectedness to campus. One participant, Max, added that being involved in campus organizations "helped [him] stay focused." Once participants became actively involved in one organization, they joined others. Additionally, many of them took on leadership roles in one or more organizations. As leaders, they felt compelled to see their visions and responsibilities for the organizations through to completion. Participants stressed that meant they had to graduate. The implication is that taking on a leadership role in a recognized student organization may contribute to students' goal and determination to graduate.

Research literature on the relationship between student involvement in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and retention suggest that active engagement

supported by institutions of higher education strongly impacts student achievement (Astin & Sax, 1998; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Student organizations specifically designed to support and aid in the retention of African American males, such as the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), Collegiate 100, and the African American Male Initiative are highlighted in the literature, as being impactful in terms of enabling persistence and degree completion for Black male college students (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; Mattingly & Humphrey, 2006; Schmidt, 2008). As the men in this study reported, these programs provide peer-mentoring opportunities, which foster institutional commitment, camaraderie, and support. Likewise, studies indicate that Black males involved in Black Greek Letter Organizations were more actively engaged in campus life, as their participation in BGLOs reinforced positive racial identity and leadership development (Harper & Harris, 2006; Jones, 2004). Further, study participants asserted that participation in programs designed to support and graduate African American males, such as SAAB, Collegiate 100, and the African American Initiative (Cuyjet, 2006b; Ellis, 2004; Harper, 2006; Wyatt, 2009) positively impacted their decision to remain in college and graduate. They offered that these programs engaged them, while simultaneously strengthened their racial identity and leadership development, through their mentorship and service components. They also stated that through peer mentorship opportunities, their peers who were leaders in the organizations with which they were affiliated modeled for them what successful Black men looked like. Having models that looked like them and shared their goals of graduating increased their motivation and commitment to acquiring their baccalaureate degrees. The implication for college administrators is that recognized student organizations should receive on-going funding and institutional

support. Additionally, students should be made aware of and encouraged to participate in at least one organization on campus. Ideally, students would continue to be introduced to recognized student organizations during freshman orientation and encouraged to participate throughout their college career.

Student Affairs Personnel: Program Directors, Coordinators, and Advisors

High tuition rates can make it difficult for students to attend and persist in institutions of higher education. Helping African American male students to acquire scholarships to defray educational costs can make it easier for them to focus on academics and thus be retained and graduate. Therefore, as early as orientation, student affairs advisors and program coordinators should make African American males aware of and encourage them to apply for scholarships affiliated with participation in athletics, fraternities and/ or recognized student organizations. A huge benefit of membership in recognized student organizations, fraternities, and/or athletics is the potential to convert involvement into scholarship support (Harper, 2006b; Messer, 2006).

There is little argument that most students who engage in recognized student organizations graduate at higher levels than those who do not. There is an abundance of evidence which support this assertion in the retention literature. In fact, this is the premise upon which this study was framed. The findings of the study confirm Tinto's (1975, 2005) and Astin's (1971) theories of student involvement.

Institutions of higher education cannot afford to lose any of their students, as funding is often contingent upon retention of students. Additionally, African American males are deemed at-risk because they have the highest attrition rate across both genders

and all races (Harper, 2006a). As such, institutions of higher education need to take a multidisciplinary approach and engage the entire campus to address this issue (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2008; Warde, 2008). Therefore, institutions of higher education leaders, student affairs staff and faculty should work collaboratively to encourage African American male students to participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

As an example, during orientation, student affairs personnel, such as program directors, coordinators, and orientation leaders could speak to students and make them aware of the impact of campus participation on their retention. It could be beneficial to make sure to include African American staff, faculty, and administrators in the orientation, as well as upper-level students and peer-advisors. Additionally, this team should explain how involvement in these activities has the potential to convert to scholarship opportunities, which might serve to be an incentive to get students involved.

The impact of student involvement on the retention of African American males is prevalent in the college retention literature. A theme which is not as predominant in the college retention literature is the impact of family support on the retention of African American males. However, 87% of the participants in this study indicated that receiving on-going family support was critical to their success. Hence, student affairs personnel should implement innovative programs to include parents in college retention efforts directed toward African American men. This might present a challenge with the implementation and enforcement of student privacy policies; however, this can charge student affairs program coordinators and directors with designing and implementing creative means to include parental involvement at the collegiate level. Student affairs personnel should find ways to forge an allegiance between the campus and parents.

Ensuring that they work collaboratively to ensure the success of students could cause a significant increase in retention for African American males.

The assumption is that students, who lack academic preparation prior to attending college, might struggle at higher rates than those who are prepared. Therefore, student affairs personnel should continue to implement academic support programs such as remedial courses, tutoring and advising for this special population.

While student affairs and college personnel cannot control for family support that students receive prior to arriving on the college campus, they can provide avenues for parental and family involvement in their students' collegiate experience. One example would be to have a college summer pre-matriculation program for African American males and parents. During the pre-matriculation and/or orientation program, parents can be made aware of the importance of support and be encouraged to participate in parental inclusive programs. As an example, parents can be invited to co-coordinate or volunteer in programs or have parent-student nights where both parents and students participate in activities which foster parent-student interaction. Families should also be invited to award ceremonies to help celebrate the success of their students. College choice literature suggests that family support activities such as visiting college and attending a financial aid workshop influence students' decision to enroll at an institution of higher education (Contreras-Godfrey, 2009). The implication is that family support activities such as these might also influence students' decision to remain in college and graduate.

The most surprising theme which emerged from the data was that study participants attributed their persistence, resilience, and graduation to taking one or more courses in Pan African Studies. Many of them stated that their exposure to Black culture

increased their desire to remain in and graduate from college and gave them a sense of well-being. Study participant, 23 year-old Kofi asserted that taking courses in PAS was like “having a community within a community” and “Black community is important; it affirms you and your essence or your ‘being’ as a person of color.” Likewise, 27 year-old graduate, Jeremiah, affirmed, “Taking classes with [professor] in the PAS department helped me to develop a strong sense of self.” This suggests that taking one or more courses in PAS may help to contribute to the racial and masculine identity developments of African American males.

During orientation, student affairs staff often encourages students to take developmental and/or multicultural courses as requirements toward graduation. During this time, program advisors (such as academic advisors or coordinators of the African American Male Initiative, SAAB or Collegiate 100) could also encourage African American males to take courses in Pan African Studies as an effort to put them in the best position to strengthen their identity development which could also strengthen their resolve to remain in college and graduate. Student affairs advisors should also encourage African American males to participate in the Pan African Studies curriculum, by ensuring that these courses are listed in the required Multicultural curriculum. One participant Travis, mentioned, “Although Pan African Studies courses are listed as options to take for required Multicultural requirements, it was hard to find them, because they were listed on the bottom of the list.”

Faculty

Many study participants cited that one or more college professors served as mentors, while others shared that student affairs administrators, advisors and/or graduate students operated in this capacity. Many participants reported that having Black student affairs professionals or faculty as mentors was vital to their success, and others offered that neither race nor gender mattered when selecting a mentor to help guide them through their college experience. What mattered to them was having a mentor who had a vested interest in their development and success in acquiring their baccalaureate degrees, more-so than their race or gender. Previous studies suggested that students found that having a faculty mentor was extremely valuable to their college experience and critical to their success in acquiring a degree. The mentor's race was not a critical factor, as Black students were not convinced that they had to have a Black faculty member as a mentor (Hickson, 2002).

In her study examining the impact of mentoring on the retention of 250 Black college students, Hickson stated that “most students felt that it was more important to have a professor, regardless of race, who cares about their future and who is interested in their education” (p. 187). The implication for faculty, regardless of their race, gender or sexual orientation is to mentor African American males, as doing so has been found to assist in their retention.

Sixty-seven percent of the African American males in this study stated that taking one or more courses in Pan African Studies contributed to their commitment to graduate from college. Males in the study stated that learning about contributions that their ancestors made to society strengthened their racial identity, which in turn increased their enthusiasm for being in college. This is consistent with Campbell's and Fleming's (2000)

findings that males who progress along Cross' (1971) stage of racial identity development exhibit an increase in their academic self-concept which in turn positively impacts their academic performance and persistence. The research literature further indicates that "students who learn about and develop an appreciation for the contribution of their ancestors will be more engaged in the academic process, thus enhancing self-concept..." (Adams, 2004, p. 127). Some of the study participants also offered that their experiences in the Pan African Studies department helped them to cope with negative experiences perceived as racist or discriminatory that they had encountered in other departments on campus.

At least two participants reported that their grades had increased once they started taking PAS classes. Although, most students did not report whether or not their academic performance improved, they did report that their enthusiasm for being in college increased, as well as their commitment to their goal of graduation. Adams (2004) found that while taking PAS courses did not necessarily enhance academic performance of Black students, those who *majored or minored* in PAS performed at higher levels academically than those who did not. In addition, Black students who took PAS courses were retained and graduated at a higher level than Black students who had not. She concluded that taking PAS courses "addressed racial identity development issues in ways that increase the likelihood that Black students will become more intrinsically motivated" (p. 129). These findings should inform leaders in academic and student affairs to take steps to increase the awareness of PAS courses among Black students on the college campus, as participation in PAS courses may aid in the retention and graduation of African American males.

While college retention literature has referenced the positive impact of Black Studies programs on the retention and graduation rates of African American students, empirical data to support this contention has been lacking (Adams, 2004). The recommendation for leaders in institutions of higher education is to design and implement accredited Pan African or Black Studies programs. This could provide a safe place for African American males and equip them with knowledge that will “[ensure] their sense of being” and make [them] “feel secure about being Black men,” as expressed by study participants, Larry and Kofi. Another recommendation would be for leaders in higher education to be intentional about hiring professors who are experts in Black Studies who are also committed to mentoring African American males.

High School Administrators and Counselors

Mentorship programs such as SAAB, AAMI, and Collegiate 100 were cited as being impactful for college-aged African American men. The implication is that it could do the same for young African American boys. Secondary school administrators and counselors might consider working collaboratively with college program coordinators to implement these programs on their high school campus. This could help colleges recruit African American males who might be more college-focused and determined to attend, persist and graduate from college. The by-product of this collaboration might be a formalized allegiance between high schools and institutions of higher education committed to graduating Black men from college. Perhaps, the African American male students would form a mentorship relationship with the young Black boys and encourage them to uphold the mission of the SAAB organization. With a mission like, “I am my

brother's keeper and together we will rise; saving lives, salvaging dreams," African American men would be more likely to be retained and graduate.

Parents

Tinto's retention model hypothesizes that individual pre-entry college attributes (family background, skill and ability, prior schooling) form individual's goals and commitments, which in turn contributes to students' persistence and graduation (Seidman, 2006). A number of study participants (87%) indicated that the on-going support and encouragement they received from their family while in college was critical to their decision to remain in college and graduate. In addition, they noted that academic preparation that their parents ensured prior to enrolling in college positioned them to succeed in college. In other words, the college preparation courses they took and academic enrichment programs in which they were enrolled prior to attending college, along with the expectations their family members set for them prior to and while enrolled in the University of Louisville gave them the inspiration and resources they needed to persevere and graduate. This is in harmony with Tinto's (2005) interaction theory which asserts that factors related to family, such as economic background, parental expectations and encouragement informs students' attitudes and beliefs about college and their ability to succeed. The implication for parents is to provide support for their African American male student(s) at the primary and secondary level by preparing them early for the academic rigors of college, as well as provide emotional and financial support while their student(s) matriculate through college. Other ways that parents can support their students while they are enrolled in college include participating in parent programs on campus,

encouraging students to participate in recognized student organizations and academic support programs (if needed) and encouraging them to seek out mentors.

Many study participants also reported that receiving partial or full scholarships to defray tuition and college costs made it easier for them to persist in college and graduate. This study finding supports those of the existing knowledge base (Harper, 2006; Messer, 2006). Had the men not had money to pay for college, they would not have had the opportunity to attend college. Once they had access to school, it then became what seemed to be their mission to get through and finish. The implication for parents is that academically preparing their students prior to their college matriculation puts their students in the best position to receive academic scholarships. In this way, their students can maximize scholarship opportunities specifically targeting scholars with academic promise.

Most of the participants who cited family support as being critical to their success felt that graduating was a way to pay their parents (and/or ancestors) back and to contribute to their family legacy. As an example, James and Sergio declared that they felt a responsibility to do well in college and graduate, because of their families' expectations for them to succeed. Doing so was their contribution to their families' traditions of academic excellence.

Community Organizations

While 11/15 (73%) of the study participants had been Porter Scholarship recipients, at least five of them stated that they lost their scholarships either temporarily

or permanently when their GPAs slipped below the required 3.0 GPA scholarship requirement. All five of the men expressed feelings of anxiety when they thought they would have to drop out of college. According to them, had they not had student loans as an option to help defray their educational costs, they would have had to leave school, because there were no scholarships on campus for which they could apply when in this unique situation. As study participant, Larry recollected his faith-based organization (church) and community leaders affiliated with neighborhood organizations provided him with monetary aid and gifts, such as food cards to ensure that he remained in school and graduated. One recommendation for community and/or faith-based organizations is to set aside discretionary funds and non-monetary gifts specifically designated to assist African American males in their retention and college graduation. Providing these men with monetary and/or non-pecuniary gifts could prevent them from slipping through the cracks.

Research findings indicate that many African American males, void of a college education, unable to find gainful employment are in danger of resorting to illicit means to support themselves and their families (Ascher, 1992; Boyd, 2007; Lester, 2003; Snipe, 2007). Helping African American males to graduate could prevent them from entering their communities without the necessary education or employment skills needed to contribute to the economic well-being of their families, communities, and/or the country. A “strong, vibrant varied and expanding national economy depends in part on the educational attainment of its citizens” (Seidman, 2005, p. xi).

Policy Makers

The retention literature on African American males indicates that many Black students attend severely under-funded, heavily segregated primary and secondary schools (Warde, 2008). As a result, many of them may not have the academic preparation needed to meet the demands of college. Therefore, policy makers and educators should work collaboratively to reform the curriculum and school structure (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). The implication is that this will ensure that at risk students, such as African American males are prepared for the academic rigors of college, which in term could impact their college retention.

With the rising costs of a 4-year college education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), it may be foreseeable that more and more college students, including African American males will have to take out student loans in order to pay for their education. It can be assumed that students can depend upon grants instead of loans to pay for college, but the amount of financial assistance provided through grants has not kept pace with increased educational expenses (Kim & Otis, 2010). To this end, policy makers should endeavor to implement policies that ensure low-interest rate student loans which keep pace with rising educational costs.

Suggestions for Future Research

Many of the findings in this study are consistent with the research literature on the retention of African American males. Three themes emerged as those which could benefit from further research. One theme is the impact of finances on African American male retention. Although the retention literature supports the notion that access to monetary

resources impacts the retention of African American males, further studies should be conducted on the impact of academic resiliency and support programs as they relate to helping African American males maintain their scholarships.

Next is the impact of family support on retention of African American males. While there is a large literature on family support, there appears to be a gap in the literature as it relates to how institutions of higher education can work collaboratively with families of African American males to support their retention.

A final theme that could benefit from additional research is the impact of Pan African Studies on the retention of African American males. Although the retention literature *suggests* that taking Black Studies courses positively impacts the retention of African American students, the literature lacked empirical evidence, prior to Adam's (2004) study. It is interesting to note that Adams' (2004) study, one of a very few in the area of retention of Black students and the impact of Black studies courses, was also conducted at the University of Louisville. Since there is a lack of empirical data to support the contention that Black Studies programs positively impacts the retention and graduation rates of African American students (Adams, 2004), one recommendation for future studies is to examine the relationship between taking Pan African or Black studies courses and retention of African American males. Future studies in these two areas would fill important gaps in the African American student retention literature.

Conclusion

African American males have the highest college attrition rates of all races and genders. Only 33.1 % of African American males who attempt their baccalaureate degrees graduate within six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Retaining African American males continues to be a concern for leaders in higher education institutions. While many leaders in institutions of higher education have been intentional in designing and implementing retention programs for African American athletes (Messer, 2006), the same attention has not been directed towards African American college males who are not athletes. This study filled an important gap in the retention literature. It takes a positive approach to examining retention and graduation gains of African American males, whereas prior research has tended to focus on the issue from a deficit perspective, highlighting drop-out rates and noting the causes of Black male attrition.

Towards this end, the focus of this study was to investigate the factors that contributed to the success of 15 African American men in obtaining baccalaureate degrees from one mid-sized, urban public university, the University of Louisville. Employing a qualitative design, the researcher conducted semi-structured, individual interviews with African American male alumni who had graduated from the University of Louisville between 2007 and 2012. Data from those interviews were analyzed using Morrisette's (1999) seven stage step-wise approach, a method specifically designed for qualitative studies with a phenomenological orientation.

The results of the analyses revealed five factors as being significant contributors to participants' successful retention and completion of their baccalaureate degree: 1. having access to monetary resources to attend and persist in college; 2. having a mentor; 3. participating in recognized student organizations; 4. having family support; and 5.

taking one or more courses in Pan African Studies. Recommendations invite educators at various levels (local, e.g., parents, faculty, student affairs advisors and administrators, and state and district, i.e., policy makers) to work collaboratively to aid in the retention and graduation of African American males. As Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon (2008) concluded, colleges need to take a multidisciplinary approach, engaging the entire campus, to address student departure. Reliance on a single program or set of activities alone may not lead to an increase in student retention (Brier, Hirschy, & Braxton, 2008).

Study Limitations

Four limitations temper the results of this study. First, locating a large sample of African American males who graduated from the University of Louisville to participate in the study presented a challenge, because limited records of African American male graduates have been kept. To address this limitation, snowball sampling was used. Second, a limitation inherent in purposeful sampling is that the sample is non-random. However, qualitative researchers “usually do not work with populations large enough to make random sampling meaningful, nor is their purpose that of producing generalizations” (Glesne, 2006, p. 34). Participants who met certain criteria fitting for the study were selected. A third limitation is that the data were collected from only one university. Thus, it is possible that the data collected from the University of Louisville may not be applicable to students graduating from other institutions. Finally, having college graduates recollect their prior experiences as college students, instead of following them and capturing their experiences as they matriculated through college

could be limitation, because their recollected experiences may not be as precise as day-to-day experiences.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

IRB PROTOCOL - Details

Tracking #

12.0333

PI

Hirschy, Amy

Title

Examining Factors Which Contribute to the Retention of African American Males at the University of Louisville

Version

2

Status

Exempt

Status Date

11/14/2012 2:14:19 PM

Board

Social/Behavioral/Educational

Meeting Date

Approval Date

10/24/2012 12:00:00 AM

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APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

1. How is it that you came to select the University of Louisville?
2. When you entered the University of Louisville as a college freshman, what did you imagine your college experience to be like?
3. a). In what ways were you prepared for college?
b). In what ways were you underprepared for college?
c). What did you do to prepare for college?
4. What challenges, if any, did you have staying in college and how did you work through them?
5. a). What student groups or activities, if any, did you join while attending the University of Louisville?
b). What were your experiences like in these organizations?
6. What role did friends play in your decision to remain in college?
7. What role did college professors play in your decision to remain in college?
8. What role did college staff play in your decision to remain in college?
9. What role did financial aid play in your decision to remain in college?
10. What role did mentoring play in your decision to remain in college? Please describe any mentoring you received, and your mentors.
11. What role did family play in your decision to remain in college?
12. What people or experiences contributed most to your successful completion of college?

APPENDIX C

Letter of Introduction

EXAMINING FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE RETENTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Letter of Introduction

Date

Dear

You are being invited to participate in a research study regarding the factors (people, experiences, and/or activities) which contribute to the retention of African American males at the University of Louisville. The information you provide will be used to complete research for a doctoral dissertation. Your completed interview will be tape recorded and stored in a locked file at the University of Louisville. You will be asked to participate in an individual interview that will take approximately 60 minutes to 2 hours. You will be also asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By signing the consent form you are agreeing to take part in this research study. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact: Kia Pruitt at 502-365-7367. You may also contact my faculty advisors, Dr. Amy Hirschy at 502-852-0625 or Dr. Samuel Stringfield at 502-852-0615.

Sincerely,

Kia Pruitt

APPENDIX D

Email to Prospective Participants

Hello,

My name is Kia Pruitt and I am a doctoral candidate within the Education and Counseling Psychology Department at the University of Louisville. I am writing to ask you if you would be interested in participating in my study, which is for partial fulfillment for my doctoral (PhD) degree. The purpose for my study is to examine the factors, such as experiences, people, and activities which contribute to the successful retention and graduation of African American males from the University of Louisville. I plan to interview at least 20 African American men who have graduated from the University of Louisville within the last five year and learn from them which factors contributed to their success. If you are interested in participating in my study, please contact me, Kia Pruitt, at kiapruitt@gmail.com or 502-365-7367. This is an exciting topic of discussion within academia as we seek to learn from you about your success and apply those things to current and future students matriculating into the University of Louisville. Your participation will be a tremendous help.

Included in this email is a letter of introduction about my study, and a consent form for your consideration. **Due to the time-restraints of the study, I ask that you please respond to this email and attached demographic survey by January 18, 2013.** I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Kia Pruitt, Doctoral Candidate
Education and Counseling Psychology

APPENDIX E

Subject Informed Consent Document

EXAMINING FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE RETENTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Investigator(s) name & address: Dr. Amy Hirschy, College of Education and Human Development, Room 325, Dr. Samuel Stringfield, College of Education and Human Development, Room 332, and Kia Pruitt, 315 W. Hill Street, Apt. 203, Louisville, KY 40208. Site(s) where study is to be conducted: University of Louisville Cultural Center. Phone numbers for subjects to call for questions: Kia Pruitt 916-604-2769.

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Amy Hirschy, PhD, Samuel Stringfield, PhD, and Kia Pruitt, doctoral candidate. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and is part of a dissertation to be submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The study will take place in the University of Louisville's Cultural Center, or where the participant feels most comfortable. Approximately 20 subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors which contribute to the successful retention and graduation of African American males at the University of Louisville.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that will take approximately five minutes to complete. You will also be asked to participate in an individual interview session. The interview will last between 60 minutes to two hours. The interview session will be audiotaped and recorded and transcribed. The researcher will also take brief notes during each session. You will have the opportunity to review the information gathered and to provide feedback to the researcher.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study will aid in the understanding of factors (people, experiences, activities) that contribute to African American male students' successful completion of a baccalaureate degree from the University of Louisville. The information collected in this study may not benefit you directly; however, it may benefit college administrators who are interested in aiding in the retention of African American males. The information collected may also benefit other African American males who are currently matriculating in college, or who will matriculate in the future.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records by the University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office or Drs. Hirschy and Stringfield, principle investigators. The data will remain in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer.

Conflict of Interest

This study involves no conflict of interest.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

1. You may contact the principle investigators, Dr. Amy Hirschy at 502-852-0625 or Dr. Samuel Stringfield at 502-852-0615.
2. If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns, or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSSPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the

institution, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

3. If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

This paper tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature means that this study has been discussed with you, that your questions have been answered, and that you will take part in the study. This informed consent document is not a contract. You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a signed copy of this paper to keep for your records.

Printed Name of Subject-

Signature of Subject _____ Date

Signed _____

Signature of Person Explaining the Consent Form _____ Date

Signed _____

(if other than the investigator)

Signature of Investigator _____ Date

Signed

LIST OF INVESTIGATORS

PHONE NUMBERS

Amy Hirschy, PhD

502-852-0625

Sam Stringfield, PhD

502-852-0615

Kia Pruitt

916-604-2769

APPENDIX F

Demographic Survey

1. Are you an African American Male alumnus?
2. Did you graduate between the years of 2007-2012?
3. What year did you graduate from the University of Louisville??
4. What is your age? (optional)
5. What was your academic study?
6. In which Recognized Student Organizations (R.S.O.s) did you participate in college?

APPENDIX G

Participant Demographics

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Age	Year Graduated	Major(s)
Larry	24	2011	PAS
Kofi	23	2012	Business and PAS
Juan	24	2012	PAS
Vennie	23	2012	Communications
Demetrius	22	2012	Communications
James	26	2008	Psychology
Jeremiah	27	2008	Spanish & PAS
Sergio	23	2011	Sports Administration
Kelvin	29	2007	Art
Kwame	24	2010	PAS
David	29	2007	Music
Travis	22	2012	Spanish
Max	22	2012	Communications
Muhammad	23	2012	Biology
Seth	23	2012	Sports Administration

APPENDIX H

Between Person's Analysis

Table 2

Between Person's Analysis

Name	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
	Funds	Mentor	RSOs	Family	PAS
	P= Porter Scholarship O=Other Scholarship L = Loans				
Larry	x (P/L)	x	x	x	x
Kofi	x (P)	x	x	x	x
Juan	x (P)	x	x	x	x
Vennie	x (P/L)	x	x	-	x
Demetrius	x (P)	x	x	x	-
James	x (P)	x	x	x	x
Jeremiah	x (P/L)	x	x	x	x
Sergio	x(L)	x	x	x	x
Kelvin	x(L)	x	x	x	-

Table 2

Between Person's Analysis

Name	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
	Funds	Mentor	RSOs	Family	PAS
	P= Porter Scholarship O= Other Scholarship L = Loans				
Kwame	x(P)	x	x	x	x
David	x(O)	x	x	-	-
Travis	x(O)	x	x	x	x
Max	x(P)	x	x	x	-
Muhammad	x(P)	x	x	x	-
Seth	x(P)	x	x	x	x

CURRICULUM VITAE

KIA MARIE PRUITT
1501 S. 1st Street, Apt. #1
Louisville, KY 40208
(502) 365-7367
Kiapruitt@gmail.com

Education

College Student Personnel Administration
University of Louisville, Louisville, KY
Expected Graduation: August 2013
GPA 3.8

Master of Arts in Counseling
Marshall University, Huntington, WV
May 1998
GPA 3.7

Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences
Shawnee State University, Portsmouth, OH
May 1992
GPA 3.6 (Graduated Magna cum Laude)

Course Highlights

College Student Development Theory
Higher Education Leadership
Student Affairs Programs, Policies, Practices
College Student Subcultures
Program Assessment in Student Affairs

Qualifications Summary

- 20 years' experience including higher education, social services, and secondary school settings
- Experience providing counseling, budget management, and program development and coordination in medical school
- Career development, conflict resolution and supervision in school settings and social service agencies
- Excellent teaching and training skills
- Experience leading and teaching in private school setting and higher education

Professional Experience:

Dissertation Fellow

Southern Regional Education Board

August 2009 to 2012

Senior Academic Counselor/Project Director

June 2001 to February 2008

University of Louisville School of Medicine Louisville, KY

- Directed, coordinated and evaluated academic, orientation, retention and support programs for medical students and monitor academic progress of medical students; advise undergraduate pre-medical and pre-dental students; advise medical students; assist with admissions counseling.
 - Co-coordinated first commemorative symposium (Brown v Board of Education Commemoration) and diversity workshops for medical school community, including creating theme and discussion topics; coordinating public relations; hosting activities, writing deans' speeches, designing recognition plaques, and assisting with marketing.
- Conducted seminars on leadership, study skills, study strategies, and time management.
- Advised Student National Medical Association (SNMA)- medical student organization.
- Monitored study groups; assist with locating resources and referrals; provide educational outreach.

- Presented for grant-awarding foundation (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation).
- Assisted in the development of the Medical Student Diversity Award.
- Developed mission statement, brochure and five year strategic plan for Special Programs Office.
- Directed and coordinated Summer Medical College Admissions Test/Dental Admissions Test (Summer MCAT/DAT) Program; provide financial reports for grants; prepared and managed financial budgets
 - Provided leadership to expand 3 week summer program to a 6-week intensive summer program for pre-medical and pre-dental students; assist in grant writing to expand programs.
 - Supervise Resident Assistants (RAs).

Doctoral Intern

August 2005 to December 2005

Indiana Wesleyan University

Louisville, KY

- Worked collaboratively with the Regional Dean, Louisville Education & Conference Center to foster dialogue, as a liaison, between administration, staff, and cohort class representatives (class leaders).
- Assisted with developing training manual and protocol for cohort class leaders (class representatives).
- Shadowed university Dean to learn daily duties and position function.

Doctoral Intern

August 2004 to December 2004

Bellarmino University

Louisville, KY

Office of Minority Affairs

- Developed mission statement, office objectives, mentoring program and programs and activities for minority students.
- Shadowed director and attended staff meetings and activities with Director of Minority Affairs.

Assistant Director/Teacher/Counselor

June 2000 to February 2001

Student Aspect Preparatory School

Huntington, WV

- Developed education curriculum and activities for students grades 6-12.
- Recruited, developed, and supervised teachers in after school program.

- Instructed junior high and high school students in English Literature.
- Facilitated groups and provided counsel in career development, conflict-resolution, and coping skills.

Rape Crisis Counselor/Coordinator

June 1999-June 2000

CONTACT HUNTINGTON

Huntington, WV

- Conducted individual and group counseling for clients and clients' families.
- Provided community outreach education on sexual assault via presentations and radio broadcasts.
- Recruited, supervised and trained counselors, volunteers, medical professionals and police officers
- Prepared reports for grant proposals.

Family Therapist

January 1998-June 1999

Columbia River Park Psychiatric Hospital

Huntington, WV

- Provided individual and group therapy for children, adolescent, and adult patients, and families.
- Maintained client records, including documentation utilizing SOAP notes.
- Participated in multidisciplinary treatment teams with medical professionals and case managers, and assisted with the development and implementation of treatment plans.

Academic Support Counselor

September 1996-May 1998

Marshall University

Huntington, WV

- Created and developed career development program; collaborated with financial aid, career services, student affairs, and other academic units.
- Created and implemented academic retention program; advised and tutored students; monitored academic progress which increased minority student retention by 30%; coordinated with faculty to monitor students.
- Supervised graduate assistants and work-study students; conducted/ coordinated workshops.

Substitute Teacher

September 1992-May 1994

Portsmouth City Schools

Portsmouth, OH

- Instructed primary, secondary and adult students in Math and English.
- Evaluated students' academic progress: proctored exams.

Adjunct Instructor, English

September 1993-December

1993

Shawnee State University

Portsmouth, OH

- Developed lesson plans; instructed students in remedial English (grammar, spelling, and writing).
- Evaluated student academic progress.

Director

January 1992-December

1992

Close to the Heart Daycare/Student Aspect Preparatory Portsmouth, OH

- Supervised staff of day care teachers; conducted hiring, training, and payroll.
- Assisted Executive Director with development and implementation of lesson plans for children (0-12).

Honors/Awards

Presidential Honors Scholar
J.W. Boynton Memorial Scholarship
Business and Professional Women Scholarship
Dow Chemical Scholar
Golden Key International Scholarship
Samuels Fellowship
Southern Regional Education Board Dissertation
Fellowship

Reference

Available upon request