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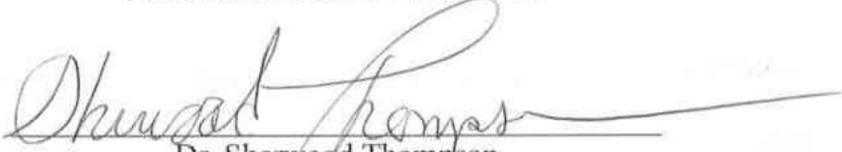
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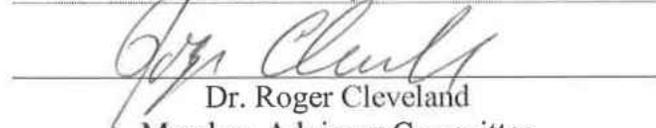
BY

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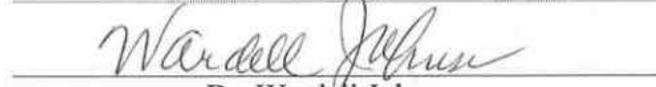
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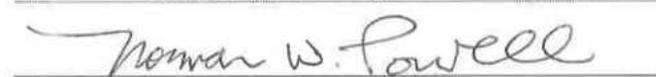
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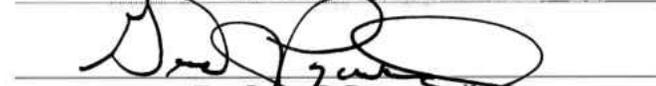
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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

December, 2017

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and my son who are my encouragement, inspiration, motivation, and heartbeat. As stated in Ecclesiastes 4:12, “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Thank you for your love and support. I also dedicate this to my parents who believed in me before I believed in myself. Respectfully, to my grandparents who have been my guardian angels and I am because of you. Lastly, the harvest is yet plentiful, nonetheless, the laborers are few; to my family, friends, and fellow laborers continue on, always forward as we seed change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Creator of all things and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I first give you thanks as you have done all things well for those who love you and are called according to your purpose. To my wife Camilla, thank for your patience, encouragement, empowerment, and support. I must acknowledge my son, Israel Christopher who motivates me daily to be the best version of myself. To my loving and supportive family, your investment in me through your prayers, love, and support in my personal, academic, and professional development has been invaluable.

To Dr. Sherwood Thompson my dissertation chair, who has instilled in me that everything in life worth doing, is worth doing well. I thank you as you have been an integral part of my growth and for your constant pursuit of excellence, instilling within me to become comfortable with excellence and uncomfortable with mediocrity. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Roger Cleveland, Dr. Wardell Johnson, and Dr. Norman Powell for you have taught me more from how you live, than by what you said. It has been written, that when the character of a man is not clear to look at his friends, I am honored to be associated with such great men of character.

Respectfully, I acknowledge the study participants whose stories and life experiences have not only shaped this study, but me personally and professionally as this journey has and will continue to be about you. I thank you for your willingness to participate and allow me the opportunity to spend time and learn more of your story. I respect your persistence and tenacity to attack any challenge set before you. I look forward to hearing about all the great things you will accomplish in the future.

This work would not have been possible without the support of my colleagues, peers, supervisors, and mentors. Thank you for being a sounding board when needed, a source of peace of mind, sharpen one another skills to make us more efficient and your unending encouragement.

Finally, I offer special thanks to my ancestors and elders whose character, strength, power, and, legacy influence me today and every day. The shoulders of my many ancestors allow me to stand tall full of the faith that the dark past that has taught me. Let us march on until victory is won.

ABSTRACT

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), between 1996 and 2008, Black (African-American may be used interchangeably with Black, as defined through this study) college students had the lowest graduation rates among racial groups at four-year public institutions. Furthermore, more recent provisional data from the National Center for Education Statistics for 2008-2013, further support continued disproportional retention and graduation rates of Black college students. Therefore, given this, the present study examined the relationship between academic achievement and an increase in Black students' satisfaction with their college experience at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and institutionally funded supportive associations for undergraduate students of color.

The study specifically considered Black undergraduate students at regional, four-year, public PWIs in Kentucky, evaluating their academic achievement, social involvement, occupational aspirations, student educational background, educational goals, demographic characteristics and personal adjustment to college. Using in-depth, phenomenological interviews, the study investigated the possible relationship between the "Stop-Out" and "Drop Out" of Black students, reconstructing their experiences and sharing their stories about the factors that led students to retain at the university and for students to leave their PWI. Based on the results, this study offers suggestions for PWIs interested in implementing support associations for Black undergraduate students to address stop-out and drop-out.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To paraphrase the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, life for Blacks hasn't been no crystal stair—especially for those seeking higher education, who sometimes have to stumble in the dark without the light of resources and support. Following the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case in 1954, colleges and universities have sought to integrate their campuses and classrooms. This change has presented educators, administrators and the general public with special challenges, such as designing effective support initiatives for underrepresented minority students (Jones & Williams, 2004). As Jones and Williams (2004) noted, “the structure and formulation of college campuses were designed to serve predominately White students. Black students were thus expected to adjust to the environment even when they did not feel affirmed by its culture” (p. 25). Fostering Black student persistence is not simply about knowing the factors that underlie persistence and retention, but also developing and executing policies that tangibly enhance student success.

It is commonly thought that college graduation is a necessary step toward achieving the American Dream. However, researchers have increasingly documented barriers to college access and completion, such as the degree of academic preparedness, social integration, financial elasticity, and familial and peer support. These barriers often become salient as incoming undergraduates make the transition from high school to college, but the benefits associated with a baccalaureate degree motivate many of them to

endure this adjustment period. According to Miller and Ly (2010), “three-quarters of high school graduates go after a college degree because they know that a career with a middle-class wage almost always requires one” (p. 25). If educational attainment serves as a socioeconomic equalizer, then institutions of higher education have both an obligation and responsibility to ensure that their students graduate.

Despite this, the U.S. is experiencing an increasing rate of dropouts among individuals seeking postsecondary degrees—to the point that Miller and Ly (2010) deemed American higher education “College Dropout Factories” (p. 20). This problem is especially pronounced for Black undergraduate students at public institutions of higher education. A National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) study on the condition of education in the US found that in a 2008 cohort, White students at public institutions finished their baccalaureate degrees at a rate of 37.9%, compared to 18.6% among Black students (both within four years after start) (NCES, 2015).

The Education Trust – a non-profit group that advocates shrinking the achievement gaps between White and Black students – found similar results after analyzing 232 public colleges and universities. Assessing graduation rates between 2003 and 2013, the organization found improvements in the overall graduation rate but noted that there had been minimal progress in closing the gap between White and Black undergraduates’ graduation rates. Nichols, Eberle-Sudr, and Welch (2016) suggest that this trend has only worsened: Between 2003 and 2013, they note, White students saw a 5.6 percentage point increase in their graduation rate, while Black students saw a 4.4 percentage point increase (p. 1).

In the state of Kentucky, which constitutes the focus of the present study, there have been some efforts to promote successful outcomes for all students. For instance, state officials and educators assembled a work group for the purpose of developing a model for performance-based funding for Kentucky's public postsecondary institutions. In support of this effort, the Lumina Foundation, a private firm committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all, released a statement from President and CEO of Lumina Foundation, working to increase the proportion of Americans with postsecondary credentials released a statement: "A focus on equity in student outcomes is an essential objective of today's outcomes-based funding models. In addition to increasing attainment, we must close the current achievement gaps for students of color and low-income students" (Spalding, 2016, p. 1). Indeed, the performance funding model proposed to be implemented in Kentucky is already treating colleges and universities' closures of the achievement gap as one of its measures of underrepresented minority students and low-income students. Given the Commonwealth's interest in performance-based funding directly related to student retention, institutions should be even more compelled to prevent minority students from dropping out. As the state of Kentucky implements the new funding model, institutions will be in competition with each other based on the outcomes produced in particular the persistence, graduation, and success of Black undergraduate students. In order to aid decision-makers in this regard, the present student seeks to analyze patterns of student progression through the institution to offer recommendations to enhance student retention and completion.

Statement of Problem

Black graduation rates are disproportionately low compared to White students, and there has been minimal progress in bridging the divide (“Black Student College,” 2007; Seidman, 2005). While colleges and universities have implemented student support services and retention programs for diverse student populations, there is still need to improve minority student retention. According to Tinto (2012),

Much of the research on student attrition has not been particularly useful to those in the field who seek to develop and implement programs to improve retention and completion because it assumes, incorrectly, that knowing why students leave is equivalent to knowing why students stay and succeed. (p.12)

Amidst these shortcomings, researchers emphasize that diversity invites many advantages for college and universities, not to mention society as a whole. According to Molina and Rogers (2006), when students encounter a diverse campus, they “report an increased ability to work with members of other ethnic groups, an increased acceptance of those from other cultural backgrounds, and increased participation in community-based and other civic activities following graduation” (p. 143). Additionally, Tinto (2012) argues that the benefits of higher education to all citizens increase the nation’s competitiveness in the global marketplace. For these reasons, the Association of American Colleges & Universities (2008) identified diversity and global learning as one of its top ten high-impact educational practices. As colleges and universities emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own, these same institutions are compelled to address the

diversity of their campuses. Thus, recruiting, retaining, and graduating Black students is beneficial both inside and outside the classroom.

Despite this fact, some students feel that colleges and universities are barely integrated (Tinto, 2012). “African-American male students, and other students of color face cultural, societal, academic, and lifestyle differences from the traditional college student, all of which colleges and universities often attempt to address” (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013, p. 211). For Black undergraduate students, the most prevalent barriers involve persisting at a college or university: “Although 45 percent of Black men 25 and older have attempted college, only 16 percent have a four-year degree -- half the percentage of White males who have a four-year degree” (Toldson, 2012, p. 6). Given the well-established positive correlation between postsecondary educational attainment and earning potential, this disparity practically ensures that Black students will continue to have less earning potential and remain underrepresented in the spectrum of high-paying professions (Kolodner, 2005).

Tinto (2012), Astin (1999), Harper (2009), Rogers and Molina (2006), and others have uncovered several factors that negatively impact Black student persistence and graduation (e.g. relationships and emotional support, communication of information, and cross-race mentoring challenges). One important factor is stereotyping. Shaun Harper (2006), who is the founder and executive director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, studied the effects stereotyping on Black students. After interviewing nearly 150 Black male students at 30 public and private PWIs, Harper found that all but two of the students reported dealing with racist stereotypes on campus. These findings are underscored by Aronson's (1995) work, which

revealed that racial stereotypes are deeply woven into the fabric of American society, yet their daily effects are often misunderstood. Stereotypes may interfere, for example, with Black students' ability to achieve high scores on the standardized tests that are widely believed to measure aptitude or intelligence.

It is vital that institutions of higher education provide individuals and their communities with access to economic stability (Cabrera, Burkum, & LaNasa, 2005), which may take the form of programs designed to assist students in navigating college. However, administrators, faculty, and staff are far too often unaware of and thus fail to identify, the institutional barriers that negatively affect the Black male student experience. "Further exploration of the issues plaguing African-American male students may, therefore, encourage additional attention and support efforts for all students of color" (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013, p. 208). The literature shows (Allen 1992, Campbell & Fleming 2000, Harper 2012, etc.) that Black males are particularly vulnerable to persistence barriers, and by institutions addressing these issues will have a collateral effect on other students of color. Karkouti (2016), findings suggest that, diverse campuses environments engage students in richly varied educational culture and expose students to new perspectives that could enhance their learning outcomes. Each student that does not retain takes his or her tuition, fees and revenue the school may have received in order to support operations creating a loss of revenue and a negative impact to performance-based funding.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The present study was designed to explore the relationship between support initiatives for Black undergraduate students and those students' persistence at three regional, comprehensive, predominately White Kentucky universities. This study adds to the literature on retention practices by examining Black undergraduate students' achievement and satisfaction at PWIs.

There has been historic studies on Black students' pre-college characteristics and their impact on institutes of higher education (Barber 2012, Karkouti 2016, Strayhorn & Johnson 2014, etc.). However, there have been relatively few qualitative studies that capture the stories of Black students—particularly their lived experiences and perception of the university during their time at the institution. The present dissertation aims to address this gap. Building on the broad research stream around student retention, I sought to identify some of the factors that negatively impact Black undergraduate students' persistence and graduation. I specifically investigated the institutional support programs for underrepresented minority groups, which are one component of these students' persistence.

The impetus for this study is the alarming trend of Black undergraduate students failing to graduate once enrolled in colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). In response, scholars have argued that institutions “should adopt a comprehensive set of support services” in order to retain Black students (Credle & Dean, 1991). According to Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2012), such support services should include, “faculty/student mentoring sessions, academic assistance, and student

engagement through co-curricular programs assisting students in exploring possible career options” (p. 210).

However, recent debates about affirmative action make it necessary to understand exactly how such support systems impact Black students’ retention and graduation. Some scholars criticize institutional efforts targeted towards Black students, claiming that affirmative action only serves to divert funding away from special population groups (New, 2016). For instance, Roger Clegg, president and general counsel of the Center for Equal Opportunity, which opposes affirmative action, claimed that “schools shouldn’t use race as a proxy for who’s at risk and who’s going to have a hard time as a student” (New, 2016, p. 2). At the same time, scholars such as Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2013) contend that affirmative action policies may serve to reshape the experiences of Black undergraduate students at PWIs:

Students of color find comfort and encouragement in seeing others who look like them in such professional roles. Seeing people of color in campus faculty and administrative leadership roles, or any role other than secretarial, janitorial, or food service, is encouraging to one’s occupational and professional outlook. (p. 209)

In the midst of this debate, it is important to remember that the student learning experience encompasses far more than just gaining knowledge and skill sets (Goodman et al., 2011). Students also need to develop a mindset that will allow them to use knowledge to examine their belief structure. In other words, students should cultivate a sense of self that allows them to effectively participate in various personal, occupational, and community contexts (Schuh, Jones, & Harper, 2011). This cultivation process requires

that students involve themselves deeply and directly in their learning and development (Austin, 1984), but that goal is imperiled when students drop out. Thus, it is important to recognize how historical differences in student retention rates stem from racial and ethnic issues, and how the problems of the past linger in the present.

In short, the purpose of this study is to examine the graduation disparity of Black undergraduate students by assessing how they judiciously navigate the academic, political, and social landscape of PWIs. Specifically, I sought to determine the students' perceptions of the academic transition, racial climate, and perceived level of support from associations targeted at diverse student populations. At the heart of this study is a question: Will Black undergraduates' experiences improve when integrated into a targeted support initiative? Addressing this question begins with grasping the individual, structural, and cultural factors that underlie many educational disparities.

Research Questions

This study will examine the stop-out and drop-out of Black students at three regional, comprehensive PWIs in Kentucky. To examine the factors that reduce or lead to stop-out and drop-out, I developed the following research questions:

How is the retention and graduation of Black students at PWIs participating in targeted, institutionally funded support programs based on race, gender, and ethnicity predict overall student academic achievement, retention, and completion of a baccalaureate degree for Black students?

What significant differences are there in Black students' overall social involvement, career engagement, and leadership development among those who participate in institutionally funded support programs and those who do not?

What are the institutional characteristics that validate institutionally funded support initiatives for Black students?

Study Design Overview

This study conducted in-depth interviews with Black students who attended, and eventually withdrew from, three regional, comprehensive PWIs in Kentucky. My goal is to understand how the students' experiences, in tandem with campus climate dynamics, influenced their withdrawal decisions. This study draws on my passion as a researcher, which is to work directly with support associations that aim to improve the success of Black undergraduate students at public colleges and universities. I believe, in line with the literature, that when Black students remain in school and graduate, there is a mutual benefit for the student, the university, and the wider community. Thus, institutions have a responsibility to meet the needs of all students. Thus, the study will provide administration and institutional stakeholders with strategies to build and implement student retention initiatives.

However, there are several hurdles to creating effective institutional support programs. As outlined before, Black students are often bombarded with negative stereotypes and may feel that they have a limited chance for academic success due to being disenfranchised, inadequate, and under-prepared (Steele & Aronson, 1995). As a

report by the Maryland K–16 Leadership Council (2007) noted in a discussion about Black males' college access and retention,

There is a great deal of evidence to demonstrate that all children are not valued equally, that some children are clearly valued more than other children, and finally that, African-American male children are valued least of all. It is not likely that schools, as they are currently structured, will ever look on the majority of children they serve as having unlimited potential.

Researchers find that there is a statistically significant relationship between Black student satisfaction and a supportive campus environment (Chen et al., 2014, p. 571). However, systemic discrepancies often mean that Blacks undergraduate students experience difficulty adjusting to the campus climate at PWIs. Consequently, Blacks have a low level of participation in leadership roles and non-athletic extracurricular activities (Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014). Moreover, Black students report a continued lack of engagement with peers, faculty, and staff of color. According to Credle and Dean (1991), “one way to make a bold commitment to increase enrollment and retention rates of Black students is to increase the number of Black faculty members, administrators and staff in predominantly White institutions” (p. 5). Likewise, Kobrak (1992) noted the strong need for healthy relationships between faculty and minority students, which positively contribute to the completion of baccalaureate programs. A partnership with Black faculty, staff and graduate students is essential to positively impact the quality of life for Black undergraduate students at PWIs. On top of this, as Davis (2004) found, it is imperative that Black undergraduate students engage in healthy interactions with their peers and achieve a sense of belonging, which can mitigate social problems such as

unfairness, sabotage, condescension, and isolation. In short, support programs that promote academic and social development can constitute a safety net for Black students by providing information, services, and a nurturing environment.

Organization of Study

This study will focus on institutional structures designed to increase the retention and persistence of Black undergraduate students, namely through academic, social and cultural programming. Strayhorn & Johnson 2014, Tinto 2012, and others have emphasized in the literature academic, and social integration play a key part in students' educational success. As Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2013) indicated, "African-American male students, and other students of color, face cultural, societal, academic, and lifestyle differences from the traditional college student, all of which colleges and universities often attempt to address" (p. 208).

In order to examine the effectiveness of retention programs for Black undergraduate students, I undertook a multi-step process. The process includes a review of similar institutionally funded support associations designed for student retention of higher education for diverse student populations at three (3) predominately White institutions in rural Kentucky.

McMillan (2008) writes, "The purpose of conducting a phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the experiences of participants in order to understand the essence of the experience as perceived by the participants" (p.291). Creswell (2008), shares that phenomenology studies are, "human experiences being examined through the detailed descriptions of the people being studied" (p. 12). A phenomenological qualitative study

will allow researchers to examine the phenomenon of Black attrition rates by understanding the meanings of the students' experience and interpret those experiences (Merriam, 1998).

As colleges and universities increase the conversation on the importance of increasing student retention, the phenomenological study will shed light through student perception of the investment in resources and programs designed to achieve that goal of student graduation.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of retaining and graduating Black undergraduate students at predominately White institutions. The chapter also clarified the study's purpose, conceptual basis, and research questions. Chapter 2 reviews the extant research – including Astin's student engagement and Tinto's student integration models – to establish a theoretical foundation for the dissertation. Chapter 3 presents the study's methodology and outlines the research design, sample selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 describes the results. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the implications of this research and suggests further research possibilities.

Definition of Terminology

This study will rely on the following definitions for core terminology:

- **Appalachia:** The Appalachian Region includes all of West Virginia and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The regions are

home to more than 25 million people and cover 420 counties and almost 205,000 square miles. (Appalachian Region Commission)

- Black or African-American: A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education). African-American and Black may be used interchangeably throughout this study.
- Drop-Out: Referring to those persons who leave the college at which they are registered. (Tinto, 1975)
- Postsecondary: The provision of formal instructional programs with a curriculum designed primarily for students who have completed the requirements for a high school diploma or equivalent. This includes programs of an academic, vocational, and continuing professional education purpose, and excludes vocational and adult basic education programs. (NCES, 1998)
- Postsecondary 4-year institution: An institution offering at least a 4-year program of college-level studies that is wholly or principally creditable toward a baccalaureate degree.
- Predominately White Institutions (PWIs): as defined by The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.
- Retention Rate - The percentage of undergraduate students who return to their chosen institution in the following fall semester. (U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics)
- Stop-Out: Temporarily withdrawing from a higher education institution in order to pursue another activity. (NCES, 1998)

- Student of Color: student of color, people, and person of color refers to racial and ethnic minority groups. (Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society)

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and describe institutional retention support initiatives for Blacks students at PWIs from the perspective of the students attending the institution. This study will seek to understand how and to what extent these retention practices assist in retaining Black undergraduate students.

This study is partly inspired by Black Lives Matter, an international activist movement that aims to create a society where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for failure. The movement was born out of a climate of racial profiling, police shootings, and systematic oppression against people of color in the United States (Austin, Cardwell, Kennedy, Spencer, 2016, p. 14). Rather than being isolated episodes, these events are rooted in the nation's racial demographic changes and historical disenfranchisement of minority groups. Thus, this study seeks to explore the racial achievement gaps of higher education through a historical framework grounded on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Brown v. Board of Education 1954). This landmark case eliminated legalized school segregation, allowing Black students to seek higher education and, by extension, gain access to skilled jobs on an equal basis with Whites.

On that basis, this literature review examines underrepresented minority students – particularly Black students at PWIs – and the role of support associations in their stop-out and drop-out rates. In order to ground the main study, this review will discuss the conditions for such students' success at PWIs, as informed by the academic and practical

spheres of student retention. As retention is related to student involvement, this chapter includes a discussion of Astin's involvement theory. Other topics and themes that are discussed include: a historical overview of Black undergraduate students at PWIs; factors that impact attrition; factors that lead to Black undergraduate retention and persistence; the specific needs and challenges of Black undergraduate students; the relationship between retention and under-preparedness; the retention concerns of Black undergraduate students, in specific, and PWIs in general. Finally, since the main study concerns institutions in Kentucky, this literature review examines the persistence and graduation of Black students at three regional, Appalachian universities.

The state of Kentucky is particularly in need of guidance in this regard. Ever since the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) found that that "the Commonwealth of Kentucky, in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, has failed to eliminate the vestiges of its former de jure racially dual system of public higher education" (p. 3), the state has sought ways to improve its standing. In response to this decision, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) developed The Commonwealth of Kentucky Higher Education Desegregation Plan in 1982. The Kentucky Public Postsecondary Education Policy for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion indicates that:

For the next 25 plus years, CHE and CPE focused the Desegregation Plan and its subsequent revisions on increasing the enrollment and success of African-American students, increasing the number of African- American employees on campus, and enhancing Kentucky State University, with later versions also focusing on improving campus climate (Kentucky Public Postsecondary Education Policy for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, p. 3).

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) in 2011 established out a Statewide Diversity Policy and Framework for Institutional Diversity Plan. The document stipulated each public postsecondary institution within the Commonwealth to commit to eliminating achievement gaps among all students. The primary function for this statewide policy for the Commonwealth was to prepare students for an increasingly diverse society by embracing diversity and equity on campus, creating an inclusive campus environment. Ultimately, the policy sought to ensure that institutions are graduating culturally competent students for the labor market.

Affirming Diversity as a Core Strategy in Kentucky

CPE's current Statewide Diversity Policy and Framework for Institutional Diversity Plan sought to affirm diversity as a core strategy. During the undergraduate college experience, faculty and staff seek to train and develop all students for positions of responsibility in a diverse society; therefore, the university administration is tasked with efforts of promoting multicultural diversity on campus. However, this attitude was not instated quickly or easily—there were many hurdles in American history that had to be overcome to reach this point.

The long path toward integration in Kentucky's colleges and universities begins with *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. This historical court case argued that separate but equal laws in the area of public education deprive Black children of the equal protection guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution—indeed that “the doctrine of separate but equal has no place” (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014, p. 385). However, this landmark case did not immediately relate to public colleges and universities.

In 1904, the Kentucky General Assembly passed the Day Law, named for state Representative Carl Day (Platt, 1999). This legislation made it “unlawful for any person, corporation, or association of persons to maintain or operate any college, school, or institution where persons of white and Negro races are both received as pupils of instruction” (p. 3). In fact, the statute was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Berea College v. Kentucky* 1908, penalizing institutions, teachers, and students both African-American and white, who violated the law (Platt, 1999, p. 3). As described by Platt (1999), in line with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that ruled public facilities should remain *separate but equal*, what is known now as Kentucky State University evolved from the State Normal School for Colored Persons, which was created to train Black teachers for the Black schools of Kentucky (p. 4).

It was not until 1950, when the legislature enacted a second amendment of the Day Law, an offshoot of Jim Crow laws, stating that integration within higher education was permissible, provided that an institution’s governing body gain legal approval and that no comparable course of study was being offered at KSU. In the shadows of the “sundown law,” which refers to a Jim Crow tradition in which African Americans were told not to be seen after dark, Black students sought integration to predominately white institutions within the state, as the educational facilities for blacks were not equal to those of whites. The original “Jim Crow” was a character in a nineteenth-century minstrel act, a stereotype of a Black man (Allen, 1992). As encoded in laws sanctioning ethnic discrimination, the phrase refers to both legally enforced and traditionally sanctioned limitations of Blacks’ rights, primarily in the U.S. South.

Although colleges and universities in the Commonwealth of Kentucky have made significant strides since the days of integration, African-American (used interchangeably with Black, as defined) undergraduate students seek to prevail through tumultuous years in the face of adversity not experienced by their white counterparts. With the development of multicultural student support services, colleges and universities can forge ahead to establish programs of inclusion that embrace the diversity of their student population on every front.

The Landscape of Higher Education for Blacks at PWIs

Observing the historical plight of Black students, Karkouti (2016), “African-Americans were virtually excluded from the American higher education system. Black students were not allowed to enroll in any institution of higher learning from 1636 until the 1830s due to governmental mandates and practices of institutionalized racism” (p. 59). Research and history have clearly documented the importance of educational attainment, including higher education and the role it plays in being competitive in the labor market. Crellin, Kelly and Prince (2012) examined the relationship between college attainment and discovered that “on average, adults 25 to 64 years old with a high school diploma earn \$24,300 annually, compared to \$35,700 for those with an associate’s degree and \$53,200 for these with a bachelor’s degree” (p. 37). However, racial minority students have been disadvantaged and underrepresented in higher education. According to Strayhorn and Johnson (2014), “One of the consummate goals of higher education is to prepare students for active, equitable, and full participation in a diverse democracy, which, at least in part, depends on their ability to interact across difference generally and

race/ethnicity specifically” (p. 386). Consequently, it is imperative to survey the landscape of higher education for Blacks at Predominately White Institutions.

Understanding state-supported public education, Anderson (1998), provided an interpretation of the history and struggle of Black education in the South in the pursuit of educational needs and desires in *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. “The short-ranged purpose of black schooling was to provide the masses of ex-slaves with basic literacy skills plus the rudiments of citizenship training for participation in a democratic society” (p 31). In an effort to extend their emancipation as free persons, Anderson (1998), detailed the unique development of both private and public education for Black southern between 1869 and 1935.

Understanding the history of education of Blacks in the south is particularly important as this study seeks to examine student perceptions of the college experience at PWIs where for years, Blacks not lacked acceptance to these colleges and universities, but were restricted from attending. Examining the ideology and content of Black education, Anderson (1998) contests, that intent of educational movement of ex-slaves were underplayed in the values of self-help and self-determination in the interest of self-reliance for the freed person. As described, “a central theme in the history of the education of black Americans is the persistent struggle to fashion a system of formal education that prefigured their liberation from peasantry” (p. 6). Booker T. Washington an integral part of the struggle for education shares, “it was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young, and none too old, to make the attempt to learn.” Considering the education and race problem, in the 19th Century, ex-slaves contributed their money and labor to help make education a possibility (Anderson, 1998).

When examining Blacks in Higher Education, researchers would be negligent to ignore the years of segregation that was shaped through inherent, though sometimes subtle, racism (Hardin, 1997). A comprehensive presentation of the Black experience in Appalachia must take into consideration a historical perspective of Blacks in Appalachia. Second-class educational opportunities were not restricted to a nationally setting, but were prevalent in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Flatt (1999), elucidates that no integrated higher education institution existed in Kentucky for almost a half of century. Flatt (1999) continues with the outline of the 1904 Kentucky Day Law passed by the General Assembly, enacting legislation that made it “unlawful for any person, corporation, or association, of persons to maintain or operate any college, school, or institution where persons of the white and Negro races are both received for instruction” (p. 3). This law forced Berea College of Kentucky to exclude students because of their race. According to Hardin (1997), it was not until 1948 that the Black community afforded financial resources to seek litigation to end segregation. The legislature enacted a second amendment to the Day Law in 1950 which permitted integration of higher education.

In 1954, Thurgood Marshall served as chief counsel for Oliver Brown, parent of one of the children denied access to Topeka, Kansas segregated white schools (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka served as a groundbreaking decision that declared school segregation unconstitutional including higher education unconstitutional. Although the decision to integrate schools aligned the Constitution with racial equality, the racial make-up of schools and universities slowly changed.

The historical legacy of segregated schools and colleges can determine the prevailing climate on campus and directly influence the environment of racial and ethnic diversity (Karkouti, 2016). The ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* decision aimed to integrate education assisted in desegregated many facets of American society. “And while the decision leads to more integrated schools, it did not completely dismantle predominately White or predominately Black schools’ settings” (Strayhorn and Johnson, 2014, p. 386). Initial school integration was followed by resource shortages and socioeconomic isolation. In the early stages of desegregation, students from the historically disenfranchised communities were likely bombarded with taunts, abuse and even threats of death simply as a result of the color of their skin. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Right Act, which was designed to eliminate discrimination against African American and other racial and ethnic groups and allow the integration of schools and other public facilities (Brown, 2001, p. 49).

As institutions seek to promote equality of opportunity for student success, scholars have become interested in the topic of institutional support associations that aid in the reduction of stop out and drop out of underrepresented minority students at predominately white institutions. Stewart (1998) claimed that the most pressing need for higher education was the successful retention and persistence to graduation of minority students. This observation almost 30-year-old observation remains true today.

Many institutions are concerned about the needs of the students inside and outside of the classroom. In 1984, The Department of Education conducted a final report on Excellence in American Higher Education. In the report presented to the Secretary of Education, entitled *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher*

Education, the leading recommendation was “to increase student involvement is for college administration should reallocate faculty and other institutional resources toward increased services to first-and second-year students” (p.36).

As students of color gained access to PWIs, these colleges and universities were tasked with developing ways to support a diverse population. The experiences students have at the university inside and outside the classroom are vital in predicting a student’s probability to retain, persist and graduate. As Hurtado (2005) outlines, race and racism remain perennial issues on college campuses as “the racial dynamics change as the number of racial/ethnic groups grows on college campuses that are becoming compositionally diverse” (p. 147).

Historically, disenfranchised Black students often face various obstacles unlike those of their white counterparts. Following decades of Jim Crow Segregation, the *Brown v. Board of education* decision of 1954 sought to create more opportunities to move toward more equality for African-Americans; however, some members of the Black community continued to face the effects of employment and housing discrimination practices, which resulted in the economic and educational disparities based on the neighborhood in which one could reside (Strayhorn and Johnson, 2014, p. 385). Education policy is intertwined with housing policy. Schools remain segregated today because neighborhoods in which they are located are segregated. Raising achievement of black children requires residential integration, from which school integration can follow.

Traditionally, the pedagogic model of higher education in the United States has been based on the Cambridge University and Oxford University models of residential colleges developed centuries ago. Modeling the framework of Cambridge and Oxford,

college campuses were developed as isolated communities responsible for developing the academic and social skills of privileged white males (Thelin, 2003). Caton (2012) indicated that PWIs

“are also in an environment in which they can receive an excellent education, perform well academically, and develop their own self-brands without the hassle of combating daily racism on the same scale as their African American counterparts in predominantly white colleges and universities” (p. 3).

In recognizing that the attainment of any postsecondary degree affects an individual’s long-term social mobility, President John F. Kennedy proposed scholarship and loan programs that resulted in an influx of financial support for institutions of higher learning. Amidst student activism and national protest leading to the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965, Higher Education Act sought to finally ensure the equality of all races and creeds and prohibit the use of federal funds for any discriminatory programs (Higher Education Opportunity Act, Public Law 110-315).

The rise of tuition coupled with the reduction of state appropriations for post-secondary education has created a college attainment gap restricting many Americans from pursuing higher education. With America’s current economic state, the job market may be more competitive today than at any other time in history. Based on Labor Department statistics, there are 3.4 applicants for every job opening (Raasch, p. 4). Therefore, the importance of a post-secondary education has increased in value. However, as Americans witness the increased value of a postsecondary education, citizens have also witnessed an augmented rise in the cost to obtain such an education. College affordability is an enormous challenge for the academy and a student’s expected family contribution may serve as a predictor of their likelihood to be retained (Hand and Payne, 2008).

Many economic and social justice movements express concern regarding the growing wealth gap. The wealth gap refers to the inequality of wealth between the richest and poorest American citizens. The increasing wealth inequality in the United States may be directly tied to the troubling gap in achievement resulting from low-income students receiving a second-class education compared to more affluent students (Hand and Payne, 2008). Recognizing the link between wealth and access to education, the Obama Administration designed initiatives such as the reauthorizing of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (the Higher Education Opportunity Act enacted in 2008), which included Federal Pell Grants student loan reform and additional college tax credits to strengthen education through quality instruction and technology advancements, attempting to provide an education opportunity for all American citizens.

State and local governments hold primary responsibility for public education. In general, there has been a continual debate on the role of government oversight in education across the U.S. Some scholars are strong proponents of small government with the argument that large government is ineffective, lacking the necessary checks and balances to minimize corruption. Conversely, there are those who are in favor of a large government that controls local authority, superseding state authority in favor of federal legislation. Lawson (2013), writing about the governmental effect control of educational policies has on minority students, noted:

“when the federal government legislates/regulates in each field, it limits the ability of states to legislate in the same field. The fact that federal involvement in education has led to undesirable outcomes for poor and minority students should reportedly make policymakers reevaluate whether it is most desirable for the federal government to play a major role in education” (p, 284).

Noting the persistence of interstate educational disparities since *Brown v. Board of Education*, Professor Kimberly Jenkins Robinson, who served in the General Counsel's office at the U.S. Department of Education, argues that “an increased federal role in education is necessary because history teaches that states are incapable, on their own, of addressing disparities in educational opportunity” (Lawson, 282-283). With no consensus on whether local, state or federal governments should have controlling responsibility for education students continue to seek an advocate to aid in creating opportunities to receive a postsecondary education.

General Demographic College Campus Projections

Many colleges and universities have adopted diversity recruitment strategies as a university-wide strategic priority. Over the past four decades, Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh (2008) suggest, that significant growth has occurred in the enrollment of historically underrepresented student groups. The demographics shifts of young people seeking higher education are less likely to white or male and more likely to Hispanic, may be the first person in their family to continue an education past high school, and will likely need help paying for it (College of Tomorrow, 2014, p. 1).

As Turner (1985), *Blacks in Appalachia*, discussing the demography of Black Appalachia, historically highlights the educational deficiency being greater in Appalachia than the national norm, “Adult black Appalachians are twice as likely not to have more than five years of schooling than the general population” (p. 248). The educational deficit not only results in instability to support families or to pursue another way of life beyond poverty, but Turner (1985) exploring education and illiteracy in eight Appalachian states,

including Kentucky, asserts, “The educational deficit, of course, adds to the powerlessness, political lethargy, present-orientation, and other manifestations of social-psychological modes of adaptation” (p. 249). In general colleges and universities in the Commonwealth of Kentucky have outlined diversity as a core value of the institution and increasing diversity on campus as a goal. Bearing in mind the demographic panorama of Appalachia colleges and universities must ruminate on the historical perspective of their regions where many Blacks have moved to urban areas to improve their access to education and resources for success.

In August 2014, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that, for the first time, the total percentage of minority students – Latinos, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans combined – was larger than the percentage of whites in public grade-school classrooms in 2014. According to the NCES, the gender gap is widening, with women now making up about 57 percent of all college students, an exponential gain compared to around 40 percent in the 1970s. Among African-Americans, however, the gap is more of a chasm: just 37 percent of black undergraduates are males. While National Center for Education Statistics data show, more African-Americans are attending college than ever – 34 percent in 2012, the most recent year available. But those students are struggling: just 42 percent of black college students go on to get their diplomas, and most take longer than four years to do it, according to the NCES (College of Tomorrow, 2014, p. 3).

Success Factors for Black Students at Appalachian PWIs

McNairy (1996) outlined the factors that influence the retention of students of color and the challenges PWIs face in the recruitment of these students. McNairy suggests institutions of higher education will benefit from university-sponsored support services that respond to the academic and social needs of all students particularly those of color.

Investigating students' perceptions of key factors that affect their academic success, and the difference in the academic experiences of Black and White Appalachian students, Cleveland (1998) ascertains, "as challenging as the quest to alter the educational quagmire urban African American and White Appalachian students find themselves in, we cannot assume that African American students in the Appalachian region are excelling in their educational process." Although there have been gains by Black students in education, Cleveland (1998), contests that "the American educational system has evidently failed, to a significant degree, to address the needs of minority and disadvantaged students" (p. 2). Black students entering higher education trail most other groups, particularly White students in educational attainment. The process of inspecting structural and cultural inequalities is obligatory for institutions as these inequalities cause cultural conflicts, inevitably causing barriers to learning at the university (Cleveland, 1998).

Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) analyzing the positive effects education have on individuals with regard to their earning, potential, quality of life, and socioeconomic status. At the same time, colleges and universities are dependent upon steady enrollment, retention and graduation figures for their financial stability. Therefore, it is incumbent

upon institutions to create an environment for all people that promote student success. In the process of creating a healthy campus, climate institutions must not neglect the unique needs of the Black underrepresented minority students. The institution's commitment must be extended to an increase in the number of Black faculty, administrators and staff, as students have responded positively to interactions with persons who look like them. The university and the community benefit when Black underrepresented minority students are able to remain in school and graduate. Colleges and universities have the responsibility to meet the needs of the students being served.

Persistence to Graduation

Exploratory of persistence to graduation, it is imperative that one does not solely consider the academic and ignore extracurricular activities recognizing that learning occurs outside of the classroom. Boyer (1987) argues that “academic and nonacademic cannot be divided, and if students do not become intellectually engaged then all talk about community will be simply a diversion” (p. 3). While addressing the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Boyer (1990) describes a higher education institution as a “purposeful community” that involves faculty and students work together to strengthen teaching and learning on campus, where the intellectual life is central (p. 9).

When considering what community means for a student's perspective, along with the impact of community on persistence to graduation, Credle & Dean (1991) suggest that institutions “should adopt a compressive set of support services to do so” (p.164). According to Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2012), such support services should include

“faculty/student mentoring sessions, academic assistance, and student engagement through co-curricular programs assisting students in exploring possible career options” (p. 210).

An integral factor in the persistence and graduation of underrepresented minority students is faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education is an understanding of the needs, backgrounds of underrepresented minority students. Educational opportunity and graduation are imperative for equal qualification for the labor market. “African-American male students, and other students of color face cultural, societal, academic, and lifestyle differences from the traditional college student, all of which colleges and universities often attempt to address” (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2013, p.208). Researchers who have focused on student retention (Astin, 1984; Boyer 1987; Tinto, 1987) consistently identify student involvement and a sense of belonging to the institution as having a positive impact on student success and student persistence to graduation.

When students do not persist in school, the university loses his or her tuition, fees and other revenue; thus, there is a mutual benefit to the college or university and to the individual in retaining and persisting. College graduates benefit institutions by creating a pool of qualified, trained students able to effectively serve society.

Credle and Dean (1991) note that “one way to make a bold commitment to increase enrollment and retention rates of Black students is to increase the number of Black faculty, administrators and staff in predominantly white institutions” (p. 164). A partnership with Black faculty, staff, and graduate students are essential in positively impacting the quality of life for Black undergraduate students. Black representation in the student body, faculty, and staff complement the effectiveness of the institution’s goals

and objectives, producing a culture of engagement and leadership. Brooks, Jones, and Burt, (2013) claim:

“Students of color find comfort and encouragement in seeing others who look like them in such professional roles. Seeing people of color in campus faculty and administrative leadership roles, or any role other than secretarial, janitorial, or food service, is encouraging to one’s occupational and professional outlook” (p.209).

As many schools and communities attempt to solve low achievement and behavior problems associated with single-issue prevention and intervention programs, Black (2006) examined teaching, learning, and social interactions in classrooms nationwide. According to Black (2006), “kids who succeed one year with a good teacher are unlikely to have that support with them two years in a row” (p. 20). The research showed that students who feel supported and motivated to learn will aide in students being able to recognize their potential. Students that believe there is someone (instructor, staff, or administrator) who truly cares for them are significantly protected from attempting high-risk behaviors that may lead to drop-outs and stop-outs.

Stop-out and Drop-out

Historically, the funding for many colleges and universities in the Commonwealth of Kentucky (and across the country) has been based on how many full-time students are enrolled at the beginning of the semester. This enrollment-based funding model provided incentives for institutions to enroll students. Most recently, states are re-considering the enrollment-based funding model and moving toward performance-based funding for higher education, causing a need to review and heighten awareness of universities looking to address the effects of drop-outs and stop-outs (Spalding, 2016). Universities

and researchers continue to discuss the long-term impact on the institution, as well as the student's career aspirations. Outside poor institutional fit, one must evaluate the reasons the best students sometimes have for leaving institutions, and how institutions can confront student dropout.

When distinguishing between dropouts and stop-outs, Herzog (2005) stated that stop-out students "return within seven semesters and who did not transfer to another institution during that length of time" (p. 888).

In a more contemporary vantage point than Anderson (1998) which examined education for Blacks in the South from 1860-1935, Fleming (1984) adds to the literature in *Blacks in College*, providing a contemporaneous foundation of Black student success. Through a comparative study of students' success in Black and White institutions, Fleming proposed the question, "is it true that black students have more difficulty in white colleges because of their race" (p. 129). Evaluating the role of Historically Black College and Universities, Fleming's study investigated the impact of student success for Blacks attending predominately Black colleges in contrast to a Black student attending integrated predominately white colleges. Fleming's (1984) comparative study of the impacts of college on Black and White students' specific consideration is afforded to student development while in college. Acknowledging the critical role of interpersonal support and relationships, Fleming suggests, "For black students, the significance of the 1954 victory is not only the right to enter white schools but also the right to choose which educational environment is best for a given individual" (p. 159). Fleming establishes the importance school choice plays in student success. "Establishing a meaningful personal

identity is a major problem for black students in white colleges, and one that affects a large majority of them” (p. 21).

The Appalachian region of the U.S. offers a unique history and dynamic of social and educational issues. Historically, there have been significant disparities in the quality of education as a result of socioeconomic status. Based on geography alone, rural Appalachian students have a barrier to college access compared to their counterparts who live in the vicinity of a college or university. Hand and Payne (2008), explain the Appalachian culture regarding localism. “Localism describes the sense of attachment that Appalachian have to the place where they were born and grew up” (p.5). In addition, leaving home for many Appalachian students can cause a rift in the familial dynamics based solely on the previous generations’ way of living. Taking into consideration the geographic and family hurdles Appalachian students must endure; the research has identified contributing factors contributing to the problem of rural students being less likely to attend and complete college compared to students living outside of rural settings.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) examined retention rates for students obtaining a bachelor’s degree, identifying differences in the drop-out pattern of minority undergraduate students as compared to nonminority undergraduate students. Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2008 selected within four (4) years after start, the 1996 cohort of full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary public institutions, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and acceptance rate, the 1996 selected cohort year, graduation within four (4) years after start, males and females White 36.3%, Black 19.5%, Hispanic 22.8%, and two or more races were not recorded until 2005 starting cohort. Comparatively, the 2008 selected cohort

year, graduation within four (4) years after start, males and females White 43.7%, Black 21.4%, Hispanic 30.4%, and two or more races 46.5%. Academic achievement of Black undergraduate students has improved dramatically in recent decades, but whites' has as well, so racial achievement gaps remain huge.

Specific to Appalachia Regional Campus

Isolating the Appalachian region from the rest of the United States reveals distinct and noticeable differences in terms of educational attainment. According to Shaw, De Young and Rademacher (2004):

“Blacks living in both non-Appalachian areas and Appalachia lag behind whites independent of where they live. However, the difference in higher educational attainment between whites and blacks living in Appalachia is considerably smaller at six percentage points, as compared to the thirteen-percent difference between whites and blacks living in non-Appalachian areas” (p.324)

Appalachia has often been portrayed as a region of economic hardships with a lack of communal educational attainment. Although this perception is decreasing, there is still room for improvement. According to recent U.S. Census information, “in 2000 the poverty rate for the nation was 13.1 percent, but in the [Appalachian] region it was 15.4 percent” (Shaw, De Young, & Rademacher, 2004, p. 247). Nearly two-thirds of Appalachian counties are classified as rural. The Appalachia region has a shared history, culture and environment. The defined territory of Appalachia incorporates southern New York and covers states or parts of states leading to the northern parts of southern states. According to the National Center for Families Learning, a leader in familial literacy, “Appalachia encompasses about 205,000 square miles of land, including all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland,

Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia” (“Where is Appalachia?,” 2015, p.1).

Research has outlined the benefits of students who experience a diverse learning experience inside and outside the classroom (Astin 1999, Tinto 2012, etc.); however, education in Appalachia has historically, struggled to keep pace with the average literacy levels held by other regions of the U.S. Caudill (2001), detailing Appalachia’s difficult past, provides historical context of rural education through a contemporary understanding. Throughout the history of Kentucky, anti-intellectualism has manifested within the region. Caudill claims that “For nearly seventy-five years after the state was established, most of Kentucky lacked a school system even in name. Not until 1864 did the state levy a tax for the support of its schools” (Caudill, 2001, p. 53).

Appalachian families have often become accustomed to certain ways of life (Hand and Payne, 2008. As it is vital for researchers to discuss cross-racial interactions and interracial friendships, it is equally important for them to address the trend for many rural residents to remain in family businesses and not consider seeking out a postsecondary degree, feeling more comfortable with a strong sense of self-identity within their communities. In a historical context, there is the painful question of priorities for students seeking higher education. Appalachian students generally are first-generation students who struggle with leaving home to pursue education that may not be valued over staying home and working within the family business and return to contributing to the stabilization of the community. Often students are faced with these difficult questions, ‘Do I stay at home, or do I seek a college degree? If do go to college, do I return home?’

Shaw et al. (2004) take a historical look at the Appalachian Region, analyzing the 1990s and 2000s census findings relating to educational attainment, identified that there was and is a persistent gap between the nation and Appalachia in terms of educational attainment. In the analysis, they found a persistent gap between Appalachia and the rest of regarding of educational attainment. The primary story that emerges after an examination of educational attainment in recent U.S. Census surveys is that although gains are made at lower levels, differences still exist between Appalachia and non-Appalachian areas at higher education levels. Research has analyzed the predictors of cross-racial interactions and interracial friendships among college students and found that such relationships hinder student success. When rural students begin to explore higher education, exposure to diverse student populations is often a new experience.

Saphier and King (1985) assess the importance of building a strong educational hierarchy in the cultural Appalachian region and argue that good seeds of students and student development will not grow in weak cultures. These authors also note that the promotion of a nurturing culture requires students and families who are keen on seeking education to return home to the community once education has been obtained assist in stabilizing the community. Saphier and King (1985) provide cultural norms that affect school improvement that include: appreciation and recognition; honest, open communication; and, involvement in decision-making in regard to the daily interactions communicated through the school's educational, technical, and human skills.

Factors that Lead to Student Involvement at Colleges and Universities

Higher education institutions are challenged with developing university-sponsored support services that positively contribute to the academic and social development of all students. Far too often the responsibility of judiciously navigating the landscape of university life is placed on the students solely. This chapter reviews the literature about how and why the traditional organizational structures do not equitably represent students of color in their educational attainment. This chapter will identify research conducted in the last few decades that highlight student retention approaches that assist in the improvement of undergraduate retention and persistence of Black undergraduate students. Theories will identify how campus environment, interpersonal relationships, and university integration influence educational aspirations and academic attainment.

Tinto: Student Integration Model

Vincent Tinto, a renowned higher education scholar, has conducted extensive research and writing on student growth. Talbert (2012) describes Tinto's student integration model as an "integration of students- such as developing cohesive relationships with students and faculty, maintaining an appropriate learning environment, engaging socially in school activities –increases their institutional commitments, thereby reducing their likelihood of student attrition" (p. 23). Tinto's student integration model further outlines that the academic environment that provides a sense of belonging has a higher chance of degree completers.

As Tinto (1987) notes, a high-priority goal of institutions of higher education should be to cultivate a sense of commitment and determination through an understanding of students' academic goals. The development of support associations allows for the opportunity to create independent student-action plans to evaluate progress and offer further guidance for students who lack commitment to the institution and determination to reach academic goals. Furthermore, peer interaction and associations can positively influence students' cognitive development, self-confidence, and motivation. "It is the interplay between the individual's commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out" (Tinto, 2006, p.6). Such student connectivity with the institution serves as an intricate component influencing student persistence.

Tinto (2006) recognizes that there are specific institutional factors that have the potential to impact a student's academic success, noting that the use of learning communities or retention programs that cultivated collaborative learning, rather than isolated learning, are effective efforts. As Tinto connects the responsibility of the institution to engage students in the learning process, he also contributes involvement with faculty and peers in learning activities and as major components of achievement.

Astin: Student Engagement Model

Comparatively, on the campus of University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Astin (1984) and his colleagues developed a student involvement theory and contended that students who are highly engaged in socially and/or academic involvement, have a greater likelihood to graduate. According to Astin (1993), "student involvement reflects

the amount of physical and psychological time and energy the student invests in the educational process” (p.134). Astin (1999) later contests that greater student involvement in college creates greater persistence to graduation, and that furthermore, involvement ensures more opportunities to acquire knowledge and development of skills from various perspectives. Tracking student participation and academic outcomes, Astin’s 1977 published comprehensive study, *Four Critical Years* had primarily focused on students who had left college, investigating the changing behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of college students. Astin’s discovery revealed that students’ interaction with their peers and faculty exponentially influenced retention.

Revisiting his 1977 study, *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years*, Astin (1993), presented a study on the student outcomes and how they are affected by college environments. Acknowledging the fact that different types of students are exposed to different types of environments, Astin identified the undergraduate experience included the educational or academic program and the faculty to which the student was exposed, as well as many other aspects of the undergraduate experience, such as the peer group affected student outcomes. Astin’s engagement theory threads together outcome predictors based on the environment, the students’ learning process and the student as a learner.

A key component of Astin’s (1984) theory of student engagement identifies the institutional environment in promoting student involvement. Terenzini and Pascarella (1994) cite institutional climate as an essential element in determining the frequency, purpose, and quality of students’ non-classroom interactions with faculty members, staff, and their peer group interactions and extracurricular activities. Per Tinto (2006), “the

more frequently students engage with faculty, staff, and their peers, the more likely, other things being equally, that they will persist and graduate” (p. 3). Additionally, Terenzini and Pascarella (1994) distinguish a student’s personal social and academic encounters as more important than what is being marketed by the institution or what resources are being provided.

Importance Factors to Reduce Stop-outs and Drop-Outs

During President Barack Obama’s (2008) acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, he stated, “Now is the time to finally meet our moral obligation to provide every child a world-class education, because it will take nothing less to compete in the global economy” (p.3). Recognizing the essential need for post-secondary education and training as college graduates’ average earnings nearly double those with only a high school diploma, per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the office of the President of the United States set a goal for America to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world within the next decade.

Most recently, the state of Kentucky has received significant attention in higher education retention, attrition, and persistence of all students to graduation. Under a proposed statewide funding formula that could determine how all state appropriations are distributed, Kentucky colleges and universities would have to improve the number of degrees earned by underrepresented minorities and degrees produced by low-income students (Blackford 2016). Colleges and universities may be requested to implement diversity-based initiatives such as developing and incorporate programs that reach out to underserved students of color.

Specific concern has been placed on retention, persistence, and graduation of Black students enrolled in PWIs. In an effort to promote success among students attending Kentucky colleges and universities, the proposed performance-funding model emphasizes the success of low-income and underrepresented minority students (Blackford, 2016). The desire for a diverse global campus is not enough. Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to prepare approaches to represent an appreciation of diversity through institutional goals, objectives, resources, and support. As colleges and universities seek to make strides in a foreseeable performance-based funding model, institutions must be thoughtful in planning and disbursing adequate resources to programs for underrepresented minority students in order to adequately and most effectively position themselves.

As students seek to persist towards graduation, exposure to a diverse student body during undergraduate studies will better prepare students to face the challenge in a global marketplace upon graduation. Preparation in a global market will necessitate not only exposure to college, but the completion of an undergraduate degree, failure to do so may inevitably constrain a student's ambitions. "Shifting demographics, rising costs of operations, a changing competitive landscape, reductions in state appropriations, pressures for accountability, and a widespread economic decline characterize the environment in which today's colleges and universities operate" (Spanier, 2010, p. 95). Colleges and universities that offer a perspective of a global community provide students with new viewpoints that enhance their critical thinking skills, as well as personal growth through exposure to different cultures.

In a response to performance-based funding metrics, institutions will seek greater value in their retention rates. A synthesis of the literature on retention, persistence, and graduation reveals a focus on environment and interaction. Upon further investigation, the literature shows a common thread in a strong sense of belonging that greatly impacts a students' motivation and determination to persist and graduate. Additionally, next to the peer group a student is associated with, faculty interaction is a significant aspect of the students' development during their undergraduate studies. Research has shown essential factors to reduce drop-out and stop-out of students requires placing emphasis on student engagement in the learning process and a sense of belongingness. The interaction between students and faculty/staff and advance pedagogical strategies in the classroom serves as an essential ingredient of successful students and universities. These studies suggest a student's cognitive, affective, psychological, and behavioral is affected in some way by environmental characteristics of the institution. Per Astin (1993), "student-student interaction had its strongest positive effects on leadership development, overall academic development, self-reported growth in problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness" (p. 4).

Chapter 3 identifies the methodology and procedures that will be used, as well as the instrumentation, assurance of reliability, and timeline of the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research study aimed to understand the perceptions and experiences of Black undergraduate students at three predominately white institutions in Kentucky. As such, phenomenology was an ideal framework for generating rich, thorough descriptions and interpretations of Black undergraduate persistence and graduation. Furthermore, this study is theoretically grounded in Tinto's (1993) student departure theory, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, and Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat theory; collectively, these theories provide a framework for interpreting Black undergraduates' academic success at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs).

The specific research question at the heart of the study is this: What is the structure and essence of the experience of this phenomenon for Black undergraduate students at predominately White institutions? The research questions examined in this study are outlined below:

- 1) What impact on retention at Predominately White Institutions do Black students experience when participating in targeted institutionally funded support initiatives based on race, gender, and ethnicity?
- 2) How does participation in targeted institutionally funded support initiatives based on race, gender, and ethnicity predict overall student academic achievement, retention, and completion of a baccalaureate degree for Black students?

- 3) What significant difference is there in overall social involvement, engagement, leadership development for occupational aspirations between students who participate in institutionally funded support initiatives for Black students and those Black students who do not participate in these programs?
- 4) What are the institutional characteristics that validate institutionally funded support initiatives for Black students?

In preparation for addressing these question, Chapter 3 will discuss the study's purpose, methodology, design, population, and procedures.

Research Design

A qualitative study allows the researcher to thoroughly examine in detail and in-depth the phenomenon of African-American retention and attrition at PWIs. Museus (2007) supports the notion that campus cultures play an important role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of college students. A qualitative approach to this study will allow me to understand the African-American student experience through first-hand insight.

An important component of student success is to obtain feedback and assess student performance. Seidman (2006) contends, "The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, who make up the organization" (p. 10). This study will explore the experiences of African-American students who have attended four-year regional public PWIs as defined by The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research). Specifically, the

study aims to understand these students' perceptions of support associations designed to benefit the academic achievement and increase the satisfaction of the African-American student college experience. Creswell (2008), outlines examination of a phenomenon through a qualitative methodology 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" (p. 1). I will utilize the phenomenological model to conduct in-depth interviews of African-American students to examine availability, access, and achievement of institutional programs and opportunities designed to aide African-American students in their navigation through college life and reach their academic, personal, and professional goals. The phenomenological model allows for fresh perspectives from participants' direct, immediate experience within their worlds with an emphasis on aspects of their collegiate experience (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Maximizing trustworthiness of data collection, I will conduct six individual interviews with Black undergraduate students at predominately white regional comprehensive four-year public universities in Kentucky that participated with institutionally funded supportive associations for students of color designed to increase persistence and graduation. Hays and Singh (2012), describe interactive phenomenological interviewing as, "the interaction between interviewer and interviewee whereby the two engage in a conversational and open dialogue that involves the exchange of narratives" (p. 238). This approach will allow for a rich and depth snapshot of Black undergraduate stop-out and drop-out phenomenon, providing a voice to the participant. To capture the true live experiences, I will utilize the phenomenological

research methodology to explore the perception of institutional retention practices, from the perspective of students' participants involved with retention programs for a diverse student at Predominately White Institutions.

Phenomenological Study

It is the goal of this study that results from this study will provide a clearer understanding of the institutional retention practices targeted towards historically underrepresented minority students and its subsequent impact on persistence towards graduation. Institutional assessment of student experience can be useful and lead to improvements that directly and indirectly affect student retention. "In a descriptive-based phenomenological methodology, the focus of the research is to describe, understand, and clarify human experiences" (Sousa, 2014, p. 214). The aim of this study will be to understand the experiences and perceptions Black students who participated in institutional support programs at PWIs. This study will specifically examine Black undergraduate students and the environmental impacts that positively or negatively contributed to the academic success as a deterrent of stop-out or drop-out. I will study in-depth the phenomenon of undergraduate Black student persistence and degree attainment at PWIs.

I choose a phenomenological in-depth interactive interview approach to share the stories of Black students who have stopped-out or dropped-out of three (3) regional comprehensive four-year public universities in Kentucky that are PWIs and reconstruct the experiences of these students to why they did not continue at their institutions. Individual interviews "allows participants to describe what is meaningful or important

using his or her own words” (Hays and Singh, 2012, p. 238). I will follow the von Eckartsberg design (1998b), which includes the following four-step process:

1. Identify the phenomenon
2. Gather descriptive accounts from participants regarding their experiences
3. Study the response and identify any common themes and/or patterns
4. Present the results in a debriefing format

This process will provide the opportunity to unearth unexpected themes and share the participant’s stories. The research design is helpful in framing the problem and can be conducted using surveys and interviews.

Site Selection, Target Population, and Sampling Methods

The population of participants for this study was focused on three (3) regional comprehensive universities in the Commonwealth of Kentucky who have institutionalized support initiatives for Black undergraduate students. The target population for this study are both students that participate in institutional retention programs and students who had the opportunity, but choose not to participate in institutional retention programs.

Site Selection

The selected institutions are three PWIs located in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Black or African-American students comprise an average of 12 % of total undergraduate enrollment across the Commonwealth of Kentucky over the past five years

the student population at these predominately white institutions (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education Comprehensive Database March 2016).

Based on data from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the Commonwealth of Kentucky has six (5) regional public PWI. From this pool of regional institutions, I selected three institutions that have support programs for Black students that have been established for at least two (2) years. The choice of each institutions represents three distinct regions of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The names of each institution will remain anonymous and be given aliases to protect identity of the institution. Each selected institution is comparable in size and scope although each are located in different regions of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Cosmopolitan University

Established as an extension campus in 1948 Cosmopolitan University in 1968 began to operate independently.

Central University

Founded in 1906 by the state legislature as a normal school, Central University (CU) primarily serves counties in an Appalachian area of the Commonwealth.

Mountain University

Mountain University was founded in 1887 as a Commonwealth Normal School and later became apart of the state-supported system in 1926.

Sampling Method

The objective of this study was to explore institutionalized retention practices for Black undergraduate students from the perspective and experiences of Black participants and Black non-participants at the selected PWIs. The participants for this study were not chosen at random, but instead were purposely identified and selected. The researcher utilized two different selection processes, which included the criterion sampling process and purposeful sampling process. The criterion sampling process was utilized to identify participants who meet the pre-determined criteria for the study. The pre-determined criteria for the participants for this research study included:

- 1) Their institution are regional Predominately White Institution comprehensive universities
- 2) Their institution must serve Black undergraduate students with an institutional retention support program
- 3) Students have the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive academic support & retention program targeting African-American/Black students.

This sampling process is used to provide quality assurance, and I was able to use this technique to select participants who meet the criteria for the study. The purposeful sampling process to recruit study participants from institutional student affairs personnel, program directors, coordinators and/or advisors. Participants of the study met all research criteria and were viable contributors to the study. The criteria identified the six participants based on whether students participated in the academic support retention program and those who did not participate in the academic support retention program. During the data collection process participants will be asked to identify the level of

engagement with institutional academic support & retention program at their institution. I used these responses to divide the six participants into two groups, participants, and non-participants. I used this type of sampling selection technique to generate group comparisons.

Generally, the sample size of qualitative research studies is small and purposeful. A large sample size could lead to difficulty in appropriately analyzing the data and too small of a sample size could lead to saturation. I followed Creswell's (1998), recommendation of using ten participants in phenomenological research. The literature on selecting qualitative sample sizes suggests researchers avoid selecting a sample size too large or too small.

Instrumentation

The instrument that will I used in this study consisted of phenomenological interview questions. In an interactive conversational interview I explored in depth details related to the participants' institutions retention practices, to explain and build upon the responses from the survey questionnaire, and to identify common themes among the participant responses. The students' perceptions of the university through the participation or non-participation of institutionalized student support initiatives will be examined through the phenomenological inquiry to understand the structure and experiences of the participants.

The students were divided into two groups (currently enrolled, non-currently enrolled). Students were selected from both groups to ensure adequate representation of both groups in the study. Comparison of the two groups assisted in identifying perceived

level of satisfaction with the institutionalized support initiative resulting in persistence towards graduation. A semi-structured interview protocol will be used to guide participant interviews at each selection site.

Prospective participants of the study will be Black undergraduate students who have or are currently attending a regional comprehensive PWI in Kentucky and participated in institutionally funded supportive associations designed for diverse student populations. Participants will have completed at least one semester at the University level. I will contact area directors of institutionally funded supportive associations designed for diverse student populations to identify a list of prospective study participants. I will conduct conference calls with university officials outlining my role as a doctoral candidate and discuss student availability to participate in the research in an effort to get information to students requesting their participation.

The study proposal will be submitted first to Eastern Kentucky University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon approval of the ECU IRB board, I distributed letters to prospective study participants requesting that they participate in the study. The letters will inform prospective participants that their participation is voluntary and they can opt out at any time. A formal letter will be sent to potential participating institutions and will be included in the appendices. The written correspondence to prospective study participants will introduce prospective participants to the goal of the study, as well as the format of the individual interview with potential meeting dates. Communication was sent to prospective study participants requesting demographic data and institutional characteristics questionnaire. Participants were informed that the study is being completed for a doctoral dissertation. Interviews were recorded and stored securely.

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was individual in-depth semi-structured interviews. Using open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview, according to Hays and Singh (2012), allows, “the interviewee to have more say in the structure and process” (p. 239). The semi-structured individual interview protocol will serve as a guide and starting point for the interview experience. Each participant will be provided with informed detailed consent.

Each interview with the permission of the participant will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher to be stored electronically and maintain confidentiality. I will collect an electronic pre-survey through email correspondence to obtain demographic information from all study participants. Individual interviews will be conducted onsite or agreed upon location, recorded and saved on a password-protected computer.

The participant will complete the prescreening process as outlined below and be confirmed as a valid participant. I will collect data for this study by using the following procedures:

Prescreening Indicators

- 1) Participants will be sent an email prior to the interview with a participant packet that will include:
 - a. Prescreening questions
 - b. Informed consent form with description of research study
 - c. Details of the internet survey with corresponding consent form

- 2) Participants will receive instructions on how to return the signed consent form and any questions they may have will be answered prior to the start of the study.
- 3) Participants will return consent forms at which time I will sign and return a copy to the participant and maintain a copy in the secured research file.
- 4) Participants complete the online questionnaire in Survey Monkey.
- 5) Schedule appointment for the interview; send a confirmation email with the appointment details.
- 6) I will collect data from the online survey questionnaire and conversational interviews.

Interview Protocol

Far too often a student's departure from an institution of higher education is attributed to that individual's ability or inability to perform academically as a result of lack of motivation. Although a plethora of environmental factors that impact African-American student success and persistence were prevalent through an integrative review of the literature, the primary finding identified an institutions ability and willingness to take into consideration the role of the campus environment at their particular institution and the climate that lead to a student's decision to leave or stay.

This study will examine academic achievement, social involvement, occupational aspirations, student educational background, educational goals, demographic characteristics and personal adjustment to college through the participation in institutionally financially supported support association. To examine the phenomenon of

Black undergraduate drop-outs and stop-outs, study participants will participate in individual interviews lasting 1 to 2 hours.

According to Butin (2012), “Effective interviewing asks open-ended questions that elicit meaningfully and ‘deep’ responses that take the shape of narratives” (p. 97). Participants will be asked direct questions linked to their satisfaction of their needs being met as a Black undergraduate at predominately white institutions. It is my goal that the deeper discussion will allow for enriched data from the respondents.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis places focus on understanding the meaning of participants’ lived experiences (Hays and Singh, 2012, p.352). When engaged in phenomenological data analysis, the researcher strives to understand the meaning and depth of the essence of the experience through the textural description. Connecting with the participant’s story, I will use a *textural description* (Hays and Singh, 2012) approach, refining the data into new categories. Using cross-analysis, I will analyze data collected at each site, placing core ideas that are presented and made explicit by the participants themselves.

As qualitative data collection includes the organization of interviews, observations and supporting documents and will not require the use of statistical software. I will comprise the data and seek to unearth themes, insights, concepts and discoveries. Following the Creswell (2008), qualitative research design approach:

- 1) Transcription of interviews
- 2) Organize data based on research questions and identify conceptual themes and new discoveries.
- 3) Interpret the findings by coding data into central themes

Data findings will be displayed in Chapter 4 through the use of graphs, diagrams, and tables. Additionally, I will categorize collected data to provide a written description of student perception of the retention practices of their institution.

Role of the Researcher

A significant aspect of this study is to provide a platform for Black undergraduate students and historical marginalized populations who previously lacked representation at the micro and macro level and the role the institution plays in Black undergraduate student drop-outs and stop-outs.

As a member of the underrepresented racial and ethnic group there will be careful consideration on my position as a researcher as it relates to student participants who I will be representing through the conducted research. The research will concentrate on the study of how the particular phenomenon of Black undergraduate stop-outs and drop-outs and how it is experienced by different individual.

Guarding Against Potential Bias

As a researcher and an African-American student who experienced firsthand obstacles during my time enrolled at a four-year predominantly white private institution and having graduated from such a predominately white four-year institution, I have

personal experiences with the environmental and institutional factors that impact a student's sense of belonging. Therefore, I was driven to focus the literature review on gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to African-American students' decision to withdrawal from higher education. The researcher will address subjectivity and pre-conceived opinions.

Limitations

The study is limited as it solely examines participants from the African-American ethnic group. Results will be limited to the perceptions African-American undergraduate population. Additionally, this study is limited to three selected regional PWI in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Examining such experiences contributes to the body of knowledge on the broader topic of African-American retention at PWIs and results may provide a guide for other institutions.

Many PWIs lack of student retention and involvement with the Black/African-American student population. It could be presumed that part of that reason could be the lack of identification with groups, organizations, disconnect. Apart from matriculation through education requires a form of identity and being able to visualize both mentally and physically in one's environment in hopes finding their place.

While all student retention is important, however, I chose to focus on African-American undergraduate retention because education attainment has long served as an equalizer, opening doors of opportunity, providing access to economic stability for individuals. Therefore, the lack of education practically ensures African-Americans will

continue to have less earning potential and remain underrepresented in the spectrum of high-paying professions.

Summary

African-American graduation rates are disproportional when compared to White students. In 2012 federal reports showed that White males finished their baccalaureate degrees at a rate of 54.4 %, compared to 33.1% of African-American males (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Diverse student population representation in the student body, faculty, and staff complement the effectiveness of the institution's goals and objectives, producing a culture of engagement and leadership.

The purpose of this study is to examine persistence towards degree attainment and institution perception of students of color who participate in support programs specific to African-American students as it relates to the benefit of academic achievement and increases the satisfaction of the African-American student experience at PWIs in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Black/African-American students are often bombarded with negative stereotypes and perceptions of having a limited chance of academic success as a result of being at-risk, inadequate, and under-prepared. With the global economy, higher education continues to be a treasured investment that overwhelming data indicate improves an individual's quality of life. The purpose of this study is to identify the challenges that Black/African-American students face that threaten their likelihood of completing college. Black/African-American students tend to have difficulty adjusting to the campus climate at predominately white institutions (PWI). Aligned with difficulties to

acclimating to a PWI, Black/African-American students have a low level of participation in leadership roles and non-athletic extracurricular activities. In addition, Black/African-American students have lack of engagement with peers, faculty, and staff.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

The intent of this phenomenological qualitative study was to provide context to the factors that led to the stop-out and drop-out of Black undergraduate students at three (3) regional comprehensive Predominately White Institutions in Kentucky. The study sought to examine perceptions of institutionalized support programs targeted at diverse student populations and other factors that lead to their withdrawal or retention at regional comprehensive university in Kentucky. Next, the chapter provides a presentation of authentic lived experiences of Black undergraduate students and the role of institutional support initiatives and how their experiences impact or influence their decision to retain, stop-out or dropout. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion about unanticipated findings.

Through analysis of the data, insight was provided into the various social and academic factors impacting Black undergraduate students at PWIs. Some examples of participants' statements are given in this chapter to illustrate their perspectives, and additional examples from the participants can be found in Appendix G under the themes and attributes they represent. The major themes that emerged are: (1) mentoring that leads to development, (2) institutional support, and (3) access to financial resources to persist.

This chapter provides a brief overview and profile of the research participants. Results of the phenomenological qualitative analysis outline the experience of persisting

and completion of a baccalaureate degree as a student of color attending a PWI.

Participants shared their experiences in an effort to shed light on areas that could be improved for students who would come after them.

Research Questions

The primary research questions examined through these interviews were:

- 1) What impact on retention at Predominately White Institutions do Black students experience when participating in targeted institutionally funded support initiatives based on race, gender, and ethnicity?
- 2) How does participation in targeted institutionally funded support initiatives based on race, gender, and ethnicity predict overall student academic achievement, retention, and completion of a baccalaureate degree for Black students?
- 3) What significant difference is there in overall social involvement, engagement, leadership development for occupational aspirations between students who participate in institutionally funded support initiatives for Black students and those Black students who do not participate in these programs?
- 4) What are the institutional characteristics that validate institutionally funded support initiatives for Black students?

Data Collection Procedures

Following a careful review of the interview transcripts of each former student in this study, the researcher identified common experiences and perceptions of the participants while enrolled at the four-year regional comprehensive university in the

Commonwealth of Kentucky. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and transcribed to answer the aforementioned interview questions.

Participants were required to meet prescreening requirements to ensure participants meet the research criteria. Once participants met the prescreening criteria and was confirmed as a participant, participants were sent an email prior to the interview with a research participant packet. The research participant packet included: (a) research study design overview and (b) informed consent form for the research study. Once informed consent was completed, participants were scheduled for the individual face-to-face interview. Interviews were conducted in the city of residence for three (3) participants and on the campus of enrollment for the other three (3) research participants. The researcher created an environment that was welcoming which established a level of comfort for participants to share their feelings as they reflected on their collegiate journey.

Background of the Participants

The demographics of participants are presented in Table 1. Specifically, gender, age, area of study, participation in student support initiatives, and current enrollment status. To protect the confidentiality and concealment of participants, pseudonyms were provided and identified in a brief profile of the participants of this study.

Table 1. Background of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Area of Study	Student Support Initiatives	Enrolled, Stop-out, Drop-out
R1 -	M	21	Communication	Participant	Stop-out
R2 -	F	19	Veterinary Science	Participant	Enrolled
R3 -	F	24	Accounting	Non-Participant	Drop-out
R4 -	M	21	Criminal Justice	Non-Participant	Stop-out
R5 -	M	19	Accounting	Participant	Enrolled
R6 -	F	18	Art	Participant	Enrolled
<p><i>Note.</i> Stop-out identifies students who have temporarily withdrawn from a higher education institution to pursue another activity, but returns within 7 semesters following their last enrollment and does not transfer to another institution during that length of time (NCES, 1998). Drop-out refers to those persons who leave the college at which they are registered for more than 7 semesters and leaves the institution (Tinto, 1975).</p>					
Table 1					

Participant One (R1) was 21-year-old African-American male from a metropolitan city in Kentucky and who participated in student support initiatives while attending the university. R1 completed two semesters as a first-generation college student before stopping out of the university pursuing a baccalaureate degree in Communication and Broadcasting and is currently self-employed. R1 enrolled with aspirations to enter mass media in front of the camera or behind as a director or produced: As someone who participated in the student support initiative at his university, R1 claimed:

I feel like if I didn't participate, I probably would have dropped out within weeks of attending the university. I have a couple friends who skipped the student support initiative, because they were like, 'I don't want to do that, it sounds stupid.' Now they don't even go to school anymore and just working minimum wage jobs. I feel like without the student support initiative; I wouldn't even be considering how to get back to school. I wouldn't be as talkative, I would just stay to myself isolated and not made any connections on

campus. But now with those connections I can use those to help me get back in school.

Participant Two (R2) was 19-year-old African-American/White female who self-identifies as Black from a small-town in Kentucky and who participated in student support initiatives while attending the university. R2 is in her third semester as a Pre-Veterinary Science major and still enrolled at the university. She affirmed her role in the student support initiative:

Going into it, I didn't really know what to expect. Then we got there to the orientation. I was able to meet just hear everybody else's stories of what's happened to them, what they've been through were somewhat relatable, and some I never realized people actually went through things like that still. It was just good to have that insight. Through the program I've come out of my shell a lot, I would say. I've gotten involved in organizations in my first semester, and it helped me adjust a lot.

Participant Three (R3) was 24-year-old African-American female from a metropolitan city in Kentucky and who was a non-participant in student support initiatives while attending the university. R3 was 36 credit hours shy of completion as a General Business student before dropping out of the university and beginning to work full-time. Reflecting on attending the university, R4 declared:

Depending on the individual I didn't feel any support from professors, staff or administrators. There weren't enough resources for me to be successful and I think part of that had to do with me being the first in my family to go to college. I think that the black students are first-generation college students who

are sometimes unaware of the things we that we have to do as far as getting into college. I felt when you get there it's difficult. You have to figure everything out on your own. I didn't know that you had to take 15 credit hours a semester in order to try to graduate in four years. I wasn't aware of that.

Participant Four (R4) was 21-year-old African-American male from a small-town in Ohio and who was a non-participant in student support initiatives while attending the university. R4 a second-generation college student, completed five (5) semesters at the university as a Criminal Justice major before stopping-out of the university and is currently working full-time. R4 reports he is resilient in his drive to return to school stating:

I really do want to get back to school. I moved down here for the simple fact that I'm five minutes away from campus. That's more incentive for me to get back in school. My campus is five minutes away. A lot of faculty want me to come back. I've told them the situation that's happened, and they said pay that off and get back because schooling is important. I'm really close to being done. I have maybe a year and a half left. At this point I have to finish it. I've stuck it out this long, and a lot of teachers want to see me come back, which is really good. A lot of my friends can't wait for me to come back, a lot of teachers can't wait for me to come back.

Participant Five (R5) was 19-year-old African-American male from a metropolitan city in Kentucky and who participated in student support initiatives while attending the university. R5 is in his third semester at the university as an Accounting Major. R5 indicated:

As a first-generation college student, nobody really told me how to do things, so I'm just figuring things out versus somebody showing me what things to avoid. Honestly, I became a part of the student support initiative as a part of my scholarship. I think it was mandatory, but I actually appreciate the support because I know we have a lot of meetings and stuff we were required to come to. If it weren't for those meetings, I'm not really sure what I would've been doing, if I really would've been focused on the things I really needed to be focused on. I believe it was pretty effective I know that when I finally found out I got a scholarship, once I finally made it to campus, the information about it was pretty informative.

Participant Six (R6) was 18-year-old Hispanic female from a rural/small-town in Kentucky and who participated in student support initiatives while attending the university. R6 is in her third semester at the university as an Art major. R6 shared her mother and step-father had some college experience and explained

I always planned on attending college and even participated in some dual credit programs while still in high school. My passion has always been art and I seen attending the university as an opportunity to refine my skills and get better at what I do. I didn't really know what to expect outside of the classroom. I guess I wanted to experience different people, but being raised in a small rural town I wanted to be close to family because they have always been a large part of my life. College was the next logical choice and with the university being close to my hometown it made it easier knowing I could see my family when I needed to.

Data Analysis

In conjunction with the research process described in chapter 3 the data was collected, coded and analyzed as a part of the phenomenological exploratory methodology. Participants discussed their perspective on institutional support initiatives and regardless of the individual backgrounds of participants each highlighted their point of view of their collegiate journey. Analysis extracted effective strategies to be explored that may have the potential to benefit African American student persistence at PWIs.

The results of the analysis explored 6 Black students' experience of persisting while attending a PWI and the factors that impacted achievement and other essential learning outcomes in college. Results observed in the interview transcripts reveal three emergent themes: 1) mentoring that leads to development; 2) institutional support; 3) access to financial resources. Excerpts from participants' one-on-one interviews present the participants' experiences from their point of view verbatim to provide a foundation to each emerging theme.

Emergent Themes

Results from the individual interviews suggested that there were some patterns that might be useful in persistence towards graduation for Blacks at PWIs. Participants relayed the message that there might be different types of satisfaction for Blacks at PWIs different than that of their White counterparts. The university culture and involvement in student support initiatives could also affect the kinds of satisfaction that students take from classroom and outside the classroom experiences. Subthemes emerged from the structured interview data that offered an understanding of support initiatives and the

impact on retention and retention practices at their respective institution. The emerging themes are discussed below.

Theme 1: Mentoring that Leads to Development

In recent years, colleges and universities are providing mentoring programs for African-American students to encourage the integration of campus beyond the classroom. Additionally, these programs assist students in exploring cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. In a study of challenges associated with mentoring of African-American students, Dahlving (2010) concluded Black faculty might feel obligated to interact with students of color and PWIs expect more service from Black faculty than White. Dahlvig (2010), shares, “The personal and professional pressure to reach out to African American students often surpasses the energy and time needed to sustain mentoring relationships” (p. 372). Research participants’ interviews highlighted the importance of racial dynamics in mentoring relationships and the impact of psychosocial developmental needs of African American students.

Developing students is a powerful retention tool, R1 maintains,

The student support initiative poured into me; push me out my comfort zone in front of other students. I had to do a presentation for international students. My major was to be an educator, but I changed it to communications because I wanted to either do radio things, use my degree to be on the radio or even just on TV somewhere. I feel like it helped me with public speaking. It made my public speaking greatly, because I practice it with them - I think it made my

skills better for my major all in whole. It made it easier. Now I can just go in front of a class for a presentation.

Multi-Dimensional Development

Campuses that actively establish mentoring of Black undergraduate students attending PWIs assist in facilitating growth and development of Black students. A Campbell and Fleming (2001) study on achievement-related conflicts and their association to identity conflicts have a joint influence on academic functioning. “The fear of success refers to feelings of anxiety which arise as individuals approaches the accomplishment of important. Self-defined goals, the attainment of which is both deeply desired and resisted by the individual” (Campbell and Fleming, 2001, p.5-6). For Black students at PWIs, achievement behaviors have been associated with the quality of interpersonal and effective self-experience of black individuals. Dahlving (2010), reveals that both persons involved in the mentoring equation grow from the exposure to another and from the challenge of stepping outside of their comfort zone.

R5 elaborated on their development as a student in the student support initiative:

I believe the support initiative has helped me make a very smooth transition from high school to college. It's probably – if I was ready before I came or not, I believe it's helped me make the transition I needed to make. I believe the student support initiative has helped me make a very smooth transition from high school to college. It's probably – if I was ready before I came or not, I believe it's helped me make the transition I needed to make. I hope the program stays as open, and honest, and true as it is throughout my college life.

I feel like incoming students, or just students, period, need the truth instead of deceptions.

R6 maintained as a participant of the initiative emphasis on faculty-staff relationships provided a roadmap of how to be successful during their journey:

A lot of faculty and staff in the program is really great, especially the program director. The director helped me a lot my freshman year and my sophomore year. One professor in particular helped me a lot. That program those guys were trying to get started, that really helped. I've seen it help a lot of other students of color. Like I said, the director helped me a lot. If I had questions about financial aid, they knew where to direct me. The older students who had been there also knew where to direct me. My advisor was helpful, so I think a lot of them were really helpful and geared towards helping you.

Confidence and Motivation

Intersected throughout the six interviews about their out-of-classroom experiences, interactions with peers, and other organizations, a connectedness to Black subgroups on campus emerged in this study. According to the participants, the student support initiative played a significant role in actively engaging them in the campus communities. The student support initiatives proactively provided programs in order to successfully navigate inclusive learning environments. As Allen (1992), references, minority participation in higher education, “Black students’ social involvement is most influenced by their relations whit White students and their belief that they made the right college choice. Students who get along well with faculty and who sense a greater unity among Black students on campus also are more involved socially” (p. 37).

R1 expressed his feelings about the university and retention efforts of his mentor, I feel like I can go to my mentors. I feel like I'm not alone on campus. I don't have to do everything by myself. I have people I can call on, whether it's homework help or help with something more technical such as housing or just financial problems. I feel like I have who I need. Honestly, those who are not in the program don't have the same support on campus. I know the people, but I don't know if I'd be as comfortable to talk to the people or even know how to talk to the people if it weren't really for the student support initiative. I believe it did being that our advisers and mentors are teaches us or gives us default of knowing how to talk to a faculty member being to where it's like if I was in class and I needed to speak to my professor, I wouldn't feel uncomfortable just going to him and saying whatever I needed to say.

Theme 2: Institutional Support

The research participants shared moments of discouragement stemming from attending a PWI. Historically the plight of Black students at PWIs is a view of a campus that is hostile, alienating, and culturally insensitive. Additionally, participants shared that the university has provided access to participate in postsecondary education, but access without support is not a true opportunity.

Student perception, becomes there reality, as R3 noted:

I felt if I really wasn't with the student support initiatives, to be honest, I feel like I would probably have transferred to HBCU. Because I feel like HBCU is targeting towards the black student, and I feel like sometimes it's a lot of stuff

here that you could tell when like they play like they care about how we doing here, which some of them who really don't. A lot of them do, but a lot of them are fake. It's a lot who do care, but at the same time, don't. They know what's going on, but they're not going to speak up.

Further evidence from R2,

Without participation in the student support initiative, I wouldn't have reached where I am now. I wouldn't have started out doing the study hours that were required. I probably wouldn't have studied as much or if I did, I'd probably be in my room. I'd fall asleep. Actually having to track hours has helped a lot to make me focus.

Faculty and Staff Interactions

Historically, majority groups have perpetuated the belief that White students were more intelligent. Karkouti (2016) referencing a qualitative study of focus groups and individual interviews examining Blacks persisting towards graduation identified that, “participants had to prove their intellectual competence more often than their White peers. The stresses that minority faces at PWIs undermined their educational outcomes and social integration” (p. 66). Institutions that intentionally foster significant interactions with faculty and staff involved with the program can impact the overall campus environment. To enhance student persistence and completion, participants conclude, institutions would benefit from establishing a cross-functional support initiative that includes faculty, support staff, and administrators working as a team to institutionalize action for student success. Tinto (2008) shares, “among students who begin higher education in a public four-year college or university, less than fifty percent of low-

income students earn their four-year degree within six years while nearly seventy percent of high-income students do so. The facts are clear, for too many low-income students the ‘open door’ to American higher education has become a revolving door” (p 118).

R1 discusses,

Some people and some teachers that you can look at as supportive and there's some that you can't. It's some that you can tell that they're here to teach you, and that's all they want to do, and there's some that you can tell wants to help you in bettering yourself and it's a lot – I think it's more they want to help you then, more teachers that want to help you than not help you, but I think a lot of them is here just because they know they got a paycheck coming in. If they didn't have a paycheck, I don't think they'd be here.

Additionally, R6 asserted:

I just feel like as long as they start to care more and give more – I think more teachers should care about average students instead of just white students or not care about – you can tell the teachers who care, and you can tell the teachers who don't. I think there should be more caring teachers that teach here. They give us more caring teachers, I think that students who care more about their classes. Where the students who don't care, I think it's because they feel that the teacher don't care. I think that's what I improve, the caring teacher part.

Student Engagement Opportunities

Diverse peer interactions in college have been associated with an array of positive outcomes. For instance, an analysis of sample data from 2,000 undergraduates in

response to the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) by Bennett (2006), revealed, “students who had discussions with others who are different from them in terms of political views and country of origin were more likely to change their opinion than those without meaningful interactions across identity groups such as race” (p. 67). Quality student experiences places and emphasis critical inquiry and skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies (Kilgo, Ezell-Sheets, and Pascarella, 2015, p. 510). During the first weeks of the semester, universities host events for students with seemingly friendly students smiling and waving and calling for students to sign up for student organizations. However, far too often participants share that the faces smiling from behind the tables encouraging sign-up, don’t reflect or represent their faces. Participants share the challenges of students of color engagement in campus communities and factors that impact meaningful participation in social activities that foster inclusiveness and participation.

Respondent 1 (R1) shared,

I think the only thing that’s not successful is their way of getting to students, the way that people get the students, not even just black students, but students, period. I think black students feel like – I think it should be more like – if it wasn’t for me telling other black freshman to do it, I don’t think they would do it. I think it’s more of a communication thing I guess is probably the only bad thing. If the communication was better on this campus, I feel that a lot of people would join the student support initiative, more minority students would, but I think they look at it like, why would I want to do that? It’s boring. When they see all the other minority students doing it, they going to join them all

because they like, maybe it is something fun we could do in there. I never really sat in a multicultural center until I started seeing my cousin and all them in there. That's when I got in there and got involved.

Through consistency, close relationships and frequent feedback, change can occur, R1 conveyed:

I've come out of my shell a lot, I would say. I've gotten involved in organizations and my first semester, too, I didn't do anything. I think I was in pre-vet club, but I never even went to the meetings.

Conversely R3, highlighted her engagement experience that did not match expectations,

Bingo was about all I got involved with. I only participated in activities because on the floor we lived on – was a learning community? I forgot what it was called. It was a specific program. We had to participate in so many hours of activities, but there wasn't much. As far as getting me involved in programs? I don't know. They didn't have much there for black students, things that interested black students. It seemed like a lot of things there were geared more towards the other majority students.

Theme 3: Access to Financial Resources to Persist

For Black undergraduate students, the lack of resources resulted in a level of stress that was not generally represented in their White counterparts. The stories from participants presented in this study illustrate how socioeconomic background influences persistence within the higher education system. Previous studies on college student

persistence describe the need for special attention to the needs of students who are the first in their families to attend college, especially those from a low-income background, (Tinto, 2008, p.123).

Students far too often feel like the second tier when attempting to communicate with financial aid officials R4 described,

A lot of the times with an advisor it was hard to schedule appointments between work, school, trying to have friends. Scheduling an appointment to talk about financial aid, and then they point you to the financial aid office, and then financial aid will tell you have to go here, and then you go there and they'd be like go back to financial aid. Sometimes you get looped around before you could even get an answer, and the next thing you know things happen like what happened to me where I am now \$8,000 in debt to the school.

Knowledge is said to be power, so the converse must be true as well with lack of knowledge resulting in lack of power. Respondent 2 shares their experience not truly understanding the consequences of financial decision making.

When I arrived, I think it was just a checklist to get a meal plan done because I already knew I wanted to come here. I don't know. I didn't really feel like my orientation didn't feel very helped. I didn't know anything, and people were just like, go over there; go do this. I think it's gotten better since then. Yeah, and people didn't ask me if I needed help. I was clearly lost. I was trying to understand how the meal plan worked because I didn't understand what Flex and Bucks were. They just kept saying if you wanted to go and get an apple, you can use Flex. I was like, what does that mean? I don't know what that

meant, but now I understand Flex, that comes with your meal plan. Bucks is more money.

College Preparedness

As the state of Kentucky moves toward the implementation of performance-based funding model, specific performance-based metrics are designated for unprepared students. The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education seeks to apply volume based performance metrics in areas that include, under-represented minority students, low-income students and underprepared students in the areas of English and Math. Previous studies on college student persistence ascertain, “universities and colleges are expected to develop and implement community-based programs that reach out to underserved communities in order to actively engage them in diversity-based initiatives” (Karkouti, 2016, p. 68). Additionally, research from Tinto (2008), pronounces, institutions should ensure first-year students have the experience of learning in community with others; “Wherever possible, learning communities should also be made available to those who enter academically underprepared, in ways that link one or more basic-skills course to a college credit-bearing course” (p. 123). Tinto (2008), reestablishes that there is little doubt academic preparation matters and a daunting challenge for institutions is promoting greater success among low-income and underprepared students.

R2,

Going into it, I didn't really know what to expect. Then we got there. We met – just hearing everybody else's stories of what's happened to them, what they've been through were somewhat relatable, and some I never realized people actually went through things like that still. It was just good to have that insight.

I've had to actually think about my classes more, monthly meetings with the student support initiatives, going over them, seeing how I can do better, and things like that. I've just met people that are like me in general. We have the same interests within the student support initiatives. Nobody dodges each other. We all just get along like a family.

R4 describes expecting to find people who could motivate me, push them further to a point than originally expected,

Yeah, I don't think they had anything like a student support initiative when I was there. Do I think it's important for upper-classmen to still attend things like that? Yes. I would say that because throughout college I needed help with different situations and with me being a first-generation college student. I think that those classes would have benefitted me. There were things I liked about it, but there were several things that I didn't. I just wish I was more informed when I went to school about what to expect, how to pay for school, scholarships, and things like that. I had to figure that out on my own.

Financial Literacy

While postsecondary institutions fully embraced multidisciplinary education, institutions have limited role in the provision of financial education. Gedds and Steen (2016), analyzes the increased demand for financial education, “the second reason for an increase in the amount of financial literacy needed by ordinary Americans is more expansive and revolves around a more recent situation, which is the growing number of choices in an array of finance-related areas and their related complexities” (p. 352).

Despite perceived and studied financial literacy deficiencies, financial education requires more than a benefits fair or an occasional seminar. The effects of rising tuition costs often results and increased loan dependence largely account for the negative impact on the completion rates of low-income undergraduate students. As Geiger (2015), describes, “With more than 60% of students now taking federal loans, every increment of increased college cost causes an additional percentage of students to resort to loans, while all existing borrowers must borrow that much more” (p. 307). Increased tuition coupled with shrinkage of state funding limits the capacity state regional universities have to meet the needs of their students impacting completion rates.

The Financial Literacy learning curve can largely impact the student experience,

Financial aid, I jumped through hoops with them. It seemed like some of them didn't know what they were talking about, so you had to call them and talk to someone else. Dealing with people in financial aid often was difficult.

Admissions, I didn't have any issues with them. I never had to go to them for anything. I had several issues. Trying to get back into school was an issue.

Losing my financial aid, I felt like I didn't have a lot of help as to what I needed to do and things like that.

A potential of a an earlier exit if not properly connected,

Before all those initiatives and programs and knowing people, I'm pretty sure I would have left a lot sooner because I had a lot of trouble with financial aid trying to fill out the FAFSA, get it right, fill out this because me and my dad were both clueless on what to fill out. We didn't know exactly how to fill it out correctly. That's what happened to me now. Me and my dad didn't fill it out

correctly, so I didn't get the financial aid, and I didn't know that. When I had those people there to help me and point me in the right direction and saying here's what you did wrong and fill it out, it helped me a lot. I feel like I would have left a lot sooner if I didn't have those programs.

Additional Findings

Colleges and universities are challenged with promoting diversity and multiculturalism on campuses. Participants identify the significant role in facilitating the collaboration of programming from multicultural affairs offices, student activities offices and community partners. Harper (2008), shares, “various offices on campus can collaborate, pooling resources to offer programs and services that cater to the needs of a diverse student body, while also creating a welcoming environment that embraces diversity and multiculturalism” (p.139). Institutions are contested with the notion that often-unspoken assumption that multicultural affairs offices or centers bear the brunt of the responsibility for cultural education and programming outside of the classroom. Participants pronounce the necessity of institutions investing long-term with intentional efforts towards creating inclusive learning and engaging campus environments.

Respondent R1 identifies,

I think they should give Multicultural Center a bigger office or even their own floor. I just feel like a lot of things are equal here, but I feel like it's some things that are more – I feel like the educational part is good here. I like it here because it's not Harvard, but it's not a community college, as well. It's a university, and they're about your work.

Student attrition and retention is a complex phenomenon regularly addressed by colleges and universities through time and money. However, student expectation, perception of satisfaction and value of usefulness of these services often fall short of their original intent. Student perceptions and expectations become important factors in determining the students' decision to leave the institution. Examining the alignment of these factors with satisfaction that may lead to retention, Wright & O'Neil (2003) adopted that if students do not receive what they expected from the universities services and perceive value in what is offered in the educational program, they will likely not persist.

Significance of Theme 1

The six research participants articulated the necessity of value added mentoring that lead to development academically, socially and personally. Four out of the six participants experienced either informal or formal mentoring from members of the university community (faculty, staff, and/or student). Participants, who were positively impacted through mentoring, share that the most beneficial mentoring relationships was found in the purpose and authenticity of the mentor and not their role or position on campus. Therefore, the value of the relationship was not a direct result of the title of the mentoring offering guidance, they expressed the most impactful lessons came from individuals who were willing to be open and candid with participants. Mentors who established clear and raised expectations for participants' success were more likely to succeed and provided academic and social support with frequent feedback regarding their performance. Respondents shared that if they invested in those activities that the

relationship not only lead to success, but to lasting relationships that remain current and fruitful.

To conclude on the significance of mentoring leading to multi-dimensional development,

Well, I like how the initiative isn't just a program. It's more like a family to where if you really need anything, you don't feel like you couldn't ask anyone. I feel like I could ask anyone for anything – not really needed. If I needed help, I feel like I could go to anyone, whether it's an advisor or one of my peers, regardless. I like the feeling of having that connection.

Significance of Theme 2

Institutional support is critical to student retention, in particular during the first year of college. The U.S. Department of Education (2004) reporting that unfortunately, more than a few students begin college academically underprepared identified, “that at least 28% of all beginning college students in 2000 enrolled in at least one basic-skills or “remedial” course (p.17). As most participants began their higher education journey as first-generation and low-income, they admitted they did not know what to expect and lacked knowledge of the college experience and what it takes to succeed. As institutions, take serious action to enhance the retention, persistence, and graduation of Black undergraduate students, the policies institutions choose to adopt require systematic alignment that establish conditions on campus that promote student success of all students. Tinto (2008) contends taking retention serious requires more than merely investing in retention programs, although that is a good start. “Added programs have

often sat on the margins of institutional life and have done little to change the prevailing character of student educational experience, especially in the classroom, and those little to address the deeper roots of student attrition” (p. 116). To maximize efforts to enhance student retention, responded that where the programs are situation, organized and aligned at the institution and in the educational life of Black students are as important as how many programs that are available. As respondent 5 declared,

I wish I would have known more about the university before attending. I wish I would have gotten involved more if there were more activities for a minority student. I guess that's it. I made it so far. I made it to my senior year. I think it's very important that I go finish that last little bit of classes. Also, I'm the first in my immediate family, besides my aunt, to go to college. I think it's very important to set that example for my siblings, even though I'm the second oldest. I feel like it's important.

Significance of Theme 3

In recalling a support initiative program, R4 reiterated, “Your network, will determine, your net worth.” The transfer of financial knowledge was limited among all six participants as shared during their collegiate journey. Understanding the financial obligations of attaining a baccalaureate degree does not arise by chance. The participants’ contingency confirmed that the access to higher education was a success. However, there were no proactive actions and policies directed toward truly understanding how to pay for college. Additionally, participants declare their frustration with the distraction of new amenities and arrangements that recruit wealthy and affluent students who can pay full

tuition and are likely graduate and creates inequalities for educational opportunities for students who have limited to no estimated family contributions to their education.

Participants agreed that higher education is the surest route to social and economic advancement but felt that the majority of time the universities decisions benefit those with financial means already and disproportionately disadvantages those seeking advancement.

Chapter Summary

In summary, chapter 4 described the participant's experiences with student support initiatives and the reaction to the main three themes; mentoring that leads to development, institutional support, and access to financial resources to persist. The data analysis provided insight to the participant's experiences through their understanding of the initiative and its purposes. Additionally, participants shared their perspectives of their collegiate experience being Black attending a PWI, strategies that were used to assist in their persistence, and personal development from them their experiences based on their interaction with the student support initiative. The questions that guided the study were:

- 1) What impact on retention at Predominately White Institutions do Black students experience when participating in targeted institutionally funded support initiatives?
- 2) How does participation in support initiatives predict overall student academic achievement, retention and completion of a baccalaureate degree for Black students?
- 3) What significant difference is there in overall social involvement, engagement, leadership development among students who participate and those students who do not participate in these programs?

The researcher reviewed the responses from the research interviews to identify themes to provide the foundation for the research analysis. Constructing the research participants collegiate experience the themes that emerged from the research study were:

1. Mentoring that leads to development
2. Institutional support
3. Access to financial resources to persist

Through the data it was evident that participants valued a support initiative that established to informal and formal faculty and staff mentoring relationships. The overall findings did fulfill the purpose of this exploratory phenomenology research study. Giving voice to their stories provides a platform that displays the impact of institutional support or lack of institutional support and the role it plays in the journey of these students. Institutional support requires considering the broader context of issues confronting Blacks as an underrepresented minority group, for the experiences of Black students in higher education are in part products of larger systemic problems. Allen (1992), commented on problems associated with access, retention, an achievement that plague African-American students in U.S. higher education. “The importance of financial support of this population is self-evident: where adequate financial aid is readily available, more Black students matriculate and graduate” (p. 41). The research analysis supports the concept that it is incumbent on universities to become more proactive and deliberate in the actions taken to address barriers to Black success within their institutions.

The final chapter five will address the above questions that assisted me in exploring elements within student support initiatives for Black undergraduate students at

PWIs. The chapter will also speak to insights constructed from the literature review, as well as contributions of the study and possible future research needs based on the findings of study or information not found within the study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

As described in Chapter 1, this research project was designed to identify the components of student support initiatives for underrepresented minority students at PWIs and the potential impact on reducing stop-outs and drop-outs of Black undergraduate students. This chapter provides the purpose of the study based on the research design, summarizes the findings of the study, and makes recommendations for higher education professionals and university administrators. Chapter 5 will discuss how the research examined the interaction between institutional student support initiatives and student persistence towards graduation, focusing on the programs role in influencing a student to retain at the university and provides suggestions for future research.

Black undergraduate students at predominately-white institutions in retention discussions present both an opportunity and challenge in higher education. Going away to college can be both a source of pride and apprehension. However, as the research analysis suggests, surviving institutions for Black undergraduate students at PWIs require a set of survival skills often not present before college entrance. Hand and Payne (2008), examining students from a student support services program at a major Appalachian university, describe similar students who traditionally low socioeconomic groups and minorities, particularly Hispanics and African American students as a crucial population in institutions of higher education and are often considered at-risk in academic persistence (p.4). With the majority of the research participants being first-generation

along with a member of a historically marginalized group based on race, their inherent hurdles Black undergraduate students must overcome during their collegiate journey towards success.

Research Questions

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study that garners consideration with respect to undergraduate persistence and graduation of Black undergraduate students at PWIs. The central research question guiding this study is: How does student support initiatives for underrepresented minority students at predominately-white institutions impact the retention and persistence of Black undergraduate students? The designed research questions sought to identify institutional practices and the impact on students' academic success. The researcher questions that guided this study in identifying institutional strategies and their impact upon students' academic success are as followed:

- 1) What impact on retention at Predominately White Institutions do Black students experience when participating in targeted institutionally funded support initiatives based on race, gender, and ethnicity?
- 2) How does participation in targeted institutionally funded support initiatives based on race, gender, and ethnicity predict overall student academic achievement, retention, and completion of a baccalaureate degree for Black students?
- 3) What significant difference is there in overall social involvement, engagement, leadership development for occupational aspirations between students who participate in institutionally funded support initiatives for Black students and those Black students who do not participate in these programs?

- 4) What are the institutional characteristics that validate institutionally funded support initiatives for Black students?

In keeping with the principles of the phenomenological method, the study instrument did not force responses, but structured questions allowed for freedom of responses for participants with open-ended questioning. The interview provided the researcher the opportunity for follow-up within the 30 minute to 1-hour interview. The open-ended questioning and environment of the interview session elicited authentic, honest, and elaborated responses.

Interpretations of Findings

Higher education institutions play an important and fundamental role in the students' transition to college, including academic, personal and professional development. As Karkouti (2016), describes, "Institutional leaders must initiate educational reforms that make higher education institutions more accountable for student learning outcomes in order to prepare a new highly skilled generation of workers who contribute to developing a strong sustainable economy" (p. 66). Results suggest the meaningful interactions identified in student support initiatives positively influence students' persistence towards graduation. The respondents' feedback frame a distinctive perspective on equity and institutional support for Black undergraduate students at PWIs. The participation in higher education for Black students has experienced periods of growth and decline. Allen's (1992) findings during a quantitative study on the differences in the college experience for Black undergraduate students who attended historically

Black colleges and universities and those who attended predominately-white colleges and universities are relevant in today's landscape of higher education today. "The recent resurgence and proliferation of racial incidents on college campuses, couple with a floundering economy, signals a need to place the issue of African-American college student outcomes at the forefront of our educational agenda once again" (p. 26). Findings relating to student support initiatives have shown a definite impact on the students' academic persistence.

Table 2 synthesizes the six study participants' perceptions of student support initiatives for Black undergraduate students at predominately-white institutions. The intent of this synthesis is to offer the reader a visual representation of the participants' words directly to the reader to allow the reader to draw conclusions on this sample population of students and learn the relationship of student support initiatives and academic success at the university. The goal of this qualitative research study was to examine the impact of the success of Black undergraduate students if institutions invested in long-term program development and institutional functioning of targeted support initiatives. Findings from this study parallel with findings of Dahlving (2010), Barber (2012), Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) among others to determine that institutional comprehensive academic support and retention programs targeting Black undergraduate students at PWIs was significant and influential in enriching the collegiate experience of study participants. Based on the findings, support programs committed to academic, social, and cultural college transition, mentoring and leadership is paramount to the persistence of students.

Table 2. Summary of Participants' Thoughts on Support Initiatives

ID	Participant's Thoughts on Support Initiatives
R1	<p>I just feel like everything has room to improve, everything. I feel like services for students of color deserves more money to do more things. They can't do a lot of the things they want to do because of - The stuff that's supporting black students don't have that much money into it, but the stuff that was supporting white organizations is funded. When I met the director, my life changed. I really wasn't caring about school anymore. I was losing a lot of friends to the streets or just dropping out, but that talk made me realize that being in school is where I need to be, I was going down the wrong road, and the director help me make that change. I think that might be the most significant part of my experience.</p>
R2	<p>Being apart of the program I would say have become more social and come out of my shell. My first semester I didn't really do anything, but the program help me build my confidence to get involved in organizations and become a student leader. If I wasn't involved in the program, I'd probably be in my room. I wouldn't have started out doing study hours, I probably wouldn't have study much. Also, the one session where we talked about people we should and shouldn't be friends with. With that and getting all my time together, I think I've done better. The program has made me feel more confident in the classroom and I have people that I can go to if I need help. With academic coaching, I feel more confident telling people, here are resources that are open to all of us.</p>
R3	<p>There were things I liked about my experience, but there were several things that I didn't. I just wish I was more informed when I went to school about what to expect, how to pay for school, scholarships, and things like that. I had to figure that out on my own. I would say that because throughout college I needed help with different situations and with me being a first-generation college student. I think that support programs would have benefitted me. As far as getting me involved in programs? I don't know. They didn't have much there for Black students, things that interested Black students. It seemed like a lot of things there were geared more towards the other students. I think that the Black students who are first-generation college students who are sometimes unaware of the things that we have to do as far as getting into college and being successful needs additional support.</p>

Table 2 (continued)

ID	Participant's Thoughts on Support Initiatives
R4	<p>Before all the initiatives and programs and knowing people, I'm pretty sure I would have left a lot sooner because I had a lot of trouble with financial aid. Later on I started making friends and started getting more involved. My sophomore year and my junior year is when it really kicked up because I was invited to a special initiative and got involved. The program helped me find a job on campus. The initiative really helped me out because that helped me meet other students of color. I actually have five good friends from that initiative. Once I started figuring out all these programs, that helped me want to be a better student because a lot of those programs were like you need to have a certain GPA, you need to have this, you need to do this. It helped me want to get my grades up instead of just like I can pass with Cs, and I'm good. It made me want to get a B in this class, and A in this class, and do this and this and this. Those really helped me focus on schooling more than goofing off and playing around.</p>
R5	<p>I feel like I can go to my mentors. I feel like I'm not alone on campus. I don't have to do everything by myself. I have people I can call on, whether it's homework help or help with something more technical such as housing or just financial problems. I feel like I have who I need. The program advocates for involvement, whether it's on campus or in the community, just trying to better our surroundings or our area. I feel like the program just laid out the steps I need to get to where I wanted to be. It's helping me get there, giving me a visual. I believe the program enhanced specific skills and being that our advisers are faculty and staff, it teaches us or gives us default information of knowing how to talk to a faculty members being to where it's like if I was in class and I needed to speak to my professor, I wouldn't feel uncomfortable just going to him or her and saying whatever I needed to say.</p>
R6	<p>Although the program was a requirement of my scholarship, it really helped me become more adept in strategies to be successful as a college student. When I first entered college, I anticipated that I would focus on my major Art with different mediums of Art. So when I was placed in other gen education courses I found it difficult to focus on them. But going to the workshops I started to appreciate the importance of being well-rounded. I generally keep to myself, but being apart of the program I was able to be connected to a community of people I could be myself around. The workshops really helped with my time management and social skills to be comfortable in different environments. I always keep with me to try and expand my comfort zone. It won't just help me become a better artist, but also a better person. Participation in the program has really taught me how to maximize my experience here in college.</p>

A priority for the region as seen in the State of Kentucky's Governor's efforts towards performance-based funding is to increase participation in higher education in order to create a more educated labor market within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. As Hand and Payne (2008) identified, according to the Appalachian Region Commission (ARC) Appalachia stretches along the Appalachian Mountain Range, encompassing all of West Virginia and portions of 12 other states, from New York south to Mississippi including the Commonwealth of Kentucky (p. 4). The Appalachian Region Commission acknowledged in 2000, 17% of the Appalachian adult population had a college degree, compared to 24.4 % of the U.S. Adult population (ARC, 2004). Nestled in the realm of the rural area as described by ARC, the three (3) regional comprehensive public universities examined in this study has traditionally faced challenges of poverty, low rates of white-collar employment, and low rates of college attendance.

Examination of the 2010 census demographic trends in Appalachia from the Journal of Appalachian Studies, Ludke, Obermiller and Rademacher (2012), identified the increase of racial and ethnic diversity in the region at a higher rate than in the rest of the country. "Between 2000 and 2010 U.S. Black population grew by 11.0 percent and the Hispanic/Latino population by 43.0 percent. IN the same period, the umber of Blacks in Appalachia grew by 18.1 percent and the Hispanic/Latino population by 120.6 percent" (p. 52) The findings provide key predictors of college outcomes for students who participate in student support initiatives with implications that extend beyond these three universities and set the stage for building comprehensive support programs across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. As the *Demographic Change In Appalachia* analysis continues, the increased rate of those in the Appalachia region earning a bachelor's

degree or more (20.4 percent) did not meet the rate (27.5 percent) of those outside of the region, despite the Appalachian region earning high school diplomas at a higher rate (Ludke, Obermiller, and Rademcaher, 2012).

Although this research was limited to three public regional comprehensive institutions in Kentucky within the Appalachian, findings provide institutions across the region opportunity to positively impact the lives and academic careers of Black undergraduate students at PWIs. PWIs are challenged to not only create a diverse study body and professional staff, but proactively increase need-based financial aid programs, incorporate diversity into the curriculum, enhance strategies to facilitate tenures and promotion of minority faculty to enhance the educational outcomes of Black undergraduate students (Karkouti, 2016). Respondents confirm across the study that student support initiatives will likely fail or be limited in effectiveness if there is not a commitment from senior leadership and the institutions. Therefore, institutional leaders are required to commit to policies that expand educational opportunities for historically underrepresented minority students enhancing equity and access for Black students at PWIs.

Discussion of Themes

The themes emerged during the examination from this phenomenological study coincide in many ways with Tinto's (2008), research on retention and persistence establishing that clear expectations, providing academic and social support, frequently assessing and providing feedback about their performance, and actively involving them with others on campus, especially in the classroom, students are more likely to succeed.

Black undergraduate students at PWIs do not fare as well as White students in persistence rates, academic achievement, and overall psychosocial adjustments (Allen 1992, Astin 1982). Nevertheless, the respondents have aspirations of baccalaureate degree despite social, economic, and educational disadvantages. The following themes: mentoring that leads to development, institutional support, access to financial resources to persist provides palpable evidence to institutions on the important influences on Black undergraduate student outcomes. Additional, emergent themes explore institutional characteristics effects on student persistence.

Theme 1: Mentoring that Leads to Development

Mentoring for research participant included reassurance that the students belong at the university and are capable and the mentor's assistance to persist as students feel supported by their mentors and are more likely to succeed in their academic aspirations. Mentoring relationships are instrumental in deepening the understanding of the complexity of the students' experience and ability to provide practical alternatives to match their needs. Higher education institutions play an important and fundamental role in the students' transition to college, including academic, personal and professional development. Results suggest the meaningful interactions identified in student support initiatives positively influence students' persistence towards graduation. The respondents' feedback frame a distinctive perspective on equity and institutional support for Black undergraduate students at PWIs. The participation in higher education for Black students has experienced periods of growth and decline. Allen's (1992) findings during a quantitative study on the differences in the college experience for Black

undergraduate students who attended historically Black colleges and universities and those who attended predominately-white colleges and universities are relevant in today's landscape of higher education today. "The recent resurgence and proliferation of racial incidents on college campuses, coupled with a floundering economy, signals a need to place the issue of African-American college student outcomes at the forefront of our educational agenda once again" (Allen, 2014, p. 26).

The findings suggest a positive relationship exists between a student who has a mentoring relationship and educational attainment. Respondents' attitudes concerning mentoring relationship recognize that a strong mentoring relationship positively influenced social involvement, academic achievement, and postgraduate aspirations. Data collected propose that the unique identity of race posed challenges of Black undergraduate students at PWIs; however, the mentoring relationship was able to aide in overcoming barriers to satisfaction and achievement at the university.

Theme 2: Institutional Support

As described by the research participants, predominately white institutions have failed to hire and invest in their faculty and staff of color. Respondents' share that disproportionately low number of faculty of color students have few mentors of same race role models. Dahlvig (2010), found most African-American students preferred African-American mentors. The study findings indicate that students feel more comfortable with faculty and staff that have similar feedback. Augmenting diversity on campus has the potential to improve campus racial climate establishing a diverse

educational environment through cross-racial engagement between students, faculty, and staff.

Research participants shared that most programs are designed for first-year and possibly second-year students, possibly because the university thinks that older students know more about how to navigate the landscape of university life according to respondents' results. However, institutions would benefit from an institutional practice that track and analyze how different groups of student progress through different programs within the institution and identify the pathways where students' progress is most at risk. As research participant describes, "As an upperclassman, I don't think the university understood that a lot times upperclassman don't know where they need to go to get help, or who to approach in preparation for major classes and graduation." Participants share institutional support needs to extend to include upperclassman students who may.

Theme 3: Access to Financial Resources to Persist

U.S. Census Bureau measures statistics of poverty in financial criterion terms. Hand & Payne (2008), in their study of Appalachian Student Success, identify knowledge of hidden rules and the extent individuals does without resources as a framework for understanding poverty. Respondents across the study were adamant about their institution's lack of transparency, access, and availability of information pertaining to college affordability. Unfortunately, as a result of lack of communication, students would miss key deadlines, unaware of available additional financial resources, or communication provided to parents following admissions regarding fiscal resources to

persist which affects his college career. R3 reported that the first time financial aid was ended the individual was unaware they were required to satisfactory academic progress in order to be eligible for federal student aid. Additionally, during the appeals process R3 claims resources from the university on information to petition university departments to appeal based on undue hardships was limited and inaccessible. Black students who are provided with adequate financial aid matriculate and graduate at higher rates evident in previous studies as well as ongoing new research (Allen, 1992).

Limitations

Some study-specific limitations, notwithstanding the commonplace limitations of qualitative phenomenology that can be labor intensive and time-consuming, there is the potential of integration of bias from the researcher. Creswell (1998), state a research must state his or her assumptions within a bracket to better understand the experiences of research participants. Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) ascertain that, "bracketing is a suspension of theoretical beliefs, preconceptions, and presuppositions" (p. 47). Thus, as a researcher and a Black college graduate I experienced firsthand obstacles during my time enrolled at a four-year predominately White private institution. Therefore, before the initiation of this study, I recognized my preconception that Black undergraduate students at PWIs often struggle with the college experience and attempted to describe objectively the participants' experiences. Having graduated from a predominately-white four-year institution, I had personal experiences and chose to focus the study on gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to Black students' decision to withdrawal from higher education.

Locating a sample of Black undergraduate students who have stopped-out or dropped-out from one of three universities studied to participate in the study presented a challenge as limited records of contact information is collected and maintained once a student departs the university. To address this limitation study subjects were recruited from institutional student affairs personnel, program directors, coordinators and/or advisors. Secondly, the purposeful sampling technique created an inherent limitation that the sample is non-random. Participants of the study met all research criteria were viable contributors to the study. A third limitation is that the data collected was restricted to three public regional comprehensive universities in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Therefore, collected data from these three institutions may not be applicable to students attending other institutions. Additionally, the examined institutions in the Appalachian region, particularly because of the historical challenges this region have experience in economic development and college attendance rates (Hand and Payne, 2008). Lastly, the study was a snapshot of participants recollecting their experiences as college students, whereas the study did not follow participants as they matriculated through their college journey and share their experiences. Capturing their experiences in real-time may be more precise to collect day-to-day experiences rather than recollecting their experiences could be a limitation.

Recommendations and Research Implications

Relationship of Results to Theory

The conceptual frameworks for this study were, Tinto's (1993) student departure theory, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Steele and Aronson's (1995)

stereotype threat theory. The retention literature asserts students who engage in recognized student support initiatives and student organizations graduate at higher levels than those who don't, the premise upon which this study is framed. Institutions of higher education, specifically PWIs, should work collaboratively with faculty, student affairs professionals, and upperclassman undergraduate students to offer co-curricular programming for Black undergraduate students who represent the highest attrition rates across race and ethnicity (Harper, 2006a).

Emerging themes are congruent with Tinto's (1993) assertion that institutional action does not absolve students of their responsibility for their own success. In Tinto's findings, no actions will ensure the success of students who are themselves unwilling to expend the effort needed to succeed in college (p.120). Overall, this study provided data that can help decision makers at the institution to better understand the needs of Black undergraduate students at PWIs and accurately identify the relationship of mentoring for development, instructional practices, institutional support, and financial literacy and students' academic success towards graduation.

The literature from Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat theory was confirmed by respondents as they divulged the time consuming process of constantly proving their academic competence with White peers and faculty. Participants disclosed the racial stereotypes that they were faced with as Black students would often become stressful and impact their academic performance having to continuously prove their intellectual competence. Karkouti (2016), reviewing the educational experiences of Black students at PWIs, found Black students considering military service because the view of the environment is more sensitive and hospitable than PWIs indicating, "the prevailing

subculture at White institutions is hostile to Blacks, because faculty and deans remain insensitive to multicultural issues” (p.66). This study’s findings endorse the stereotype threat theory indicating a Black students’ college experience at PSIs is associated with racial stresses and the propensity to undermine performance and integration.

Areas where students perceive institutions are doing well at include (a) encouraging students to participate in student support initiatives making the programs relevant to their collegiate journey (b) connecting with peer, faculty and staff mentors and having them actively engaging in co-curricular program (c) mentors holding students accountable for their in-class performance and raised level expectations (d) collaborate with campus partners to meet their needs (e.g. tutoring, financial aid, career services), (e) encouraging students to use critical thinking skills leading to academic and personal development. Student perception on the impact of mentoring for personal development during their collegiate journey garnered the highest results.

Areas that students perceive institutions are weak at implementing best practices include (a) diverse representation and composition of the student body at the institution (b) limited classroom diversity represented in the curriculum and learning outcomes (c) quality of purposeful interactions with diverse individuals (e) transparency of financial obligations of students once admitted (f) effectiveness of quality interaction with faculty in the classroom. This study suggests two specific practices institutions would do well to implement are to provide opportunities for students to connect with mentors who assist in monitoring their progress and transition and institutional commitment to providing co-curricular education and resources that support their academic development.

Scholars have documented unintended consequences interacting only with members of the group to which one belongs as the potential to be problematic on developmental outcomes. Strayhorn & Johnson (2014), in discussing the goals of higher education share, “one of the consummate goals of higher education is to prepare students for active, equitable, and full participation in a diverse democracy, which depends on one’s ability to interact across difference generally, and race/ethnicity specifically” (p. 386). Analysis is insufficient in the present study to substantiate claims of deleterious effect on developmental outcomes, as the student support initiatives promote diverse promote interactions at the university. Student support initiatives implement and integrate programmatic efforts to enhance campus diversity, and university administrators are charged with promoting structural and classroom diversity with emphasis on learning and personal developmental outcomes.

Black student achievement at PWIs is impacted by adequate academic preparation and academic remediation. Student support initiatives can be an essential ingredient for Black success at PWIs. “Any attempt to address the problems faced by African-American college students without considering the broader context of issues confronting Blacks as a discriminated minority is doomed to fail” (Allen, 1992, p. 42). Student support initiatives that are comprehensive academic support & retention program targeting Black students, provide intervention that yield positive results when centered on first-year transition, mentoring, and leadership. Targeted services allow universities to address key factors that influence Black students’ persistence towards graduation.

Examining the success of Black undergraduate students at Predominately White Institutions administrators, student affairs practitioner, and faculty must commit to a

deeper understanding of the complexity of the Black undergraduate student experiences. Karkouti (2012), “Transforming the existing culture requires educational leaders to inform policymaking through studying the factors to promote equality and decrease the disparity between all social classes” (p. 66). If institutions fail to respond to campus diversity and inclusion matters in a timely manner, could lead to social turmoil that may impact universities retention and enrollment rates.

Future Research Recommendations

A diverse campus prepares students for the global economy and society. Museus (2008), asserted, that diverse campus communities constitute environments rich with educational opportunity. Additionally, the research has spotlighted diverse classrooms and universities and the impact it has on preparing students for a global society. The research will show that through diverse classroom and campus settings, students have a greater chance to reduce racial stereotypes and through student-student interaction foster cross-racial understanding that allow groups to develop better solutions to problems. Lastly, this research provides colleges and universities with tangible evidence from this select number of six (6) informants describing the importance of racially diverse student bodies in PWI educational settings where students have the opportunity to learn from each other across cultural boundaries.

Black undergraduate students at PWIs as an underrepresented minority group are identified as a special marginalized group on predominately white campuses and the danger is to label and stigmatize their efforts. Framing the effect of diversity and multiculturalism on performance based outcomes at Kentucky institutions of higher

education. Many issues that Black undergraduate students can be solved with timely information as students are referred to the resources and information necessary for solution. Research participants report deficiency in the consistency of contact from the university. Participants indicated that they are recruited to the university, but feel much less secure in their college experience as a result of inconsistency in advising and individual guidance to integrate into campus life.

Empirical evidence of the respondents suggests the lack of classroom diversity, diversity-related courses and co-curricular activities minimizes educational benefits. Considering the relationship between educational outcomes and classroom diversity, evidence suggests that diverse and inclusive campuses provide opportunities for cross-racial interactions among students related to development of students' problem-solving, group skills and critical thinking (Strayhorn and Johnson, 2014). Encouraging positive cross-cultural interactions significantly influence sense of belonging and reduces Black student isolation and social alienation at PWIs.

Intentionality in diversity for implementing culture outside the classroom and collaboration with faculty to enhance cross-cultural engagement. Student support initiatives may benefit from forging cordial relationships between faculty and initiative participants. Programs may establish a liaison for outreach to faculty, department chairs and deans to interact with program participants early in their university onboarding process and better prepare them to transition into college. Engaging culture centers and collaboration with faculty, students necessitate tutoring and other academic support services. Fostering relationships outside of the classroom, supplemental instruction might be made a part of the students' program for reviewing course content. The present study

of Black undergraduate persistence towards graduation has significance for future research. Studies similar to this offer an expansion of the available information about cross-racial interactions in higher education, institutional diversity in college and the role of support initiatives targeted towards particular subgroups.

Scaffolding of the literature exposed the researcher to a plethora of studies that validate the use of co-curricular programming to improve the academic success of undergraduate students. Studies conducted by Astin (1984 and 1993), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Tinto (1987, 2004, 2006) during the initial literature review showed positive effect on academic success through various student integration and engagement models. However, following an integrative review of collected works on retention and persistence, studies were limited in addressing both male and female Black undergraduate students at PWIs; thus, further research on the practice of student support initiatives for this targeted group is justified to establish their validity on campus as positive predictors of academic success for Black undergraduate students at PWIs.

I was able to access studies on the effectiveness of Black male initiatives on academic success. Relying predominately on self-identification from students, designs gathered information qualitatively to show the initiatives direct positive impact on students' academic success. There were limited individual studies to determine whether a positive relationship exists with female Black undergraduate students at PWIs targeted support initiatives effect on students' academic success. For future studies, I recommended to conduct a quasi-experimental study to include pre and post assessment and use static measurable of GPA, course grades, persistence towards graduation, in order to determine whether a relationship actually exists between the type of support

Black male and female undergraduates require independently to positively impact academic success.

The duty of who is responsible and accountable for enhancing diversity on campus is regularly is generally shifted to one student affair practitioner, chief diversity officer, or department. PWIs with limited opportunities for cross-racial interactions and interracial friendships limit social and educational benefits of diversity and diminish students' collegiate experience. The landscape of higher education would benefit from additional studies that examine student affairs support programs in order to successfully diversify the racial and ethnic makeup of college campuses.

Conclusion

Student support initiatives have become an increasingly prevalent aspect of higher education institutions. As Black undergraduate students arrive to predominately-white campuses often have limited to no indication of the rate of an academic disadvantage compared to majority students at the university. Admittedly, the interviewed students shared they did not feel adequately prepared for their high school experience to persist in college.

In 2012, federal reports showed that White males finished their baccalaureate degrees at a rate of 54.4 %, compared to 33.1% of African-American males (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The purpose of this research study was to examine the Black experience at PWIs and seek factors that cause drop-out and stop-out among Black students. The researcher sought to identify factors among six undergraduate students attending three predominately white institutions in Kentucky that contribute to Black

students' unsuccessful retention and completion of a baccalaureate degree. Literature indicated that African-American undergraduate students have to judiciously navigate the political and social landscape during their experience at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) and have the potential to negatively impact the experience on the students' decision to drop-out or stop-out.

Education has the ability to change lives and more often than not will expand the opportunities to recipients of education. At the core of public universities is the understanding that the institution's design is to enhance the community in which it resides and the students it services. Students and families must deliberate the core dilemma regarding college choice that will lead to graduation and must be cautious on whether it is appropriate to have the expectation of institutional support to be on par with the increasing tuition cost and the inclusive learning community for Black students at PWIs. With an apparent value on higher education within society, the majority of the Black research participants are willing to pay for the cost of education but fail to have the means and are challenged with connecting with available resources to finance higher education. Current as well as, prospective students and families must be guided early on in the college admissions process about available resources (financial aid, grants, scholarships, co-op, incentive programs, corporate partnership, etc.) to better assist with avoiding large sums of debt throughout the college students.

With changing the landscape of higher education, colleges and universities are confronted with integrating the global community, while maintaining its core values and staying true to their mission. Over the years institutions have sought to build strong relationships with local communities and even branching out statewide. As the local

community benefits economically, politically, socially and culturally, institutions must be preemptive in their aim to develop the entire student in a global context. Moving forward, to properly prepare students, colleges and universities have to be willing to adapt and adjust incorporating the global community within campus, it is imperative colleges and universities remain proactive in their institutional racial climate thus playing a role in retooling the university to service the Black student population.

In conclusion, this study was an attempt to investigate the Black undergraduate drop-out and stop-out at three regional public comprehensive predominately white institutions in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the role student support initiatives. The research identifies mentoring acquaintances, institutional support, and financial literacy are positively related to students' sense of belonging and increased persistence towards graduation when connected to student support initiatives. Although these findings are not generalizable on a national scale, the findings from the sample from the study provide an opportunity to apply transformative practices to reduce the stop-out and drop-out of Black undergraduate students at PWIs. This study provided compelling evidence in support of targeted student support initiatives for Black student sat PWIs as these types of relationships are important and require additional attention. These findings offer a foundation for future studies and examination of this complex phenomenon.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX

A: DESCRIPTION OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

DESCRIPTION OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

To gain a detailed depiction of participants' perspectives related to their student retention services/initiatives experiences, I will conduct individual interviews, each lasting 30-90 minutes. These interviews will be semi-structured and audio taped. The specific questions explored will be included in an interview guide and are summarized in the following paragraph.

The individual interview questions were arranged from general to specific to follow a progression of participants' experiences with student retention services/initiatives. I will ask:

- How did you learn about the availability of student retention services/initiatives?
- How did you decide to seek student retention services/initiatives?
- How would you characterize your experiences in the student retention services/initiatives?
 - How would you characterize your experiences not participating in the student retention services/initiatives?
- Tell me about your impressions regarding the student retention services/initiatives.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The survey questionnaire consisted of five major parts:

- Part 1 of the survey will measure expectations and perceptions of perceived service quality rating from students and faculty and addresses research questions 1 and 2.
- Part 2 of the survey will also address research questions 1 and 2, and required participants to rate overall quality, value, satisfaction, and other features of service provided by the participating educational institutions.
- Part 3 of the survey address research question 3 and measured the students' behavior intentions by requesting data on the possible actions students might take based upon experience.
- Part 4 of the survey will address research question 3, requested demographic characteristics, and participant information.

- Part 5 of the survey measured responses from students who were not able to or made the decision not to complete their programs and dropped out of the institution.
1. Tell me about the process by which you began participating with student retention services/initiatives (NKU Rocks, Freshmen Academy, DREAMS). Describe how you arrived at the decision to participate with the student retention services/initiative.
 2. What was your experience in the process of the student retention services/initiatives? Tell me about your interactions with the coordinator/director, faculty, staff, students and administrators.
 3. Tell me about a time when you think it (student retention services/initiatives) was successful.
 4. Tell me about a time when you think it (student retention services/initiatives) was unsuccessful.
 5. How did your participation in student retention services/initiatives experience complement your preferred method involvement and engagement? Tell me how comfortable were you with the services, involvement and learning strategies that were used. Tell me what made it comfortable/uncomfortable.
 6. How did participation with student retention services/initiatives help you enhance specific skills that you would realistically use in your personal collegiate journey? Tell me how (or if) student retention services/initiatives assisted you with any of the following things:
 1. Student-Faculty Interaction
 2. Supportive Environment and Quality of Interactions
 3. Academic coaching and ability to achieve in the classroom
 4. Feel valued and part of the campus community; comfortable being myself at my institution
 5. Become more adept at following strategies to be successful college student.
 6. Developed learning strategies that corresponded to higher grades
 7. Tell me how you think your participation (or non-participation) in student retention services/initiatives played a part in your academic learning experience and overall college experience.

8. What one change would you like to see implemented that would improve your educational experience at the institution, and what one thing should remain?
9. Please describe the most significant experience (learning, social, cultural) you have encountered at your institution.
10. Please describe what has been most satisfying about your experience so far at this institution, and what has been most disappointing?
 1. How has participation or non-participation in student retention services/initiatives factor into your collegiate experience?
11. To wrap up, if you had any additional comments or feedback that you'd like to share on the quality of your student retention services/initiatives on your educational and personal experience please feel free to share.

APPENDIX

B: INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY

INSTITUTIONS

INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY INSTITUTIONS

Date

Dear [Institution Name, Director Name],

Your work with [support association name], has had the ability to impact students on your campus. As I complete my research for the Education Leadership and Policy Studies doctoral dissertation at Eastern Kentucky University, I will be seeking to examine African American student perception of the university and the key factors that affect their academic success reducing or leading to stop-out and drop-out of the University.

I plan to interview at least 12 individuals who have participated in institutionally funded supportive associations for students of color, Black undergraduate students in particular, at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) that were created to benefit the academic achievement and increase the satisfaction of Black undergraduate student's college experience.

I am seeking your assistance in this endeavor to provide a list of prospective students to participate in a research study. Student participation is voluntary, and responses will remain completely confidential. Furthermore, interview conversations will be taped, recorded, and stored in a locked file at Eastern Kentucky University.

Your participation in providing a list of students who have participated in your program within the past three years will be a tremendous help as we seek to identify mechanisms to support student persistence and retention. This is an opportunity to share the stories of undergraduate students in an effort to learn from, grow and improve our respective institutions.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone (614) 329-6113 or by email chris.w.blakely@gmail.com. Dr. Sherwood Thomson, Professor at Eastern Kentucky University, serves as director of my dissertation and can be reached at Sherwood.thompson@eku.edu if there are other questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Christopher W. Blakely
Doctoral Student
Eastern Kentucky University

APPENDIX

C: INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS

INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear,

You have been invited to participate in a research study that will examine African American student perception of the university and the key factors that affect their academic success reducing or leading to stop-out and drop-out of the University. The information you provide will be used to complete research for the Education Leadership and Policy Studies doctoral dissertation at Eastern Kentucky University. You will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire and participate in an interview conversation that will be taped recorded and stored in a locked file at Eastern Kentucky University.

I thank you for agreeing to take part in this study voluntarily. By completing the consent form, you agree to take part in this research study. At any point during this research you will not be forced to answer any question or questions that make you uncomfortable. Additionally, you may choose not to take part in the study at all. There are no expectations of return for your participation, if you chose not to be in this study or stop at any time, you would not lose any benefits.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you and hear your story. Attached is a copy of the Participation and Demographic Data Form. Please review, complete, and return via email.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone (614) 329-6113 or by email chris.w.blakely@gmail.com. Dr. Sherwood Thomson, Professor at Eastern Kentucky University serves as director of my dissertation and can be reached at Sherwood.thompson@eku.edu if there are other questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Christopher W. Blakely
Doctoral Student
Eastern Kentucky University

APPENDIX

D: COMMUNICATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

COMMUNICATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

As I work to complete my doctoral studies at Eastern Kentucky University, I thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. As it has been shared with you, my research will examine the stop-outs and drop-outs of Black students at predominately white institutions. My study will place specific focus on the availability and use of support associations and the impact it has on dropouts.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you and hear your story. The conversation should last between 45 minutes to an hour. I will be mailing a letter with additional details to the address you provided. Attached is a copy of the Participation and Demographic Data Form you completed, can you review to ensure all information is correct and has not changed?

I appreciate your assistance and look forward to seeing you on [Date] at [Time] in [Location]. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone (614) 329-6113 or by email chris.w.blakely@gmail.com. Dr. Sherwood Thomson, Professor at Eastern Kentucky University, serves as director of my dissertation and can be reached at sherwood.thompson@eku.edu if there are other questions or concerns.

Due to the time restraints of the study, I ask that you, please provide a response by (completion date).

Best regards,

Christopher W. Blakely
Doctoral Student
Eastern Kentucky University



Institutional Review Board
Application for Exemption Certification

Instructions:

1. All applications for IRB review must be submitted online by the Principal Investigator.
 2. After completing this application form and all required attachments, access the online submission portal at eku.infoready4.com. Choose Application for Exemption Certification from the list of available opportunities and click the Apply button on the right. If needed, you can filter the category column by Institutional Review Board (Human Subjects Research).
 3. If you are a current EKU employee or student, click the option to log in as an EKU user. Your user name and password are the same as what you use to log in to EKU's network. Your user name is not your email address.
 4. Complete the basic information in the online application and upload this application form and all required attachments in their original file formats (i.e., Microsoft Word documents). Please do not save your files as PDFs.
 5. Upon receipt of a new online application, an IRB administrator will review the submission for completeness and return incomplete applications for updates prior to processing.
 6. Once an application is accepted by an IRB administrator, it will be assigned to the faculty advisor (if the principal investigator is a student) and the department chair for approvals prior to being reviewed by the IRB.
 7. If the IRB reviewers have questions or request updates to the application materials, the principal investigator will be notified by email and asked to resubmit the application online.
 8. Once the IRB has approved the application, the principal investigator will be notified by email.
-

1. Title of Project:

Black Minds Matter: Black Student Perception of 3 regional comprehensive Predominately White Institutions in Kentucky and the Role of Institutional Support Programs in Reducing the frequency of Stop-out and Drop-out.

2. Principal Investigator:

Principal Investigator Name: Christopher W. Blakely
Department: Educational Leadership and Counseling Education

3. Faculty Advisor, Committee Members, and Degree Program (required if PI is an EKU student):

Primary Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sherwood Thompson

Committee Members (required for theses, dissertations, scholarly projects, field experience, or other studies guided by an academic committee):

Dr. Roger Cleveland

Dr. Wardell Johnson

Dr. Norman Powell

Degree Program: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

- 4. Other Investigators:** Identify all other investigators assisting in the study. Add lines if needed.

Name: Dr. Sherwood Thompson Authorized to obtain consent? Yes No

Responsibility in Project: Doctoral Advisor

Name: _____ Authorized to obtain consent? Yes No

Responsibility in Project: _____

Name: _____ Authorized to obtain consent? Yes No

Responsibility in Project: _____

- 5. Estimated Duration of Research Project:** upon IRB approval through 12/15/2019
Note that research may not begin until IRB approval has been granted.

- 6. Funding Support:** Is the research study funded by an external or internal grant or contract? Yes No

Funding Agency: _____

Copy of funding application narrative attached? Yes (required if study is funded)

- 7. Interaction with Research Participants:** Will data be collected from individuals through intervention or interaction with the participants (any form of communication: electronic, paper, or in person)? Yes No

- 8. Identifiable Private Information:** Will identifiable private information be collected from existing records (i.e., medical records, assessment data)? Yes No

- 9. Research Activities:** Does the study involve any of the following*? Check all that apply.
- a) Prisoners, fetuses, pregnant women (other than coincidental), or human in vitro fertilization;
 - b) The review of medical or other records if the information is recorded in such a way that participants can be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the participants;
 - c) Survey or interview techniques which include minors as participants;
 - d) The observation of minors if the researcher participates in the activities being observed;
 - e) Techniques which expose participants to discomfort or harassment beyond levels encountered in daily life; or
 - f) The deception of research participants.

**Note: If the study involves any of the above, the study is not eligible for exemption.*

10. Exemption Categories: Research activities may be classified as exempt when the ONLY involvement of human subjects falls within one or more of the categories below. If any activities do not fit in the categories below, the project is not eligible for exemption. Check one or more of the categories below that apply to the research project:

- 1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special educational, instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- 2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. **IMPORTANT: Subpart D amends this exemption, in part: If the subjects are children, research involving an interview or survey procedures and research involving observations of public behavior in which the researcher(s) participate in the activities being observed are not exempt. However, research involving the use of educational tests and research involving observations of public behavior in which the researcher(s) do not participate in the activities being observed are exempt. [34 CFR 97.401(b)].**
- 3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category (b) of this section, if: the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- 4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects

cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. Note that, according to the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), "to qualify for this exemption the data, documents, records, or specimens must be in existence before the project begins. The principle behind this policy is that the rights of individuals should be respected; subjects must consent to participation in research."

- 5) Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
- 6) Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

11. Background:

a. Provide an introduction and background information for the study, including a brief discussion of past research findings leading to this study. Cite literature that forms the scientific basis for the research.

- a. The investigator will investigate through a phenomenological in-depth interview approach to examine stop-out and drop-out of Black undergraduate students at regional comprehensive predominately white four-year public universities in Kentucky. This study will aim to approach an in-depth interview technique to share the stories of Black Students who have left regional Kentucky universities and reconstruct the experiences of these students why they did not continue at their respective institutions that participated in university-sponsored student support services for African-American/diverse student populations/under-represented minority students.

Colleges and universities have implemented student support services and retention programs for diverse student populations, however, minority student retention needs substantial improvements. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data show more African-Americans are attending college than ever 34% in 2012, the most recent year available. But those students are struggling: just 42% of Black college students go on to get their diplomas, and most take longer than four years to do it according to the NCES.

Tinto(2012), identifies that,

"Much of the research on student attrition has not been particularly useful to those in the field who seek to develop and implement programs to improve retention and completion because it assumes, incorrectly,

that knowing why students leave is equivalent to knowing why students stay and succeed” (p.12).

Given the current political climate in the state of Kentucky, where the governor along with the Council on Postsecondary Education has submitted proposed legislation to the General Assembly outlining specific performance-based funding where retention and specifically retention of underrepresented minority students will serve as a metric for state appropriations to institutions of higher education. Thus, there is a mutual benefit to the school and the individual to retain students.

12. Research Objectives:

a. List the research objectives/hypotheses.

The objective of this study is to explore institutionalized retention practices for undergraduate students from the perspective and experiences of Black participants and Black non-participants at PWIs. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What impact do Black students receive when participating in institutionally funded support programs for Black students at Predominately White Institutions serve as a predictor of overall student satisfaction, retention, and completion of a baccalaureate degree for Black Students?
2. What significant difference is there in overall satisfaction, retention, persistence, and graduation between students who participate in institutionally funded support programs for Black students and those Black students who do not participate in these programs?
3. What are the institutional characteristics that may deem the validity for institutionally funded support programs for Black Students?

13. Project Location:

a. Where will the study take place?

The study will be conducted at public locations like Morehead State Camden-Carroll Library, Eastern Kentucky University Library or Northern Kentucky University Steely Library. If participants prefer, the study can be conducted off-campus at coffee shops and other sites that emerge as appropriate in the course of the research study.

b. If the study will take place at a location other than ECU, attach a letter from an authorized representative of the organization granting permission to use the facility for research purposes.

ECU only Letter(s) attached

c. Will any data be collected through organizations other than Eastern Kentucky University?

No Yes, complete the following:

- Will personnel of the organization be involved in the data collection process or have access to data after collection? No Yes - If yes, list personnel on page 1, include copies of CITI completion reports, and define role here: _____

14. Subject Population:

a. What criteria will be used to determine the *inclusion* of participants in the study?

The participants for this study will not be chosen at random but will be purposely identified and selected. The researcher will utilize a criterion process to identify participants who meet the pre-determined criteria for the study. The pre-determined criteria for the participants for this research study include:

- 4) Their institution is regional Predominately White Institution comprehensive universities
- 5) Their institution must serve Black undergraduate students with an institutional retention support program
- 6) Students have the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive academic support & retention program targeting African-American/Black students.

Based on data from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the Commonwealth of Kentucky has six (6) regional public PWI. From this pool of regional institutions, the researcher has selected three institutions that have support programs for Black students that have been established for at least two (2) years.

Selected participants will complete a volunteer participation survey and will be undergraduate African-American students that participate in university-sponsored student support services for African-American students at predominately white institutions. Subjects will be selected from Eastern Kentucky Univerisity's Freshman Academy, Morehead State University's DREAMS mentoring, and Northern Kentucky University's NKU R.O.C.K.S.

Creswell (2008), outlines understanding a phenomenon through a qualitative methodology 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" (p. 1). To capture the true lived experiences, the researcher will utilize the phenomenological research methodology to explore institutional retention practices, from the perspective of students' participants involved with retention programs for a diverse student at Predominately White Institutions.

b. What criteria will be used to determine the *exclusion* of participants in the study?

Subjects that participate in university-sponsored student support services targeted towards African-American/diverse student populations/under-represented minority students at predominately White institutions.

c. Anticipated Number of Participants (*maximum*): 6

d. Age Range of Participants: 18-65

e. Gender of Participants: Male Female or Gender not relevant to study

f. Ethnicity of Participants: African American or Ethnicity not relevant to study

g. Health Status of Participants: _____ or Health status not relevant to study

15. Recruitment of Participants:

a. How will prospective participants be identified for recruitment into the study?

I will contact area directors of institutionally funded supportive associations designed for diverse student populations to identify a list of prospective study participants. I will conduct conference calls with university officials outlining my role as a doctoral and discuss their direct relationships with the students to get information to students requesting their participation.

The researcher will receive permission from Eastern Kentucky University's Freshman Academy, Morehead State University's DREAMS mentoring, and Northern Kentucky University's NKU R.O.C.K.S. programs. The sample for the research study will be limited students at ECU, MSU, NKU, who are identified as currently participating in or previously participated in university-sponsored student support initiatives for diverse and underrepresented minority students. If permission is not granted by Eastern Kentucky University's Freshman Academy, Morehead State University's DREAMS mentoring, and Northern Kentucky University's NKU R.O.C.K.S. or the sample size is too small, then it might be necessary to research at another university with university-sponsored student support initiatives for African-American students at predominately white institutions.

The researcher will distribute letters to prospective study participants requesting that they participate in the study. The letters will inform prospective participants that their participation is voluntary and they can opt out at any time. A formal letter will be sent to potential participating institutions and will be included in the appendices. The written correspondence to prospective study participants will introduce prospective participants to the goal of the study, as well as the format of the individual interview with potential meeting dates. Communication will be sent to prospective study participants requesting demographic data and institutional characteristics questionnaire. Participants will be informed that the study is being completed for a doctoral dissertation. Interviews will be recorded and stored securely.

b. Describe the recruitment procedures to be used with potential participants.

Participants will be students identified by their college(s) as students who are eligible to participate in institutionally funded support programs will completing their bachelor's degree program. Participants will be informed about the research by their college. The participants will be specifically informed that their participation is voluntary and that no identifying information about them will be revealed if they choose to participate in the research survey. The participants' notification, including a secure Internet link to the survey, will be communicated in an email sent to the college email accounts of identified participants/students.

- c. Recruitment materials to be used:** Check all that will be used and attach copies: None, Advertisement, Flyer, Telephone Script, Verbal Recruitment Script, Cover Letter, Text to be posted in electronic participation management software Other:

16. Ensuring Voluntary Participation: While studies that are appropriate for exemption are not required to formally document the informed consent process, investigators are expected to provide information to potential participants and ensure their voluntary agreement to participate.

- a. What procedures will be followed to ensure that potential participants are informed about the study and made aware that their decision to participate is voluntary?**

The researcher will distribute an email to participants', which will include a statement that specifically indicates that their participation in the survey is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled and that the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

A cover letter will be part of the email sent to participants and the survey will contain a first question/statement informing them that their consent is voluntary. The first page of the survey will contain a single question about student voluntariness and students will be required to click either "I consent" before continuing to the survey or "I do not consent" then they will be redirected outside the survey.

- b. Consent materials to be used:** Formal consent forms are not required for exempt research; the following are examples of items typically used in exempt research to ensure voluntary participation. Check all that will be used and attach copies: None, Cover Letter, Introductory paragraph on data collection instrument, Consent Form, Other:

17. Research Procedures

- a. Describe in detail the research procedures to be followed that pertain to human participants.**

Human participants will be identified through university-sponsored student support services provided to African-American students attending Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) of higher education at regional comprehensive four-year public universities in Kentucky. The researcher will prepare a cover letter to go into an email that will inform the participants of university-sponsored student support programs for African-American students about the research interview and how to volunteer to participate. The cover letter will specifically inform students that their participation is voluntary and that no specific identifying information about them will be revealed if they choose to participate in the research. To further protect the privacy of the participants, the email inviting students to participate will be sent to the students/participants by the principal investigator, with documentation of referral from

the college/university program director. The survey will remain open totaling four weeks. Two weeks after the initial email is sent to the students, a follow-up reminder email will be sent out to students/participants who have not taken the survey that they still have two weeks to complete it. The second email will follow the same protocol as the first email.

18. Potential Risks

a. Describe any potential risks—physical, psychological, social, legal, or other.

There is minimal risk associated with the study. The interviews will be recorded with a digital voice recorder and saved in password protected files. One possible but the unlikely risk is that the identity or confidentiality of the participant could be breached. Also, it is possible that some of the questions asked to the participants may invoke emotion. If this does happen, I will inform the participant that we can skip the questions or stop the interview.

b. What procedures will be followed to protect against or minimize any potential risks?

All data will be anonymous and coded for anonymity. No individual can be identified. Information about the study design and purpose will be presented to participants. The researcher will follow appropriate research protocol to ensure safeguards.

19. Research Materials, Records, and Confidentiality

a. What materials will be used in the research process? Include a description of both data collected through the study as well as other data accessed for the study. This study will use data/information collected from the interviews with research participants. The records will be stored with my faculty advisor in a locked file cabinet following the completion of the research project.

The pre-determined criteria for the participants for this research study include:

- 1) Their institution is regional Predominately White Institution comprehensive universities
- 2) Their institution must serve Black undergraduate students with an institutional retention support program
- 3) Students have the opportunity to participate in a comprehensive academic support & retention program targeting African-American/Black students.

This sampling process is used to provide quality assurance, and the researcher will use this technique to select participants who meet the criteria for the study.

The second instrument that will be used in this study will consist of qualitative interview questions. In a conversational interview, the researcher will explore more in-depth details related to the participants' institutions retention practices, to explain and build upon the responses from the survey questionnaire, and to identify common themes among the participant responses. Based on the responses I will prepare a table

to show the relationship between the survey and interview data and the research questions.

A semi-structured interview protocol will be used to guide participant interviews at each selection site. Prospective participants of the study will be Black undergraduate students who have or are currently attending a comprehensive regional PWI in Kentucky and participated in institutionally funded supportive associations designed for diverse student populations. Participants will have completed at least one semester at the University level.

b. Describe procedures for maintaining the confidentiality of human participants data.

No identifiable information will be collected.

c. Who will have access to the data? If anyone outside the research team will have access to the data, provide a justification and include a disclaimer in consent documents.
Primary researcher and faculty advisor.

d. Describe how and where research records will be stored. Note that all research-related records must be maintained for three years from the study's completion and are subject to audit. Student research records must be maintained by the faculty advisor who signs the application or provided to the IRB for records maintenance.

The records will be stored with my faculty advisor in a locked file cabinet following the completion of the research project through a password protected zip file.

e. How will data be destroyed at the end of the records retention period (i.e., shredding paper documents, deleting electronic files, physically destroying audio/video recordings)? Disks and paper materials will be shredded. Electronic files and video recordings will be destroyed.

20. Application Checklist:

Application for Exemption Certification (this application)

CITI Training Completion Reports for all investigators, key personnel, and faculty advisors

If applicable: recruitment materials (i.e., advertisements, flyers, telephone scripts, verbal recruitment scripts, cover letters, etc.)

If applicable: consent form, consent script, or introductory cover letter

If applicable: Instrument(s) to be used for data collection (i.e., questionnaire, interview questions, or assessment scales)

- If applicable: grant/contract proposal narrative (required if study is funded)
- If applicable: letter(s) granting permission to use off-campus facility for research

APPENDIX

E: SAMPLE LETTER FOR PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Dear Program Directors,

Your work with the university's student support services initiative has had the ability to impact students on your campus. As I complete my research for the Education Leadership and Policy Studies doctoral dissertation at Eastern Kentucky University, I will be seeking to examine African American student perception of the university and the key factors that affect their academic success reducing or leading to stop-out and drop-out of the University.

I plan to interview individuals who have participated in institutionally funded supportive associations for students of color at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). This research is an opportunity to share the stories of undergraduate students to learn from, grow and improve our respective institutions.

I am seeking your assistance in this endeavor in connecting with prospective students to participate in a research study. Student participation is voluntary, and responses will remain completely confidential. Your participation in assisting me to connect with students who have participated in your program within the past three years will be a tremendous help as we seek to identify mechanisms to support student persistence and retention.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone (614) 329-6113 or by email chris.w.blakely@gmail.com. Dr. Sherwood Thompson, Professor at Eastern Kentucky University, serves as director of my dissertation and can be reached at sherwood.thompson@eku.edu if there are other questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Christopher W. Blakely
Doctoral Student
Eastern Kentucky University

APPENDIX

F: INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS

INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION TO PROSPECTIVE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear,

You have been invited to participate in a research study that will examine African American student perception of the university and the key factors that affect their academic success reducing or leading to stop-out and drop-out of the University. The information you provide will be used to complete research for the Education Leadership and Policy Studies doctoral dissertation at Eastern Kentucky University. You will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire and participate in an interview conversation that will be taped recorded and stored in a locked file at Eastern Kentucky University.

I thank you for agreeing to take part in this study voluntarily. By completing the consent form, you agree to take part in this research study. At any point during this research you will not be forced to answer any question or questions that make you uncomfortable. Additionally, you may choose not to take part in the study at all. There are no expectations of return for your participation, if you chose not to be in this study or stop at any time, you would not lose any benefits.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you and hear your story. Attached is a copy of the Participation and Demographic Data Form. Please review, complete, and return via email.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone (614) 329-6113 or by email chris.w.blakely@gmail.com. Dr. Sherwood Thomson, Professor at Eastern Kentucky University serves as director of my dissertation and can be reached at Sherwood.thompson@eku.edu if there are other questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Christopher W. Blakely
Doctoral Student
Eastern Kentucky University

APPENDIX

G: COMMUNICATION WITH PROSPECTIVE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

COMMUNICATION WITH PROSPECTIVE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

As I work to complete my doctoral studies at Eastern Kentucky University, I thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. As it has been shared with you, my research will examine the stop-outs and drop-outs of Black students at predominately white institutions. My study will place specific focus on the availability and use of support associations and the impact it has on dropouts.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet with you and hear your story. The conversation should last between 45 minutes to an hour. I will be mailing a letter with additional details to the address you provided. Attached is a copy of the Participation and Demographic Data Form you completed, can you review to ensure all information is correct and has not changed?

I appreciate your assistance and look forward to seeing you on [Date] at [Time] in [Location]. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me by phone (614) 329-6113 or by email chris.w.blakely@gmail.com. Dr. Sherwood Thomson, Professor at Eastern Kentucky University, serves as director of my dissertation and can be reached at sherwood.thompson@eku.edu if there are other questions or concerns.

Due to the time restraints of the study, I ask that you, please provide a response by (completion date).

Best regards,

Christopher W. Blakely
Doctoral Student
Eastern Kentucky University

APPENDIX

H: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Black Minds Matter

Why am I being asked to participate in this research?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the implementation of support associations for Black undergraduate students at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) to address the Stop-Out and Drop-Out of Black undergraduate students. You are being invited to take part in this research study as a student of color and attendance at a regional comprehensive four-year public universities in Kentucky that are predominately White institutions. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about six (6) people to do so.

Who is doing the study?

The person in charge of this study is Christopher Blakely, principal investigator and doctoral candidate at Eastern Kentucky University in the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling Education. He is being guided in this research by Sherwood Thompson, Ed.D., Educational Leadership Studies.

What is the purpose of the study?

By doing this study, we hope to share the stories of Black Students who have left regional Kentucky universities and reconstruct the experiences of these students why they did not continue at their respective institutions that participated in university sponsored student support services for African-American/diverse student populations/under-represented minority students. This will provide important information to help smaller insitiutions of higher educaiton improve orgnizaional structures and processess with respect to insitutionlized student support programs.

Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?

The research procedures will be conducted at a location on campus. You will need to come to an identified location on campus at least one time during the study. Each of those visits will take about one hour.

What will I be asked to do?

Your involvement in the research will be a 1-hour interview. Interviews will be audio recorded and led by the researcher.

Are there reasons why I should not take part in this study?

Other than personal choice, there are no reasons why you should not take part in this study.

What are the possible risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

Although we have made every effort to minimize this, you may find some questions we ask you (or some procedures we ask you to do) to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can tell you about some people who may be able to help you with these feelings.

You may, however, experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced introspective look into their college experience when reviewing the support associations at your institution. We cannot and do not guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Do I have to take part in this study?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

What will it cost me to participate?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?

You will receive \$25.00 for taking part in this study. If you should have to quit before the study is finished, you will still receive the full amount, the gift certificate, etc.

Who will see the information I give?

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about this combined information. You will not be identified in these written materials.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you.

However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. Also, we may be required to show information that identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as Eastern Kentucky University and/or The Council on Postsecondary Education.

Can my taking part in the study end early?

If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to participate. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to end your participation in the study. They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

What happens if I get hurt or sick during the study?

If you believe you are hurt or if you get sick because of something that is done during the study, you should call Christopher Blakely at (614) 329-6113 immediately. It is important for you to understand that Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick while taking part in this study. That cost will be your responsibility. Also, Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study.

Usually, medical costs that result from research-related harm cannot be included as regular medical costs. Therefore, the costs related to your child’s care and treatment because of something that is done during the study will be your responsibility. You should ask your insurer if you have any questions about your insurer’s willingness to pay under these circumstances.

What if I have questions?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Christopher Blakely at (614) 329-6113. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

What else do I need to know?

You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

I have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of person agreeing to partake in study Date

Printed name of person taking part in the study

Name of person providing information to subject

APPENDIX

I: PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

Q1: Tell me about the process by which you began participating with student retention services/initiatives. Describe how you arrived at the decision to participate with the student retention services/initiative.

Participant R1

When I first heard of the student support initiative, I was like, this is going to be boring. You got to sit through talks. You got to meet, got to sit here, not nothing to do, bored, want to go to my room. Then I just actually went to it. I skipped the first two thinking I ain't going. I ain't going to lie. Then after that, I went, and I was like, dang, I was going to the first two. They probably having fun all semester, but I think it's more like a – you just have to come in with a clear mind and you would be fine when it comes to stuff like that. I went in like, I don't want to do it, came out telling all my cousins yeah, do this program it's worth it.

I think it might have been that little cook out we had when everybody was out there just listening to music, having fun, playing corn hole is what got me interested in participating. Even those times we just had a game night like Uno, and all that because Uno makes everybody friends for some odd reason. The draw four ends friendships, but Uno makes them happy too. I think them just having events were everybody just comes and is relaxed is the best thing to do because it makes people feel like they're in their element where they can do whatever they want, talk to whoever they want, have fun. If college wasn't fun, I don't know how I would take it. I don't know how I would take this place.

Participant R2

Going into it, I didn't really know what to expect. Then we got there. We met – just hearing everybody else's stories of what's happened to them, what they've been through were somewhat relatable, and some I never realized people actually went through things like that still. It was just good to have that insight in be around people with similar experiences.

Participant R3

I didn't get involved in any initiatives when enrolled. I didn't know about anything that would help me. I would say a personal relationship was lacking. I think they had flyers all throughout campus. I would just read them, sometimes, and wouldn't go to anything except for Bingo. I don't think they had anything like that when I was there. Do I think it's important for upper classmen to still attend things like that? Yes. I would say that because throughout college I needed help with different situations and with me being a first-generation college student. I think that those classes would have benefitted me.

Participant R4

My freshman year, I wasn't really involved in anything. I just was like I've got to go to class, go back to my room, and just be by myself. I didn't know anybody, didn't have friends that I knew were going to the university, so I had to basically start over. I just stayed to myself and didn't join anything.

Later on I started making friends and started getting more involved. My sophomore year and my junior year is when it really kicked up because the student support program director got me involved in a lot of programs. He helped me find a job on campus. The initiative really helped me out because that helped me meet other students of color. I actually have five good friends from that initiative.

Once I started figuring out all these programs, that helped me want to be a better student because a lot of those programs were like you need to have a certain GPA, you need to have this, you need to do this. It helped me want to get my grades up instead of just like I can pass with Cs, and I'm good. It made me want to get a B in this class, and A in this class, and do this and this and this. Those really helped me focus on schooling more than goofing off and playing around.

I hung out with kids who now a lot of them aren't here because they came to school to party. Once I figured that out and got into those programs, it helped me out. I was like these aren't the friends I want to have. I want to have these friends in these programs who are trying to get through school and better themselves, and that really helped mold me into a better student.

Participant R5

That's the crazy thing. The student support program is here to support. They ain't trying to get in the way of anything. I don't know why people be like nah, I ain't messing with it. Honestly, I became a part of the initiative or program as a part of my scholarship. I think it was mandatory, but I actually appreciate the student support program because I know we have a lot of meetings and stuff we were required to come to. If it weren't for those meetings, I'm not really sure what I would've been doing, if I really would've been focused on the things I really needed to be focused on.

Participant R6

As a diversity scholar recipient, the scholarship required that I participate in the student support program focused on student retention. In choosing the university one of the perks included being able to have small classroom sizes and services like these that allow me to be connected to resources to help me graduate. I really didn't have a choice, but I am glad that I had to.

Q2: What was your experience in the process of the student retention services/initiatives? Tell me about your interactions with the coordinator/director, faculty, staff, students and administrators.

Participant R1

I felt like my college experience got better because I was able to talk to them about anything, stuff at home. The student support program director knows a lot. Because I was shot back in May, I went to her to talk to her about it because I didn't really know how to take it. Then, me and her sat and talked for about an hour or two. Me and more students, I guess it made us – it made me more friendships whereas a lot of them can come to my apartment now because I'm able to participate in the student support program and we've been close all these years of being here, which will be four years.

Sometimes I feel like – I sometimes sit in the back just to observe stuff, and then sometimes I sit in the front just because I feel like that makes a teacher pay attention to you, because you're in the front. When I sit in the back and I observe, sometimes I feel like some teachers will go to teach you everything you need to know. With some teachers, they're more focused on just giving their – like I say, they taught it to you instead of – I don't know. Some of them, I feel like they – some of them, they'd rather teach just White students because they feel like it. There're some of them – I don't know all of them, but I think it might be a few that they know they have to teach us because we're in their class, but if they got to choose, they probably wouldn't choose us to be in there. I feel like that about some, but they never show it out loud. You just have to – I'm just a person who reads people, and I can read very well, and I read in a lot into them. There's some teachers who wouldn't rather deal with you, but they have to because that's their money.

Some people and some teachers that you can look at as supportive and there's some that you can't. It's some that you can tell that they're here to teach you, and that's all they want to do, and there's some that you can tell wants to help you in bettering yourself and it's a lot – I think it's more they want to help you then, more teachers that want to help you than not help you, but I think a lot of them is here just because they know they got a paycheck coming in. If they didn't have a paycheck, I don't think they'd be here.

Participant R2

It's given me a place to study and feel not like an outsider – I don't really like to study in the library, so it's given me another place to come and study and make friends there. With the dynamic dialogue series – is that what we had last year? I learned about different organizations. I don't know. I guess I met new people and new things to do. I don't know. I guess the classes remaining open to discussion and stuff like that so we can just feed off each other.

Participant R3

There were things I liked about it, but there were several things that I didn't. I just wish I was more informed when I went to school about what to expect, how to pay for school, scholarships, and things like that. I had to figure that out on my own. As far as getting me involved in programs? I don't know. They didn't have much there for Black students, things that interested Black students. It seemed like a lot of things there were geared more towards the other students.

Participant R4

A lot of faculty is really great and the student support program director especially. He helped me a lot my freshman year and my sophomore year. One of the faculty in particular helped me a lot even though I wasn't in his degree program. That program that they were trying to get started, that really helped. I've seen it help a lot of other students of color. Like I said, the student support program director helped me a lot. If I had questions about financial aid, he knew where to direct me. The older students who had been there also knew where to direct me. My advisor was helpful, so I think a lot of them were really helpful and geared towards helping you.

A lot of the times with an advisor it was hard to schedule appointments between work, school, trying to have friends. Scheduling an appointment to talk about financial aid, and then they point you to the financial aid office, and then financial aid will tell you have to go here, and then you go there and they'd be like go back to financial aid. Sometimes you get looped around before you could even get an answer, and the next thing you know things happen like what happened to me where I am now \$8,000 in debt to the school.

Participant R5

I believe it was pretty effective I know that when I finally found out I got a scholarship, once I finally made it to campus, the information about it was pretty informative. I believe it's given me – what can I say? It's helped me a lot in the way I communicate. It's given me a lot of tools, a lot of insights that I wouldn't have if I didn't really attend the student support program. Well, I like how the initiative isn't just a program. It's more like a family to where if you really need anything, you don't feel like you couldn't ask anyone. I feel like I could ask anyone for anything – not really needed. If I needed help, I feel like I could go to anyone, whether it's an advisor or one of my peers, regardless. I like the feeling of having that connection.

Participant R6

My experience with the student support program has been all positive. Coming in I was really reserved in quite, but one of the things I learned is that I have to be willing to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. I am able to meet regularly with the director and can walk in the office at any time even if I don't have an appointment. They are always

willing to help. My faculty mentor has really been helpful. My major interferes often with making the evening programs, but the ones I have met have made a big impact.

Q3: Tell me about a time when you think it (student retention services/initiatives) was successful.

Participant R1

I gave one of the staff mentors to the student support program my number and he gave me his because he's that guy who's like – he's like a big brother to me. One of the other staff members is like my mom away from home. The director, she was like that one big sister who doesn't let you make excuses. I feel like – and then there are other staff mentors, she stays with me too. I feel like I made a connection with people on campus because I just like – you never know when you need someone to talk to. I think that's the best thing about them too. They don't – you can talk to them about anything as to one thing. I made a lot of family here that's faculty that I can call anytime if I needed them.

It's in here. Me and a friend, we went in the cultural center and we like got stuck in there. You go in there once and you see all these other minority students and they're in there talking and having fun. Then they're like, hey, how you doing? What's your name? After that y'all just – if they see you, they speak to you. You go in there and y'all all become friends just by walking in a room just to see what is in there. I feel that if they had more posters with it out or even a big office. I feel like they deserve a big office for the Multicultural Center. I feel that you can't get all – everybody can't be in there at once because it's going to be crowded. If they had a bigger office like this, the whole middle of the student center that was – not the whole middle, but if they had as big an office as some other departments or centers on campus, it would be more easier for them. I think a lot of students would go in there just to be in there because it'd be a lot of them.

Participant R2

I guess it's made me feel more confident in the classroom. I have people that I can go to if I need help. Also in the student support program, I learned about the group tutoring, so that helped a lot last semester. With academic coaching, I feel more confident telling people oh, here are resources that are open to all of us.

Participant R3

That was about it. I only participated in activities because on the floor we lived on – what was the student support program? I forgot what it was called. It was a specific program. We had to participate in so many hours of activities, but there wasn't much. It was a living learning community.

Participant R4

I told my parents about the student support program director a lot. He's helped me out a lot through school, he helped me get jobs, and they were really thankful for that. My freshman year, the peer mentors I had were great. I still am good friends with all of them and keep up with them, and they help me out a lot through the stress of school, helping me cool off.

There was a group of us during finals week. We studied together, and then we'd go play basketball to let off some stress after studying. We were playing basketball at midnight in the summer. It would just let off stress, and we'd feel like I'm going to go home, take a shower, and then I can go to this test and not be oh, God. I'm going to do bad on this test.

It was just a good stress reliever. It helped me out a lot because it gave me an expectation of what I need from friends and people in my life. I need to have people who are promoting me to do better and not people who are promoting me to do worse or stay in the same position.

Participant R5

I know that being a part of program is not only the student support program but the people in it. We encourage each other to do good or positive things. Maybe if my grades are slipping, not only will my advisers and – I'll be hard on myself, but I have other peers holding me accountable for my actions, as well.

Participant R6

I think it has always been successful. The student support program has always been positive with resources on campus, guest speakers to come in and sharing with us how to get ahold of the right people on campus. Whenever I need help with classes or planning for the next semester or meeting new people.

Q4: Tell me about a time when you think it (student retention services/initiatives) was unsuccessful.

Participant R1

I think the only thing that's not successful is their way of getting to students, the way that people get the students, not even just Black students, but students, period. I think Black students feel like – I think it should be more like – if it wasn't for me telling other Black freshman to do it, I don't think they would do it. I think it's more of a communication thing I guess is probably the only bad thing. If the communication was better on this campus, I feel that a lot of people would join the student support program, more minority students would, but I think they look at it like, why would I want to do that? It's boring.

When they see all the other minority students doing it, they going to join them all because they like, maybe it is something fun we could do in there. I never really sat in a multicultural center until I started seeing my cousin and all them in there. That's when I got in there. I was like...this is the place to be.

Participant R2

I don't know. I'm not disappointed in much.

Participant R3

There were no programs available for me at the time. I feel like if there was a community amongst Black students that it would have been easier to get involved and connected

Participant R4

The student support programs are really good. Just because some programs need more funding, don't cut the funding for another. I'm pretty sure it's easily within a budget to just add a couple hundred here or there. There are certain things we really don't need. There's expenses we really don't need.

Participant R5

I can't really think of an exact time where the student support program was unsuccessful, but I know people that were supposed to be in the student support program that didn't really come. You could tell the difference between people that were participating in the student support programs and the people that weren't really participating in the student support program. It's nothing wrong with those people, but it doesn't seem like they had the same drive or the same motive as the people that were in the student support program.

Participant R6

I can't think of a time when you it was unsuccessful. I do wish that my schedule would allow to me to make some of the student support programs that are held in the evening.

Q5: How did your participation in student retention services/initiatives experience complement your preferred method involvement and engagement? Tell me how comfortable were you with the services, involvement and learning strategies that were used. Tell me what made it comfortable/uncomfortable.

Participant R1

Maybe one day but not as much. I feel like I'd be comfortable, but I have more nerves behind me than anything. Now, it's just like I feel I could just go up there and talk to

these people and they're going to learn something new from me and keep it moving. If I didn't do it, I'd would be like, I hope I helped them. I don't know if I can. We have bubble guts and stuff like that. Now I don't even have that because the new director, he's like my mentor. He is the one that – he was the like how the former director was to me. When he was here, he was like, The Guy. "What are you doing? Come on, I need you to do this for me." I'd be like, okay. He was that guy.

The director, he put me in a program for Thanksgiving, I had to do a presentation to students who are international students studying at the university. My major was to be a teacher, but I changed it to communications because I wanted to either do radio things, use my degree to be on the radio or even just on TV somewhere. I feel like it helped me with public speaking. It made my public speaking improve by practicing for me, it was good to practice it with them. I feel like it will make it easier just to talk to people, make my skills better talking in front of a crowd or presenting to a crowd, or even just – I think it made my skills better for my major all in whole. It made it easier. Now I can just go in front of a class for a presentation. I did it in front of 100 international students who couldn't understand much English but I was able to deliver it in a way they ended up knowing everything and I was like, okay, I did a good job. That made me know that that was what I wanted to do with my life, to be a speaker or something.

Participant R2

A little more assertive to go do versus waiting for someone to say do. I guess I've just met people that are like me in general. We have the same interests within the student support program. Nobody dodges each other. We all just get along like a family, I guess.

Participant R4

I think it played a big part because I felt like I would have dropped out a lot sooner if I hadn't found these. Even now that I'm in a situation where I'm not in school right now, these initiatives still make me want to come back. I know I can do this. These people showed me I can do this. It's not about I can't do this, it's about I've got to push myself to do it. Like I said, I owe a bunch of money, and it's not oh, well. I owe money and I'm not going to come back. I'm going to get a job, I'm going to make this money, I'm going to pay it off as soon as I can, and I'm going to get back. I'm even trying to see if I can just get one class just to say I'm still in school.

Before all those initiatives and programs and knowing people, I'm pretty sure I would have left a lot sooner because I had a lot of trouble with financial aid trying to fill out the FAFSA, get it right, fill out this because me and my dad were both clueless on what to fill out. We didn't know exactly how to fill it out correctly. That's what happened to me now. Me and my dad didn't fill it out correctly, so I didn't get the financial aid, and I didn't know that. When I had those people there to help me and point me in the right direction and saying here's what you did wrong and fill it out, it helped me a lot. I feel like I would have left a lot sooner if I didn't have those programs.

Participant R5

Honestly, I feel like If I wasn't involved in the student support program I would have the same support. I know the people, but I don't know if I'd be as comfortable to talk to the people or even know how to talk to the people if it weren't really for the student support program. Oh, most definitely. I believe the student support program, it kind of – how can I say it? It advocates for involvement, whether it's on campus or in the community, just trying to better our surroundings or our area. I feel like the student support program itself is a community, to be honest. We still reach out and are welcoming to other communities, but I believe the student support program has built its own community, and it's doing its own thing in a good way.

Participant R6

I really prefer to stay by myself. My roommate is someone I knew before I arrived at the school and I have a pretty good relationship with her. Outside of some of those people I already know, I am usually hesitant to get involved. However, the student support program has encouraged me to expand my comfort zone. I have started to get involved with some student groups within my major such as the photography club and the film club. Being in the student support program has helped me learn about my leadership skills and how I can get involved and where I should get involved.

Q6: How did participation with student retention services/initiatives help you enhance specific skills that you would realistically use in your personal collegiate journey? Tell me how (or if) student retention services/initiatives assisted you with any of the following things:

1. Student-Faculty Interaction
2. Supportive Environment and Quality of Interactions
3. Academic coaching and ability to achieve in the classroom
4. Feel valued and part of the campus community; comfortable being myself at my institution
5. Become more adept at following strategies to be successful college student.
6. Developed learning strategies that corresponded to higher grades

Participant R1

I think the student support program has been wanting to make me open up more. Just them people in that office alone, those is – I feel like it if wasn't for them, I wouldn't want to talk to no staff, because they was the first people that made me feel at home away from home so without them, I don't know what – how I feel about staff. You was probably the only one that wasn't you in the Multicultural Center that I had a relationship at first before I knew anybody in there, because that's just because you was just.

Just studying. I was one of the guys who – math came easy to me, so I never really studied it. Now when I came to college, it was more like they taught me better study skills and more how to stay focused when I studied. because me, I don't know. I have ADHD, but I might, because when I study, I start to just goes off, do something. I got to take a break to do something and keep me up. They taught me not to not write out everything the teacher tells you to write out; just write out what will stick in your head to give you the answer. They taught me that a long. One of the staff members taught me that. She taught me to play attention, or not pay attention, but make sure you do it to where you can remember the right answer and not having to read all the notes. It's one paragraph and one note. You need to do two sentences and you know the answer. When I was in high school, I didn't study at all. I just knew the stuff because it was easy. Then you come to college. It's the same stuff, but it's a lot more to it now. That's all it is.

Participant R2

It's made it easier to go up and talk to my professors and just to talk to people in general. It's made it, I guess, easier to communicate with other people. I used to just – I guess I'm more outgoing now and more open. Yes, whenever we went over the time management, to sit down and like dang, I have this time and I can do. Also the one where we talked about people we should and shouldn't be friends with. With that and getting all my time together, I think I've done better.

Participant R3

There was a lot of disappointing situations at the university. The situations with roommates, sometimes the classes being difficult, me not knowing how to study, there not being a lot to do on campus for minorities and on weekends, me losing my financial aid. I wouldn't say I was treated differently than any other students. I don't know. I'm a very quiet person. There definitely wasn't much class participation from me. I don't know. I've had mostly good experiences with my professors.

I feel like I was not supported by faculty, administrator and the university because I was Black. I almost felt disposable. My interactions with professors and administrators were okay depending on the person.

Participant R4

Like I said, my freshman year, I didn't feel comfortable, didn't get involved in programs. I was like I don't really want to meet new people. I'd rather be friends with my roommate and never talk to anybody but my roommate and people in my hall, if I had to see them. Then I started to break out of my shell. I was able to get more comfortable with people, and it helped me out a lot because it helped me get into more programs. The more programs you get into, the more people you meet. The more people you meet, the more people you can hang out with. They expand your horizon of school, so I'm not just in my room at all time.

I was in a program called EBE or Every Body Everybody, and it was started by two of my friends, Haley and Abbey. It was to promote positive body and just being kind to people and being nice to people. That was a great program. I told a bunch of friends about it.

I also started playing in the intramural leagues, and that was fun. That kept me in shape. It helped me meet friends. As I moved on and got into more programs, I started to meet more people, I started to hang out with more people, I started to break out of my shell, and it made me way more comfortable at school. It made me not want to leave school.

When I was first here and I didn't know anybody, I was like I don't know about this college thing. Once you start to meet people, I was like this is for me, I do like school, I do want to get an education. I have people that I can talk to, and it's not just like I'm here alone and getting a degree alone for four years.

Participant R5

That's what's crazy the impact of meetings, how a little 20-minute meeting can make a difference. Some people really don't know. They really have nobody to tell them. I feel like I have who I need. I'm part of the student support program, the Accounting Club, the Spanish Club. I don't think being a DOA Scholar counts. Real Men. That's a lot, to be honest. Coming into college I didn't see myself getting involved a lot. I knew I would do something, but I just never really knew what that something was. I never really knew that I'd end up doing this much. I say staying focused or disciplined or knowing which group of friends to hang around at what time. It's a lot, to be honest. Just to hold yourself accountable, I know we get a lot of that type of information through our student support meetings, and we get time in between our meetings to practice what we've learned, basically.

Participant R6

Participation in the student support program has truly enhanced my skill set. Coming into school I want to just focus on getting in the BFA program. Being with the initiative I was showed how I could build relationship with faculty members in the Art department and how to showcase my skills. I have been able to build quality relationships with faculty that I will be working with a lot. During my monthly check-up meetings I am able to setup goals for the semester and revisit those and learn how to improve each day to get to the best version of myself.

Q7: Tell me how you think your participation (or non-participation) in student retention services/initiatives played a part in your academic learning experience and overall college experience.

Participant R1

I felt if the student support program really wasn't there, to be honest, I feel like I would probably have transferred to HBCU. Because I feel like HBCU is targeting towards the Black student, and I feel like sometimes it's a lot of stuff here that you could tell when they did that, when they was doing the Build the Wall writing thing when they chalked it on the floor, I feel like nobody got in trouble for that. You see a lot of Build a Wall which is so invasively like other people's lives didn't matter to them, but if we was to write Black Lives Matter on something, it would be chopped off. It would be washed off fast, but that thing about Build a Wall has been on there for about a week and a half before any got on Twitter and got big. That's how it ended up getting washed off, because they was like, it didn't mean anything. Still I feel like if we was to write Black Lives Matter anywhere, it'd get washed off real fast here.

I just don't know sometimes, I feel like they play like they care about how we doing here, which some of them who really don't. A lot of them do, but a lot of them are fake. It's a lot who do care, but at the same time, don't. They know what's going on, but they're not going to speak up. I feel like if I didn't, I probably – I have a couple of friends who skipped the student support program because they was like, I don't want to do that. It sounds stupid. Now they don't even go to school anymore. They just working. I feel like without the student support program, I'd still be in school, but I'd probably be one of the guys who didn't really talk to nobody. I probably be – I probably go still play ball at the gym, but other than that I probably be back in my room playing video games and doing homework and not messing with nobody at all. I probably be like, nobody allowed in my house type of guy still. I probably be quieter around a lot of you, but I'm more talkative now because of being in it. I think if I wasn't in it, I wouldn't be cool with nobody.

Participant R2

I've had to actually think about my classes more, our monthly meetings, going over them, seeing how I can do better, and things like that. I have another answer, but now I don't remember.

Participant R3

Terrible. Do I need to elaborate? Knowing what I know now if I could go back and have an opportunity to participate in a program like the student support program that helps with transition skills I would.

Participant R4

It helped me with my interaction with faculty members because they would see these programs I'm in, and they would say what's this about? They'd ask me, and I could explain it to them. It was good for me because it helped me get more comfortable with my teachers and people in higher places. I was able to feel more comfortable talking to my professor about having a question in class.

Originally I never asked questions. If I didn't understand something, I just let it slide under the radar and try to figure it out myself later on. Once I got comfortable with my teachers and was able to ask my teachers about questions, I felt like I could actually raise my hand and just have them answer a question without people going why is he asking this? One of my teachers I had gotten on such a good level with, I would email her if I had a question about this or text if I had a question about this.

Participant R5

I believe that the student support program has pushed me to be more or to do more academically and to set higher goals or higher standards for myself. I believe the student support program has helped me make a very smooth transition from high school to college. It's probably – if I was ready before I came or not, I believe it's helped me make the transition I needed to make. I guess before even getting a job, I saw leadership as you got to be part of a club. You got to be on the board. You got to do this. I ain't even realize what kind of role that the peer coaches play and having leadership and just play a different role for the students that we bring in, whatever.

Participant R6

I think if I didn't participate in the student support program I would probably stay in my room and go home every weekend. As it relates to academic learning I am confident that I have all the resources that I need to be successful and prepared my a career. Although I am close to home being a part of the student support program has gave me the confidence to stick around participate and really have a true college experience.

Q8: What one change would you like to see implemented that would improve your educational experience at the institution, and what one thing should remain?

Participant R1

I think they should give Multicultural Center a bigger office or even their own floor. I just feel like a lot of things are equal here, but I feel like it's some things that are more – I feel like the educational part is good here. I like it here because it's not Harvard, but it's not a community college, as well. It's a university, and they're about your work.

I think it's more like – I feel like – I just feel like as long as they start to care more and give more – I think more teachers should care about average students instead of just White students or not care about – you can tell the teachers who care, and you can tell the teachers who don't. I think there should be more caring teachers that teach here. They give us more caring teachers, I think that students who care more about their classes. Where the students who don't care, I think it's because they feel that the teacher don't care. I think that's what I improve, the caring teacher part.

Participant R2

As far as the student support program, we do things as far as time management and the other things, but those are services we present to you. Has that assisted you to actually apply those versus just – someone can come talk to you, but then you're like, okay, thanks. Has that helped you to implement strategies? Yeah, I guess whenever we talked about it in a group of people, it was easier to relate it to one of us or all of us. It's easier if you see the same people and like, oh, we can all do this together, then it's easier to apply it.

Participant R3

Services like financial aid and even the admissions process, I feel like they didn't communicated with you enough or give a lot of details. Financial aid, I jumped through hoops with them. It seemed like some of them didn't know what they were talking about, so you had to call them and talk to someone else. Dealing with people in financial aid often was difficult. Admissions, I didn't have any issues with them. I never had to go to them for anything.

Participant R4

One thing I would like to see is I would like to see the student support program better funded. It was good. I know a lot of students who benefited from it; me, and others, a bunch of other people. The only problem was we met once every month, and it just seemed like they weren't getting us the attention we needed. As the student support program says, statistics show that Black men are usually the highest to drop out.

It's a good program to have because schools want to keep students. You want to keep students of color because it looks good. It's bad to say, but it looks good. The thing was it wasn't just for students of color. Anybody could be there, Black, White, gay, straight, women, anybody. It was a good program.

It kept students, it showed them where they needed to go to get this. They pointed out scholarships you could get. They had people come in and talk to you. It was a good program. I would love to see programs like that for students that aren't the norm, that aren't just a White man put more funding to because that would be great for us.

Participant R5

I feel like being a part of the student support program – or not being a part of student support program, you don't really have access to the help that you really need. You can still get access; you can still find the people that could help you but with student support program, it's already basically in the palm of your hands. You just have to exercise it. I'd like to see our student support program community or just the community on campus just grow and be more consolidated and see everyone start working together and be on one accord, to be honest.

Participant R6

I think it is important to get this information out to prospective students early in the process. I know I wasn't really aware of the student support program until I was rewarded my scholarship where I was told that I would be required to participate. Honestly, when I was told I had to participate they really didn't give me a lot of information of what I was participating in and what I would get out the student support program. I think it is important that people know about the student support program because it is really good and beneficial but if people don't know about it they can't take advantage of the student support program.

Q9: Please describe the most significant experience (learning, social, cultural) you have encountered at your institution.

Participant R1

Just seeing the Black community on campus grow. I think that might be what it is, seeing it grow. When I first came here, it was a lot of us, but it wasn't as much as it is now. It's enough now where – and it's continuing to grow, and I think just watching how the sorority and frats are actually growing as well here is a good thing, because my aunts are Deltas. My cousin, she is a Zeta. My cousin, he's an Alpha here. You really don't see that much Black fraternities here. That's another bad thing, how the White sororities and fraternities had their own dorms, but Black frats and Black sororities are split up. I didn't like that at all. I feel like the more that the Black fraternities and sororities grow, the more campus will be comfortable for African-Americans, because they look at it like, we're growing as a whole. We're growing a lot. I feel like the number of African-Americans is getting wider and wider every year. It's a lot. Compared to last year, it's a lot of us.

It's important to me because I feel like you could be yourself when you see more of your color. Some people say they put their White voice on when they're around a bunch of White people. They do that. I feel like if I was in a room full of White people, I could be, but I can't be me completely. A White person might judge me for being me. If I was in a room full of Black people, they wouldn't judge me because they be like, I got a cousin like you or an uncle or aunt like you. They wouldn't judge me at all. I don't like when people judge you and all, neither, but it's some that I feel like if you was there, you have to be a different type of person because they judge you. It's just a lot of judgment when people too. That's one thing.

Participant R2

I would say social. I've come out of my shell a lot, I would say. I've gotten involved in organizations and my first semester, too, I didn't do anything. I think I was in pre-vet club, but I never even went to the meetings.

Participant R3

I had several issues. Trying to get back into school was an issue. Losing my financial aid, I felt like I didn't have a lot of help as to what I needed to do and things like that.

I would say over the phone and face-to-face communication was a little better, but not that much. I know I had met with this lady that worked in enrollment and said that she would pay for one of my classes. She then changed her mind. I don't know why. That became an issue. They also messed up on my degree works. I had to go and get that fixed, myself, even after I talked to my – what was she called, my advisor. After I talked to her boss, she still sided with my advisor. I had to go and get that fixed, myself. Financial Aid, me calling them, and I was on the phone for a long time, waiting, which I shouldn't have had to do. That was an issue as well.

Participant R4

I feel like it is. I couldn't exactly explain to you why I feel like it is, but I feel like as a student of color, it's always going to be different unless you go to a school that's predominantly students of color. It's always going to be a different experience for you. You may feel like I don't fit in here or this isn't my scene until you find who you fit in with. It's not like it's a bad thing, and it's not like it's different in a bad way. I feel like people in society expect you to fail, so you have to go in there and do twice the work to prove a point that you can do it, and you're not going to fail. That sucks to say, but it's a fact.

Participant R5

I feel like I can go to my mentors. I feel like I'm not alone on campus. I don't have to do everything by myself. I have people I can call on, whether it's homework help or help with something more technical such as housing or just financial problems.

Participant R6

The most significant experience I have encountered at my institution is being able to attend a student leadership conference last year. The conference really helped me see things in a different perspective. As a person of color from a predominately White town, I didn't have a lot of opportunities to interact with other students who had similar backgrounds. But going to the conference I was able to share my story and hear other stories that were similar by also inspiring to want to do more and be the best despite any obstacles.

Q10a: Please describe what has been most satisfying about your experience so far at this institution, and what has been most disappointing?

Participant R1

I just feel like the disappointing part is just the way how they treat Black students as second class often – another disappointing thing is when you're being at – when you look at the homecoming group, it was only – my cousin who is a Black female was one and one Black male was one, but the rest was White. Why is it only two Black people running for homecoming king and queen? I feel like it should be more color in there. If you look into it and it's like – we probably been one or two Black homecoming kings and queens ever at this school. It ain't winning nothing. I think it's more homecoming kings and queens here are just Black than White, to be all the way honest. I'm not being racist or anything, but I just feel that way because of just it is. They got it. I know a bunch of them that's getting [poked in the nose] and stuff and sororities or fraternities or all of that, they're not getting recognized for it. I feel like they should be recognized more for the way they put in work at school. Instead of just getting put on the Dean's List, I feel like they should be able to win homecoming king and queen with a 4.2 GPA here.

Participant R2

Felt very supported. Every day I see the directors of the student support program, you're asking how classes are, if I'm going to the gym, and I've not gone to the gym. Just things like that, you always ask about different things, not just class.

I guess I was disappointed that my FYS class was really weird. We had an exam over things that were just random that didn't matter. It was a faculty member in biology, and it was global sustainability, I think. I was disappointed because every other FYS class was like oh, we watched *Saved by the Bell*. We sat and just talked about things weird things.

Participant R3

My academic advisor was horrible. She didn't know what she was talking about. I usually didn't reach out to her unless it was time to do advising for classes. I don't know. I would say a positive experience was meeting different people at ECU. Negative experience, living with crazy people.

Participant R4

My most satisfying situation at my school is I had a class that I always struggled in. It wasn't a class, it was more the teacher. It was an upper level course, and she expected the best of the best. You couldn't just slack and give her a crappy paper. She expected it to be at minimum three pages, which doesn't seem like a lot, but when you don't really understand the subject, three can take forever to do.

My most satisfying memory was when I turned in a paper and got an A on it. It wasn't 100, but it was an A. I knew I could do the work, I knew I could do it, and she even said this was a great paper. I knew you could do it. You just had to apply yourself, and that me

feel good. If I can pass this teacher, if I can do one of these assignments on this teacher and get 100 with one of the toughest teachers; everybody's who's taken her was like don't take her; if I can get a good grade on that, I know these classes that I'm slacking in just because it's easy, I could just fly by.

One of my worst memories was the first time I failed a class. I've never failed a class in my school career. It was because it was a lecture-style class, and I wasn't used to that. I was used to having that teacher be able to individually focus on one student if they needed help. I struggled in that class.

Participant R5

I think my favorite part of the student support program is when we went to the student leadership conference and we got to network with people from other campuses. We could see if they were doing similar things or they were different or just how we can improve what we have going on at our own school. Honestly, I didn't really know what to expect because I had never really – I've been to a conference but not really a leadership conference. I liked it. When we met the people at the front tables and they gave us the name tags to the next day where we had classes on workshops – we just got to interact with different people. I believe it gave me something to bring back to the campus. I felt pretty motivated when I came back.

Actually, the most disappointing thing about my experience so far would probably be my GPA freshman – well, my first semester of college. I mean, it wasn't completely terrible, but it wasn't up to my standards, honestly. Basically ever since then, I've been trying to make sure I keep it up and keep getting better, evolving instead of devolving.

Participant R6

Getting into the Bachelor of Fine Arts program has been my satisfying experience so far. It was very stressful leading up to this point, but I had a lot of support and encouragement. I always know that I can get positive feedback and encouragement whenever I visit the center and speak with the staff. I was disappointed last year when I received my lowest grade in one of my major classes. I was having real difficulty with my professor who was new to the university and would really be inconsistent in evaluation of my work. She would say I was doing well with a particular project, but when it became time to grade it was not up to par. I am thankful for the student support program who has supported me in this process and giving me ways to attack this situation.

Q10b: How has participation or non-participation in student retention services/initiatives factor into your collegiate experience?

Participant R1

I probably be quieter around a lot of you, but I'm more talkative now because of being in it. I think if I wasn't in it, I wouldn't be cool with nobody. It's a lot of opportunities like student success center, they do a great job when you are involved in the student support program

Participant R2

I guess it's shown me how easy faculty and professors – how easy it is to just talk to them. They're just people. They don't care to talk to you, pretty nice most of the time. That helped me build relationships with them.

Participant R3

I wish I would have known more about the university before attending. I wish I would have gotten involved more if there were more activities for a minority student. I guess that's it. I wouldn't have chosen that particular school. I wish I would have went to a more diverse school. I don't feel like there was enough resources to be successful. I think part of that had to do with me being the first in my family to go to college. I think that the Black students are first generation college students who are sometimes unaware of the things we that we have to do as far as getting into college. I felt when you get there it's difficult. You have to figure everything out on your own. I didn't know that you had to take 15 credit hours a semester in order to try to graduate in four years. I wasn't aware of that.

Participant R4

Interaction with the services and programs helped a lot and feeling like I belonged. It did a lot. It helped me because before I met a certain faculty member, I didn't know any real teachers at the university except for the classes I had. I didn't really want to talk to them. Once I started talking to him, I knew teachers were people just like me, but it was a superior kind of thing. He's your teacher, he graduated, he's smarter than you.

You could see he's just like me and it would make me more comfortable to talk to my teachers in these programs. I had teachers asking me about these programs. If the student support program I was in had an event and the teacher walked past, they were like hey, and call me by name. What's this? I could explain it to them and talk to them. Later on they'd be like how's that going?

In one of my classes because I'm a criminal justice major, the teacher took us to a courtroom to see how the proceedings worked. We were able to sit in and watch that. It was really good, and she gave extra credit for it. She was like here's the schedule. If you ever want to come in, you can just come in and watch and sit. That helped me a lot. I think it was the best thing I could have done for myself was getting involved in campus and get a better feeling for my teachers and meeting them and talking to them.

My personal experience has been really good with the school. Like I said, a lot of the student support programs and faculty have helped me succeed. A lot of faculty wants me to come back. I've told them the situation that's happened, and they said pay that off and get back because schooling is important.

Participant R5

To this day, honestly, I feel like it's important not to be judgmental. It's always important to be humble and be willing to work for what you really want and be able to be the change that you really want instead of just talking about it. Most definitely. I was comfortable before being in the student support program, but I feel like the student support program just laid out the steps I need to get to where I wanted to be. It's helping me get there, giving me a visual.

Participant R6

Participating in this program has really helped me develop as a student and get out of my shell.

Q11: To wrap up, if you had any additional comments or feedback that you'd like to share on the quality of your student retention services/initiatives on your educational and personal experience please feel free to share.

Participant R1

I just think they should give more to students of color— not just Black people but minority students. We deserve more because it's like – I just think we deserve a lot more. They're giving us enough, but I think they should give us more than just enough. I feel like they give more than enough to White students. I feel like the Black frats should be able to have more, but they don't because they're not getting enough. Then I feel like - I just feel like they should give more to the minority students, and campus would be a better place and stop breaking stuff down. They stop breaking stuff down, it'd be better.

I feel like as – that's another thing. I feel like the Black – the stuff that's supporting Black students don't have that much money into it, but the stuff that was supporting White organizations, they got a lot of money into it. I'm a part of an open mic series. We was in the thing where they picked the organizations to give money. When you hear about it, it was a bunch of White frats and sororities, White organizations. We're the open mic and we're not even just Black students. We're for everybody, and we didn't get anything. We fundraise for everything. Our t-shirts we fundraised, put our own money towards. Anything we do, we was able to throw a lock-in and we would, but it's like we don't have the money to pay for security because we just don't have the money to do it. A lot of the money's not getting given to us or not to the Multicultural Center. I feel like they would

do lock-ins or more fun stuff, but they don't have the money to do it. They have to fundraise or they just do what they can with what they got, which is hurtful.

Participant R2

I wouldn't have done – I wouldn't have started out doing the study hours. I probably wouldn't have studied as much or if I did, I'd probably be in my room. I'd fall asleep. Actually having to track hours has helped a lot to make me focus.

Participant R3

I made it so far. I made it to my senior year. I think it's very important that I go finish that last little bit of classes. Also, I'm the first in my immediate family, besides my aunt, to go to college. I think it's very important to set that example for my siblings, even though I'm the second oldest. I feel like it's important.

I wish they'd make an assessment for people. I have a full-time job, so it's hard for me to make it to campus to take classes. I wish they had a lot more online classes. As far as communication, that's been good so far with people outside, too, with the university, as far as getting back into school. I would just say having more online classes.

Participant R4

I really do want to get back to school. I moved down here for the simple fact that I'm five minutes away from campus. That's more incentive for me to get back in school. My campus is five minutes away. I've got a job, I've got an apartment, I'm fine. Now I'm like I'm right here on campus every day. I can walk to campus if I really wanted to and see I need to get back. As soon as I pay this off, I'm getting back

Participant R5

I believe it did being that our advisers of student support program our staff and faculty, it teaches us or gives us default of knowing how to talk to a faculty member being to where it's like if I was in class and I needed to speak to my professor, I wouldn't feel uncomfortable just going to him and saying whatever I needed to say. I believe that student support program has a pretty nonjudgmental environment. It's also very welcoming and encouraging and just educationally based just for – in a positive way, really. I hope student support program stays as open, and honest, and true as it is throughout my college life. I feel like incoming students, or just students, period, need the truth instead of deceptions.

Participant R6

I don't have any additional comments or feedback that I'd like to share