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AN EXAMINATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS'

PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES AT THE

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS'

PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES AT THE

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Shashuna Jenean Gray

Old Dominion University

Director: Dr. Dana Burnett

The focus of this research is the perceptions of academic success held by African American male students attending a community college. Community colleges often serve as the gateway for unprepared, at-risk students. However, this group of students frequently fails to persist and matriculate even after six years of attendance. Understanding the perceptions of academic success within two defined groups of students, pre-enrollment and probationary, would allow community college leaders to efficiently allocate resources to ensure high levels of engagement within the college classroom. *Keywords: academic success, African American male students, community college, focus group, perception, persistence, probationary students, self-efficacy,*

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

African American males, in comparison to other ethnic groups and genders, are disproportionately underachieving in higher education. This group has fallen below many other groups in the areas of the percentage of degrees earned, persistence rates, and cumulative grade point average (Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Wood and Ireland, 2014). African American students, as a group, African American male students have lacked focus as well as lacked a sense of community within the college and university setting (Strayhorn, 2007). Booker (2007) addressed two key issues related to student success and persistence rates among African American students and whether or not the students perceived a sense of belongingness and interconnectedness at predominately white universities (Booker, 2007). According to Harper, African American males were frequently viewed as intellectually deficient in academic settings (Harper, 2009; Jenkins, 2006).

The idea for this study originated in response to the low rate of student success demonstrated by the student population of African American male students in higher education (Harper, 2007; Strayhorn, 2007; Wood & Ireland, 2014)   Without the necessary support mechanisms required by many minority students, the dropout rates have continued to rise in the student population of African American males. The intent of this qualitative research study was to examine African American male students' definition of success at the community colleges. The study compared the students' expectations of success with the colleges' expectations of academic success.

African American males are a highly under-represented group within community college classrooms (Alexander, 2004; Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasjer-Scott, 2014; Wood, 2012; Wood, 2013). In 2002, African American males represented 4.3% of all students enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions in the United States. The percentage of African American males enrolled in colleges and universities in 1976 has not changed appreciably (Harper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2010). According to the State Department of Education, in 2010, African American males consisted of less than 6% of the entire undergraduate population in higher education (Eunyoung and Hargrove, 2013). Within higher education, African American males had the highest dropout rate among every ethnicity and gender within the student population (Wood, 2012). The number of African American students enrolled in higher education has increased slightly in recent decades; however, the number of African American students enrolled in higher education compared to non-African American students' remains significantly lower (Strayhorn, 2007). African American students also tend to graduate at significantly lower rates than Caucasian students (Harper & Davis III, 2012; Robertson & Mason, 2012) and face challenges not encountered by White students (Strayhorn, 2007).

Background

African American students experience many challenges while navigating the higher education system. African American males specifically had a tendency to grow up in single parent homes with low socio-economic status (Strayhorn, 2007). They have received negative messages from media outlets including television, radio, and music including the explicit and degrading lyrics of some rap music. The messages in the music failed to provide education as an alternative for earning a comfortable living wage. African American males additionally faced stereotypes of inferiority from faculty and staff (Wood, 2012). African American male students

had difficulty demonstrating persistence and retention because this student group often lacked they academic preparation needed to remain in good academic standing. This group of students also had difficulty balancing the demands of both work and school (Wood, 2012).

Community colleges in the U.S. enroll the largest number of underrepresented minority students, including African Americans. These enrollments additionally included many at-risk students. The mission of the community college was centered on the retention of these underrepresented students promoting student achievement in the educational process (Chang, 2005). Conger and Long found a gap in the literature acknowledging a gender difference, which was further segregated by race in the higher education (2010). Even when Conger and Long controlled for variables such as gender, race, and parental education rates, their research indicates that African American male students lagged behind their African American female counterparts in all higher education institutions. The rate of African American female persistence after enrollment was significantly higher than that of African American males. African American male students faced disadvantages by selecting college majors that were typically associated with lower grade-point averages (GPA's), fewer required credits, and lower rates of persistence (Conger & Long, 2010). African American males had a tendency to steer away from college majors requiring higher level math including science, math, computer technology, and engineering (Conger & Long, 2010; Wood, 2012).

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine African American male students' definition of success at the community college. The study compared the students' expectations of success with the colleges' expectations of academic success, as measured by (1) grade point average (GPA), (2) persistence, and (3) advancement toward degree completion. I

first defined academic success from the institutional perspective, and I then compared the institutional definition of academic success with the African American male students' perception of academic success to discover if there is a disconnection between the institutional definition and the students' perception of academic success. By uncovering differences, I was then able to identify the interventions that community colleges leaders may implement to improve academic success in this population of students. The study examined the results of the responses of the African American male students from focus group meetings conducted with a random sample of students enrolled at a medium size, public community college located in the Southeastern United States. The study bridged the gap between an institutional definition of academic success and that of this student subgroup.

Research Questions

The research study was guided by the following questions:

1.   What are the perceptions of African American male community college students as to what constitutes academic success prior to and after enrollment at a community college?

2.   What are the perceptions of African American male student's perceptions as to what constitutes academic success after a student has been placed on academic probation at a community college?

 3.   Are there differences between African American male students' perceptions of academic success and academic success as defined by the community college where participants are enrolled?

Significance of the Study

In 2009, President Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) aimed at increasing the number of American citizens who have earned a college degree; AGI envisions community colleges contributing an additional 5 million degree graduates by 2020 (American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 2011b). The increased emphasis placed on improving student success and, ultimately graduation rates may be viewed by college leaders as additional stressors on the mission of community colleges. Community colleges had large numbers of students enrolling in courses at a level of preparedness below college-level work (Bailey, 2009). Years before President Obama announced the AGI; he charged the community colleges with improving the success rates of students. The charge spawned an increased interest in retention and persistence rate of all student groups enrolled in community colleges. Community colleges, from their inception, have focused on providing access to the communities in which the institutions are operating (Bailey, 2009); now there is an additional focus on persistence and graduation.

The community college mission provided access to students, but the mission often failed to ensure that students have the support needed to be successful in college regardless of the level of preparedness the student possesses upon entry into the institution (Bailey, 2009). Community colleges are charged by governing bodies and federal regulations to accept all students who apply with a high school diploma or GED. Insitutiitions are focused on the retention of students; institutions are compelled to understand the experiences and perceptions of the students struggling to remain enrolled in college while maintaining a passing grade point average.

Two-year public colleges are the primary entry point for African American, low-income, Latino, and working adult students (Dowd, 2007). Historically, community colleges had enrolled

half of all undergraduate students of color. Community colleges enrolled 1.7 million, or 41%, of all undergraduate students at the poverty level during 2007-2008 (2007). With a growing number of students opting to attend community colleges as the college entry point of choice, these institutions are required to allocate additional resources, both human and financial, to prepare the underprepared student. Community colleges have responded to students' lack of preparedness by providing remediation to students who need it (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

From 1999-2000 to 2009-2010, the percentage of degrees earned in the United States increased for all racial/ethnic groups. The percentage of degrees earned by African American male students still lag behind the rate of the degrees earned by African American females. More than 68% of all degrees awarded to African Americans are awarded to females (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014). The difference in the number of degrees conferred to African American males and African American females is notable within each degree type. African American female students earned two-thirds of all associate degrees awarded during the academic year 2009-2010 (NCES, 2014).   Higher education leaders are compelled to take steps to close the degree completion gap. An understanding of the differences between males and females of the same ethnicity is needed to help close the gap.

In comparison to other students, African American males are underachievers with respect to higher education degree completion (Wood & Ireland, 2014). The rate of success of this population of students falls below many other groups in the percentage of degrees earned, persistence rates, and cumulative grade point average (Wood & Ireland, 2014). The failure of African American male, two-year college students to persist, obtain credentials, and to transfer is a problem of importance to post-secondary educational leaders (Museus, Jayakumar, & Robinson, 2012). In a separate study, Wood (2013) delineated the factors, which would increase

the probability of African American male students remaining in college. The factors included participation in study groups, discussion with faculty, and the creation of academic plans, participating in clubs or sports, and attending entertainment activities- all of which would increase student engagement in post-secondary educational institutions (Wood, 2013). While public two-year colleges enrolled a large number of African American males, data related to this group are minimal. Finding from Wood's study indicated that African American male students at two-year schools are less prepared and have taken a lower level, including developmental, courses than their peers at four-year colleges (Wood, 2013). The findings of the Wood study (2013) indicated an increased need to investigate the reason for the lower success rates of African American males enrolled at community colleges.

The lack of research pertaining to African American males and academic success at community colleges drove the need for the undertaking this study. I attempted to identify what factors impacted success in African American male students to identify further which factors lead to greater rates of success within this student subgroup as well as whether or not the students' perceptions of success influenced the ability to demonstrate academic success.

Seminal Research

In an effort to address the practical questions of the "why, who, and when" related to student departure, Tinto has studied the rate of student departure over several decades. Tinto specifically desired to discover if student departure from 2-year institutions arises from different sources than student departure from 4-year institutions (Tinto, 1993). When comparing the rate of student departure, Tinto surmised that the rate of departure would vary when mediated by the students' gender, race, social origins, as well as ability. Tinto explored the data for first-year, first-time college students. He determined that frequently institutions fail to estimate the actual

rate of student departure within an academic year. Additionally, Tinto discovered that the ability to accurately understand data related to student departure is often stalled by the institution's inability to obtain sufficient detailed data related to the contributing factors to student departure (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto believed that if institutions addressed the rate of student departure in the institution's academic strategic plan, the institutions could modify their procedures and policies so as to retain more students and increase the graduation rates. Tinto's research of the reasons associated with student departure from two-year institutions considering race, gender, and social origin provided a retrospective view of the current study by examining one particular student group, African American males, at community colleges. The student group in question represented the highest departure rating and the largest number failing to maintain enrollment and demonstrate academic success. The current study revealed there is an obvious misalignment of the institutional definition of academic success and student perception of academic success exists for students after they have been placed on academic probation. The study additionally identified the fact that the demographic background and full or part-time status is related to academic success and retention of African American male students.

Tinto also investigated whether or not persistence in college required more than a simple adjustment to the educational setting on the part of the student (Tinto, 1997). Tinto found that much of the previous research failed to distinguish between involuntary departure as a result of academic dismissal and involuntary departure occurring from the inability to maintain the minimum academic standards over a defined period of time (1997). Voluntary dismissal included lack of financial ability to continue enrollment, lack of internal motivation to complete the course work, and/or increased family responsibilities interfering with the completion of the

course work. According to Tinto, persistence in college required more than an adjustment to the academic setting by the student. In order for a student to persist over time, the student needed to maintain the minimum standards of academic performance (1997).

Students entering college must deal with many factors that might impact success, most of which, community college faculty and staff are not able to control. These variables included educational plans, personal goals, high school GPA, college preparatory skills/high school curriculum, and parents' income, education, and support (Hossler & Bean, 1990). Hossler and Bean defined the planning process institutions should follow to manage enrollment. The key strategies included deciding an intervention plan as opposed to allowing things to happen naturally, forming a timeline for intervention, being rational about the planning process, devising a plan as a process for future action, and being open to alternative plans (Hossler & Bean, 1990).

By understanding the demographics of students more likely to drop out or stop-out, higher education institutions have been able to strategically plan within budgetary constraints while remaining true to the both external and internal stakeholders. The list developed by Hossler and Bean failed to include any data pertaining to the students' perception of academic success. To address this gap, the current study is needed to provide the missing data to help understand why African American male students fail to succeed academically and persist in the community college setting.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following functional definitions were used:

Academic Probation – A status obtained by a student after the student's cumulative grade point average (GPA) falls below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale (Lee Hill College Catalog, n.d.).

Academic Suspension – Status given to a student when a student is no longer able to enroll in classes because the student's cumulative GPA is lower than 1.5 percentage points on the 4.0-grade point scale (Lee Hill College Catalog, n.d.).

African American or Black - A person with origins from Africa or black racial group

Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) – The accumulated average of a student's grades for all courses taken during the period in which the student was enrolled in the institution

Degree Completion - Achievement of all requirements to receive a degree, diploma, or certificate

Enrollment – A student registered for a minimum of one college credit during an academic semester

Educational resiliency – The ability to succeed academically despite the risk factors and the life challenges student faces while enrolled in post-secondary education

Graduation Rate – The percentage of students completing a degree program at the community college

Persistence – Continuous enrollment throughout the duration of an academic program or degree program (NCES, 2015)

Post-Probationary Student – A student's status with the institution after the student has raised his/her GPA after been placed on academic probation

Student Engagement – The level of connectivity with the institution the student reports through direct communication with college faculty/staff, student activities, and student engagement activities

Subgroup – A specific group of students segregated by the commonalities of the groups' racial origin

White – A person of decent from the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East or North American (NCES, 2015)

Organization of the Study

The dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I introduced the significance of the study and the rationale for examining the perceptions of post-probationary African American males at a community college. Chapter II examines the existing literature on African American male perceptions of student success with a review of the literature on this student group. Chapter III details the research methods including the mixed-method research design, the data collection process, the data analysis, the various strategies utilized to validate the research. Chapter IV presents the findings of the qualitative methods study. The themes that emerged from the interviews were identified with thick description adding to the triangulation of the data points. In the final chapter, the results and the key findings of the study were presented. The responses of the participants are discussed, and the data checking results are revealed. The strengths and the weaknesses of the study were discussed along with the patterns in the responses of the participants. Chapter V concludes with implications for future research as well a concise summary of the findings including the conclusions and limitations of the overall findings.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the student subgroup, African American males. Section two of the chapter outlines the factors influencing the persistence of students in general followed by specific issues impacting African American male students' persistence. Section three, of chapter two, examines gender differences and the impact of gender on student academic success. Section four emphasizes the institutional characteristics which are promoting academic success while section five reviews the literature focused on community colleges and academic success with a detailed review of literature related to African American males.

Overview of the African American Male Student Population

The low rates of student success in this subgroup were evident in the community college system included in the study as well (NECS, 2014). The failure of a number of two-year college students to persist, obtain credentials, to progress towards transfer, has been an ongoing problem of importance in post-secondary education (Brooks, Jones, & Burt, 2012; Museus, Jayakumar, & Robinson, 2012).

Wood and Ireland (2014) obtained data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) which included responses from 11,384 Black males from 260 community colleges in the United States. Wood and Ireland noted that engagement was dependent on the faculty's willingness to participate in building a sense of community and the level of engagement

in the classroom impacted student success. Larger size courses have limited opportunities for

student engagement and often inhibit these collaborative relationships inside and outside of the

classroom setting. Wood and Ireland (2014) suggested the level of engagement is influenced by

precollege decisions the students have made prior to enrolling. When Black males have had a

negative experience in education before enrolling in college, the negative interaction shaped the

future interactions as well as persistence.

The number of African American male students enrolled in higher education has

increased significantly in recent decades; however, the number of African American male

students enrolled in higher education compared to White students remains significantly lower.

African American male students tend to graduate at significantly lower rates than White male

students, and they encounter more challenges such as facing higher dropout rates (2007).

Without the necessarily established support mechanisms required by many minority students, the

dropout rates will continue to rise. African American male students often lack focus and depth

as well as a sense of community to the colleges and universities (2007). When these students are

engaged with faculty mentors, high levels of satisfaction are reported. Additional evidence

demonstrated that approximately 70% of all African American students failed to complete a

college degree (2007).

As the demographics of the college campus have shifted, Reason (2009) analyzed how

the changing demographics of students will impact higher educational policies. The shift in

demographics has resulted in a realignment of current policies of student retention (Reason,

2009). By developing an understanding of the indicators and the reasons that result in students

leaving college, institutions have decided to refocus their retention efforts to promote the

academic success of all students focusing specifically on African American male students (Reason, 2009).

Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster (1999) found that African American students are more likely to withdraw from college than White students. A surprising statistical analysis showed that if African American students are prepared for college, the African American students were more likely to complete college than their white counterparts. The model identified by Murtaugh et al. (1999) specifically referred to high achieving students enrolled in a four-year university. This model was not representative of the normal student body population of a community college. Research existed for the four-year institutions, but there was a gap in the literature with regard to community colleges.

Strayhorn (2007) analyzed the students' level of connectedness by reviewing the responses on the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ). Colleges and universities have instituted mentoring programs designed to support and encourage persistence in minority groups. Mentors had the capacity to positively socialize their mentees by providing real-world perspectives, by helping to identify the academic direction, and by helping students make informed decisions pertaining to the education process (Strayhorn, 2007). Satisfaction is a predictor of the intent to leave college which ultimately affects persistence and retention. The mentor relationship had a more positive effect on the student's level of satisfaction with college. Strayhorn (2007) provided insight concerning the need for a structured mentoring relationship to increase student satisfaction and retention for African American male students (Strayhorn, 2007).

According to Wood (2012), African American male students need to have a positive relationship with the faculty teaching the classes. Colleges need to provide an environment where the faculty is able to make as well as maintain contact with the students (Wood, 2012).

The colleges should facilitate a process to check on students and be available to listen to students' comments and concerns (Wood, 2012). The college needed to focus on "taking away the students' right to fail" by creating an attitude of completion and academic success (Wood, 2012). The attitude of completion and success on a college campus has driven programs as well as supported the mission of the college.

In 2013, Wood completed another study to examine the background characteristics among African American male students in public two-year and four-year institutions. Wood discovered significant differences that existed among this sub-group by institutional type. Previous research indicated there were significant commonalities among African American male students with respect to racial and gender affiliations (Wood, 2013). He noted previous research failed to demonstrate whether differences exist in the sub-group of African American male students. Data were derived from 533 Black male students participating in the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. The analysis was conducted using two stages of logistic analysis. In the first stage, individual logistic regressions were conducted with eighteen variables. In the second stage, significant variables from the first stage were analyzed using appropriate controls (Wood, 2013). Findings from this study suggested that African American male students at two-year colleges are markedly different from those attending four-year institutions. After examining previous research, Wood failed to discover a significant difference in age, income, high school grade point average (GPA), and scores from college entrance examinations (Wood, 2013).

The findings from previous research depicted the reasons that would increase the probability of African American male students remaining in college noting participation in study groups, discussion with faculty, the creation of academic plans, participating in clubs or sports,

and attending entertainment activities. While public two-year colleges enrolled a large number of students in this subgroup, the data strictly related to this group are minimal. Wood's findings from the study indicated African American male students at two-year colleges are less prepared and have taken lower level courses than their peers at four-year colleges. The study concluded with the assumption the black male students attending two-year and four-year institutions are markedly different. While these African American male students shared an ethnic heritage, they are notably different in their experiences.

Data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau indicated the gap in degree obtainment for African American males that currently exists. In 2010, African American male students received only 4.2% of all associates degrees earned in the country while African American females received 7.3% of all associates degrees. On the contrary, White male students earned 34.9% of all associates degree earned. Only 47% of African American students graduated on time from U.S. high schools compared to 78% of White male students. The six-year completion rate for African American male students attending public colleges and universities was 33.3% compared to 48.1% for students overall in 2012 (Harper, 2012). Table 1 below depicts the attainment gap in the number of associate's degrees earned by gender and ethnicity.

Table 1 Percentage Black Males to All Males and Black Female

	Associate Degrees	Percentage of Students
Black Males	838	4.20%
White Males	6899	34.90%
Black Females	1451	7.30%
All Students	19740	

Note. Adapted from 2010 US Census Bureau data report

According to Kim and Hargrove (2013), persistent trends of African American male underachievement were evident. Despite the desire to attend post-secondary education institutions, this group of students continued to fall well below other student groups in terms of retention, academic success, and graduation. While the factors accounting for the pattern of educational attainment were numerous, the focus on academic achievement was noticeably absent in the existing literature.

Parental Support

Harper (2012) recommended that parents have consistently high academic expectations. Harper (2012) also suggested that the families of black male students become as knowledgeable about the college process as possible to help their student remain as successful as possible during the time of matriculation (Harper, 2012). Harper (2012) stated that if parents rehearse academic expectations of college at an early age for young black males, they will grow into young black men who understand that college is the best option for success after high school. Harper (2012) further posited that it might be beneficial for the parents and families of black male students to understand the college process enough to ask questions when needed and to navigate through the processes of matriculation such as declaring a major or applying for financial aid. Expressing to black male students the importance of college attendance, coupled with the wherewithal to ask engaging and relevant questions about the process of applying and matriculating through college, has created an avenue for increased enrollments and successes of African American men in college (Harper, 2012).

Student Persistence in Higher Education

Tinto (2007) established that student engagement, especially in the first year of the college experience, was a forecaster of increased rates of retention. Booker (2007) addressed two key issues related to student success rates and persistence rates among African American students and whether or not the students perceived a sense of belongingness and interconnectedness to predominately white universities. In the environment of shrinking resources and increased expectation for student success, colleges and universities must remain cognizant of the need for continuous improvement of student learning outcomes, academic completion, and student preparedness.

Booker (2007) concluded the most prevalent indicator of student success was the effect of faculty instruction style on the perceptions of the classroom community. Students who indicated they were engaged in the classroom where active learning techniques were employed reported a stronger sense of belonging in the classroom. Relationships with faculty followed closely behind instructional style and a sense of community. Students indicated interpersonal relationships with professors as factors that encouraged a comfortable environment for students. Interaction created a strong classroom community (Booker, 2007; Harper, 2004). When colleges created a sense of community on the college campus, the environment of security enhanced retention and engagement.

Kuh (2008) found that bridging student engagement and persistence in student behaviors and perceptions consistently reinforces the link between student behavior and persistence to academic success. Hughes and Pace's (2003) report reaffirms less engaged students tend to leave college prematurely. The overall extent of the level of engagement required by the various ethnic groups has not been determined.

Kuh et al. (2008) examined student records from colleges and universities to determine the link between academic achievement and persistence. The records of the institutions revealed that other than grades, the factors related to persistence vary dramatically. The institutional analysis of the learning support on campus was able to predict if a student would drop out prior to dropping out. This analysis was one important factor that leads to increasing the overall rate of persistence (Kuh et al., 2008). The previous authors emphasized the need for a similar study to be conducted specifically at community colleges.

Harper, Harris, and Mmeje (2005) concluded that colleges and universities should take advantage of orientation programs to prepare students for the college experience and should consider "men" only sections of orientation. Student affairs officials needed to make every effort to showcase the achievements of individual students while exposing students to positive models of behavior. Higher education institutions needed to aspire to create environments of intellectual stimulation and psychosocial growth. In doing so, the institutions desired to reduce unwanted behaviors committed by male students and increase the rate of persistence and academic success.

Historical research related to college completion rates (Kuh et al., 2007; Tinto 1987, 1993) had demonstrated a longstanding interest in the rates of academic success in college. Even so, there was still need to assess and determine student persistence and academic success rates simply because the rates of completion and success had not increased significantly even when the enrollment rates have grown.

Marrs and Sigler (2012) reflected on the experiences of men at the college level to understand how gender differences impact motivation, time management, and engagement. The overall academic performance of colleges and universities had been under scrutiny and gaining

attention in the media. Most colleges reported that male students were less academically prepared than their female counterparts (Marrs & Sigler, 2012). Male students appeared less proficient in self-testing and the use of study guides even though the data demonstrated some female students struggle in this area. The personnel of the college needs to incorporate methods to address the possible gender differences as an interventional strategy (Marrs & Sigler, 2012).

Academic Success

Joi (2008) found that success was an evolving term for African American male students at a four-year university. The implications of evolving success presented a truer sense of success specifically for these students. The restrictions placed on the definition by an institution may limit the small measures students strive toward as the students persist toward completion of a course or toward a degree. Joi's findings expressed the notion that students often feel their accomplishments are overlooked or not acknowledged when success is defined on an institutional level (Joi, 2008).

The term academic achievement has been used interchangeably in the existing literature with academic success. Academic achievement, according to Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2012), is evidenced by grade point average and enrollment in non-developmental courses. While Hines and Holcomb-McCoy did not state how high the grade point average needed to be to signify achievement, a passing grade point average was implied.

At the community college in the commonwealth where the study was conducted, a student was placed on academic probation when the student's GPA fell below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. Defining when a student was not academically successful or placed on probation had been used in previous research (Kuh, 2007; McGrath & Burd, 2012; Vander, 2007). Implying the opposite

of academic success had been an alternative to defining the terminology. A student remained in good standing with the institutions if the student had a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher according to many college catalogs.

A review of existing literature was completed to define academic success at the institutional level. Wood (2014) defined academic success primarily in relationship to students' grade point averages (GPAs) or achievement. He secondarily added continuation towards the students' self-reported collegiate success as academic success. The definition presented by Wood aligned with existing definitions of academic success (Beckles, 2008; Perrakis, 2008). Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2010) described the role of the four-year, predominately Black institutions in preparing underprepared Black males for college, but failed to define academic success. According to Brooks, Jones, and Burt (2010), academic success was reached if a student has a minimal GPA of 2.75 on a 4.0 scale.

Museus, Jayakmar, and Robinson (2012) compared the differences in academic success rates by examining the racial differences in the students attending two-year institutions. Museus, Jayakmar, and Robinson (2012) desired to understand if a students' ethnicity impacted a student's academic success. The findings also suggested the extent to which community college students' involvement outside of the class including extra-curricular activities, involvement with faculty, and student organizations demonstrated a correlational relationship with student success both academic and social (2012).

Ewing-Cooper and Parker (2013) used the term academic achievement when referring to academic success. Santiago and Einarson (1998) coined the term academic confidence to refer to academic success. Santiago and Einarson found the students' perceptions of academic preparedness positively predicted a sense of belief that the student would be successful. While

both articles used terms correlated with academic achievement, neither article defined academic achievement or academic success.

According to Campbell and Mislevy (2013), "academic abilities" demonstrated a correlational relationship with student success and the students' ability to persist at an institution. Campbell and Mislevy failed to define academic abilities clearly but included GPA, the number of hours studied each week, and perceptions of faculty as indicators. Students were surveyed during the research, and they identified four items associated with academic ability: (1) earning the grades the students' desires; (2) maintaining a level of motivation; (3) developing students' feeling of being adequately prepared for the academic demands; and (4) adjusting to academic work at the college.

Gender Differences and Academic Success

Conger and Long (2010) examined the gender gap in post-secondary education by reviewing the grade point average, the number of credits earned by each student, and the overall rate of persistence after collecting data from students enrolled in four-year colleges in Florida and Texas. The students' difference in the factors was separated by gender. The findings indicated that males fall behind their female counterparts after the first semester in college in the range of grades as well as the number of credits earned. The review of the literature has not kept the pace with the disparity in gender differences at the higher education level. Conger and Long (2010) analyzed the gender differences across eight higher education facilities to determine the gender and personality characteristics. The data were collected from the eight participating institutions.

Both Conlin and Ewert found there is a difference in the student success rates when gender is the independent variable. There is a noticeable increasing difference between males

and females and the differences significantly increase when societal upheavals, financial difficulties, and relationship concerns are added to the equation (Conlin, 2005; Ewert, 2012). The gap between female and male students continued to enlarge. Ewert (2012) found that women are more likely than men to earn a bachelor's degree noting the differences crossed most racial and ethnic groups and all socioeconomic levels. As early as kindergarten age, the differences were apparent (Conlin, 2005; Sax, 2008). Conlin and Sax both found male students were being turned off from school and schools needed to support the male students to a greater extent by focusing on techniques to increase the level of engagement. In the United States, women were quickly closing the gap between females and males by earning an increasing number of medical degrees as well as doctoral degrees. Women also constituted the largest student group entering law school. The patterns of disengagement levels for male students are explored to provide key indicators of the growing gap between male and female students. The gender disparity had been reported as a concern and researchers are attempting to discover if this problem could be solved (Conlin, 2005).

Noel-Levitz (2007) noted that male students tend to have poorer study habits than female students. Noel-Levitz examined incoming freshmen students attending both two-year and four-year institutions. The study also documented that college males study less than college females. The study failed to indicate which study habits were analyzed in the course of the research design (2007). Less time spent studying had a relationship with lower grades and lower success rates.

African American students in higher education had received considerable attention chronicling their experiences over the last two decades. A variety of researchers has compared the experiences and perceptions of this student group dividing the students by the type of

institution the students attended. Harper et al. (2004) examined students attending both

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as well as students attending

predominately white institutions (PWIs) (Harper, 2004).

Harper, Carini, Bridges and Hayek (2004) identified that students who are actively

engaged inside as well as outside the classroom gain more from the college experience than the

students who are not involved in the campus community. The researchers collected data

obtained from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The responses from 1,167

African American undergraduate students from twelve HBCU's were obtained. The students

attended both public and private HBCU's. The sample was subdivided into 919 women and 248

men. The study revealed that African American men devoted insufficient time and effort to

studying, completing assignments including papers, and engaging in critical thinking activities.

The faculty at the HBCU's could spend additional time encouraging the students in meaningful

academic preparations (Harper et al., 2004). The faculty additionally held the students

accountable for assignments completed outside of the classroom. The study vividly described

the level of engagement with personal interest. While male students tended to interact more

frequently with the faculty than the female students, the male dominated classroom has

diminished (Harper et al., 2004).

According to Ewert (2012), social integration, attendance patterns, and academic

performance affected the gender gap. The study drew on the theories of Tinto and Bean

examining persistence and the factors influencing the rate of persistence including social

involvement. Ewert found that the enrollment of women tended to be more continuous resulting

in more women with an advanced level of academic performance. According to Ewert's study,

men were much less likely to attend college than women. Ultimately, Ewert predicted the

engagement trends existed between the male and female students in this ethnic group of African Americans.

Zafar (2013) conducted a study centered on the selection of college majors. The data set included sophomore level students from a university in the Northwestern U.S. The participants were both male and female students. The author noted a significant difference in the educational attainment of the participants based solely on the gender. The participants noted that enjoying coursework, and gaining parents' approval are the most important determinants in the choice for both genders. The participants were given a set of questions to determine the types of employment potential they were most interested in. The author developed a questionnaire to obtain the data (2013). The study revealed males and females differ in their preferences in the workplace, with males caring about the pecuniary outcomes in the workplace much more than females. The gender gap is mainly due to gender differences in preferences and tastes, and not because females are under-confident about their academic ability or fear monetary discrimination as the students enter the workforce (2013). The gender differences that existed between the male and female students are complex. Zafar did not identify one single cause behind the reasoning but multiple reasons. The findings of the study indicated a need for changes policies that change attitudes toward gender roles. The study failed to include whether or not racial differences impacted the gender differences in academic success and educational obtainment (2013).

Davis (2002) conducted a study to examine the effect of gender roles for male students in college. Ten traditional-age White college males were interviewed. The participants were traditional aged collegians. The interviews were analyzed using a phenomenological method. The findings of the study demonstrate the importance of student affairs staff becoming more cognizant of gender differences between male and female students. Davis indicates that there is a

need to understand the diversity of male students. The focus of the Davis study was men from the ethnic majority (2002). Davis strongly felt future studies should include gay men, men with disabilities, and men from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The Davis study clearly pinpointed the lack of research specifically focused on African American male students and their academic success (2002).

<div align="center">**Institutional Characteristics**</div>

Yancy, Sutton-Haywood, Hermitte, Dawkins, Rainey and Parker (2008) assessed and analyzed a Freshman Academy (FALC) for all incoming students at Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) a historically black university (HBCU) in North Carolina. The level of student satisfaction was closely correlated with the students' self-perception of the gains in college (Yancy, et al., 2007). The higher level of satisfaction the students reported the better the students' chance of succeeding academically.

Scholars have attempted to determine the factors contributing to student success and retention for many years. Identified predictors of student success vary greatly between the types of institutions and the diverse student bodies attending the various colleges and universities (Hu et al.; 2007; Tinto 1975; Yancy et al., 2007). Settle (2007) recommended that community colleges needed to match the social environment of four-year colleges to increase the rate of student persistence and retention.

Duggan and Williams (2011) reported that students completing a freshmen orientation course are more likely to persist in community college. The college orientation courses were one institutional practice that may contribute to higher persistence rates. Colleges needed to analyze the current orientation course or orientation structure to ensure the best aspects of the course are employed to raise the rates of student persistence. The findings of Duggan and Williams

identified higher persistence rates with students completing orientation courses (Duggan & Williams, 2011).

According to Harper and Wolley (2002), African American males failed to discover the sense of community associated with high levels of student engagement and academic success. This student subgroup was not very active in campus activities outside of the classroom at both historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) and PWI institutions (Cuyjet, 2006). The lack of strategic institutional efforts to promote inactivity of the college campus experience for African American males has contributed to decreased levels of persistence, matriculation, graduation, and post-graduation success (Cuyjet, 2006).

Harper (2012) proposed colleges and universities attempt to remove financial barriers which may prohibit academic success by creating summer bridge programs for African American males. The summer bridge programs led to college academic success (Harper, 2012). Harper (2012) suggested that for financial aid counselors might assist students in finding alternatives to loans and secure, healthy financial aid packages so that students did not worry about how they would pay for college (Harper, 2012). Some previous research indicated that African American male students were not successful in college simply because African American males were not able to afford college, and did not understand the financial obligation that comes with pursuing higher education (Cass, 2012).

Grade Point Averages

Tinto (1987) confirmed the relationship between low-grade point average (GPA) and students deciding to drop out or stop out of college. When students are faced with academic probation then ultimately dismissal from the college, the institution had a significant role in providing effective interventions and alternatives to students leaving college. Hu and St. John

(2001) emphasized the importance of race when predicting long-term persistence of students in college in relationship to GPA. Reason (2003) indicated that not only does race prove to be a quality indicator of persistence but the gender of the student was equally important when attempting to predict student persistence.

Kuh et al. (2008) examined whether student engagement contributed to the level of academic performance demonstrated by the student and whether or not the student persisted by analyzing the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data and other institutional records. The researchers found a slight relationship existed between the first year's GPA and persistence beyond the first year of academic learning. When students had higher grade point averages, the students were more likely to persist and demonstrate higher rates of retention.

Nakajima, Dembo, and Mossler (2012) noted cumulative college GPA was one of the strongest predicting variables for determining student persistence. While GPA was not the only factor correlated with persistence, GPA was an important measure when determining if a student would complete the student educational plans. Students with higher cumulative GPAs were more likely to remain in college than their peers with lower GPAs.

Settle (2011) discovered similar results by analyzing variables associated with student persistence of both first-generation and continuing-generational students at a two-year university. Settle's research identified the types of students more likely to persist as a male continuing-generational student from a rural area. The common factor for all students in the model was some type of social interaction with a faculty member. Settle's research verified that grades are important to both students and the institution but grades also served as factors of discouragement for students especially when the grades had low.

Hu (2010) found a small relationship between the first-year GPA and persistence beyond the first year in college. The findings indicated there is a slight relationship between the student's first years at the college that contributed to the students' level of academic success. Students with higher GPA's seemed more likely to persist beyond the first year of college enrollment. The study considered specific demographic information as an important variable that contributed to high levels of persistence. The lack of demographic information studied in relationship to GPA and persistence at community college verified the need to expand the knowledge of specific demographic groups at community colleges in comparison with the persistence rates and overall GPA. The lack of demographic description within this study delineated a need to examine African American male students in efforts to support academic success. GPAs represented a readily available unobtrusive measure of college achievement for many students. An increase in GPA was associated with the odds of persisting (Hu, McCormick, & Gonyea, 2012).

Whittington (2014) noted a student's level of motivation to persist in the higher education was linked to the student's level of success. Whittington's study used Vroom's Theory of Motivation as the theoretical framework. Northouse (2016) described Vroom's Theory in relationship to the motivation of individuals which may be applied to students as well:

…will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing their work if they believe their efforts will result in a certain outcome and if they believe that the payoff for doing their work are worthwhile.

Community Colleges

Previous research studies failed to address African American male students specifically, and males, in particular, enrolled in non-developmental courses at community colleges: the need for a comprehensive research study at a community college was evident. Strayhorn (2007) focused on a historically black university but did not include community colleges. The Strayhorn study explored the differences in African American students satisfaction with the college based on the students' relationship with the college faculty. The mission of access created a student body population unlike the universities of many of the previous research studies. National statistics indicated that of all beginning two-year college students seeking to earn a credential whether the credential was a certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree—less than 40% earned that credential within six years including all ethnicities (Hoachlander, Sikora, Horn, & Carroll, 2003).

Chang (2005) demonstrated that faculty-staff interaction was vital to college student development and achievement. The study analyzed the relationship between students and faculty on two-year college campuses. The racial groups of the students were assessed to describe if any interaction between race and faculty contact was apparent after reviewing the data obtained from the study (Chang, 2005). Chang utilized data obtained from the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students (TRUCCS) survey. The sample population consisted of 2,500 individuals. The study identified a need to develop an understanding of the racial subgroups and the need to increase faculty-student interaction; this study revealed that community colleges are able to positively influence the students of color to persist and transfer (Chang, 2005). The positive relationship contributed to increased retention models and better-prepared students to

transfer to four-year universities. Chang's study proposed the most extensive treatment on the topic of faculty and student interaction with the community college system (Chang, 2005).

A few community colleges have undertaken initiatives to increase academic success rates for African American male students. For example, the St. Louis Community College-African-American Male Initiative has been successful in improving the grade point averages for the African American male students (AACC, 2010). In the fall of 2009, the average grade point average for participants in the program was 2.47 on a 4.0 scale (AACC, 2010). At the beginning of the study, the semester's grade point average for African-American male students on the Florissant Valley and Forest Park campuses was 1.7 on a 4.0 scale. After being engaged in the program, however, the sixty-seven participants reported cumulative GPA's averaging 2.8 or better (AACC, 2010). Museus, Jayakmar and Robinson (2012) findings confirm the importance of extracurricular involvement at community colleges and suggest that students attending two-year institutions students who were able to participate in extracurricular activities reap the same benefits as those students attending a four-year institutions by creating a sense of community with the institution, students, faculty, and staff (Museus, Jayakmar, & Robinson, 2012).

Summary of Literature Review

A review of the existing literature confirmed a need for this study. Of the 15 million undergraduates enrolled in post-secondary education across the country, less than 5% of the students are African American male students according to Strayhorn (2008). Approximately 67.6% of the African American male students who enrolled in college failed to persist to graduation within a period of six years (Harper, 2006). The rate of academic success of African American males in higher education was low (Harper, 2007; Strayhorn, 2007; Wood & Ireland, 2014). Weaver-Hightower (2010) noted the gap between African American males and Asian

American males in postsecondary degree attainment of any kind is 44% after reviewing data from the 2008 census. African American males were and are earning far fewer degrees than other ethnic groups of male students in post-secondary education nationwide (Alexander, 2004; Bailey, 2003). While the existing literature primarily focused solely on the reasons African American male students' failure to matriculate, the literature on the academic success of this student group was limited. The literature related to the academic success of African American male students at community colleges was even more limited. This review of the literature delivered a theoretical and practical framework to support the research study.

Existing literature related to African American males and academic success tends to focus heavily on the family support, self-esteem, academic efficacy, external relationships, and outreach initiatives instituted by the colleges. The results of this literature review failed to identify any research related to the institutional definition of academic success and African American male students' definition of success to identify measures to help African American male students align their definition of success with that of the institution. While previous researchers have attempted to identify why African American males have not had the comparative rate of success as other student groups, a review of the existing literature failed to discover the point at which student's report of a lack of connection with the community college. The previous literature also failed to identify whether the expectations of higher education aligned with those experiences of the African American male students attending community colleges. I additionally aimed to identify which factors may contribute to the expectations and experiences of the African American male students while defining academic success at the institutional level and comparing the institutional definition with the students' perception of academic success.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three outlines the methodology I followed to complete the preliminary research study. The methodology for this qualitative study incorporated both one-on-one interviews of community college administrators and the use of focus groups to capture the perceptions of the academic success of African American male students. The use of interviews and focus groups provided data I utilized to analyze inconsistency if any between African American males students' meaning of "academic success" and the institutional understanding of that term.

Tschechtelin (2011) identified three trends or challenges community colleges have faced: enrollment surges, pressure to improve student success, and declining government support. Since the creation of community colleges, these institutions have provided open access to students. The value of a community college education has continued to be more evident with an enrollment progression of 15% between the years 2008 and 2010 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011a). However, only 45% of the entering community college students earned a degree or transfer to a four-year college within six years (Tschechtelin, 2011). An increased emphasis has been placed on improving academic success rates and providing students with the support mechanisms needed to be successful. After an examination of the students by gender and by ethnicity, community colleges were able to take steps towards improving the academic success of all students but African American male students in particular.

Qualitative research, according to Merriam (2009), searched for indicators of success or quality improvement based on the stories and perceptions of the sample population. Using the natural setting of the participants, I became a tool for discovering the new knowledge created by

the revealing the perceptions of the participants (Merriam, 2009). This phenomenological study was focused on examining the differences between the institutional definition of academic success and African American male students' perception of success at a community college, by capturing perceptions of the meaning of the term from both constituencies. The interview process and the focus group meetings continued until saturation was reached. I conducted multiple focus groups and one-on-one interviews during the data collection process. The phenomenological approach was an effective method of research, which brought in the experiences and the perceptions of the participants to light. The participants' viewpoint added a layer of dimension to the study that would otherwise be unavailable to me. Phenomenology did not begin with a hypothesis but rather created new knowledge of the experiences of the participants without bias and judgment of the researcher (Merriam, 2009).

The discussions captured from the focus group sessions served as the preliminary source of data. The focus groups served not only as a first-hand source of data; then in some instances, I followed up focus group findings with one-on-one semi-structured interviews to develop the themes of the research study (Morgan, 1997) and I also provided an additional layer of trustworthiness to the study. I used the inclusive approach with the focus group in this study. The inclusive approach was a method that collects data from the participants through the interaction of the group on a topic described by the researcher (Morgan, 1997).

Rationale and Significance

The perception of academic success for student groups in which the academic success rates were significantly lower than other groups is extremely important to retention and enrollment trends. Defining the differences in expectations between the institutions' and African American male students' perception of success delivered a baseline from which to begin

providing support mechanisms for this student group and thereby increasing the rates of academic success for this group of typically underperforming students attending community colleges.

While there are multiple studies focused strictly on the low rates of success for African American males, to my knowledge, there have been very few empirical studies focused on the students' perception of academic success defined by the students and compared to the institutional definitions of academic success. Nor has this researcher identified literature identifying evidence comparing the African American male student's expectations of the higher education experiences and the actual experiences of the students at community colleges.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to attempt to comprehend the perceptions of success held by African American male students who are enrolled at a public community college located in the Southeastern United States. The study compared the students' expectations of success with the colleges' expectations of academic success.

This preliminary study occurred at a medium size community college in the Southeastern United States. The descriptive responses of the two separate independent focus groups composed of five members for each session were collected and recorded. The focus group sessions captured the perceptions of the student participants relevant to academic success at the community college. I conducted follow-up interviews with the student participants as needed. I additionally interviewed a purposive sample of community college administrators in a semi-structured interview format.

Research Questions

The proposed study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of African American male community college students as to what constitutes academic success prior to enrollment in the community college?

2. Are there any differences between African American male student's perceptions of what constitutes academic success after a student has been placed on academic probation at a community college?

3. Are there differences between African American male students' perceptions of academic success and academic success as defined by the community college where participants are enrolled?

These questions were designed to delimit the study while allowing the examination of

actual experiences of the African American male students.

Procedure of Data collection from Students

I used open-ended questions for the two distinctive focus groups. One of the focus group types consisted of beginning African American male students who have not taken a college level course. The first group of African American male students was selected from students completing the college's mandatory orientation program, and the students indicated they were enrolling in credit courses in the college's transfer program. The second group consisted of a sample of African American male students who enrolled in credit courses in the transfer program and ended their first year of college on academic probation. A data-checking meeting or follow-

up occurred virtually or by phone. The rates of success and the perceptions of the students were captured during the focus group and the follow-up procedures.

Procedure for Institutional Data Collection

Based on document reviews and interviews with institutional leaders, I compiled an aggregate definition of academic success from the institutional perspective and then compare the institutional definition of academic success with the African American male students' perception of academic success and discovered there is a disconnection between the institutional definition and the students' perception of academic success. After uncovering the points of disconnection, I identified several plausible intervention strategies that community colleges leaders may implement to improve academic success in this population of students. The study examined the results of the responses of the African American male students obtained from focus group sessions conducted with a convenience sample of students at the participating institution. The study also obtained institutional definitions of academic success from administrators at the participating institution to attempt to discover a benchmark for academic success. The interviews with the institutional administrators were conducted in a semi-structured manner. I used a purposive sample of community college administrators.

Method

I used a three steps procedure to establish the institutional definition of academic success. First, I reviewed the existing literature to obtain the definition of academic success from previous studies. After failing to establish a definition, I synthesized or produced a definition from the review of the literature, then corroborated the definition and any differences by reviewing the college catalogs of the participating institution. I took an additional step in an effort to triangulate the definition of academic success by interviewing four community college administrators to

obtain the institutional definition of academic success. I used a purposive sample of

administrators from the community college including deans, and directors. The interviews

occurred in a private conference room in person on the college campus. I obtained verbal and

written consent from each participating administrator. Defining academic success from the

literature, college catalogs, and by conducting interviews will allow the researcher to observe the

multitude of definitions outlining academic success across institutions and student subgroups

within African American male students and administrators. All data collected during the study

was measured against the baseline definition of academic success.

After establishing a consensus definition of academic success from the literature and

from the participating institution, I conducted focus groups at the institution with students until

data saturation was reached. The focus group meetings occurred in a private conference room on

the college campus in person. I conducted as many focus group sessions as needed to reach

saturation of the perception among the student participants. I conducted focus groups consisting

of 5 members on the chance that multiple definitions may develop. The focus groups were

comprised of two types of African American male students. The first focus group contained

students who have not completed a college-level class. I gained access to these students through

the colleges' mandatory orientation sessions. The second focus group consisted of students who

ended their first year of enrollment on academic probation. The two contrasting groups of

students provided a wide range of students' perceptions of success. I obtained permission from

each of the focus group participants prior to digitally recording the interview sessions. The focus

groups included semi-structured interview questions. I prepared questions in advance, and the

questions were open-ended questions to elicit more than a simple yes or no response. I drew out

responses from the subjects with well-developed questions. Data were generated from memoing

during the transcription of the interviews, the observation, and the interview itself. Memoing

during the interview process allowed the researcher to include her perceptions of the subject, the

body language, and the eye contact made during the observations and the interview process

(Hays & Singh, 2012).

Recording the data obtained via the field notes, interviews, and observation transcription

occurred as soon as possible after the initial meeting with each participant. Coding the data

generates themes. Coding was the process of categorizing keywords or themes as well as

making connections between the key words and/or themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). The process

of coding introduced data points a researcher might uncover during a research study. Coding the

data was a complex process. I allowed time during the coding process to further assess the data

and reveal the voices of the research participants. According to Maxwell and Miller (2008), the

connections discovered through the coding process reveal a narrative of the participants' voices.

I used the data generated in the process to capture the essence of the voices of the participants in

the research study (Maxwell & Miller, 2008).

Coding

After the coding of data, I created notecards for sorting of the data by themes. The mail

merge process was utilized to create the notecards. The number of cards increased significantly

as the number of themes and participants increases. I created approximately 400 cards during the

coding process (Hays & Singh, 2012). The themes allowed me to categorize the data. The

themes I unveiled from the process allowed me to capture the perceptions of the participants and

align the perceptions with institutions' perceptions or determine where the lack of connection

between academic successes from the institutional definition varies from the students' definition,

and where the connection went askew.

Credibility

The research study attempted to establish a high level of credibility. I spent time chatting with the participants to establish rapport prior to the focus group meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting, I had a brief conversation with the subjects to encourage the participants to attend the focus group sessions. I engaged the participants in the general conversation to ensure the participants were comfortable with the researcher and the study. I contacted the participants by phone or email for any follow-up questions that may have arisen during the review of the data.

I completed an extensive review of the interview transcript questions to obtain a holistic overview of the data obtained during the in the interview. The data obtained in the interview provided vital insight of the perceptions of the students' views about academic achievement, and student success. By utilizing the recorded notes from the focus group meeting, I produced a transcript of the session. After the transcription data, I coded the data on the transcript in different colors each time I read through the documents. A legend was created by using color-coding, so I was able to track and color code the themes as the themes emerge. I was also able to document how long after the interview the themes emerged based on this initial coding process. It was my desire is to reduce any potential self-bias regarding the students' responses.

Setting

The study was conducted at one community college in the Southeastern region of the United States. The college represented typical medium size community colleges in the state. The college was a multi-site institution serving a region equivalent of the size of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. The college community consisted of multiple full-service campus locations. The campuses provided advising, academic tutoring, counseling, and computer

laboratories. The Counseling Center normally advised, counseled, and provided career and transfer information to students at the college and to former students of the college.

The institution was located between the state capital and a large region of the state characterized by a high socioeconomic status. The community college had a service region consisting of seven counties and one city. The college was established in 1970. The college had two full-service campuses and two educational centers offering courses and limited student services. The medium size institution was listed with a Carnegie classification listing of rural and on the fringe of an urban area. The college is a two-year public institution. The college offered seven Associate of arts and science degrees, two Associate of science degrees and nine Associate of applied science degrees. The college offered a number of certificates with a student body population of 7,520 students. The student to faculty ratio is 24:1.

Sample and Setting

Table 2 summarizes the undergraduate enrollment at the community college by the gender and also by ethnicity.   For the purpose of this study, the sample consisted of African American male community college students.   The participants of the study included full-time degree/certificate-seeking African American male enrolled at the community college participating in the study. While in qualitative research using a random sample of students was not generalizable or necessary, I endeavored to include participants in this study who are representative of the diversity of male, African American students who attended the participating institution so I would be able to draw valid inferences from the data. The participating students provided the researcher with an overview of the perceptions of the student body population involved in the study.

Table 2 Student Characteristics Fall 2012 for the Participating College

Percentage of Undergraduates who are Female	62%
Percentage of Undergraduates who are Male	38%
Percentage of Undergraduates who are full-time	32%
Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%
Asian	2%
Black or African American	16%
Hispanic or Latino	8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0%
White	68%
Two or More Races	4%
Race and Ethnicity Unknown	2%
Nonresident Alien	0%

(Source: IPEDS College data 2013-2014)

Table 2 displays the profile percentage of male students from which the samples were drawn. The table additionally depicts the percentage of students categorized by ethnicity at the participating institution.

Participants were solicited through the counseling center and through the orientation coordinator at the participating community college. I contacted the director of counseling and requested the directors identify any students meeting the broadest demographic of ethnicity. I also solicited approval from the college to post recruitment signs on the participating campus. I

began to search for participants immediately after receiving approval from the IRB, and the college president through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

Interviews and Focus Groups

I disseminated a short demographic paper survey to the members of the focus groups prior to questioning the participants. The demographic survey was used to capture pertinent information for coding later during the research study. The demographic information I collected was related to the age of the participants, the county in which the participants reside, grade point average (if any), and length of time predicted to complete the degree at the community college.

Selected participants received a letter of introduction, and the participants were invited to participate in a one-hour interview session conducted through a focus group with me. Interviews were useful and effective methods to obtain the data from the sample population according to Yin (2014). Interviews deliver targeted data by providing focused insight based on the personal views, attitudes, and experiences of the participants. Using the interview process through focus groups to obtain information from the participants was accomplished by asking the interview questions after creating a positive relationship with the participants. Focus groups allowed for the collection of data on a large scale since the behaviors of the participants can also be captured. Focus groups increased the interactions with the study participants and facilitated more open discussion. I attempted to eliminate any bias. Once I established a positive rapport with the participants, the participants were more likely to provide open and honest feedback during the focus group meetings and the fact-checking meetings.

The focus groups were conducted in a private location on each community college campus. I used a list of questions with each focus group and asked follow-up questions as appropriate. The participant's demographic information was obtained prior to the beginning of

the interview. Every attempt was made to provide the participants with a non-judgmental atmosphere conducive to open and honest responses. I avoided making facial expressions that may have been perceived as judgmental. The interview protocol located in Appendix B served as a guide for the interview. I asked additional probing questions based on the responses of the participants to completely understand the perceptions of the participants in the study (Appendix B).

Each question in the interview protocol correlated to one of the original research questions defining the study. The research questions were used as a template for the interview process.

Ethical Considerations

Every attempt was made to ensure confidentiality of the participant information and data, so the students will be assigned a pseudonym on all documents. Consent forms were destroyed immediately after the research data were transcribed. The names of the students were removed from the transcript and the recordings during the transcription process. Within the dissertation, if a student is referenced, the student is referenced only by a number assigned by the researcher during the transcription process. I will completely destroy the participant data sheets, notes, color-coded themes, and transcription seven years after the research study is completed and receives the approval of the dissertation committee. Until the seven-year time period is reached, I will keep all related documents in a locked file cabinet in my home.

Strategies for Trustworthiness

The research study attempted to establish a high level of credibility. I meet with the participants prior to the focus group meeting to establish rapport in the interview. During the interview, I engaged the participants in the general conversation to ensure the participants were comfortable with the research study. I built rapport with each participant. I contacted the participants by phone or email for any follow-up questions that arose during the review of the data.

I recorded field notes during the interview and recorded each interview. I completed a reflective journal making journal entries within forty-eight hours of each interview. Using the journaling process during the research study provided additional data I may not have captured during the initial interview and reflective memoing process.

I additionally used member checking to verify the data I collected originally during the interview. I provided a copy of the transcript by email to each participant to allow the participant the opportunity to review and approve the data from the interview. The copy of the transcript, once approved by the participant, had the names removed and the participant number added to protect the identity of the participants in the study. The recorded field notes were be reviewed, and the participants were asked for clarification if any area remains questionable during the reflective memoing process.

Limitations of the Study

The research study was designed to examine African American male students' definition of success at the community colleges. The study compared the students' expectations of success with the colleges' expectations of success, as perceived by the students' self-reported (1) grade

point average (GPA), (2) persistence, and (3) advancement toward degree completion.
Limitations exist within the study were listed below:

1. The research study was not necessarily generalizable to all African American Male
    students attending one community colleges.

2. The study was not necessarily inclusive of all institutional factors contributing to
    student academic success for the student subgroup of African American male
    students.

3. The study did not completely identify the reasons African American male students
    continue to lag behind other student subgroups in obtaining academic success.

4. The study was not necessarily generalizable to all post-secondary institutions.

Regardless of the existing limitations, the researcher believed this foundation study assisted
community colleges in the long term efforts to improve academic success for all students but
African American male students in particular.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were applicable to this study:

1. The study included only African American male students at the participating institution.

2. The study did not attempt to compare or explain persistence as this is not the focus of the
    study.

3. The findings are not generalizable to other community colleges or African American
    male students.

Assumptions

The following research assumptions were made:

1. The responses obtained from the participants were made freely, honestly and openly during the research process and fact checking.

2. The students in Focus Group B will all have completed one year of college at the time when the interviews occur.

Researcher Bias

I am fully aware all individuals possess some type of bias. I acknowledged my personal bias and will deal with the imperfections of the research design to the best of my ability. I have been employed by the participating college for ten years. I used the journaling process to record my perceptions and feelings during the length of the study. Being aware of my personal bias worked to help to reduce the incorporation of my bias into the study. According to Patton (2002), the absolute objectivity of the purest form did not exist. I attempted to control my bias by maintaining a journal throughout the study. I recorded weekly self-reflections of my personal feelings of the process throughout the length of the study. The reflexive process of journaling was used to reduce my personal bias associated with the study and the participants.

Summary

Chapter 3 summarizes the research design of the qualitative research study. I utilized the prescribed methodology to create new knowledge pertaining to the student subgroup and defined the institutional practices that influence the students' ability to remain or complete college. In order to increase the response rates on the administrators' survey, I used a pre-survey letter in the form of an email. I scheduled an in-person interview with each administrator. I used a

purposive sample of administrators for the study (Appendix D). Chapter 4 included the findings

of the research design.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS

The purpose of this preliminary study was to examine the perceptions of academic success held by African American male community college students. The study sought to explore if student perceptions of academic success were mediated by student enrollment status. The research was conducted at a mid-sized community college in the Southeastern United States. The scholarship explored the perceptions of academic success held by African American male students entering the community college as well as African American male students who ended the first year of their community college experience on academic probation. The study also derived an institutional definition of success formed by an extensive review of the college catalog, existing literature, and by interviewing a purposive sample of administrators on the college campus.

Responses of the African American male students were obtained from focus group meetings conducted with a random sample of students. Two different groups of African American male students were interviewed during focus groups sessions. The first focus group consisted of African American male students who had not yet enrolled in the community college. The second focus group participants were African American male students who had ended their first year of enrollment on academic probation. Three focus groups of each type of student group were conducted. Results of the research study are presented in this chapter. This work also determined the students' perception of academic success defined by the student participants. The research study identified a gap between the institutional definition of academic success and perceptions of African American male student participants. The interpretation of academic success was dependent on the enrollment status student participants.

The semi-structured questionnaire used in focus group sessions was designed and guided by the following research questions:

1.   What are the perceptions of African American male community college students as to what constitutes academic success prior to and after enrollment at a community college?

2.   What are the perceptions of African American male student's perceptions as to what constitutes academic success after a student has been placed on academic probation at a community college?

3.   Are there differences between African American male students' perceptions of academic success and academic success as defined by the community college where participants are enrolled?

Participants

A total of thirty students participated focus group interviews. A demographic summary is found in Table 4. The participants in my study have common qualities important to my research, yet the students were diverse enough to provide various perceptions about academic success at the community college. All participants gave responses that helped answer the three research questions depending on which focus group the African American male students participated in during the study.

The students participating in the study were African American male students, and the student's ages ranged from 17-26 years of age. Fifteen students participated in each type of focus group. The mean age of the student participants is listed in table 3. The students self-identified as African American male students. The students were first-time degree-seeking African American male students who either planned to enroll for the fall semester or had completed their

first year of college and ended the year on academic probation. The participants' responses were

aggregated by the focus group type in which the student participated. The students were placed

in one of two group designations. The students who participated in the new student enrollment

group were assigned the group designation A. The students who participated in the focus group

sessions after ending their first year on academic probation were assigned the group designation

B.

Table 3

Demographic Information for Focus Group Participants Displayed by Mean Age

Group	Mean Age
A	17.8
B	21.5

In the summer and the fall of 2015, I conducted six separate focus group sessions using a

recording device and note-taking to record the responses of the student participants. From the

onset, I desired to conduct focus groups until information saturation occurred. The transcriptions

were accomplished for each of focus group recordings within 72 hours of the focus group

session. I also maintained a reflective journal to reduce research bias during the data collection

phase of the research study. After three focus groups had been held for each designated student

group, I concluded that data saturation had occurred.

Defining Academic Success

During the same period, I also conducted four one-on-one semi-structured interviews

with community college administrators. The administrator interviews were held in a neutral area

in a private conference room near the library at the college. The administrator interviews were

recorded using a recording device and note-taking. The administrator interviews were

transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. The administrator interviews, college catalog

review, and the review of existing literature were all used to derive an institutional definition of

academic success for the community college participating in the research study. The entire

interview process including the actual interview, memoing, transcribing, and data analysis lasted

approximately five hours for each participating administrator. I conducted two mock interviews

with administrators and determined I did not need to revise the interview questions. The

community college was assigned the name Lee Hill community College for reporting purposes in

this study.

The Lee Hill Community College did not include a definition of the term "academic

success" in the college catalog nor on the college's website. After a thorough review of the

college catalog, I was able to define two related terms: satisfactory academic progress and good

academic standing. The term satisfactory academic progress relates to the number of credits

student earns and the specific grades that student earns in attempted courses. A student must not

exceed earning total credits greater than 150% of the program length, and the student must earn a

grade of A, B, C, D, or S in at least 67% of the credits attempted on a cumulative basis (Lee Hill

Community College, 2015, p. 39) . The grades of F, I, U, R, and W are not considered

satisfactory grades. If a student has earned less than 15 credits, the student must maintain a

cumulative GPA of 1.75 in order to maintain good academic standing (Lee Hill Community

College, 2015, p. 39).

At Lee Hill Community College, a student who has completed at least 12 credit hours and

has failed to maintain a cumulative GPA of 1.5 is placed on "academic probation," and the

statement "Academic Probation" is added to the student's official transcript. Students placed on

academic probation are not permitted to take online classes or hold office in any student

organization.

Administrator Interview Findings

Four administrators participated in the study. Only gender, ethnicity and length of

service demographic information was collected from the administrators as seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Demographic Information for Faculty Administrator Participants

	Gender	Length of Service	Ethnicity
#A	Male	4	African American
#B	Female	10	Caucasian
#C	Male	10	African American
#D	Female	30	Caucasian

The administrators' collectively concurred that the college values student retention and

graduation. Two administrators collectively believed the measure of success should be

determined by the student.   Administrator B stated,

> Not all student who decides upon a community college achieves graduation. If a student
>
> attends the college to take one course and the student gains the knowledge the student
>
> was previously lacking, then that student is successful, academically. The student
>
> achieved the student's goals regardless if the student earned a cumulative GPA to

maintain financial aid regulations or whether or not the student earned an A, B, or C letter grade.

Administrator A is an African American male administrator and who previously worked at a four-year institution in a different region of the state. He did not believe the institutional definition of academic success should encompass all groups of students because he notes that different populations of students have different needs. Administrator A stated:

I don't think (different populations of students have different definitions of academic success) because different groups and different populations of students have different needs. I understand being an academic institution there has to be one goal and one model to follow, one definition of success, however, you can't just have one if you understand there are different needs for different groups. There are different departments to handle the specialty groups; there are different definitions as well. I believe there should be a multilayered definition of success; I understand why there is not, but if the institution is really interested in seeing all students being successful there has a to be multi-layered definition.

Administrator A's personal definition of academic success centered on the concept of attaining academic goals. He felt that if a student's personal goals were accomplished, the student would demonstrate academic success. If the goal for the student was to earn a certificate for a credential, obtaining the certificate would demonstrate academic success. If the goal for the student is to take a class whether or not the class leads to a credential, the student's goal would be met. He summarized his definition into a simple statement.

My personal definition of academic success will be whatever the student's goals are if those goals are met. If it is the goal of the student is to take one college class and successfully pass it that is an academic success for that student. If the goal of the student is to obtain a certificate or some form of credential that will help them get a promotion that is a success. If is the goal is for students to take a class whether or not the class leads to a credential the student's goal is met. Even if it's for them to actually obtain a degree or going to four-year it just really dependent on what the student's goals are and I see my role working in higher education is to help students reach those goals, for us to determine what is a success for you and how can I help you reach it.

Administrator A declared that Lee Hill Community College was not concerned with the "outliers." The outliers were the students who really could benefit from the extra attention or the extra reinforcement of academic success. The efforts of most colleges were typically targeted at the students who are in the "middle student" group. Administrator A states the "middle students" are students who would probably be successful no matter what college the student attended. Administrator A stated, "(Lee Hill Community) college has multiple support mechanisms in placethe support mechanisms often fail to reach the underprepared or first generation students. If the college could provide support to the outliers, the success rate might increase." Administrator A wholeheartedly believes because enough support is not provided to the outliers those students continue to fall by the wayside. Administrator's A concerns relate to African American male students as these students are often under prepared and first-time, first-generation college students. Administrator A feels that Lee Hill Community College does not focus adequate attention on the students who will need additional support mechanisms to succeed academically.

Administrator B had been a college administrator at a number of four-year public and private institutions in addition to her service at Lee Hill Community College. She has also worked in the private sector. Administrator B believes the definition of academic success is multi-faceted. First, the grades a student earned and how effectively the student performed in the classroom should be considered. The second aspect of the definition should determine whether or not a student was able to complete the degree certificate the student was pursuing when the student enrolled in the college. Administrator B believed Lee Hill Community College should monitor the number of students who do not complete their degree program but transfer prior to completing their degree or certificate program. If a student enrolled in the student's desired four- year school, the student demonstrated academic success. To my knowledge, the college does not record the credentials of students who transfer prior to completing a degree program or certificate. By not considering these students as completers, the college had fewer students demonstrating academic success when using the college's measure of graduation.

Administrator B's personal definition of academic success noted that the definition varied from individual to individual. She noted that academic success in certain circumstances could be considered ambiguous. She stated the definition could vary by a person's role at the college:

> …even if that student only wants to take one class and learn how to draw better or how to paint better, then they (the students) have been successful academically because they've reached a goal. So whatever that goal may be for one student academic success is that I actually get a C math class.

Administrator C was formerly employed by a four-year institution in another state. He also served as a club advisor on the college campus. Administrator C stated success could mean many different things at a community college. Initially, Administrator C did not have a personal

definition of academic success. After he was given a few moments to consider the question, he composed a definition:

> Students who leave the college with the knowledge of being able to perform at a higher academic level than when the student entered the college. A student may enter the college and not be successful in the classroom, but the student might have received exactly what the student needed from the college to go out and obtain employment and be successful in life.

Administrator C also hoped that students would not spin their wheels for years and years using financial aid money or their parent's money because they never realized college was not the right fit at that time. He acknowledged that some students enter the institution with the intent to graduate and some enter the institution with the intent to take only a class or two. Students who have entered the institution and leave the college with the knowledge to be productive members of society either on their own or through graduation have demonstrated academic success.

Administrator C believes the current mission of the community college should be reevaluated. He believed the model at the community college has become stagnant and has not changed to meet the needs of today's student. He stated:

> The community college model is 50 or 60 years old, and the model has not adapted to fit the students attending today. The students are younger at the point and entry, and the students are not as technologically savvy as the college believes they should be. The classes we offer are either too challenging or not challenging enough. Are we repeating the same content as the high school? We need to align the curriculum to reinforce the K-12

curriculum. We can continue to develop the model to challenge the students in the appropriate classes.

Administrator C believes the institutional definition of academic success fails to include students with special needs or veterans. The current student body population of the community college has changed, and therefore the mission must undergo a transformation.

Administrator D is a Caucasian American female who has worked at the institution for approximately 30 years. Administrator D had worked in the private sector prior to working at the community college and served as a faculty member prior to serving in her administrative role. Administrator D stated that it was initially difficult to describe the institutional definition of academic success. Within the context of her definition, she believes there is an obvious disconnect between the retention and graduation rates at the college. Her personal definition includes many of the components of the definition I was given in the other interviews. Administrator D believes the definition of academic success may vary for different programs within the institution as nursing students, for instance, are graded on a 7 point scale instead of the 10 point scale other programs use to grade students.

Administrator D believes the institutional definition of academic success cannot be uniformly applied to all student groups and the definition should be a multi-tiered definition that best supports the students on their personal career path. Administrator D stated a student could fail a course, but the one failing course might not prevent the student from obtaining the career goal the student desired. Administrator D's personal definition centers on personal objectives of the student at the time the student is enrolled at the college. If an individual achieved his or her academic goals and the individual has been able to become a productive and contributing member

of society, the individual has demonstrated success. Academic success is not static but is a dynamic and fluctuating definition to meet the mission of the community college.

> …academic success is when a student is able to learn and comprehend and deliver the information they have been taught. When they succeed, they do not only succeed by the letter grade earned, but they succeed on how they implement something to be learned from a course into their everyday life.

When Administrator D was asked if there was any information she would like to add, she added, "I believe that academic success is definitely individualized and that all students can succeed academically as it relates to their personal goals."

Defining Institutional Academic Success

After I had established the institutional definition of academic success for the community college using the document inspection and the administrator interviews, I turned to the student focus groups for their commentary. The institutional definition of academic success served as a baseline definition for comparison. Using the institutional definition of academic success, the student focus groups were designed to answer research question one and two from the students' perspective using the institutional definition of academic success. The definition of academic success follows:

> A student is able to demonstrate academic success when the student maintains a GPA of 2.0 of higher, the student is eligible for federal financial aid, and the student is able to enroll in the next sequential course. Additionally, a student is academically successful when he/she is retained by the college and completes enrolled courses and/or graduates with a degree or certificate and/or transfers to another higher education institution.

Student Focus Group Data

The questions utilized in the focus group sessions and the member checking sessions were designed to discover if these African American male students held a similar perception of academic success when compared with Lee Hill Community College institutional definition. If there is an obvious disconnect between the students' perception of academic success and that of the institution, the students may not meet the minimum standards simply because their goals are not convergent with those of the institution.

Focus Group A and Research Question One (FGAQ1)

Prior to enrollment at Lee Hill Community College, the first focus group of African American male students based their definition of academic success on their high school ideal of academic success since the first focus group had not had the experience of attending college. Students expressed a definition of academic success that included the concept of maximum personal effort which would ultimately lead to remaining current with one's studies, not falling behind, and completing each assignment. The end result of passing or "good" grade demonstrates academic success. The group also included graduating and maintaining a certain GPA as an effective measure of determining academic success. While the group believed the "certain" GPA was not necessarily a 4.0, the group collectively believed the level of effort an individual displayed equaled the output of a passing grade. Focus Group A of new students was composed of five African American male students. One student in Focus Group A sessions, Student # 11, in the group expounded on the collective group definition:

Well, it is definitely a B or higher, but it is also making sure that I have learned something. I feel that at times I could have earned the grade of B or even higher, and I still am not able to take away concepts from the class; I did not learn anything.

Student #11 had a transfer institution in mind from the start. He planned to transfer to a four-year institution approximately 60 miles from the community college. He also confirmed the need to be engaged within the classroom as a vital component to success. He additionally confirmed the notion that he faced challenges as an African American male student.

Student #6 benefitted tremendously from the focus group setting. He is shy and would not have been comfortable meeting with me in a one-on-one setting. He was reserved and quiet during the focus group meeting. While he had plans to transfer, he had not identified a transfer institution during the focus group session, and he also did not identify a transfer institution during the follow-up session.

Student #6 also failed to identify challenges related to his ethnic background during the focus group session. He did not feel his academic success was related to his ethnicity. He did not have a mentor, and he did not note a benefit associated with establishing a mentoring relationship. Student #6 was not engaged in the follow-up process during even after many attempts from me to engage him.

Student #8 in the session stated that maintaining a GPA of a B or higher constituted academic success, but he also wanted to be certain he learned something while enrolled in the course. His perception of success was not related to his ethnicity. Student #8 did not notice academic challenges related specifically to his gender nor his ethnicity, but he faced challenges as an African American male student. Student #8 noted he did not spend a great deal of time studying

when he was enrolled in high school and was not certain if he needed to change behaviors to succeed while enrolled in college.

However, within the same focus group session, student # 9 did note his perception of success was impacted by his ethnicity. Student # 9 worked hard and desired to be successful because of his cultural background but demonstrating success was not always easy. Student # 9 noted:

> It is kinda hard for African American males to come up (succeed) in the world because there are some people out there that do not want us to succeed. There are many success stories such as Ben Carson, Frederick Douglas and W.E.B. DuBois, men like that. Those men started us on our way, paving the way for where we are today. Being unsuccessful is not an option.

Student #10 stated, "There are times when a student could earn the 3.0 GPA and would not be able to take away concepts from the class. Not taking away concepts equated with not learning." Student #10 did feel that college would be a challenge but not a challenge that would prevent him from demonstrating academic success. Student #10 has an older brother attending another college within the state but has plans to attend the Air Force Academy. While he was not sure if he had plans to join the Air Force, he always desired to attend the Air Force Academy.

Focus Group A and Research Question Three (FGAQ3)

Based on my research, I found distinct differences between the institutional definition of academic success and the student participants' definition of academic success. The students participating in the Focus Group A sessions included a strong reliance on effort and engagement in their baseline definition of academic success. The students in this session expressed a belief that a high GPA was a primary indicator of success.

Student #8 stated that maintaining a GPA of a B or higher constituted academic success, but he also wanted to be certain he learned something while enrolled in the course. He expressed his view this way. "Maintaining a certain GPA, like a B or higher but I also want to learn something." He felt not taking away concepts equated with not learning.

The Lee Hill Community College's definition of academic success did not include ensuring that a student learns as a significant component of the definition. This notable variance may be assumed; however, even the college administrators did not include learning in their definition.

Within the Focus Group A participants, I noted several commonalities in the definition aligned with the institutional definition of academic success. In the focus groups, three student participants agreed a cumulative GPA of a B or higher demonstrated academic success. This group of students indicated attendance in all the classes and the completion of all assignments aided in the achievement of academic success.

Student #12 admitted to not "previously spending a great deal of time studying outside of class," and he was uncertain if the college would force him to change his previous study habits. He had achieved academic success in high school and desired to continue to excel academically. Student #12 was extremely vocal in the focus group session. He did not work outside of attending college, and he wanted to run track when he transferred to a four-year university.

For several reasons, Lee Hill Community College seemed to have an obvious lack of connection to the African American male students. In the Focus Group A sessions, several students noted plans to transfer prior to earning a degree from the community college. Student # 12 stated:

I feel like if there are more African American or Black teachers. I haven't run into too many. But I know that when I did they (African American or Black teachers) understood my culture more and when they used examples it was more specific to me. The examples they used made it a lot easier for me to relate to what they were talking about. For example, when I was taking geometry, the teacher was African American, and he used basketball for a lot of my examples. If not basketball, he used hip hop for a lot of examples, so it kinda put things into place, and it was easier to grasp the concepts. So understanding the culture is very important. It helps when it comes to learning something.

Another student in a separate focus group session noted that he did not see a large number of students, faculty, or staff that resembled him. Student # 9 noted, "There are certain things related to me as a Black male that people may not understand." He further indicated that he felt there were some people who do not want to see African American males succeed. He concluded by stating that failure was not an option for him personally. He named several significant African American males he held in high esteem.

After three focus groups had been held and the data transcriptions completed, I analyzed the data I collected. During the data analysis, I concluded that data saturation had occurred. The incoming, first-year students did, in fact, demonstrate a disparity between the institutional definition of academic success and the definition of the students. This disparity did not indicate a lack of drive or motivation just a difference in the perception of success. The noted disconnects with incoming first-year students and the institutional definition were students' lack of a relationship with a specific GPA, the student's inability to remain eligible financial aid, and the students' failure to include retention as a measure of academic success.

With data saturation, I was ready to interview the students who ended their first year of enrollment on academic probation, Focus Group B.

Focus Group B and Research Question 1 (FGBQ1)

All students who participated in focus group session B concurred that a high level of academic success was expected. However, students stressed that success required an increased attention on personal effort and seeking support as opposed to the maintenance of a particular GPA. The students in this focus group were assigned the numbers 15-30, and this group of African American male students was assigned to focus group designation B for students on academic probation or the probationary group. Students are placed on academic probation at the participating institution when a student fails to maintain a cumulative GPA of 1.5 after the student has attempted twelve credit hours at the institution (Lee Hill Community College, 2015, p. 39).

Student #26 experienced a difficult transition from high school to college. When he first entered the Lee Hill Community College, he planned to transfer to a traditional four-year institution. He has reassessed that dream. He realized too late in the semester that he would not be able to demonstrate academic success. He stated:

> In high school, I was able to do all my work while I was in school. In college, you have to do everything at home. I do not know how to manage the time to study and get all the work done. I do not know what to write down, what to re-read and I do not have the time to get everything done and work.

Student #26 was unable to identify the resources the college had established to help him transition into the higher education area and demonstrate academic success. After being placed

on academic probation at the college when he was asked his definition of academic success, he simply stated that he needed to raise his current GPA.

Student #18 participated in "weighing his options" as far as a transfer institution but indicated he would transfer. Recovering from being placed on academic probation will not be an easy undertaking; however, he appeared committed to success after a setback. "I am planning on transferring. I am just not sure where. I want to do my best this time."

Student #20 stated, "even if I do not know the answer, I will raise my hand just so I do not look dumb." This student stated he has struggled even though he spends time studying. Added to his academic inadequacies was the pressure from home to be a role model to his three younger brothers.

> In my household, I am the first born. So, I have two little brothers looking at me. So, my academic habit and stuff like that. They are watching. Around the house, from what my father tells me, regardless of whether I see it or not, they are paying attention to what I am doing. They are watching me study. They apparently look up to me.

The low success rate in the probation focus group may be related to a disconnect between student retention and academic support at the college. The students appeared to believe that Lee Hill Community College does not provide effective outreach to the African American male students. Participant # 23 stated, "We need someone who cares about our academic success. We need support outside of class."

The African American male students in the probation focus groups had the commonality of work, family, and outside influences competing for the time for completing assignments, completing readings, and attending classes. Consistent with Strayhorn (2012), student

engagement within the classroom was essential to academic success. Both types of focus groups acknowledged the importance of having a relationship with the classroom instructor.

Focus Group Summary

Focus group participants concurred that the definition of academic success was multi-layered. The group of incoming students noted the definition included achieving a student's personal, academic goals as well as graduating from the institution. Attainment of academic goals equated with academic success for this focus group.

The student participants did not believe an actual GPA defined academic success in the study but rather working hard and completing all assignments was a vital component of success. The institutional definition, on the other hand, stated students should maintain a specific GPA. The students' definition of academic success in this focus group did not place any importance on meeting the federal requirements for financial aid as the institutional definition did. Nor did the students' perceptions of success equate with graduation as the ultimate measure of academic success.

Students were evenly divided on whether there were challenges the students faced as African American male students. While some participants noted there were challenges, others did not. They noted there is sometimes a perception that African American male students are perceived as unintelligent.

Student #23 stated, "Sometimes the instructors believe I am not smart just because I am African American. As an African American male student I find that certain instructors, especially male instructors, they do not give African American male students the same opportunities.

Probationary students indicated that when a sense of community exists within the college classroom, the students have a better chance to of completing their degree program and achieving academic success. Student #22 noted:

> The students need to feel comfortable asking the teachers to slow down and asking questions. Stay in touch with the office hours. The students need to feel connected to one another and the material.

This group of students collectively appreciated the value and the importance of having a relationship with the faculty. The student focus group stated that moving forward in their academic careers; the students would seek clarification of due dates and assignments from the faculty if there was ever a question. They believed that support from the instructor is a vital component of academic success.

Focus Group B and Research Question 3 (FGBQ3)

The students who have been placed on academic probation following their first year of enrollment had strong opinions on whether there was an alignment of the colleges' definition of academic success with the institutional definition. The students in the probationary group believed that academic success was not measured solely by a student maintaining a certain GPA.

One student, Student #22, probationary group, noted the inability to overcome the technical difficulties of using the college's course management system, Blackboard. If the students were expected to submit completed assignments or acquire course documents from Blackboard, the college needed to provide introductory training according to student #22. The students also noted a lack of connection to the course materials. Without a connection to the content, underprepared students, often less motivated, failed to complete the assignments, leading to an increased rate of academic failure rather than academic success.

Student # 24, probationary group, noted that he had been ill during the timeframe when he was placed on academic probation. Knowing the faculty cared made a difference in his attempt to move from probationary status at the college. "When the faculty care, it makes a difference," he exclaimed.

Probationary students collectively voiced that they decided upon Lee Hill Community College because of the affordability as well as the proximity to their current county of residence. The students have looked at transfer institutions but must work to raise their current academic standing in order to transfer.

Academic success could be measured by the level of effort student displays in the course. However, academic success is not only measured by the final grade a student earns. The student may be able to take usable knowledge and to apply to life or to future courses. Student # 25

stated, "If you are planning on transferring, you need a C or better. I understand why the C is important, but it is not necessarily the only measure of academic success."

When the students were questioned about measuring success and not strictly using grades, the students indicated a number of alternative measures. The students felt academic success could be measured by the amount of time a student allocates to studying, by the level of effort student displays, and the ability to use the material. Probationary students indicated that academic success is a personal measure and could not be quantified by a number or letter grade. Student #25, probationary group, noted:

> My definition of academic success is taking a course and learning, obtaining the information the instructor is presenting, whatever the instructor is facilitating. I need to be able to retain something. So when I leave the course, I take something away with me. It is not a grade. The grade does not mean anything if I didn't learn something.

The focus group B participants concurred they lacked the needed study skills. The students did not know how to study nor were the students always able to identify what material the students needed to study for exams and quizzes. As a group, the probationary students did not feel adequately prepared for the transition from high school to college. In the high school setting, the students noted they were constantly reminded of due dates for assignments and the opportunity to complete assignments after the assigned due dates. The lack of reinforcement of study skills in the probationary group was one critical intervention the probationary students could have benefitted from in the college setting.

Table 4 depicts the three research questions aligned with exemplar responses from the student

focus groups sessions. The responses were examples provided to support the findings of the

research study in a concise format.

Table 4 Research Questions and Exemplar Student Responses

Research Question	Key Quality	Exemplar Responses
1. What are the perceptions of African American male community college students as to what constitutes academic success prior to enrollment in the community college?	Perceptions of academic success with new students	Student #1: Achieving all your academic goals equates with academic success. Student # 2: Passing the class. Student # 5: Completing my degree and transferring with the highest GPA possible. Student #6: Well, it is definitely a B or higher, but it is also making sure that I have learned something. I feel that at times I could earn the grade of B or even higher, and I still am not able to take away concepts from the class. I did not learn anything. Student #8: Consistently maintaining a GPA of a B or higher constituted academic success, but he also wanted to be certain he learned something while enrolled in the course. Student #10 Graduating with a high GPA

		Student #9: Being head honcho.
		Student #10: There are times when a student could earn the 3.0 GPA and would not be able to take away concepts from the class. Not taking away concepts equated with not learning.
2. Are there any differences between African American male student's perceptions of what constitutes academic success after a student has been placed on academic	Perceptions of academic success with probationary students	Student #16: Being successful, getting good grades, and staying focused in school. Student # 18: I don't know, just graduating from college is an academic success. When the faculty cares, it makes a difference. Student # 19: Raising my GPA Student #20: In my household, I am the first born. So, I have two little brothers looking at me. So, my academic habit and stuff like that. They are watching. Around the house, from what my father tells me, regardless of whether I

probation at a community college?		see it or not, they are paying attention to what I am doing. They are watching me study. They apparently look up to me. Student #24 felt compelled to work toward this goal even though he knew it would be a struggle with his current academic standing at the college. Student #25: My definition of academic success is taking a course and learning, obtaining the information the instructor is presenting, whatever the instructor is facilitating. I need to be able to retain something. So when I leave the course, I take something away with me. It is not a grade. The grade does not mean anything if I didn't learn something. That is my definition of academic success, taking the knowledge and remembering some of it. If I do not remember any of it, that person is worthless.

| 3. Are there differences between African American male students' perceptions of academic success and academic success as defined by the community college where participants are enrolled? | Institutional Alignment | Focus group students' participants in the new enrollment groups agreed a cumulative of a B or higher demonstrated academic success. The student perceptions were aligned with the intuitional definition. The students participating tin the new focus group sessions had a high expectation of academic success. All students concurred that a high level of academic success was expected. The students participating in the probationary focus group sessions collectively indicated they felt a student could demonstrate success and not necessarily earn an A, B, or C grade. Academic success could be measured by the level of effort student displays in the course. However, academic success is not only measured by the final grade a student earns in class. The student may be able to take usable knowledge which the student is able to apply to life or to future courses. Students indicated there were missing pieces related to their academic success at the college: engaging faculty, active learning, and academic support. |

New Student Themes (FGA)

After conducting three separate focus group sessions with African American male students prior to their enrollment at the community college, several themes emerged. The student responses for the incoming student focus groups were in contrast to the probationary student focus groups. Focus groups that included entering African American male participants revealed six common themes.

Self-Efficacy

The new students all held a strong belief that they would succeed academically. Student #11 stated confirmed this in the focus group session, "I will make good grades and succeed academically." The students possessed the internal desire to perform at the highest level and demonstrate the attainment of the African American male students' academic goals. The new student focus groups all planned to study outside of class as well as consult with their professors through office hours or the periods before and after class. This group of students had a strong sense of self-efficacy. This theme was consistent with existing research on this group of students.

Working Toward a Goal

Secondly, participants understood the significance of maintaining a high GPA and consistently working toward graduation and transfer. They expressed a strong internal belief in their own ability to demonstrate academic success. They all noted a motivation to persist; the strong will to work towards graduation. The students had identified transfer institutions and several had career goals as well. Having well-defined goals gave each student participant an objective to work toward achieving.

Self-Motivation

The theme of self-motivation was the third theme I discovered among the participants prior to enrollment. This sense of motivation in the pre-enrolled students is much greater than that of the probationary students. Self-motivation, as the students describe it, is the internal drive required to complete assignments, courses, and ultimately degrees. The students who participated in pre-enrollment focus groups all had the desire to work hard and work with a purpose. All the students in these focus group sessions knew they would eventually transfer. The students had a strong sense of belief in the student personal determination as a primary factor that will enable them to succeed academically. The students were ambitious and inspired to progress forward by earning a degree from the college.

Finishing the Race

It is not where you start but where you finish was the fourth theme that emerged during the research study. The students in the new student focus groups decided upon enrollment at a community college. In many cases, the students decided upon attendance at a community college strictly due to the close location of the community college to home. The students did not immediately wish to move away from home. In one case a student informed me, he had a little more growing up to do. Participant #13, stated, "I just needed to stay at home. I needed to grow up a little bit more. I just wasn't ready to leave."

Another student, Student #11, informed me he planned to attend a four-year institution in the state, but the amount of financial aid he was due to receive was not adequate to cover his tuition, books, fees, and dorm costs. He shared during the focus group meeting that he "was thinking about going to Morgan State but it was very expensive. They (the college) did not give

me (the student) the financial aid I needed. I thought about it, and since I realized how expensive Morgan State was, I opted for a community college. Community college is the cheapest route."

He noted his attendance at a community college would save money. He did not consider the community college as a detour but as a cost saving measure propelling him toward a career and his future.

The fifth theme of the new student focus groups was the theme of the long-term benefit of personal investment in the educational process. The student participating in the new student focus group session all exhibited the internal drive required to succeed academically in the college environment. The students believed the effort they each individually displayed within the classroom and outside of the classroom by both studying and reviewing the concepts discussed in the classroom would ultimately equate with a high grade being earned in the class. Student #8 strongly believed he would succeed academically. He noted,

In terms of academic success, I want to be sure I learned something at the conclusion of the course. By studying outside of class and completing assignments, I will be sure to obtain my personal success.

If the students failed to display a high level of effort in class, the students would not earn a high grade in the class. African American male students prior to enrollment do not display a "broken spirit." The students strived hard to display high levels of academic success. The students believed that by working hard and trying their best, they would see the reward of hard work by receiving the anticipated high GPA and eventually graduating. One student noted he enjoyed competition within the classroom setting and was inspired to work harder to demonstrate he was

the top student in every class.   During the fact-checking session, student # 9, noted he worked hard to "shine" within the classroom.

Being Prepared

The sixth theme revealed was the characteristic of advanced preparation.   The students participating in the pre-enrollment focus group sessions all indicated that completing all assignments and visiting instructors during posted office hours were essential components of academic success. The students sensed the value of going to classes with the readings and the assignments completed. It was evident within these focus groups that the students believed being prepared for the class would be a significant component of their student academic success.

Being prepared for their classes includes having textbooks on the first day of class, attending classes and asking questions according to the students in the focus group sessions. Student #14 noted his plan included attending class. "I plan to attend all classes. I want to be a better student than I was while I was in high school, be the high school student I never was." The students placed a high level of significance on personal determination and personal motivation in terms of academic success. The students desired to obtain academic success even though they had decided to attend a community college for a variety of reasons.

One student participant in the incoming focus group desired to attend a four-year university immediately upon graduation, but he also opted for community college as the entry point to higher education because of the proximity to his home and the lower cost of attendance. The student always knew that he would attend college it was more of matter as to where he would attend. Student #11 planned to transfer to a smaller four-year college when he completed his degree Lee Hill Community College. The smaller classroom size and one-on-one instruction appealed to the student. The student stated failure was not an option; he had never considered

not being successful. Even if he encountered what could be considered a setback, he would not allow one moment to derail his plans for a successful academic future.

The students participating in Focus Group A all had a well-developed sense of their learning styles as students. The students participating in these sessions also knew specific details about themselves such as the best time to study for the students' perspectives. The focus group students acknowledged that active learning strategies in the classroom helped facilitate learning. The students noted classroom engagement is a needed and welcomed addition to the learning process for African American male students. One student indicated, he needed constant stimulation in the classroom, or he would find his mind wandering. Students who understand this personality characteristic may attend class better equipped to simulate themselves when the student is not receiving the simulation from the other classroom activities or from the classroom instruction.

Students found small changes helped with the facilitation of learning such as going to the library to study as opposed to studying at home. In the library, studying seemed to be an intentional action as opposed to an afterthought. The students indicated even knowing whether the student was a morning or night person helped the student prepare for proper studying. The end result of the self-knowledge supported the students' goal of obtaining academic success at Lee Hill Community College.

Probationary Students Themes (FGB)

Inadequate Preparation

The first emerging theme was the theme of inadequate preparation for the demands of college was the first theme to emerge during the research study. The students as a whole concurred that they were not prepared for the transition from high school to college. One student reported he

did not study while he was enrolled in high school and had similar expectations for college.

Student #26 stated:

> In high school, I was able to do all my work while I was in school. In college, you have
>
> to do everything at home. I do not know how to manage the time to study and get all the
>
> work done. I do not know what to write down, what to re-read and I do not have the time
>
> to get everything done and work.

The students had not mastered time management and often did not complete the

assignments for each class. The students additionally failed to dedicate adequate time to study

the materials outside of class.

Lack of Connection

The second theme was the theme of lack of connection was overwhelmingly

evident. The students in the second group felt the college did not try hard enough to capture the

students' interest as African American male students. The students noted the inability of the

college to meet the students' basic needs. The students stated the college failed to understand the

students' weaknesses and build upon the students' strengths. Student #16 noted, "I did not feel

there was the support I needed individually. I needed to talk to someone like me, and I needed

someone to help motivate me."

External Distractions

The third theme that emerged was the theme of external distractions. The participants

noted they did have many distractions that prohibited them from being successful as students:

family obligations, personal health, outside employment, and personal time management. The

collective patterns of the participants such as GPA, attendance patterns, and lack of external

motivation do not equate with students who are committed to learning. The participants did not

attend every class but stated they attempted to attend as many as possible. The students' efforts may be tied to ensuring all opportunities are utilized to achieve success. The students believed, even though all participants in the group were on academic probation, that the students were good students. The data never revealed any data points to the contrary. The students in Focus Group B noted they did not frequently ask questions in class nor they did know the appropriate answer to the questions presented in the classroom.

Lack of Self-Efficacy

A fourth and final theme revealed in the research process for the probationary focus groups was the lack of self-efficacy. The African American male participants emphasized they were competent students in high school. The many students revealed the relationships they had with teachers in high school were important to their prior success. The students as a collective focus group failed to acknowledge any personal responsibility for their academic standing during the research study. The participants indicated they felt the instructors should set more flexible deadlines and contact the students to ensure the assignments are completed, graded, and adequate feedback from the instructor provided. The data confirms the lack of self-efficacy of the student.

The probationary focus group student participants failed to take personal responsibility for the lack of academic success. The students remarked the faculty should present the material in a number of methods to accommodate the students learning styles. If the student understood the student's own personal learning style and then studied the material in a manner best suited to the student's learning style, the student might have a greater chance to demonstrate academic success. Students must be held accountable for the learning the material. Another student in the

focus group session indicated he did not spend any time studying but admitted after failing; he should have spent time studying.

The students in the probationary focus groups all demonstrated the one characteristic of persistence after failure. The students, even though they had been placed on academic probation, were all enrolled in the community college for the next academic year. The students in many cases had reduced their work schedules, and in other cases, the students had reduced their course load from the five to four classes (still maintaining their full-time status). The students collectively began to make minor adjustments in an effort to improve their academic standing and improve their GPA. After a student is placed on academic probation and failed to raise his GPA to 1.75, the student would face academic suspension from the college. The probationary student participants were all facing academic probation during the study.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from the data collection process. Multiple themes emerged from the findings, based on the responses from the focus group participants and of the Lee Hill Community College administrators. In chapter 5, I presented the recommendations for community colleges leaders and the limitations of this study. I included implications for future research, as well as present my concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to ascertain the perceptions of academic success held by African American male community college students. This work of scholarship examined the perceptions of African American male students just prior to enrollment at a public community college located in the Southeastern United States and compared these perceptions with those African American male students who ended the first year of enrollment at the same community college on academic probation. The research compared the students' perceptions of academic success with the colleges' institutional definition of academic success. This chapter presents an overview of these findings, conclusions, recommendations for practice with African American male students at the community college, future research models for this particular student population, as well as potential implications for community college leaders.

Summary of Methodology

The research questions were addressed by using only qualitative research methods. The methodology followed in the process included structured, one-on-one interviews with administrators which established a baseline institutional definition of academic success, focus group sessions with the African American male students and the review of the existing literature including a thorough analysis of the college catalog. All three of these collective steps added value to the overall findings of the research process which identified an existing gap between probationary students' perceptions of academic success and the institutional definition of academic success. Then finally, the study identified where the point of disconnection occurred

between the students' perceptions of academic success and the institutional definition of academic success. This difference was prominent in one particular Focus Group Session, the Probationary Student Group. The research gave the student participants a voice and offered the perceptions of the participants to enlighten institutions on processes that might encourage persistence and graduation from the community college.

Participants

For the focus group sessions, six groups consisting of five African American male students were recruited. For the Focus Group A sessions, pre-enrollment students, the students were recruited during the mandatory student orientation. The Focus Group B students, probationary students, were recruited by the college's counseling services department. A total of 30 students and six focus group sessions were involved in the qualitative research. All of the students self-identified as African American males. The average age for Focus Group A was 17. 8 years of age while the average age for Focus Group B participants was 21.5 years of age. (Please refer to the previous chapter and Table 3 for a visual display the participants' demographics).

Data Collection

The research began in the summer of 2015 and continued until the end of the fall of 2015. During the spring of 2016, the follow-up interviews were conducted. Participants were recruited through a mid-sized Virginia community college. The methods used to collect the data included one-on-one interviews with community college administrators, focus group sessions and a review of institutional documents. Follow-up interviews were initiated with all participants. All administrators participated in the follow-up interviews, and sixteen of the students participated. Data analysis included transcribing the data collected from the focus group and one-on-one semi-

structured interviews sessions followed by the coding of the data. Strategies for trustworthiness included detailed field notes, reflexive journaling, member checking, simultaneous data collection and analysis, and thick descriptions (Hays & Singh, 2012).

<div align="center">**Response to Research Questions**</div>

Research Question One

In response to research question number one, what are the perceptions of African American male community college students as to what constitutes academic success prior to and after enrollment at a community college? I discovered an obvious difference in the perception of academic success for the student participants in Focus Group A of new students as compared to Focus Group B of probationary students. The perceptions of the learners are distinctly interconnected to the learners' level of effort, retention, and progression towards degree completion.

In Focus Group A, participant # 6 noted that he desired to maintain "a certain GPA, like a B or higher but I also want to learn something." He had the perception he would be academically successful using his study skills from high school, and he had definite plans for transfer after earning a degree from the college. In his follow-up email, participant #6 indicated he successfully completed all courses he had enrolled in during the fall semester, and he considered himself academically successful at that time. Participant #17 did not enroll at Lee Hill Community College during the spring semester. He was placed on academic suspension at the end of the fall semester as indicated in his follow-up email. Before being placed on academic probation, Participant #17, believed he would be academically successful building on his experiences from high school.

By examining the perceptions of the African American male students related to the research questions, one sees the relationship between success and academic standing or perceived academic standing drives the students' motivation and determination toward persistence and to graduation. The students in Focus Group A held high perceptions of academic success which in turn would influence their ability to achieve their academic goal. Maintaining the level of motivation is critical to keeping the students personally vested in their learning opportunities (Whittington, 2014). The students who had demonstrated academic success in high school believed they would demonstrate the same level of academic success at Lee Hill College. The student participants in Focus Group A all held the perception they would succeed academically. While this group did not indicate maintaining a specific GPA was a component of academic success, working hard and passing classes was included in their definition. The students all believed strongly in their ability to maintain attendance standards, complete the required assignments, pass the class with a grade of C or higher, and demonstrate academic success.

Research Question Two

In response to research question number two, participants consistently demonstrated behaviors that failed to lead to academic success. The students failed to complete the assignments, failed to earn the grade C or better in the class, and were unsuccessful in their efforts to complete sequential courses. The students' perceptions of success in this Focus Group shifted from that of the extremely positive view of progression and earning "good" grades held by Focus Group A to the notion of "just getting by" and "just learning." Focus Group B participants acknowledged a lack of effort and motivation after being placed on probation. The

students held a perception of academic success. However, the perception was not aligned with the Focus Group A participants nor that of Lee Hill Community College.

Participant #7 noted his personal definition of academic success was multi-faceted. He stated his definition included, "achieving all your academic goals, trying your best. Staying on top of your work."

The Focus Group B participants did not take advantage of the resources Lee Hill College had in place to assist the students in their pursuit of academic success. The participants noted their non-attendance with the tutoring center, even when the students were encouraged to attend tutoring; the lack of a relationship with a faculty adviser; and failure to meet with professors during the professors' assigned office hours. Creating a culture on the college campus where students do not view tutoring or advising as a negative event is a key to the pursuit of academic success.

Participant #21 indicated after being placed on probation, "… (I'm) trying to get the GPA up, as high as possible."

Participant #16 stated that after being placed on probation he found himself working with a purpose, "…the purpose is trying to be successful."

The institutional definition of academic success is a multi-faceted definition bringing into account the federal and state requirements for funding sources as well as the institutional goals. With colleges' having to satisfy a number of both external and internal stakeholders, the institutional goals of academic success are misaligned the students' personalized goals.

Administrator C believed the current mission of the community college should be reevaluated. He believed that the model at the community college has become stagnant and has not changed to meet the needs of today's student. He stated:

The community college model has not evolved since the opening of the first community college. The students attending community colleges today are frequently underprepared, underrepresented, and have a low SES. The model has not adapted to fit the students attending today. The students are also younger, and they are not a savvy as the college thinks they should be. Community college often offers classes that are either too challenging or not challenging enough. The students do not have designated majors or career paths upon entry, and the student may frequently flounder for years attempting to find the desired program of study which aligns with the students' skill set.

If the goal of the student is to graduate and/or obtain employment or enhance a skill, the community college should envision itself as the vehicle through which each student will travel on the path to goal setting. By adopting the concept of" beginning with the end in mind," community colleges will be able to focus resources and support staff on identifying the goals of the student and the intended career path of the student at the time of initial enrollment at the institution. After the identification of the plan, the institution can provide the individualized support for each student or for each cohort of students to ensure academic support. In the end, student perception of academic success matters not only to the student but to the institution. By first identifying and then by understanding the students' perception of academic success, community colleges might experience an increase in the number of student completers and student transfers to four-year institutions. The changes should involve long-term interventions implemented during the first year of enrollment. The first generation, underprepared, and

underrepresented students enter the college with external challenges and often do not succeed simply because those students do not know what resources are available to them (Strayhorn, 2012; Wood, 2013).

Research Question Three

In response to research question number three, Are there differences between African American male students' perceptions of academic success and academic success as defined by the community college where participants are enrolled?-- the answer is yes. Community colleges have a mission to provide education to all. However, it continues to be a daunting task when students enter the institution with varying levels of academic preparation, ideals of academic success, as well as a closure on career and personal goals.

<div align="center">

Summary of Major Findings and Some Recommendations

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Mentoring

The participants in the study indicated mentoring was an area where the participants found little immediate value in their participation.   The current mentoring resources at Lee Hill Community College seem to have a perceived questionable impact on student academic success for both groups of students who participated in the study. When participant #22, a probationary student, was questioned about the need for mentors he stated, "We need academic role models." When participant #26, a probationary student, was asked if there was a benefit to having a mentoring relationship, he adamantly exclaimed, "No." If the college continues to use mentoring as a medium to support academic success, the program needs to be well-structured and utilize mentors of color. A well-structured mentoring program includes training for the mentors, required mentor/mentee meetings, and follow-up interviews to ensure the students were

appropriately placed. While this finding contradicts the findings of Strayhorn (2007), it is consistent with the findings of Moore et al. (2004).

Strayhorn provided insight concerning the need for a well-structured mentoring relationship to increase student satisfaction and retention for African American male students (2007). Within the confines of the well-structured mentoring program, During a Focus Group A session, participant #9, a new student participant, stated, "I am not sure if there is a benefit to having a mentor." When the group was further probed as to whether they felt a mentor would enhance their academic success, participant #17, a probationary student participant, indicated, "I do not need a mentor. Not sure if it makes a difference." Participant # 17 added, "We need African American males as academic role models. We need African American teachers and staff."

This finding on the value of mentoring was consistent with the research of Moore et al. (2004). According to Moore et al., African American male students in specific programs find value in a well-structured and organized mentoring program at the graduate level more than at the undergraduate level. Moore also noted a shortage of African American faculty and staff on the campuses available to serve in the mentoring role. The shortage of African American male faculty was also consistent with the situation at Lee Hill Community College. The lack of structure and the fact these students are in their first two years of their undergraduate program add validity to the notion that there should be a review of the mentoring practice, as a resource to help with persistence and retention and a topic that should be considered for additional research.

Peer-mentoring between new and continuing students has demonstrated a positive impact on the academic success of students at four-year universities (Terrion & Daoust, 2011). Peer-mentoring, while based on the traditional mentor practice, allows students the opportunity to not

only acclimate themselves to the college campus but provides a more experienced peer the new students can turn to for emotional support as well as friendship. Peer-mentoring may also lead to increased self-efficacy leading to increased interaction with faculty and the ability to seek out resources on the college campus (Terrion & Daoust, 2011).

Participant # 19, a probationary student, admitted to having a difficult time during his first year of enrollment at Lee Hill Community College. Even though he previously faced difficulty, he was uncertain if there was value to a mentor in the traditional role. He shared with me, "It was good to talk to someone, not necessarily a mentor, but sometimes it is good to know someone is there."

Self-efficacy

The second key finding was a lack of self-efficacy related to Vroom's Theory of Expectancy. Successful students are hardworking and expect a good grade as a result; probationary students do not have the internal desire to work hard because they had not reaped the benefit of their previous efforts. Northouse (2016) and Whittington (2014) both described Vroom's Theory in relationship to the motivation of individuals which may be applied to students.   This theory applied to the study of African American males as it may have provided the missing link between student academic success and the perceptions of academic success for this group of students.

Vroom's Expectancy Model (Vroom, 1964) developed the relationship between personal desire and the engagement within a student and/or employee, and this relationship may be applied to African American male students as this study identifies their perceptions of academic success. Participant # 11, a new student participant, indicated, "… if you try your best and work hard. I will make good grades and succeed academically."

Participant # 14 viewed college as a fresh slate. He planned to attend all classes. "I want to be a better student than I was while I was in high school, be the student I never was."

Whittington (2014) reiterated the notion that students enter into higher education with the desire to comprehend and understand the world around them. The engagement activities in the classroom are enhanced by the students' motivation to succeed. If the students do not have the motivation to succeed academically, then the students fail to demonstrate academic success. The college has a vital role in identifying, developing and fostering the students' level of motivation to ensure the students remain vested in the educational process (Whittington, 2014). The Whittington study used Vroom's Theory of Expectancy as the foundational model to make the connection between the students' level of effort having a unique connection to the level of success based on the expectation of a positive outcome.

Participant #17, probationary group participant, indicated that when he noticed that he was struggling academically, he did not attempt to make any changes to his current habits or study plans. He shared with me, "I did not go to tutoring. I didn't think there was anything that could be done."

Participant # 26, probationary group participant, shared with me that he also found himself struggling and he failed to tap into the resources of the college, using tutoring services.

When I first started struggling, I would sometimes go the professor's office hours. But I wouldn't piece the ideas together. I wouldn't take the extra effort. I know I could have worked harder, but sometimes I would honestly give up.

When he was asked about using the resources at the college, he admitted to not using tutoring or counseling for the needed academic and mental support.

Terrion and Daoust (2011) also postulated that a student's sense of self-efficacy had impacted students' academic performance. When a student was not performing at the level defined by the institution as one of demonstrating academic success, the student's level of self-efficacy decreases. When students are **trained** to utilize the support services, the students are more likely to persist and demonstrate academic success (Terrion & Daoust, 2011).   Training for students to better utilize student support services includes but is not limited to mandatory sessions in the colleges' tutoring/academic support center. Another example included the use of supplemental instructors' as peer learning partners to provide students note taking workshops and test taking/test anxiety workshops.

Participants#24, probationary group participant, indicated he perceived a lack of motivation at Lee Hill Community College. He shared, "I do not see it here (at this college)."

Collegiate Inexperience

A third key finding was the students' inability to navigate the system of higher education, lack of connection with terminology, resources, and college culture.

Harper (2012) stated that if parents rehearse academic expectations of college at an early age for young black males, they will grow into young black men who understand that college is the best option for success after high school. Harper (2012) further posited that it might be beneficial for the parents and families of black male students to understand the college process enough to ask questions when needed and to navigate through the processes of matriculation such as declaring a major or applying for financial aid. Expressing to black male students the importance of college attendance, coupled with the wherewithal to ask engaging and relevant questions about the process of applying and matriculating through college, is a great way to

create avenues for increased enrollments and successes of African American men in college (Harper, 2012).

Participant #20, probationary group student, was a first-generation college student who struggled academically. He understood that this was a tremendous opportunity, but he had not always taken advantage of the opportunity. He shared with me during the focus group session:

In my household, I am the first born. So, I have two little brothers looking at me. So, my academic habit and stuff like that. They are watching. Around the house, from what my father tells me, regardless of whether I see it or not, they are paying attention to what I am doing. They are watching me study. The apparently look up to me. But this is all new to me. I do not have anyone who has done this before.

Participant #16, probationary group student, indicated that he had experienced a family illness during the period leading to this academic probation.

My mom, she got um sick, and she also got unemployed, so I am trying to do a job and go to class. So when I talked to my academic professors, they were like umm we can't help you. I asked could I get the work or the notes from someone else. It was very hard to find a balance, so I just dropped out.

Lacking the ability to navigate the system of higher education or knowing where to seek assistance when needed, students may drop out or stop out as participant #16 indicated. Participant # 16 was a first-generation college student. Requiring a mandatory orientation session not only for the students but also for the parents may place first-generation college students in a position to succeed since the parents will have the needed information to direct their students when the students are not able to navigate the college.

This finding is consistent with Kuh (2007): who suggests that students need to be taught as early as possible how to use the college resources effectively. Participant # 19 was also a first-generation college student. While he had an older sister, she never attended college. Early introduction into the college setting and identification of potential resources, may eliminate the floundering many first-generation college students encounter during their enrollment.

Participant #29, probationary group student, indicated he was struggling academically. When he was questioned about what steps he took to seek help to perform at the academic level defined by the institution, his response was simple. "I didn't do anything. I just stopped going."

When students lack the ability to seek out the resources, they are more likely to stop out or drop out. When participant #29 was asked why he did not take action after the realization of academic struggles, he responded, "I was not sure what to do."

Harris and Wood (2014) reported that African American male students frequently reported being treated rudely, being ignored by faculty in the classroom, and often given the run-around when seeking information to navigate the higher education system. The inability to successfully navigate the relationship with the college or university often leads to students dropping out or stopping out. Building a culture of trust and respect is essential to establishing a sense of community with the African American male students and proves to be a needed construct for their academic success (Harris & Wood, 2014).

Lack of Connection to Classroom Setting

The fourth key finding was the students' inability to feel comfortable in the classroom setting which translated into a lack of connection to the content. This disconnection stemmed from the lack of faculty of color and lack of sense of community as well as a sense of inferiority.

Strayhorn (2008, 2012) noted African American students tend to enroll in community colleges typically due to the lower cost associated with attending. These students are sustainably different than their white counterparts and frequently do not have the college cultural capital associated with academic success in the higher education arena. Cultural capital includes caring faculty, sense of community, and institutional knowledge needed to navigate the system of higher education.

Murtaugh et al. (1999) found that African American students are more likely to withdraw from college than White students. In a surprising statistical analysis, if African American students are prepared for college, the African American students are more likely to complete college than their White counterparts. The study of Murtaugh et al. (1999) included high achieving students enrolled in a four-year university but did not include community college students. If community college leaders could identify a mechanism to increase the persistence rates of African American male students at the community college, then colleges might experience an increase in the success rates of this group of students. Persistence is frequently linked to academic success, and academic success increases the opportunity for this constituent to graduate from colleges and universities.

When students fail to see an immediate return on time invested in studying the material or the students do not understand why the content presented during the lecture is relevant to the individual student, they fail to complete the assignments, participate in the lecture discussions, or study for the examinations. Lack of the connection to the course content is one of the barriers to academic success for African American male students. As participant #12, new student group indicated, an understanding of why the material is relevant to his day to day increased his desire to know additional information about the subject.

Lack of Student Engagement

The fifth and final finding was a lack of sense of student engagement in the classroom setting. Tinto (2007) established that student engagement, especially in the first year of the college experience, was a forecaster of increased rates of retention. Booker (2007) addressed two key issues related to student success rates and persistence rates among African American students and whether the students perceived a sense of belongingness and interconnectedness to predominately white universities. In the environment of shrinking resources and increased expectation for student success, colleges and universities must remain cognizant of the need for improvement of student learning outcomes, academic completion, and student preparedness.

Booker (2007) concluded the most prevalent indicator of student success was the effect of faculty instruction style on the perceptions of the classroom community. Students who indicated they were engaged in the classroom where active learning techniques were employed reported a stronger sense of belonging in the classroom. Relationships with faculty follow closely behind instructional style and a sense of community as predictors of academic success. Students indicated interpersonal relationships with professors were factors that encouraged a comfortable environment for students. Interaction created a strong classroom community (Booker, 2007; Harper, 2004).

Kuh (2006) found that bridging student engagement and persistence in student behaviors and perceptions consistently reinforces the link between student behavior and persistence to academic success. Faculty must be encouraged to not only teach academic facts but also and engage their students.

By creating a bridge between student engagement and the course content, the college will strengthen the relationship between academic success and persistence. The findings in the study

confirmed this relationship between persistence and engagement leading to academic success. Kuh (2007) noted that when the faculty is skilled in managing the class discussions and incorporating active learning strategies and using active listening skills, the students perform at unimagined levels of academic performance.

Participant # 23, probationary group, noted, "As a male student, I am going to go even deeper, as an African American male student I find that certain instructors, especially male instructors, they do not give African American male students the same opportunities."

Participant #22, probationary group, agreed, indicating a need for faculty of color, "We need African American teachers and staff."

Participant # 21, probationary group, indicated, "I dropped my first class because the teacher just didn't seem interested. That is the first time my grades started slipping."

Participant #23, probationary group, added, "I think we (African American males) need to be inspired. Music helps. Teachers need to take whatever tools to reach the students."

Participant #22, probationary group, went on to supplement, "The students need to feel comfortable asking the teachers to slow down and asking questions. Stay in touch with the office hours. The students need to feel connected to one another and the material."

Unanticipated Findings

Beginning this research, I honestly believed the inability to demonstrate academic success was a lack of effort and distraction caused by the varied responsibilities African American male students held outside of class. I also believed the students would find the concept of mentoring as a supportive structure leading to direct and immediate academic success. As a faculty/staff member of the college for more ten years, the lack of academic success for this

particular demographic drove the desire for this research. Until this research was completed, I failed to examine the self-efficacy misconceptions the students described in the focus group sessions. The students have the desire to succeed academically, but often the students lack the ability and the knowledge to determine the appropriate next steps when faced with a challenge. For example student, # 16 began to struggle academically when a parent became ill and did not understand the policies of the college, so he remained enrolled and ultimately failed of the courses he was enrolled in during that semester. Earning a GPA of 0.0 for the semester, triggered a series of events Student #16 was still attempting to overcome.

Limitations, Issues, and Implications

The study captured the perceptions of the academic success of African American males enrolled at a community college during two unique time periods. This study did not attempt to analyze the external influences which may have impacted the students' perceptions of academic success nor did the study compare or explain other factors related to student persistence. This study is not generalizable to all community colleges nor all community college students. The data collected during the study was self-reported from the student participants and the select administrators at the participating community college. The study was confined to only one participating institution.

The perceptions of the students may vary depending on the home environment, parental level of education, the level of preparedness, and other factors that may influence a student's ability to learn and be successful in the educational arena. The transferability of the research study to other institutions may or may not provide useful information as the data are the perceptions of the students at a well-defined environment (Shenton, 2004). The data may be of

interest to community college leaders who are interested in improving the success rate of students in the population failing to demonstrate high levels of academic success.

The small size of the participant sample makes the study results impossible to generalize to the entire student population of African American male students at the community college. Thus the study lacks transferability on a large scale to other community colleges based on size and location. Future studies might survey a broader sampling of African American male subject. The thirty participant sample only skimmed the surface of this student population.

Recommendations

The current mission of the community college is to provide access to students wishing to enter a postsecondary educational setting. The underprepared student often spends a year completing developmental English courses. These students may become disengaged since the completion of the developmental courses prevents the students from taking other courses such as a course requiring an English prerequisite. In the area of math, students may take a year or longer to complete all the needed developmental courses. This can be one year or longer during which the student is not eligible to take a credit level math course. Placing students in developmental courses may be a cause of student dissatisfaction. College may desire to follow the models of Texas, Florida, and California by eliminating developmental education courses and using the co-enrollment model to provide the support the students need to demonstrate academic success.

After a short review of the findings, I was left with one glaring question. What are the potential barriers to academic success for African American male students obtaining academic success at the community college? Colleges need to identify the potential barriers to equip the students to perform at the anticipated level of success. While colleges are providing mentors and

or coaches for the students, the students need to develop the ability to recognize the barriers and formulate solutions for themselves. What can colleges do to ensure the academic success of this particular group of students, African American males? The results of the preliminary study are relevant to community colleges across the country because this particular student demographic continues to hold the ranking of the least successful demographic of students in terms of retention and academic success. Here are a few ideas that may lead to improvements.

Recruitment of Faculty of Color

According to Roberson and Mason (2008), the intentional recruitment of faculty of color provide African American male students a higher chance of retention on predominately white campuses. Cuyjet (2006) described the presence of faculty of color as an opportunity for the students to find comfort and encouragement from people who resemble the students. Students have noted a need for faculty to support students, present the material in a clear format, engage students in the classroom, be highly organized, and to present relevant content to the students' life. The students indicated when the instructor creates an environment conducive to learning; students have a greater opportunity to demonstrate academic success. The recruitment of diverse faculty specifically African American male faculty should remain a priority for the college.

The importance of student engagement has been noted in Kuh' s study (2007), and the current study reinforced the Kuh's findings. The current study also placed emphasis on the need to create a culture of engagement at the community college and in particular for African American male students. The support provided inside and outside of the classroom promotes academic success. Colleges should continue to provide professional development to ensure the

classroom faculty is utilizing active learning strategies and assessments that accurately measure and motivate the students' engagement in courses in which they enroll.

Study Skills Development or Enhancement

The student participants in the study represent a segment of higher education historically demonstrating a lack of academic success. This student demographic would experience a potential increase in student academic success if the college provided academic support services by embedding the services into the first 15 credits of a degree program. The student support services should include supplemental instruction in entry-level courses and mandatory lab support including tutoring hours. The additional lab hours in the course will provide a personal touch that adds an opportunity to assist students who are considered at-risk and underprepared.

According to Turner (2016), the use of mandatory study groups and peer-to-peer tutoring sessions provided the students in his/her study with an increased opportunity to demonstrate academic success. The sessions could provide insight on note-taking skills, study skills, and examination review. The students in Turner's study took responsibility for the assignments and readings and began to develop the missing study skills and behaviors needed to demonstrate academic success. Participant #26 shared during his session "…I do not know what to write down, what to re-read and I do not have the time to get everything done and work." The students were sometimes unaware that the college provided a number of workshops on test-taking strategies, test anxiety, time management workshops or note taking. All of the workshops could be offered through tutoring services or academic support services. By offering training in the skills related to academic success, the college could potentially eliminate the sense of inferiority frequently associated with African American male students in the classroom.

Turner's study (2006) revealed several four-year universities participating in the study that had incorporated the embedded study skills into the students' first year of enrollment. The study found a positive impact on student success with the incorporation of the study skills into an existing course. 94% of the participants realized effective study habit and behaviors after the participation in the study.

Creating Specialized Student Development Courses

As Tovar and Simon (2003) have recommended, colleges should provide specialized student development courses designed to target specific student populations. Their 2003 study emphasized a need to offer student development courses taught by African American faculty to African American students. The courses facilitated by ethnically similar faculty tends to more easily create a comfort level between the student and the instructor and a sense of belonging to a student and the institution. If a level of comfort exists among faculty and students, African American male students are less likely to drop out or stop out and are more likely to persist through goal completion. Strayhorn (2012), as well as Hurtado and Carter (1997), reinforced this concept. The bond created in specialized college orientation and; career development classes create an atmosphere where a student is less likely to leave when the student begins to struggle or feel a sense of inferiority.

Eliminating Developmental Education Courses

Adding a co-requisite enrollment in developmental math, credit math, developmental English, credit English and biology during the first semester of enrollment is a second option to provide students with increased opportunities to demonstrate academic success. Demonstrating success in the first semester seems to hold the key to developing self-efficacy and increased motivation for success. The co-enrollment options would limit the time students spend in developmental courses and allow the students to move toward degree attainment at a faster pace.

After admission, students would complete placement exams if the students do not meet a minimum GPA requirement or did not reach the benchmark score on the SAT or ACT which is a common practice four universities have implemented which community colleges might consider implementing as well. As students are enrolled in classes within the degree program and receiving the necessary remediation to succeed academically, the students will graduate and persist from semester to semester.

Several states have eliminated developmental courses altogether. The students have embedded developmental work within the traditional course (Zachary & Schneider, 2010). Embedding the normal course content and the remediation into existing courses may be accomplished by lengthening the course or extending the number of credits assigned to the course using lab hours to allow the time for the increased instruction and remediation needed to support the students.

Supplemental Instruction and Learning Communities

Community college is able to provide additional support models for the academically underprepared students. With limited funds, the additional support may be provided by peer tutoring or support staff the college. Colleges should examine the concept of placing students with similar backgrounds into "learning communities" (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Learning communities are classes with the same students enrolled in multiple classes such as English and math (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). With extended class periods, students are able to receive the additional help needed for success from the instructor, peers, or a counselor (Enstrom & Tinto, 2008). Students within learning communities have demonstrated a 10% higher completion rate than similar students who were not placed within the communities (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Research suggests the students are more likely to attain higher rates of academic success during the first enrollment in a course as opposed to enrolling in the course and failing and then needing

to attempt the course a second or third time (Bailey, 2009). The college should continue to offer embedded support to the underprepared student through the learning communities and peer to peer tutoring.

Allowing Students to Enroll in Cohorts for Two, Three, or Four Courses

The cohort model has demonstrated success previously with students enrolled in developmental courses (Slanger et al., 2015). This cohort model would allow supplementary instruction in gateway courses this group of students frequently struggles with. The students could utilize peer-to-peer instruction as a secondary support mechanism for success. The cohorts could be designed according to the students' placement test scores as well as future career plans. The cohort model helps to create a sense of community among students and with the institution. When students are engaged, student retention increases.

Supporting the Outliers

Supporting the "outliers" (the students who need additional support to demonstrate success) with intrusive advising and the formation of student learning communities are two strategies colleges might desire to consider to support the equity agenda. The Wood and Ireland study from 2014 suggested that the level of engagement is influenced by precollege decisions students have prior to enrolling so capturing the students and providing ongoing support and intervention at the point of entry is vital to ensuring academic success. When African American male students have had a negative experience in education prior to the enrollment process, these frequently have shaped the student's future interactions with the college (Wood & Ireland, 2014).

Proposed Future Research Studies

Future research studies might include a pre-survey for data collection of student demographic information and a pre-survey in the Likert scale format to determine designed

educational strategies regardless of color, information on dealing with inequality in the classroom and defining the students' definition of classroom belongingness. Future studies should incorporate the methods outlined to include additional minorities, expand the participant sample and define success earlier during the research process.

Due to the limited nature of this study, I did not collect any specific data pertaining to all the indicators of academic success for students after they exited academic probation. The study did not attempt to delve into the details of the students' probationary status. The reasons associated with the student being placed on probation have not been identified as data mandatory to the study. The institutional goals may not establish the needed support mechanisms for all students without establishing the reasons that may have influenced the students' being placed on probation. Future studies may seek to identify the most significant reasons students are placed on probation, as well as identifying the factors that led to the probationary status of the students initially. The studies might seek to explore what interventions if any, a community college has in place to support academic success for all students but specifically in probationary student groups. By identifying the reasons that impacted the students prior to being placed on academic probation, the institution may identify potential strategies for academic success within the student population.

Expanding the Sample

Only African American male students were included in the participant sample for this research study. While the focus of the study was limited to one gender and one ethnicity, future studies may want to include a focus on other genders. Subsequent studies could also focus on additional ethnic groups to assess whether the racial classification was a significant indicator of the student's lack of academic success. Future studies may also want to include students with

disabilities and veteran students to determine whether these intervening variables play a factor. Future studies may also want to include African American female students to determine if the perceptions of academic success vary by gender. Another study might be designed to investigate the perceptions of academic success solely for African American veteran students or African American students with disabilities.

Identifying the Points of Dissatisfaction

While the study was not designed to determine to what extent the level of student dissatisfaction impacted the academic success of the African American male participants, the study collected data about a few specific occurrences that leaves me with a few questions about that particular measure. If and when a student is dissatisfied with any area of the college, how does the level of dissatisfaction impact the students' performance and progress as well as retention and graduation? Are there outlets to capture student dissatisfaction and use these incidents to improve the community college? I recommend a future expansion of this current work to evaluate the impact of perceived dissatisfaction with academic success.

Longitudinal Study

Future studies may attempt to reconvene the pre-enrollment student participants after completing the first year of enrollment at the community college. The data collected from the group after the first year of enrollment might determine if the perceptions of the pre-enrollment group varied as dramatically as did those of the probationary student group. A research study concentrated on the pre-enrollment participants after the first year of enrollment might provide data as to whether the perceptions of academic success changed during the course of enrollment. The reconvening of this group might also identify if any of the highly motivated students at entry had a change of perception after completing the first year of enrollment at the institution. If any

of the students in the proposed study end their first year of enrollment on probation, the change in perceptions of the students will shed light on the institutional characteristics that impacted academic success for this student group.

Uncovering Faculty Perceptions

Future researchers may also desire to interview faculty to examine the faculty perceptions of academic success. Faculty play a vital role in the students' completion and retention at the community college. By determining if the faculty perceptions of academic success align with the institutional definition of academic success, community colleges may provide insight related to the specific reasons why many African American male students fail to demonstrate academic success.

Implications for Higher Education Leaders

Prior to enrollment at the community college, African American male students who participated in the research study and institutional administrators agreed on the notion that definition of academic success was frequently determined by external circumstances in the lives of the students, but that the students needed to take responsibility for their own academic success. Therefore, no apparent disconnect between the students' perception of academic success and the institutional definition of academic success exists initially. African American male students prior to enrollment have high expectation for academic success. Students proclaim a desire to maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher. All the students who participated in this focus group session have a plan to transfer to a four-year university within a two-year time frame and have identified a prospective four-year institution. However, there is an apparent disconnect between the actual rates of academic success displayed by this group of students and their initial perceptions of academic success. This disconnect should be examined to understand what action

steps community colleges should consider aligning the perceptions of academic success with improved success rates.

By providing additional support mechanisms that are aligned with a realistic assessment of the initial student perceptions of what constitutes academic success for this group of students, colleges and/or universities may increase the long-term rates of academic success. The recommendations may be considered partially or collectively. However, immediate action is required on the part of colleges to ensure the academic success rates do not continue to fall for this student group. By identifying the potential barriers to academic success, community colleges have the unique opportunity to redirect these African American male students on the pathway to a bright future and the opportunity to earn credentials and transfer to a four-year institution if that is the long-term plan for the student.

With limited state resources and a budgetary shift to retention-based resources in higher education, the community college should make decisions about tutoring services; special advising programs focused on motivation or other intervention methods based on the prediction of the students' academic success. Targeting specific groups of students could be a more cost-effective intervention for students who are at risk of academic failure. Strategies to target specific student groups may include sharing the information with faculty or counseling through early alert warning systems, intrusive advising, and mentoring. The findings of this study underscored the need for specific instructional activities and techniques to increase student engagement, utilizing the learning styles of African American male students. The African American male students participating in the study emphasized a critical need is to have engagement with the faculty. Future resources should be undertaken to collect data on student engagement in the classroom and then eventually by ethnicity and by gender. Instructors should

strive to incorporate active learning techniques designed to engage all classroom learners by the students learning styles. The learning styles of the students could be discovered during the mandatory student development course the college currently teaches. Instructors should receive professional development to engage the multi-dimensional learning styles activities emphasizing collaboration and interpersonal interaction among students.

The Chancellor of the community college system where this study was conducted has proposed tripling the number of student credentials earned statewide by 2021 including both credit and non-credit credentials (Chancellor Goal's website, n.d.). With less than 40% of the students who attend Lee Hill Community College earning a degree or transferring to a four-year institution (Wyler, 2014), the community college should provide additional support to the high risk underprepared, African American male students by increasing the moments and opportunities the college has to intrude in the lives of its students and engage them. Intrusion in academic student lives by providing support, direction, counseling, and advising can accelerate progress to the achievement of the goal proposed by the Chancellor. Increasing the academic success rates of the group of students who participated in my study is a key component to improving the academic success rates at community colleges.

By understanding and uncovering the perceptions of the academic success of African American male students who nationally demonstrate a low degree success and identifying the barriers to success, community college and four-year universities might better align processes and programs to promote academic success for all students. By understanding the perceptions of incoming students, colleges may develop strategic planning initiatives targeted to ensure students receive the academic and social support needed to navigate higher education successfully. With the lowest rate of success of all student demographics, African American male students require

special attention and effort with highly structured programs and designated support personnel to maintain enrollment with persistence to graduation.

Based on best practices in higher education, public policy, and implications for planning, African American male students would benefit from the ability to study in a cohort model, have a well-documented pathway course enrollment plan, and have access to the support mechanisms colleges have instituted. Capturing useful demographic information at the time of enrollment allows the college to begin early interventions with the students through mandatory orientation sessions and then reinforce the salient points of a student development course designed specifically for this particular group of students. These early invention methods will offer the students the ability to benefit from the up-front support mechanisms since the students will have the knowledge of how to transverse the educational system before the student is at risk of failure. By the colleges' efforts to remove the obstacles and barriers to completion, the academic success rates for African American male students should continue to improve and thereby increase the academic success rates.

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Appendix A: Research Study Consent to Participate

Research Study Title: AN EXAMINATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES EXPECTATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THEIR EXPERIENCES AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative methods research study is to examine African American male students' perceptions of academic success at the community college. The study will compare the students' expectations of academic success with the colleges' expectations of academic success after a baseline definition of academic success is established through administrator interviews and a review of the college catalog and academic articles.

Process: Participants will be interviewed by a researcher to examine the perceptions of African-American male student success the focus group meetings. The focus group meetings will take up roughly one hour long.

Confidentiality: The identity of participants will be kept confidential throughout the study. The comments may be included in the final report. However, every effort will be made to keep the records confidential. The participants will be identified only by a pseudonym.

Benefits: There are no known benefits for participating in the study.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with participating in the study although the discussion of success makes cause so the type of distress. If you should happen to experience distress, the researcher will refer the participants to a competent mental health professional who can help with the distress.

Contact Information: The responsible party for this study is Dr. Dana Burnett can be reached at dburnett@odu.edu. The researcher for this study is Shashuna Gray can be reached at 334-322-3450 or sgray033@odu.edu.

I greatly appreciate your assistance. I know it takes time and energy to participate in the study and I'm grateful for yours. If there are any questions or comments that come up now or in the future, I hope you will contact us regarding any questions.

_____   _____

Subject Signature   Date   Researcher Signature   Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for African American Male Students

Opening script:

Hi. My name is Shashuna Gray, and I am working on a research project to learn about academic success for African-American male students at community colleges in the state. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me today. Is it okay if I record this session? It will help me make sure I do not miss anything important. After I have made a record of your interview, I will remove your name from the recording.

I have several questions I would like to ask you about your background and your experiences as a college student. I believe this interview will take approximately an hour, but perhaps it may take a little bit longer.

The purpose of this study is to examine the African-American male students' definition of success and to determine whether or not the students' perception of success aligns with the institutional definition of success. I hope it will lead to a better understanding of support mechanisms or programs or processes that can be implemented to improve student success rate for African American male students at community colleges.

I have a short form I'd like to read it to you and if you agree I will ask you to sign the form. (Read the consent form). You can stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions do you have for me before we begin?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for African American Male Students

1. What is your definition of academic success? Do you regularly attend your classes? Attend your instructors' office hours? Complete all assignments?

2. Do you think your definitions of success align with the college's definition of academic success?

3. What challenges do you face as a male student? Tell me about them. Are they related to your race?

4. Do you believe African American male students have higher success rates when the students are engaged in co-curricular activities at the college? Why?

5. Does the college provide opportunities for mentoring and have you taken advantage of the opportunities?

6. Do you have any consistent interaction with a faculty advisor or a member of the college's academic advising center or your academic advisor?

7. Why did you choose to attend this community college? Where you aware of efforts by the college to recruit African-American males? What did those efforts mean to you?

8. Is there anything you would like to share with me that you feel will be important to the study?

Appendix D

Demographic Questions for Student Participants

Birthdate   _____

Month   Day   Year

Racial/Ethnic Background (circle one)

African-American   Asian/Pacific Islander   Caucasian   Hispanic   Native American

Two or More Races   Other_____

How many college credits have you attempted? _____

What is your current GPA? _____

County of Residence_____

Have you failed any classes? _____ How many credits were the classes? _____

Are you planning on transferring to a four-year institution? _____

How long do you think it will take to complete your associate's degree?

_____

Are you employed? _____ How many hours do you work each week? _____

Appendix E

Interview Protocol for Community College Administrators

Opening Script:

Dear Community College Administrator,

Thank you in advance for your time to answer a few questions about your institution. My name is Shashuna J. Gray. I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I would like to ask you a few questions about academic success at your institution. Your identity will not be reported in research findings. Thank you for your participation.

Appendix F: Administrator's Interview Protocol

1. How does your institution define academic success? Tell me about it.

2. Does your institutional definition of academic success align with financial aid requirements? 2B. Do you believe a student is capable of being successful and not meet the financial aid regulations simultaneously?

3. Is your institutional definition of academic success the same for all groups of students at your institution?

4. Should the institutional definition of academic success transverse all student groups?

5. Would you share with me your personal definition of academic success?

Appendix G: Shashuna Gray's Curriculum Vita

SHASHUNA J. GRAY

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Highly skilled and accomplished professional with more than 22 years of experience in a university and community college setting including over 10 years leadership experience. Distinguished educator who demonstrates excellence in practical and scientific knowledge along with strong organizational management skills.

EDUCATION

2012-2017 **Ph.D., Darden College of Education**
Community College Leadership Ph.D. Program
Old Dominion University, Norfolk VA

An Examination of the Perceptions of Academic Success of African American male students at the Community College
Defended October 25, 2016

1992-1994 **Master of Science, Biology**
Alabama State University, Montgomery AL

The Effect of Herbimycin A on the Mitogenosis and Exogenesis of XC Rat Tumor Cells
Awards: Patricia Robert Harris Fellowship

1988-1992 **Bachelor of Science, Biology**
Alabama State University, Montgomery AL
Minor: Chemistry

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2013—Present **Dean of Arts and Sciences**
Germanna Community College, Fredericksburg Area Campus, Fredericksburg, Virginia

2009-2012 **Department Chair/Assistant to the Dean**
Germanna Community College**,** Fredericksburg Area Campus, Fredericksburg, Virginia

2006-2012 **Associate Professor of Biology**
Germanna Community College, Fredericksburg Area Campus, Fredericksburg, Virginia

AWARDS AND MEMBERSHIPS

Golden Key International Honour Society   Phi Theta Kappa. Student Advisor
VCCS Master Online Instructor   Fredericksburg STEM 16
Chair Academy 2011   Virginia Association of Biological Educators

The word processor for this dissertation was Shashuna J. Gray.