ABSTRACT

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OF WHITE UNDERGRADUATES ATTENDING

PUBLIC HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITIES

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The purpose of this study was to identify factors that influence the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have experienced an increase in White, undergraduate student enrollment since the early 1980s (American Association of University Professors, 2007; Libarkin, 1984; Standley, 1978). Student engagement has been consistently linked to positive student outcomes such as cognitive and social development, college adjustment, and persistence rates (Berger & Milem, 1999; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella & Hagedorn, 1999; Harper, 2004; Kuh, 1995; Pike, 2000). However relatively little is known about student engagement on HBCU campuses and even less is known about the engagement of non-Black students on HBCU campuses. HBCUs have been known for their ability to provide support resulting in academic success for African American students (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999), but little research has examined their ability in providing such support for other student populations, like White undergraduates. Thus, the primary research question guiding this study was: what factors influence the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs?

   This qualitative multiple case study explored the experiences of 22 White undergraduate students attending two, public HBCUs, located in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern parts of the United States. While all the of the participants' experiences were unique and distinctive, the results from document analysis and individual and focus group interviews revealed five factors influenced their engagement: (1) faculty-student interactions, (2) staff-student interactions, (3) involvement in co-curricular activities and university-sponsored programs, (4) prior diversity experiences, and (5) first-year experiences. Based on these findings, recommendations for future research and practice are offered.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ENGAGEMENT OF WHITE UNDERGRADUATES

ATTENDING PUBLIC HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITIES

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment

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Advisory Committee:
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Preface

I am a proud alumnus of a public historically Black university. Anyone that knows me well will tell you, "Joelle loves Winston-Salem State University!" The lived experience I have as a result of WSSU is the reason why it has become a permanent part of my life as well as a guide to the manner in which I work with current college students through my professional work and hopefully, future scholarship. My better understanding of myself and the shaping of my identity began with freshmen orientation in the summer of 1991 and continued until graduation in May 1995. From the moment I moved into my freshman, women's residence hall, Atkins Hall, I was greeted and nurtured by the then dorm mother, Ms. Brown, as well as the resident assistants on each floor. Their welcome was overwhelming! Current students, professional staff members, and faculty interacted with me as if I were a part of their biological families. Upperclassmen encouraged me to get involved in campus leadership activities. My resident advisor actually gave me the application to apply for freshmen class president. Faculty members set high expectations and often told me that you have to be better than the best in all that you do because some individuals not associated with HBCUs have a different perspective on the quality of students graduating from these institutions. Student affairs professionals and senior leaders, such as the president and provost, always exposed us to unique opportunities to engage in campus-wide activities. This form of support continued through my daily journey on campus as I interfaced with the cafeteria staff, librarians, faculty, and student affairs administrators. These initial interactions with members of the campus community influenced by confidence and empowered me to run for freshmen class and sophomore class president without hesitation and eventually to

become the first, two-time Student Government Association (SGA) president in the history of the institution. It was in this context, the public HBCU setting, that I was engaged from the moment I set foot on campus to unpack and moved into my residence hall.

These two factors—HBCUs as institutions of higher education and student engagement as an educational concept and practice, are of prominent importance in both my personal and professional life. They are also the reasons I decided to dedicate a significant portion of my graduate education career to learning more about the success and plight of HBCUs and how they may or may not influence the engagement of all students entering their gates for a college education.

Dedication

There are so many individuals who have influenced my ability to advance as a doctoral student, professionally and scholarly. To attempt to name everyone who has impacted my life for thirty-six seconds or thirty-six years would take a significant amount of time and a great deal of space in this text. I would like to therefore acknowledge and dedicate this scholarship to my ancestors and the other historical giants who saw the need to establish institutions, now referred to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and those who continue to champion their importance and existence to higher education. I would be remiss if I did not name some individuals, who had and have benefited from the existence of HBCUs and either demonstrated or conveyed their importance to me in various ways. Those individuals include:

- Mrs. Isabel Taylor Davis, my deceased 106-year old, paternal grandmother who attended Winston-Salem Teachers Institute, what is now Winston-Salem State University, and where I obtained my undergraduate education.

- Ms. Ruby Costella Davis, my deceased aunt and daughter of Mrs. Isabel T. Davis, who was an alumnus of Winston-Salem State University and instilled in me from the age of 7 that there was no other institution more worthy than "Ol SU'!

- Mrs. Coretta Branche Miller, my deceased, maternal grandmother who attended and graduated from Shaw University as an adult learner after raising her five children.

- Ms. Michelle Slater, my Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. soror and dear friend, who graduated from Spelman College and attended The Ohio State University to pursue doctoral study in physics. Michelle's untimely death in 1996 changed my

life as a young adult significantly but her pride and passion for Spelman College and the pursuit of education was a core piece of motivation and ability to complete this study. Michelle, this doctorate is for YOU (it's not physics but hopefully close enough)!

Last but certainly not least, I dedicate this dissertation and all its significance to the education of all individuals who desire the opportunity to access higher education, especially to my parents, Mr. Charles and Mrs. Helen Miller Davis. My parents also taught my sisters and I that we could achieve and accomplish anything we put our minds to. As K-12 educators for their entire professional careers, they sacrificed their time and maybe even some of their dreams in order for us to have the opportunity to achieve our goals and realize opportunities they were not afforded as young adults. Their efforts often included working additional jobs in addition to their full-time, demanding jobs as special education and physical education teachers. I can vividly remember the summers my parents worked in order for their children to attend educational summer camps and participate in other enrichment activities. Their efforts and example, if I may, are the primary reason I have the propensity to believe that I could obtain a terminal degree and overcome difficult challenges in life. Mom and Dad, thank you for your all that you have done and continue to do for me, even as an adult woman!

I would like to thank my sisters, Charlita, Sharon, and Karen as well as my niece Asya Niambi Davis who have been my cheerleaders and sources of inspiration. Further, I must acknowledge the Carter-Barnes family and the Cook family for their ongoing support and love. I would especially like to thank my in-laws, Mr. James H. and Cornelia

Carter and Ms. Antionette Carter, who have supported and sent prayers from North

Carolina as well.

Acknowledgements

My thoughts and ambition to pursue higher education, and specifically a doctoral degree, would have only been a dream and not a goal had it not been for my family and my extended family in the small town of Oxford, North Carolina. Oxford is a small town with a lot of rich history but primarily known since its establishment as a "little tobacco town" outside of the research triangle. Within that town, I was fortunate to be influenced each and every day by my neighbors, who were teachers within the local school system, members of both the Stovall and Antioch First Baptist church communities, and community leaders through organizations such as the Girl Scouts, 4-H Club, and the Gleaners (Purity #22), a young women's organization of the larger Order of the Eastern Star. These organizations and the people within always stressed the importance of education and the belief that anything you put your mind to you can do. This same ideology was reinforced by my parents, Mr. Charles and Mrs. Helen Davis, who too were educators throughout their professional careers, and instilled in my siblings and I that acquiring an education was imperative to securing or establishing a quality of life, making a change and difference in this world.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the love, support, and patience from my soulmate, life partner, husband and best friend, Mr. Randall Laurence Carter. Randall and I have been a part of each other's lives since 1993 when we met at our undergraduate alma mater, Winston-Salem State University. Since I met him across from "the plots" he has always had a giving heart and attempted to help and support me in anyway that he possibly could. Our relationship includes 10 years of marriage and 5 years of courtship. Seven of those years have been influenced by my graduate education and thus, some of

our goals, have been put on hold. Randall, I love you for all that you are and all that you do. It is because of you I was able to press forward on the dissertation when I did not have the energy or desire to sometimes even finish. As we always say, when it's good or bad, at the end of the day, "It's me and you kid!" This dissertation is yet another example of our continuous love and commitment. I love you Babe!

External to my family, I also have other individuals who deserve recognition and acknowledgement of their support through this process: My Advisors and Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt-Thank you for being not only my doctoral advisor and dissertation chair but a role model of what it means to be a professional, on both student and academic affairs sides of the house. Your presence and the way you conduct business while mentoring students is impeccable. As a woman of color, I have learned some much from working with you and watching you successfully coach and mentor students from diverse backgrounds in our program. Dr. John Williams, I would like to also thank you as well as for coaching me throughout my doctoral process and planting the seed for me to focus on student engagement for my dissertation. My success in this process would not have been possible without the efforts, involvement and feedback from my other committee members as well Dr. Alberto Cabrera, Dr. Noah Drezner, Dr. Susan Jones, and Dr. KerryAnn O'Meara,. Your insights and constructive feedback have definitely impacted the quality of this study.

I must also acknowledge my extended family that consists of long-time friends, family members, neighbors, sorors, fraternity brothers, church members and fellow doctoral students who have helped me through this rigorous process. These individuals represent a large network of inspiration who coached me on to continue, when I wanted

to stop, to counsel me on calming me down when I was at my wit's end, and these are people who believed more in me at times than I believed in myself. First, I would like to thank and honor Mr. Jeffrey Alston, my dear friend and also Winston-Salem State University alumni member. Jeff and I worked together when I was SGA President at WSSU and he has never stopped believing in and supporting me. I love you, Jeff! Second, I would like to acknowledge my dear friends from The Ohio State University, Dr. Juan Gilbert and Dr. Robin Vann Lynch. The both of you have been a source of inspiration to and for me since 1997. I am so fortunate to have connected with such stellar and loving people like you. And, who knew—our relationships started with the OSU Black Graduate and Professional Student Caucus! I would like to thank my UMCP colleagues, Dr. Wendell Hall, Dr. Toyia Younger, Dr. Sean Simone, Dr. Rebecca Thomas, Michael Pascarella, Traci Dula, Dr. Deborah Bryant, Dr. Javuane Adams-Gaston who have all been advocates, a source of inspiration and resources through this process. Thanks for everything.

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As my study and others reveal, mentorship by faculty and staff continues to be an important part of the collegial experience. I am proud to say that I have had faculty and staff mentors from my undergraduate alma mater, Winston-Salem State University and

my graduate alma mater, The Ohio State University providing me a sense of encouragement as well as reminding that I could not only achieve this goal but it was an exception. To my Winston-Salem State University family especially individuals such as Dr. Francine Madrey, Mr. Donald Benson, Ms. Vera Stepp, Dr. Madeline Scales, Dr. Manuel Vargas, Dr. Shirley Manigualt, Dr. Rebecca Wall, Dr. Elwanda Ingram and many other WSSU faculty thank you for instilling in me that I would be Dr. Carter before I even knew what a Ph.D. was or the commitment it would require. Dr. Susan Jones and Dr. Ada Demb, two of my Ohio State University mentors and faculty, I would like to thank you both for serving as those sources of support and advocating for me until the end!

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for taking time on the weekends and holidays to review my drafts with a fine tooth comb

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needed to share the stories of these twenty-two incredible students.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have recently witnessed an

increase in the enrollment of White, undergraduate students (Adrisan, 2005; Brown,

2002; Carter-Williams, 1984; Goggins, 2007; Goldman, 2008; Healy, 1996; Martin,

2007; Sims, 1994). Recent reports indicate that between 1980 and 1990, White student

enrollments across all HBCUs increased by 10,000 students. In 1995, enrollments

peaked, with 35,963 white students matriculating at HBCUs throughout the country

(American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2007; National Center for

Education Statistics [NCES], 2001). The increase in these enrollments has been most

apparent in public, state-supported HBCUs (Brown, 2002). In fact, many of these

institutions have larger White undergraduate enrollments than Black undergraduate

enrollments. For example, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*

(JBHE), institutions such as Lincoln University (Missouri) and Kentucky State

University have White student enrollments representative of more than 50% of the total

student population (The Shrinking…, 2001). Further, the White undergraduate

population at Langston University (Oklahoma) has risen from 11.6% to 40% since 1980

(Drummond, 2000; Marcus, 1981).

NCES reports continue to show a considerable White student enrollment of

34,673 across all HBCUs (2006). This enrollment represents 29,577 White

undergraduate and 5,096 White graduate students. The Thurgood Marshall College Fund

(TMCF), a national association representing 47 public HBCUs and historically Black law

schools, reported that White undergraduates were the largest non-Black student group

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represented on the campuses of its member institutions. In a 2006-2007 demographic report, White students represented 12.3% of 199,757 students attending TMCF institutions (Thurgood Marshall…, 2009).

The steady increase of White undergraduates attending public HBCU campuses compels educators to better understand White students' collegiate experiences at HBCUs. One lens to assess these experiences is through examining their engagement on campus. Student engagement is defined as the amount of time and energy students choose to devote to activities both inside and outside the classroom (Kuh, 2001). As a behavioral construct, it is characterized by students' active involvement rather than passively attending or participating in social and academic activities. The second critical component of student engagement concentrates on how institutions allocate their resources and structure their curricula and other support services to encourage students to participate in activities positively associated with persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation (Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 2009; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991).

Student engagement has become an increasingly important benchmark for institutional quality and measure of student learning (Kuh, 2009). It has been positively linked with a wide range of student outcomes such as critical thinking skills (Anaya, 1996; Pike, 2000), leadership development (Posner, 2004), identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004; Hu & Kuh, 2003), and persistence (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Researchers have suggested critical factors influencing active engagement include the frequency of interaction between students and faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and

between students and staff (Flowers, 2003; Kuh, 2009). Other influential factors for engagement are students' involvement on campus (Astin, 1999; Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2003), students' experiences within diverse environments prior to college (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008), and students' experiences in the first year of college (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008).

There have been studies on student engagement at HBCUs (Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004; National Survey on Student Engagement [NSSE], 2004; Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes, 2007). However, there are few empirical or theoretical studies (Closson & Henry, 2008; Peterson & Hamrick, 2009; Steck, Heckert, & Heckert, 2003) that address aspects of engagement of subpopulations such as White, undergraduate students on public HBCU campuses. This gap in the literature served as an impetus for the current study which explored the ways in which White students attending HBCUs described their experiences. Primarily, this inquiry sought to determine factors related to their engagement. This introductory chapter, the first of seven, discusses the problem, and outlines the intent, justification, and significance of the current investigation. The conceptual framework that shapes this inquiry and the guiding research question are also presented.

Background and Statement of the Problem

Previous research studies, media briefs, and HBCU advocacy organizations have primarily presented data on White undergraduates attending HBCUs as statistical comparisons illustrating the changes in enrollment trends and graduation rates (Wells-Lawson, 1984; White, 2010; White Students Outnumber…, 2000). However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, publications and social media outlets began to offer a different

perspective of White students attending HBCUs and drew upon personal interviews and reflections from these students. The students' vignettes and personal reflections attracted the attention from popular news media such as CNN and the higher education community.

Morehouse College, a private HBCU with a mission to educate and advance the mobility of African American males, has a history of enrolling and graduating White males who have reported positive experiences. Joshua Packwood, a 2008 Morehouse graduate and the college's first White valedictorian stated, "I have been forced to see the world in a different perspective that I don't think I could've gotten anywhere else" (Goldman, 2008, para. 7). Similarly, Steven Schukei, a White, Morehouse alumnus and former student government association vice-president attributed his increased confidence and ability to acquire a major leadership role to what he described as the "Morehouse Mystique". The Morehouse Mystique, as defined by Schukei, meant achieving self-efficacy and "having the confidence to do what you need to do, to stand for things that need to be stood for and to live your life [in an] exemplary, [way]" (Chappell, 1998, p. 64 as cited in Willie, Reddick, & Brown, 2006, p. 71).

Elisabeth Martin, a senior international studies major attending Kentucky State University (KSU), is another example of positive, White student experiences on an HBCU campus. She was elected as the 2009 homecoming queen by the student body at KSU, the sole public HBCU in the state. Despite some negative reactions from alumni, Elisabeth was confident in the support of her peers and indicated she had no reservations about running for the key position on campus. She affirmed that her motivation to run for the position was her desire to serve the University in the capacity of a student leader

(Watkins, 2009). These recent occurrences reflect experiences White undergraduate students have realized in both public and private HBCU settings. They differ from studies depicting White HBCU students as mainly graduate students who commute and are not engaged in activities outside of the classroom.

In contrast, there have been studies reporting less than positive experiences for White students attending HBCUs (Abraham, 1990; Nixon & Henry, 1992). In many cases, White students have reported being harassed because of their race by their Black peers and faculty. Specifically, students described instances of feeling like an outcast or that they did not belong in the HBCU environment. In 2003, Stephanie Kwader, a White freshman from a small northeastern Pennsylvania town, applied and was accepted to Bowie State University (BSU) in Maryland. Stephanie did not realize that BSU was an HBCU until her mother found information while researching the institution online. Stephanie reported being the target of "white jokes" in the presence of other students, experiencing difficulty making new friends, and discomfort in some classes such as English. In particular, she recalled an English professor asking students to define Black womanhood. Stephanie felt this was a perspective that she could not possibly understand and stated, "I can't be involved [in the class] if I don't feel comfortable" (Honawar, 2006, np).

Josh Bradley and Brian Multon are two White students who attended North Carolina Central University (NCCU), a public HBCU located in Durham, North Carolina. Josh grew up in a predominately White neighborhood in Asheville, North Carolina and chose to attend NCCU because of its jazz studies program. Josh reported that he felt other students prejudged him and felt uncomfortable when students stared at him and his

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African American girlfriend (Jones, 2010). Similarly, Brian indicated he was initially

concerned about socially adjusting to NCCU due to tensions he felt from other students.

Brian reported that students often questioned him and asked why he chose to attend

NCCU instead of the neighboring, flagship traditionally White research institution,

University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill.

However, even when some White students expressed negative experiences such

as feelings of isolation, disregard by faculty in the classroom, or racist behaviors from

Black students, their overall perceptions of the campus environment have been positive.

Stephanie, Josh, and Brian believed they benefited from being a part of an environment

where students can interact with diverse peers and faculty. Furthermore, Brian and Josh

indicated later in interviews that the despite challenges, they eventually became engaged

on campus and developed new friendships. During her sophomore year, Stephanie

helped organize the university's homecoming parade. Similarly, Brian joined the staff of

the *Campus Echo*, the NCCU student newspaper (Honawar, 2006; Jones, 2010). The

experiences and voices of these particular students are significant because they not only

characterize their experiences in an HBCU environment, but their stories illustrate

student engagement.

Although there is some research and media briefs on aspects of White student

engagement at HBCUs (Peterson & Hamrick, 2009; Spencer, 2009; White, 2010), the

previous examples should not be considered representative of the typical experiences of

White students on HBCU campuses. Still, relatively little is known about the experiences

of White undergraduates attending public HBCUs and their engagement. Existing studies

on White undergraduate students on HBCU campuses have focused on students'

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perceptions and attitudes on race, satisfaction with the institution, college choice, and self-reported descriptions of the academic and social climate (Abraham, 1990; Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997; Daniels, 2008; Libarkin, 1984); how White students and Black students comparatively self-report low grades, White student relationships with African-American faculty and perceptions of diversity on campus (Wells-Larson, 1994); and the experiences of White graduate students on HBCU campuses (Fountaine, 2008; Hall & Closson, 2005). Findings from these studies consistently indicated that White students report having strong relationships with HBCU faculty, a high comfort level of discussing race relations, and adequate efforts to accommodate diversity on campus (Closson & Henry, 2008; Nixon & Henry, 1992).

More recent studies focus on the increase of White students enrolling in HBCU graduate programs and the impact of environmental factors on their social experiences (Hall & Closson, 2005). The majority of the studies on White student enrollment and college experiences have been quantitatively designed with data collected through surveys (Abraham, 1990; Libarkin, 1984; Wells-Larson 1994). Very few studies specifically address the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs and employ qualitative methods such as individual and focus group interviews, and informal observation. Although existing studies provide insight into White student experiences on HBCU campuses, there is neither a clear picture of the ways in which this student population describes their engagement experiences, nor an understanding of which factors influence their engagement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. In the last twenty years, scholarly research and inquiry on the experiences (social, psychosocial, and academic outcomes) of Black students attending predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) have been extensive (Allen, 1992; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Willie, 1994). There is also an extant body of literature examining the differences between the academic and social experiences of Black students attending PWIs (Astin, 1982; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Roebuck & Murty, 1993) and HBCUs (Allen & Haniff, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987), as well as research exploring the similarities and differences in the experiences of White and Black students attending PWIs (Bohr, Pascarella, Nora & Terenzini, 1995; Terenzini, Yaeger, Bohr, Pascarella & Amaury, 1997; Waston & Kuh, 1996). Absent from the literature are the voices and experiences of White and other non-Black undergraduate students attending HBCUs. Few studies address the emerging presence of White students on Black campuses or assess their levels of engagement, and social and academic experiences (Brown, Richard, & Donahoo, 2004).

In this investigation, a qualitative research design and individual and focus group interviews were used to gain a better perspective on key factors influencing the

engagement of White undergraduates attending two public HBCUs. Heritage University[1] (HU), a comprehensive, urban, doctoral degree-granting HBCU located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, and Gulf Coast University (GCU), a liberal arts HBCU located on the southeastern coast of the United States, were selected as research sites for this inquiry. The research question guiding this study is what factors influence the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs?

Research Sites

Heritage University and Gulf Coast University were selected as the two research sites for this study. Both institutions are located in states required by federal desegregation mandates to diversify student bodies and to dismantle any dual systems of higher education (Matlock, 1984). Each institution has a history of White undergraduate enrollments extending from the early 1980s to 2000s. From 2000 to 2010, White undergraduate enrollments have fluctuated but remained consistent over a ten-year period. HU and GCU are also members of larger state higher education systems and are categorized as comprehensive, regional institutions by their respective overarching systems.

Heritage University is a mid-size, doctoral degree-granting, public HBCU located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Located within minutes from a major metropolitan city, the campus offers an array of academic programs such as engineering, architecture, and broadcast and public relations that have become attractive commodities

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[1]Heritage University and Gulf Coast University are pseudonyms used throughout this document to protect the identity of the institutions.

for the institution within the last years. The mission of HU illuminates its goal to enroll a diverse student body, while maintaining its priority to educate underrepresented students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who represent a significant number of individuals from the local area.

In 2008, HU enrollments reflected an African American student population comprised of 5,629 students. The White undergraduate enrollment consisted of 100 students, followed by 68 Latino/a, 32 Asian, and 8 Native American students, respectively. Heritage has a history of providing educational opportunities to White students prior to its formal recognition as a state institution. Since 1999, White student enrollments have fluctuated due to increased competition from neighboring public institutions. Although White students represent the second largest student population, the majority of White student representation is within HU's graduate student population.

Gulf Coast University is a mid-size, liberal arts degree-granting institution located in the southeastern part of the United States. As one of the oldest HBCUs in the state, GCU's mission is to produce global, productive members of society through high quality instruction, research, and community involvement. The mission also emphasizes the institution's priority to engage students in learning and personal growth within a student-centered environment influenced by African American culture and a diverse student body. The largest majors on campus include biology, business management, mass communications, criminal justice, and accounting.

GCU has an undergraduate population of 3,598 and African American students represent 94% of the student body. Following African Americans, White, Latino/a, and Asian students represent the largest ethnic undergraduate student populations. GCU's

White undergraduate student enrollment has also fluctuated over the last ten years. Since 1999, White student enrollments have declined from 7.9% to 3.2%. Within the institution's strategic plan, a key priority is to increase its non-Black student enrollments through targeted recruitment efforts. A more extensive profile, background and information on the participants at each research site will be introduced in Chapters Four and Five.

Significance of this Study

There have been few studies exploring the experiences of the White majority when they elect to become a minority, or temporary minorities (Closson & Henry, 2008; Hall & Closson, 2005; Peterson & Hamrick, 2009; Steck, Heckert & Heckert, 2003). In this study, temporary minorities are characterized as individuals who are not underrepresented or considered a minority in all social settings. For example, Smith and Borgstedt (1985) suggested that a social climate, such as an HBCU campus, where Blacks are the authority and Whites are subordinate is a unique context. Specifically, the authors suggested that in the HBCU setting "Whites would be in a subordinate status overall" (p.14). Further, Hall and Closson (2005) postulated that Whites as temporary minorities could also be characterized by the amount of time they spend in a space or environment with individuals from non-White student populations. For instance, Closson and Henry (2008b) examined the social adjustment of undergraduate White students as minorities on an HBCU campus. The authors explained that White students, as temporary minorities, may spend most of their time in classroom settings, which is not substantial to understand the meaning and complexity of White privilege and what it means to be White. Specifically, the authors contended:

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However, although these students may have been learning about Black culture from their daily living experiences as well as how to modify their behaviors to better 'fit in', they might not necessarily have been learning much about White culture and what it means to be White in the context of privilege and oppression. (p.531)

To this end, this study possesses the design and potential to offer significant contributions to the research literature, inform practice and policy for HBCU administrators and faculty, and add new perspective to policy and research in higher education in general. Over the last 30 years, White student enrollment has increased and White student experiences have evolved on HBCU campuses. In contrast, the literature has not kept pace in explaining the impact and implications of these trends. There is a significant void in the current knowledge base concerning White undergraduate student engagement on HBCU campuses (Closson & Henry, 2008b). This study can significantly contribute to understanding the ways in which White students are engaged and the impact of their engagement. This study contributes to the research literature by delving deeper into the intricacies and experiences of White students in minority roles.

Since there is documented research suggesting Black students attending PWIs experience college differently from their White counterparts (Moore, 2001; Nettles, 1987), it is plausible to consider the inverse—that White students attending HBCUs may experience college differently from their non-White counterparts. In fact, there is some data that suggest the experiences of White students may be different from their Black peers attending HBCUs (NSSE, 2009). Moreover, Birnbaum (1983) stated:

Historically, Black colleges offer Black students an alternative to the

environments of predominately White colleges and universities as well as a

chance to work with faculty who understand the Black experience, and they give

White students an opportunity to experience being in a minority role. (p. 112)

Therefore, this study is also significant because it more closely examines how White

students may engage or experience HBCU campus life differently from their non-White

counterparts.

In addition, this investigation may extend the lines of inquiry surrounding

diversity and multiculturalism on HBCU campuses. Both have become increasing

priorities as HBCUs, in particular public HBCUs, are faced with moving beyond serving

as a vehicle to increase access and promote equity for a traditional African American

demographic. HBCUs are now compelled to position themselves as powerful academic

enterprises designed to meet the dynamic needs of a global student population (Minor,

2008; Nahal, 2009). Although this study does not specifically explore diversity and

multiculturalism, the findings could potentially provide a platform or model for

examining each of those priorities through an engagement perspective. The study can

also add to the emerging scholarship and discourse on multiculturalism at HBCUs and

how the institutions facilitate diversity.

Furthermore, this inquiry might provide useful insight to HBCU administrators

and faculty as it relates to programming and teaching. The outcomes could help to

inform how White students learn, which kinds of extracurricular and co-curricular

programs add value to their educational experiences, and how their experiences prior to

enrollment on HBCU campuses mold, shape, and guide how they interact within an HBCU environment.

Finally, the outcomes of this inquiry could be advantageous to HBCUs in emphasizing their contribution to higher education, particularly public higher education systems. Given the increased opportunities for access to historically marginalized populations, opponents of HBCUs have questioned their contemporary educational relevance and purpose (Jost, 2003). The findings in this investigation may strengthen the argument that HBCUs are a viable option for White students, thus suggesting that HBCUs have the capacity to provide positive collegiate experiences for a broader range of students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this inquiry is a synthesis of the works of Astin (1982, 1984, 1993), Kuh (1993, 2003, 2009), and the National Survey on Student Engagement (2009) benchmarks used to assess student engagement. Drawing from Astin's involvement theory, Kuh (2001) characterized the concept of student engagement as a reciprocal exchange between the student and the educational institution. This means engagement is measured by the time and effort students place into their studies and activities that lead to experiences resulting in student success. Second, engagement involves how institutions allocate resources and align their services in ways which encourage students to participate in and benefit from a range of activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Associates, 2005). Kuh's (1993) notion of seamless learning environments and engagement supports Astin's theory in that it emphasizes the importance of developing educational structures extending beyond the classroom and enabling students to become

more involved. While Kuh (2001) parallels the basic tenets of Astin's model, he extends

the paradigm and addresses the critical role institutions should play in providing

resources and services that encourage student participation. Although student

involvement and student engagement are conceptually similar, researchers have

highlighted a key qualitative difference—a student can be involved, but not engaged

(Harper & Quaye, 2009). For instance, a White student could be a member of a

university sponsored organization on an HBCU campus, but not contribute time and

effort to important organizational tasks, pose questions and provide feedback, or take

action to experience deeper learning and commitment.

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement focuses on the amount of physical

and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience. This

conceptualization emphasizes more of what students do rather than what they perceive,

feel, and make meaning of in terms of their experiences. Astin (1982) also suggested that

active or engaged students report more positive educational and social outcomes from

their educational experiences. Major factors noted to influence positive student

involvement include faculty and student interaction, residence life, academic

involvement, and participation in organizations such as the student government

association (Astin, 1984, 1993). This model has been widely used in higher education

and regarded as a foundation for better understanding and exploring student engagement

(Chickering & Gasmon, 1987; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Kim & Conrad, 2006;

Kimbrough, 1998; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996).

The National Survey of Student Engagement is a well-known instrument used by

more than 1,400 diverse postsecondary institutions since 2000 (NSSE, 2010). The tool

captures data from undergraduate students who voluntarily complete the survey in order for higher education administrators to assess the extent to which students are engaged in educational practices related to high levels of learning and development (Harper, 2004; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). The benchmarks outlined by NSSE helped to guide the interview protocol for this exploratory study on White undergraduate students attending HBCUs. The protocol was divided into five major areas: (a) level of academic challenge, (b) student interaction with faculty members, (c) active and collaborative learning, (d) enrichment of educational experiences, and (e) supportive campus environments.

Kuh's (2001) conceptualization of student engagement, undergirded by Astin's (1984) foundational model for student involvement, and the NSSE (2009) benchmarks for assessing student engagement, collectively, provide a practical framework to examine the collegiate experiences of White, undergraduate students on HBCU campuses. A synthesis of all three was the driving force in developing the primary research question for this study—what factors influence the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs?

Limitations

There are several limitations to this investigation. First, this study is limited in its scope in that only undergraduate students attending public HBCUs who identified as White or Caucasian were selected as participants. Further, the focus of the study was solely on their perceptions and self-reporting of their engagement. Participants' experiences were not compared to other student populations on campus such as African American students. Thus, the sample alone narrows the focus and limits the generalizability of the study.

Dwyer (2006) argued that the scholarship on diversity on HBCUs has been focused, almost exclusively, on the experiences of White students. Such a focus only indirectly addresses the various aspects of multiculturalism on HBCU campuses and more integrated, comprehensive studies are needed to examine the experiences of diverse students, faculty, and curriculum issues at HBCUs. Thus, this study does not investigate or inform approaches to integrate multiculturalism into campus programming or curriculum transformation efforts.

Another limitation of this inquiry is the lack of variety among institutional sizes and type. The two sites selected for this study are not representative of public HBCUs with larger White, undergraduate student enrollments. For example, West Virginia State University and Bluefield State University are two public HBCUs with White undergraduate populations larger than their African American student populations (Brown, 2004). The experiences of participants in this study may differ from those HBCUs with larger White student enrollments. In addition, the inclusion of institutions with more substantial White undergraduate populations could have yielded more student participants and garnered more diverse perspectives about White, undergraduate student engagement. However, the ability to include institutions possessing these preferable characteristics was constrained by time, financial resources (e.g., travel, lodging, and participant stipends), and access to university supporters and gatekeepers.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to the discourse on engagement in higher education, specifically the examination of engagement on HBCU campuses. The student voices and experiences embodied through this study offer a valid context to extend the dialogue about engagement at HBCUs and

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strategies for students', specifically White, undergraduates, successful matriculation on HBCU campuses.

Definitions of Terms

Given the possible variance in meanings of terms within higher education, the following terms were defined in a manner specific to this study:

1. African American or Black – a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups in Africa; this excluded persons of Hispanic origin and did not include international Africans from the African continent (Bickham-Chavers, 2003). African American and Black are used throughout the study, mainly to reference these populations during specific, historical time periods, and to limit redundancy.

2. Caucasian or White – a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (NCES, 1997). Caucasian and White are used throughout the study as self-reporting identifiers for participants and to limit redundancy.

3. Engagement- the amount of time and energy students choose to devote to activities both inside and outside the classroom (Kuh, 2001).

4. Historically Black College or University (HBCU) – any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary of Education to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation (NCES, 1997).

5. Structural Diversity- a term that represents the numerical demographic composition of the student body (Chang et al., 2006; Gurin, 1999).

6. Temporary Minority- In this study, temporary minorities are characterized as individuals who are not underrepresented or a minority in all social settings (Hall & Closson, 2005).

Summary

This study seeks to identify and describe factors influencing the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. This introductory chapter established the purpose, justification, and significance of the inquiry. The next chapter presents the conceptual framework and domains of the NSSE framework for this investigation by introducing relevant bodies of literature to support this inquiry.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This chapter provides an overview of literature regarding student engagement and the experiences of White undergraduates attending public HBCUs. Five bodies of research inform and shape the context of this study. The chapter starts with providing the contextual background of HBCUs and their experiences in maintaining diverse student bodies. Next, the research examining the influence of desegregation in higher education (Darden, Bagakas, & Marajh, 1992; Diamond, 2007; Garibaldi, 1984; Harvey, Harvey & King, 2004; Jost, 2003) is highlighted. Special attention is given to the influence of desegregation laws as they affected plans to increase White student enrollment, especially in the states where research sites are located. Then, a section examining White student enrollment trends and a 30-year span of research focused on White students' presence on HBCU campuses (Brown, 1973; Elam, 1978; Hall & Closson, 2008; Hazzard, 1989; Standley, 1978) is presented. The fourth segment presents the increasing focus on White student identity development research within college environments. Finally, the last section highlights student engagement research with specific focus on student engagement and involvement theory. In addition, an introduction of the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) as a tool in assessing key factors of student engagement will be presented. Additional literature is provided to further describe those factors germane to this current inquiry.

Contextual Background for Diversity at Public HBCUs

HBCUs were established during the middle to late 1800s in both the northeast and southern regions of the United States (Anderson, 1988). In their earlier formation, the primary goal and mission of these institutions was to provide the first educational opportunity to former enslaved Africans and others of African descent (Grimes-Robinson, 1998). Today, HBCUs have demonstrated pinnacles of success through offering educational opportunities to more than 14% of African American undergraduates and awarding more than 28% of bachelor's degrees to African Americans as well (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink & Bennett, 2006). These data are significant when one considers that HBCUs represent only 3% of all the nation's institutions of higher education, according to the United Negro College Fund [UNCF] (2004). According to the United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, HBCUs have also played a vital role in training 80% of all Black Americans who earn degrees in medicine and dentistry and are leading institutions in conferring baccalaureate degrees to Black students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields (1991).

In demonstration of mission-specific priorities to provide access to educational opportunity, many HBCUs have operated with an open admissions policy—one that allows any high school graduate to matriculate (Roach, 2005; Willie, 1978). Non-Blacks, including Native Americans, African, Latin Americans, Caribbean students, White women, and Jewish people have all benefited from the educational and social commitment of HBCUs, particularly during the segregationist age of 1895-1954 (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Willie, 1978). Allen and Jewell (2002) exclaimed, "HBCUs have long been a haven for those academic talents that were unappreciated or unwelcomed

elsewhere due to race, ethnicity, or gender. White women showed a strong presence on faculties…when their opportunities for employment were limited" (p. 16).

Historically, White philanthropists often served as the founding presidents and primary faculty and staff to manage the daily operations of HBCU campuses (Harvey & Williams, 1996). Therefore, it was not unusual for White teachers to enroll their children and teach them in the same classrooms with Black students (Allen & Jewell, 2002). Although the co-mingling of races was considered illegal in many states during the 1800s, HBCUs were exemplars of diverse learning environments and demonstrated that Blacks and Whites were willing to collaborate and function effectively within an educational environment. Willie (1978) stated:

> Black colleges have operated on the basis of an open admissions policy from the beginning. One reason that black colleges and their students persevere is that education is a form of liberation for them, a sacred possession no oppressor can take away. Black colleges in every generation have been reluctant, therefore, to deny education to the highly motivated who are willing to study and work. Students of varying academic and cultural backgrounds have been brought together on the Black-college campus, to teach and be taught by each other as well as by the faculty. The diversity of their campus experience has made Black-college students wise in ways of the world as well as wise in the use of words. (p. 147)

Willie's (1978) statement promotes the importance of campus diversity and, more importantly, the interaction of diverse peers on HBCU campuses. Similarly, Dwyer (2006) conceptualized diversity outcomes as the "experiences students have as they

interact with diverse others within their college environment, as well as the ways in which these experiences shape the interactions students will have with the world once they graduate from college" (p. 39). In this context, diversity outcomes embody the learning that occurs as a result of exposure to interactions between diverse peers and enhancing students' ability to foster connections between diversity experiences and multiculturalism.

Although African Americans continue to numerically represent the largest student enrollments at most HBCUs (Greer, 2008), these institutions also serve international and domestic student populations who are American Caucasians, non-American Caucasians, Hispanics, Asians, Southeast Asians, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, African, and Native American (Nahal, 2009). Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Peterson, and Allen (1999) described this numerical representation of diverse students as structural diversity. Structural diversity, or the inherent number of diverse students represented on HBCU campuses, does not necessarily mean students interact cross-racially frequently or on a regular basis. In fact, some researchers (Hurtado, et al., 1999) have suggested that structural diversity is not sufficient in order for HBCU students to gain the greatest benefit of diversity. As Hurtado et al. (1999) further explained:

> Although structural diversity increases the probability that students will encounter others of diverse backgrounds, given the U.S. history of race relations, simply attending an ethnically diverse college does not guarantee that students will have the meaningful intergroup interactions. (p. 333)

Some researchers have argued that the inquiry focused on diversity outcomes and multiculturalism at HBCUs has been overlooked and warrants scholarly attention

(Dwyer, 2006; Nahal, 2009). Research examining the frequency and quality of diverse interactions among students attending diverse colleges may yield pertinent information as it relates to student engagement and impact of diverse interactions on academic growth and learning (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Influence of Desegregation Policy on Public HBCUs

Interventions of the state and federal courts have shifted the landscape and discourse of diversity within higher education. The landmark court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling ended segregation in both K-12 and higher education sectors and sparked the emergence of other litigation questioning the constitutionality of same race, public colleges and universities, and equity in state appropriations between public HBCUs and PWIs. Other cases such as *Adams v. Richardson* (1973), *California v. Bakke* (1978), and the *United States v. Fordice* (1992), are also key examples of the federal government's role in facilitating policy implementation and influencing how states should enforce desegregation and diversify state systems of higher education. The *Adams v. Richardson* (1973) and the *California v. Bakke* (1978) decisions were significant because they provided the guidelines and criteria for the implementation of policy relevant to diversity and admission practices (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Further, these cases resulted in either mandatory or voluntary actions for public institutions to increase campus diversity and comply with federal requirements associated with desegregation plans.

In the *Bakke* case, a White student claimed he was not admitted to the University of California medical school due to preferential consideration afforded to minority applicants with less competitive academic records (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

Concomitantly, public institutions, regardless of their race enrollments and missions, responded to Bakke by creating race-neutral admission policies and programs designed to achieve the levels of diversity necessary to meet federal and state requirements as well as the demands of students (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Moore, 2001).

The *Adams v. Richardson* (1973) case was a result of a class action suit filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund against Elliot L. Richards, then Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), the forerunner of the Department of Education, charging that 10 states (two of which are the locations of the research sites for the current study) were still operating dual systems of higher education. The NAACP pointed to the fact that HEW continued to distribute funds to these states despite their lack of responsibility to adhere and implement policy changes required by desegregation laws. Essentially, desegregation laws mandated all state, public institutions to dismantle any dual systems of higher education, diversify student bodies and faculty, and provide HBCUs with funding to initiate capital improvement projects. The *Adams* case persisted for more than twenty years and was met with resistance from many of the southern states in terms of implementing changes (Jost, 2003). In the early 1990s, the case dissipated based on the Court's ruling that the "plantiffs lacked a private right of action against a federal agency" (Brown, Richard, & Donahoo, 2004, p. 15). Researchers such as Taylor and Olswang (1999) postulated that if the *Adams* case had been settled properly, HBCUs may have been protected from the same pressures to desegregate as PWIs, and become eligible for improved funding and "The ongoing morass of rulings against HBCUs in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana would have never happened" (p. 76).

Within the public policy arena, legislators and educators have debated whether public HBCUs should be held to the same standards and requirements as their PWI counterparts to increase campus diversity and demonstrate the need for their continued existence in integrated systems of higher education. Whiting (1989) argued that desegregation was intended to be one-directional (e.g., PWIs recruiting and enrolling more Black students) but the backlash has been decreasing Black student enrollments at HBCUs and increasing threats of mergers with public White institutions and even institutional closures.

The influence of these cases has had a pendulum effect on HBCUs. Some education researchers contend that desegregation plans create a unique opportunity for HBCUs to demonstrate effectiveness as educational institutions in spite of limited resources and criticisms for being modern day vestiges of segregation (Jost, 2003). Richardson and Harris (2004) asserted that:

> Despite the formidable barriers of stereotyping, pernicious bias,
> inequitable distribution of resources and imprecise understandings of their
> role relative to integration, HBCUs remain examples of what White
> institutions ought to have been achieving: an inclusive, community
> service-oriented and student-centered higher education. (pp. 375-376)

For others, the increase of non-Blacks has been considered a detriment to the mission, direction, and existence of HBCUs (Brown, 2001; Fryer & Greenstone, 2007; Preer, 1982; Wenglinksky, 1996). Drezner (2007) argued that, "For a historically Black college, losing its original mission is akin to the dismantling of the institution" (para. 14). This increase in White student enrollments through

recruitment strategies such as scholarship awards and the transformation of some

HBCU student bodies from majority Black to majority White (e.g., Bluefield

State University in West Virginia and Lincoln University in Missouri) has

heightened the concern among HBCU administrators and key stakeholders about

the future of these institutions and their capacity to be comparable and

competitive with traditionally White institutions (Shih, 2009) in the current higher

education market.

The dismissal of the *Adams* case did not preclude the debates on the need for

public HBCUs and litigation in other states persisted (Taylor & Olswang, 1999). In

1992, the State of Mississippi became the focus of the discourse on public HBCUs

through the *United States v. Fordice* (1992) case. This case focused on the State of

Mississippi Higher Education System and has been considered by some researchers and

HBCU proponents, "as the most direct assault upon HBCUs" (Richardson & Harris,

2004, p. 373). The ruling indicated that institutions in the State of Mississippi had not

done enough to eradicate segregation and that each policy or practice of the State must be

evaluated to determine if practices prior to the desegregation laws were still place. The

Supreme Court held that dissolving formal racial barriers between PWIs and HBCUs was

not sufficient evidence to demonstrate desegregation within the system. The Court

established a three-test measure to determine if systems continued to be segregated.

Specifically, according to the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the State was to

demonstrate that its HBCUs and PWIs were not ethnically homogenous and the

duplication of programs across campuses had been alleviated (2004).

In the view of the Supreme Court, Mississippi had failed two of the three tests because duplicate programs were being offered between both institutions and the student bodies were still majority (White and Black) at the PWI and HBCU. The Court's mandate was for the State of Mississippi to either justify the existence of both of institutions or eliminate the HBCU (Marcus, 1981). The case was sent back to the lower courts and the State of Mississippi was required to devise a plan to remedy the concerns of the Supreme Court. Their response was a creation of a uniform admission policy to increase diversity in PWIs and HBCUs. To date, the revised admission processes have resulted in more African American students attending the State's PWIs than White students enrolled in one of three public HBCUs in the state. The concept of educational justification was born as result of this case. Some researchers have explained educational justification as the distinctive experiences and outcomes provided by HBCUs that determine if they provide better experiences for students than other institutional types (Wenglinksy, 1996) and that they add value to higher education as a viable economic commodity (Fryer & Greenstone, 2007).

Influence of Desegregation Policy in Research Sites' States

The two states in which Heritage University and Gulf Coast University are located were also a part of the 10 states identified in the *Adams v. Richardson* case that were required to develop and submit plans to the federal government delineating their strategic and intentional plans to dismantle any polices or processes that sustained dual systems of higher education. The U.S. Department of Education, formerly known as HEW, required each of these states to explicitly delineate how they planned to alleviate higher education systems segregated by race and create one unitary system (Brown,

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2004). In response to this federal government request, the states in which HU and GCU reside, submitted plans that were deemed as unacceptable. Thus, each was required by the federal government to submit desegregation plans entitled, "Criteria Specifying the Ingredients of Acceptable Plans to Desegregate State Systems of Public Higher Education". The following sections present and discuss how each state approached ensuring dual systems of higher education were dismantled, and targeted the recruitment of White students attending public HBCUs as a means to do so.

Impact on Heritage University. In 1969, the Office for Civil Rights in the US Department of Education informed the state of [see Author] that it had been identified as one of the 10 states that had not complied with federal law to discontinue the operation of racially segregated higher education systems. In response, the state developed a plan called, "A Plan to Assure Equal Postsecondary Educational Opportunity". The primary objectives of the plan included goals designed to continue the integration of the State's PWIs through recruitment efforts and affirmative action plans, and the enhancement of HBCUs through recruitment efforts and improving retention programs for African American students. Between 1985-1989, the State continued to submit annual progress reports to the federal government and continued to implement programs to increase equal opportunity, even after compliance requirements had been met.

In 1992, the United States Supreme Court issued the *United States v. Fordice* decision. Under the *Fordice* decision, the Court determined that race neutral admission policies were not sufficient in demonstrating that states had eliminated policies that continued to enforce or facilitate segregation and that a wide range of factors should be assessed to evaluate and determine whether a state had dismantled the dual system.

Those factors included but were not limited to: admission standards, program duplication, institutional missions, and the continued operation of an inappropriately large number of previously segregated institutions.

As it pertained to institutions like Heritage University, the Office for Civil Rights informed the State that unfair burden to desegregate would not be placed upon African American students and faculty. Further, proposals to merge or close traditionally or historically black colleges and universities were carefully scrutinized. In 1994, the State decided to reexamine the progress of its desegregation plans and identify ways to work collaboratively with the Office for Civil Rights to continue improving its efforts to ensure equal opportunity. One major strategy to reexamine the impact of desegregation efforts included meeting with all of the state institutions and arranging site visits to each location. From the site visits, one of the primary issues included enhancing the state's HBCUs to improve educational opportunities for African American students as well as require HBCUs to increase their attractiveness to students of all races, especially White students.

Currently, contention around issues of equity in spending allocation and program duplication continue to persist within the State. A recent lawsuit suit filed by a group of community members, alumni, and students has suggested that the State is not in compliance with desegregation laws. The State's HBCUs continue to be underserved with regard to funding, and neighboring PWIs continue to offer duplicate programs. The State Legislature has not fully commented on the lawsuit, but emphasized that the State's higher education commission has been delegated to continue working with HBCUs to

develop best practices to ensure competitiveness and comparability to other institutions in the State (Hayes, 2009).

Impact on Gulf Coast University. In 1969, the state of [see Author] also received notification that the desegregation plans that it had submitted to the Office for Civil Rights, US Department of Education had not been approved. Particularly, the Office for Civil Rights indicated that the State along with the other nine *Adams States* had not implemented policies and procedures designed to eliminate traces of prior dual systems of higher education in an effort to create a unified system of higher education. For this State, in particular, the Office for Civil Rights noted that the State's plan did not include a comprehensive statewide plan since all individual institutions within the system were not included in long-range assessments of program duplication. Furthermore, the plan did not address strategies to enhance the resources and facilities of the State's African-American land grant college (Lindsay, 1988).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the State continued to advance their plan by monitoring the efforts of both public HBCUs and PWIs. Gradually, institutions began to develop and implement aggressive programs to recruit diverse student bodies and faculty as a means to remain in compliance with the Office for Civil Rights. For one HBCU in the State, however, desegregation efforts were challenged when it was alleged that the institution discriminated against Whites in admission and hiring practices (Bellamy, 1979). As a result the State Court ordered the system leadership to submit a plan for the HBCU's desegregation and as a result, a few White students enrolled. Only days following the Court's ruling on the HBCU, the Office for Civil Rights ordered the entire State to submit a comprehensive plan for all colleges and universities within the

system. Over the next several years, the State submitted plans that failed to meet the approval of the federal government. It would be ten years before the state submitted a plan deemed appropriate by Office for Civil Rights.

The approval of the State's plan was predicated on its ability to organize personnel and resources to accomplish four major goals that included the: "eradication of a dual system of higher education; racial mix among students in all institutions and at all levels; adequate representation of African Americans and women as faculty, administrators and on governing boards; and establishment of an ongoing system of monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the plan" (Lindsay, 1988, pp. 568-569). Following much debate and discourse at the state legislature level, the state system leadership decided and agreed upon a plan to meet the four goals. Lindsay (1988) noted that one of the major changes was transferring key academic programs from one institutional site to another. Specifically, two academic schools were transferred between GCU and a neighboring predominantly White University. The exchanges of the academic programs was one way that the State had decided to "eliminate duplicate programs in close proximity and all vestiges of de facto segregation" Lindsay, 1988, p. 569). Additional plan strategies included increasing the diversity of faculty, students, and administrators on each respective campus.

To date, the diverse representation on students on both HBCU and PWI campuses in the State have increased, but are not significantly higher. Hatfield (2008) reported that key alumni and community members have suggested that after the underrepresentation of African American students, in particular, enrollment at the State's larger PWIs is appalling. In terms of HBCUs in the state, lawsuits recently resurfaced in 1999 alleging

that institutions in the State remained racially identifiable and that public HBCUs should be merged with PWIs (Hebel, 1999). The federal judge hearing the case dismissed a portion of the case citing that the plantiffs did not have legal basis for their claims. Proponents of HBCUs have suggested that the ruling is a victory for African American students and enable HBCUs to continue providing access for African American students.

Contemporary Complexities

In light of these major legislative decisions and mandates, institutions of higher education face another era of public policy that will ultimately impact the manner in which students are recruited, retained, and supported. As recent as 2009, states, such as Mississippi, have reconvened discussions regarding the need for public HBCUs. This time, the focus is not on campus diversity and program duplication, but on the best allocation of state resources in the midst of national economic constraints (Minor, 2008; Threat to Black Colleges…, 2009). Therefore, in addition to adhering to the requirements of desegregation plans, the issue of educational justification for public HBCUs has extended into debates regarding state resource allocation. HBCUs may be required now, more than ever, to demonstrate how they are models of student success, strive to increase minority populations, and deserve to remain as an institutional choice in higher education.

Further, it is important to acknowledge that for states, such as the one where HU is located, continue to grapple with issues stemming from desegregation laws and specifically the mandates associated with the *Adams v. Richardson* case. Specifically, the presence and increase of White students are a result of this particular case as it concerns attractive academic programs only being offered at institutions such as HU in the state.

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For example, the undergraduate architecture program is one of the few of its kind and caliber offered in the area. Therefore, for student participants, such as Laura and Alice, the HU architecture program was not only one recommended by their community college professors but it also the best program considering HU's location and cost.

<p style="text-align:center">Enrollment Trends of White Students at HBCUs</p>

As African American student enrollments increased at traditionally White institutions during the 1970s, so did White student enrollments at HBCUs (Healy, 1996). The steady enrollment of White students became most apparent on public HBCU campuses (Adrisan, 2005; Blitzer, 2000; Carew, 2009; Drummond, 2000; Gibson, 2007; Goggins, 2007; Gordon, 2005; Jefferson, 2008) as the pressures from desegregation laws became more arduous (Brown, 2001; Jost, 2003; Taylor & Olswang, 1999). In fact, litigation extending these laws caused a major shift in the demographics of students attending HBCUs between 1976 and 2001. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report examining enrollment trends at HBCUs indicated that White student enrollments increased from 181,346 to 260,547 over the 25-year period (Provasnik, Shafer, & Snyder, 2004). During this particular time period, public, four-year HBCUs showed the largest total student enrollments which increased from 143,528 students in 1976 to 181,346 in 2001. For White students, enrollments were modest with increases from 17,410 in 1976 students to 23,144 students in 2001. Between 1990 and 1995, White student enrollments in public HBCUs peaked and maintained enrollments between 28,000 and 29,000 (Provasnik, et al., 2004).

In 1998, the National Association for Equal Opportunity (NAFEO) also recognized the trend of increased White student enrollments at HBCUs. NAFEO

observed that at least a dozen of the existing 113 HBCUs had White student enrollments ranging from 19% to 49%. Moreover, between 1990 and 1998, White student populations rose by 16% while Black student enrollment in HBCUs only increased by 8% (White Students…, 1998). These data are significant because they provide evidence that all ethnic student enrollments on HBCU campuses increased during this period with the exception of the historically dominant group, African American students. One rationale for the decrease in Blacks attending HBCUs was due to the increase in postsecondary options made available following the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Healy, 1996; Provasnik, et al., 2004). The rationale for the increase in other ethnic student populations, such as Asian Americans and Latino/a, is not as obvious. Recent data gathered from member institutions of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF), a national organization representing public HBCUs and law schools, reported that African Americans represented 84% of the total population, followed by a White student enrollment of 8%, Hispanic enrollment of 2%, and Asian enrollment of 1% (Ashley, Gasman, Mason, Sias & Wright, 2009).

The increasing presence of White students on HBCU campuses has attracted attention from various media since the mid-1980s, and now well into the 2000s. Numerous headlines across online news networks such as CNN and social magazines like *Jet* read: "Recruitment Letter to Whites Insults Blacks at Fayetteville State" (1994) and "Whites-Only Scholarship at Black College, Alabama State, Stirs Controversy" (1999); "Black Schools Go White" (Drummond, 2000); and "White Valedictorian: First for Historically Black Morehouse" (CNN.com, 2008). In commentary reports and op-ed pieces, White students were interviewed and reported positive experiences attending

HBCUs through interactions with diverse students and involvement on campus. Therefore, national data reports confirmed the increasing numbers of White, undergraduates attending public HBCUs and the media provided voices of the lived experiences of these students to the general public and higher education communities.

A 2006 NCES report showed that White, undergraduate students represented 29,577 of 268,372 students attending all HBCUs. For public HBCUs, White students represented 28,922 of 203,008 students enrolled. These data reveal that more White students are enrolled in public HBCUs compared to private HBCUs. Brown (2001) asserted that White student enrollments are more prominent in public HBCUs due to the influence of desegregation plans stemming from the *Adams* case. Researchers and HBCU leaders have other reasons for the surge of White student enrollments including changing state demographics and the affordability of tuition (Brown, 2002). University presidents, such as Dr. Melvin Johnson of Tennessee State University, whose White student enrollment is 22%, stated that diversity is a means to create cultural competency on campus and provides an environment where students can be exposed to diversity and become best prepared for a global society (Martin, 2007).

The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* [JBHE] (2001) reported that on the campuses of Lincoln University in Missouri and Langston University in Oklahoma, whose student bodies appeared to be transforming into majority White, enrollments declined from 83.1% to 70.4% at Lincoln and 44.9% to 33.5% at Langston between 1992 and 1997. These data include significant decreases in White student enrollments at these two particular institutions. However, White student enrollments of 70.4% and 33.5%

respectively at the two institutions still represent a significant number of diverse students compared to what most PWIs have been able to achieve.

Research on White Students on HBCU Campuses

Despite the gaps in the literature, some studies have examined the trends of White student matriculation at public HBCUs and provide a foundation for further study. Early studies were exploratory by design and provided insight on the characteristics of White students as well as their perceptions and reasons for attending HBCUs. More contemporary studies have continued to assess issues surrounding college choice, but extended into deeper investigation of White students' college experiences related to their social adjustment, involvement on campus, and racial identity development. Combined, these quantitative and qualitative studies establish and expand the knowledge base regarding the impact of increasing diversity on HBCU campuses.

Over the past 30 years, the research depicting the characteristics of White students attending HBCUs has been consistent. Brown (1973) and Elam (1978) conducted studies to examine issues including White students' college choice and experiences on HBCU campuses. Brown (1973) found that White students attending HBCUs had limited contact and experiences with Blacks with the exception of school (K-12) and work experiences. Further, students did not report any apprehension participating in the classes and voicing their opinions freely. Elam (1978) reported that White students attending HBCUs were older, married, and typically transfer students and former military personnel. The author further asserted that these students were not interested in participating in social aspects of college life and focused on completing requirements for the degree. In both studies, students indicated their primary reasons for attending a Black

college were proximity to campus, convenience, adaptability, program availability, and entrance requirements.

Hazzard's (1989) study and Standley's (1978) investigation, supported by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), highlighted the characteristics of White students attending HBCUs and emphasized the importance of strategies to increase White student enrollments and establish nurturing campuses for this emerging population. Hazzard (1989) randomly surveyed White students at five HBCUs in North Carolina to assess their reasons for attending an HBCU. The analysis revealed that the primary reasons were (1) convenience; (2) courses and degrees offered relevant to their goals; (3) low-cost tuition; and (4) location (e.g., proximity to home or work). Based on the student responses, both researchers suggested that HBCUs would need to become more accommodating and sensitive to the needs of White students to be successful with diversity recruitment efforts and competitive with surrounding institutions in the future. For example, concerns from White students in Standley's (1978) study included stereotypical views of Whites held by Black students (e.g., Whites think they are superior to Blacks) and challenges with financial aid and registration processes. In contrast, White students surveyed also indicated that they felt comfortable communicating with students from different racial backgrounds and Black students introduced them to the campus community and its resources.

Similar to Hazzard's (1989) study, Conrad, Brier, and Braxton (1997) employed an open-ended, multi-case study design to identify factors contributing to the presence of White students on public HBCU campuses. The researchers selected five HBCUs that demonstrated the ability to attract White students. The study included both White

undergraduate and graduate students, but the majority of the participants were undergraduates (C. Conrad, personal communication, July 22, 2008). The researchers found that the reputation of academic programs followed by financial support and institutional characteristics were key factors in the decision for White students to attend an HBCU (Conrad et al., 1997). In a specific case, a student emphatically stated, "I am here for the money. There is no way I would be here but for the money that I am getting" (Conrad, et al., 1997, p. 49).

Studies that contributed significantly to understanding this trend include comparative studies of Black and White students attending both HBCUs and PWIs. Abraham (1990) conducted a study supported by the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) to assess the perceptions of White students on Black campuses and Black students on White campuses. The survey content areas included demographics, attitudes and opinions on race, satisfaction with the institution, college choice, minority recruitment efforts, and academic and social climates. Using a similar sample, Wells-Lawson (1994) looked at Black and White students attending 30 PWIs and HBCUs to examine the experiences of students attending both institutional types. This study investigated whether White students at HBCUs are as likely as Black students at PWIs to report lower grades, less satisfactory relations with faculty, similar perceptions of accommodation of diversity in the campus environment, and feelings of discrimination.

The results from both studies varied, but the similarities revolved around issues of (1) comfort level and ability to discuss race issues and (2) strong relationships with faculty. Wells-Lawson's (1994) findings cited that although discrimination was expressed on both campuses by both groups, White students attending HBCUs perceived

more accommodation of diversity than Black students on PWI campuses. That is, White students on HBCU campuses reported more "open discussion of racial issues, administrative support of minority group activities, and faculty sensitivity to minority group discussions" (Wells-Lawson, 1994, p. 17). These studies were designed to explore two separate issues, however, both reported the importance of strong faculty relationships and the ability to speak openly about race relations. While these findings are important, they did not explain how White students initiated or developed strong relationships with faculty on campus.

Research conducted by Sum, Light, and King (2004) and Closson and Henry (2008b) are examples of more contemporary studies employing qualitative approaches to analyze factors that may motivate White students to attend an HBCU and examine issues related to their social adjustment and transition on HBCU campuses. Sum, Light, and King (2004) conducted focus groups with White students attending high schools, community colleges, HBCUs, and PWIs in the state of Mississippi to assess their perceptions of and experiences attending HBCUs. The data showed both positive and negative perceptions and experiences from the participants. The perceptions of the White students attending the State HBCU were favorable and students often referred to their instructors as fabulous and described the coursework as challenging. These students, who were nontraditional students, "felt the benefits of their education outweighed any discomfort, which they generally described as minimal" (Sum, Light, & King, 2004, p. 421).

Overall, however, the general sentiment of the White high school, community college, and PWI students was negative. These particular students were strongly resistant

to the idea of attending an HBCU due to perception of poor academic quality, social

discomfort, anticipated discrimination, and parental disapproval. Thus, the researchers

concluded that "race still matters in Mississippi students' choices for higher education"

(Sum, Light, & King, 2004, p. 431) and the State's efforts to change funding allocation,

enhance and add academic programs, and revamp admission requirements would not

sufficiently increase diversity with the enrollment of White students.

Closson and Henry (2008b) conducted a mixed methods research study,

employing focus groups and identity racial scales (Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale

[BRIAS] and White Racial Identity Attitude Scale [WRIAS]) to assess the social

adjustments of White students on HBCU campuses. The researchers recruited eight

students (five Blacks and three Whites, full-time, undergraduate students) to participate

in a monoracial focus group and take an identity scale assessment. The findings

indicated that White students expressed that being in a predominately Black environment

was different, but they did not share stories of isolation. The students reported faculty

members were approachable and supportive in their academic endeavors. Black

participants also reported favorable relationships with faculty, but felt White students

attended the university because of scholarships and not because they really were

interested in attending an HBCU. The critical finding and suggestion from the study was

the "need, among both White and Black students at the HBCU, for greater racial

awareness and understanding for themselves and their diverse environment" (Closson &

Henry, 2008b, p. 531).

Although the research on White students attending HBCUs is limited, it is an

emerging body of knowledge (Dwyer, 2006; Hall & Closson, 2005; Nixon & Henry,

1992; Peterson & Hamrick, 2008). Mmeje, Newman, Kramer, & Pearson (2008) postulated that it is imperative for HBCUs to respond to the recent influx of White students to ensure students are fully engaged. The authors recommended several strategies such as the development of Minority Affairs Offices, encouraging students to participate in leadership programs, and alternative student programming that correspond to the interest of this student population. Several researchers have employed quantitative measures to assess perceptions and experiences of White students. However, from studies such as those by Sum, Light, & King (2004), it is reasonable to assume that qualitative methods offer are an optimal strategy to gather rich, descriptive data on what students feel and experience on a daily basis as well as how they interact with others on campus. Findings from a study on factors of engagement for White, undergraduate students will offer information to more appropriately develop strategies and programs to best meet the needs of the growing White, undergraduate student population on HBCU campuses.

Identity Development and Student Engagement

Research has also suggested that identity development is an important link to student engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Before students can begin to successfully navigate new environments and engage with individuals from different backgrounds, they must first have a strong sense of belief and ease with their own identity. Sallee, Logan, Sims, and Harrington (2009) asserted that "White identity development depends on psychosocial development" (p. 210). Psychosocial theories tend to view development as a series of stages students transcend through and evolve. These stages describe how they view themselves, how they relate to others, and the manner in

which their own thinking, valuing, and behaving progresses (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Specifically, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggested that the "psychosocial changes experienced during the college years extend beyond the inner world of the self to include the relational aspects of students lives: the manner in which they engage and respond to other people and to the aspects of their external world" (p. 562). Thus, as students become more sophisticated learners, they gain a better sense of self-concept, become more independent, and in some cases, become open to new ideas and those who are "socially, culturally, racially and ethnically different from them" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 562). The next section examines relevant research and literature on White identity development.

White Student Identity Development

Over the past 30 years, there has been a substantial body of literature developed examining the processes of racial identity development of several Third World groups, (Blacks, Asian Americans, Chicanos, American Indians), who live in a White racist environment (Hardiman, 1982). The extant literature, however, is limited as it concerns understanding the racial identity development processes of the dominant White group. Helms' (1992) research on Black and White student identity development through racial identity scales offers perspectives on the various stages that White students transcend as they better recognize themselves as White individuals and interact with individuals from diverse, ethnic backgrounds.

The White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) first appeared in 1990 and was designed to assess six types of White racial identity themes (Helms & Carter, 1990). The WRIAS scale levels varied based on the degree and acknowledgement of racism and

consciousness of Whiteness (Hall & Closson, 2005). Students' identity development influences their ability to adjust socially on campus. The manner in which students adjust to campus, to some degree, could impact their levels of engagement. Gaining a more thorough understanding of key identity development models that address how students' maturation and progression through various stages influences, or not, and levels of student engagement may provide vital information in guiding HBCU administrators and faculty.

The research literature is also limited with respect to White identity development within the context of HBCUs. However, the more contemporary studies that have examined White identity on HBCU campuses have been mixed. The most compelling findings from such studies have been around the issue of White privilege and specifically how White students within HBCU settings, unlike Black students attending PWIs, can select not to acknowledge their race within in this particular context.

Peterson and Hamrick (2009) conducted a study on the racial consciousness of White males attending HBCUs. Using the White racial consciousness (WRC) model and White male privilege philosophy of the Key model, White male students were interviewed to "identify and analyze college experiences that informed beliefs and racial consciousness among a group of White men who were 'temporary minorities' by virtue of their status and as full-time undergraduate students at an HBCU" (p. 38). The findings revealed that students made meaning of their college experiences through classroom environments, social environments, and greater awareness of race and privilege. The students specifically discussed the challenges and discomfort associated with being the only member of a race in a majority class setting and bearing the expectation to represent

the beliefs and opinions of the entire race. The students also provided examples of the difficulties encumbered in adjusting and integrating into the social environment of an HBCU, and credited their HBCU affiliation for their increased awareness of race and privilege. The researchers concluded that White male students' racial beliefs and understandings may be influenced by attending an HBCU. However, the authors emphasized, "only in rare instances did respondents systematically question the benefits incurring to them because of larger systems of inequities. No respondents voiced a commitment toward working to change such systems" (Peterson & Hamrick, 2009, p. 55).

Steck, Heckert, and Heckert (2004) examined the racial salience among White and Black students attending three predominately White institutions and one HBCU, located in the northeastern and southern parts of the United States. In this particular study, racial salience is characterized by the manner in which college students constructed and placed importance on their racial identity. The researchers hypothesized that racial identity salience among Whites in the HBCU setting would be significantly greater than the racial identity among Whites attending the predominately White institutions. Interestingly, the final results did not support this hypothesis. Instead, the White HBCU students' racial identity salience was lower than that of Black HBCU counterparts and White HBCU students were less likely to exhibit racial identity salience compared to White students attending PWIs. Initially, the researchers believed that "Whites tend to become more conscious of racial identity when they are in the numerical minority" (p. 69), especially within a different cultural setting such as an HBCU. The data, coupled with follow-up interviews with White students on the HBCU campus,

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supported the transparency phenomenon which suggests that Whites are generally less likely to think of themselves in racial terms as people of color (Flagg, 1998). The transparency phenomenon is believed to be shaped by White privilege in that "most Whites have the ability to construct their lives so they are never or rarely in a setting of being numerically less prevalent than other racial groups" (Steck, et al., 2003, p.58).

Challenges to White Student Identity Development

Some researchers such as Peterson and Hamrick (2009) and Steck et al., (2004) have pointed out potential barriers to White student identity development. Essentially, findings from studies conducted by Peterson and Hamrick (2009) and Steck et al. (2004) aligned with the position that structural diversity does not inevitably yield increased interactions between diverse peers or understandings of diverse perspectives (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1998). Structural diversity is defined by the numerical representation of a specific number of ethnic groups on a campus (Gurin, 1999). Some research studies have suggested that structural diversity can serve as a basis to increase students' interactions with diverse peers and capacity to understand diverse perspectives (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Gurin (1999) referred to such increased interactions between diverse peers as interactional diversity—"the extent to which students from diverse backgrounds actually come into contact and interact in educationally purposeful ways" (Hu & Kuh, 2003, p.321). For White undergraduate students, interactional diversity may serve as the catalyst for curricular and co-curricular programming that can increase these students' understanding of diversity and increase their academic self-confidence, social agency, and critical thinking skills (Nelson Laird, 2005).

Other studies have suggested that White students' lack of commitment or perceived responsibility for changing oppression systems may be due to privilege or their inability to conceptualize themselves as racial beings or that they have not yet entered what Helms (1995) described as the Disintegration status. The Disintegration status is a period where White persons are forced to realize and accept that skin color affects life. Sallee et al. (2009) argued "feelings of guilt and anxiety characterize this status as White people begin to feel responsible for their privilege" (p. 208). Another reason could be embedded in Arminio and McEwen's (1996) position that "Race for Whites could be considered something so obvious that its implications are remote from their awareness" (p. 315). Therefore, programs and even academic courses may serve as a means to encourage White students to see themselves as racial beings and conduits to combat racism and eliminate oppression (Helms, 1993 & Katz, 1978 as cited in Arminio & McEwen, 1996, p. 315).

Reason and Evans (2007) argued that colleges and universities continue to perpetuate environments absent of the opportunities for White students to consider the influence of their own race and those of others in their daily lives. Research studies have also stressed the importance of the role colleges and universities play in creating environments where White students have the opportunity to explore, construct, and deconstruct their Whiteness and understand how their culture shapes society and the views of other cultures (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson & Allen, 1998). Hall and Closson (2008a) argued it is imperative to include HBCUs in the diversity discourse and consider them as major institutional actors in dispelling hegemonic ideals and color-blind environments on college campuses.

Student Engagement in Higher Education

Student engagement has emerged as a recognized concept and viable construct for student success in higher education. As a concept, researchers have examined the influence and connection of student engagement to a wide range of learning and student development outcomes (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008). Studies have considered the impact of student engagement of college experiences based on race (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996); gender (Harper, Carini, Bridges & Hayek, 2004); student classification (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot & Associates, 2005; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2008); and institutional size, type and structures (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Kuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Porter & Swing, 2006; Ryan, 2008). As a construct, researchers have examined the impact of engagement on outcomes such as cognitive development (Anaya, 1996; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Kuh, 1995; & Pike, 2000); moral and ethical development (Jones & Watt, 1999; Liddell & Davis, 1996; Rest, 1993); student persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999; Tinto, 1993); and identity development (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Most of these studies found a direct correlation between student engagement, academic achievement, and student satisfaction.

Involvement and Student Engagement Theories

Student engagement is a term most often used in college impact and student success research to describe principles associated with a quality education (Kuh, 2001). One common definition of student engagement in the literature is the amount of time and level of participation students dedicate to purposeful activities influencing their learning and overall education experiences (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh,

Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991). George Kuh has extensively studied the impact of student engagement on college success and his work suggests that the best indicators stem from Chickering & Gasmon's (1987), *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Kuh, 2009). The seven principles include "student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning" (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991, p. 8). These principles are characterized by students' motivation and interest to be engaged in the classroom and co-curricular programs and the institution's efforts to organize and allocate resources to optimize students' ability to engage on campus. Student success, through academic and social activities, is most often realized when these two components function in tandem.

Kuh (2009) explained that student engagement as a concept and practice has evolved in its complexity and importance over time. Pace (1984, 1990) and Astin (1984) significantly contributed to examining engagement as a measure of success and institutional quality. Pace (1984, 1990) developed the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) to measure the quality of effort to identify specific activities that contributed to student learning and development. Pace's work, over a span of three decades, revealed that students gained more from their college experiences when they devoted more time and energy toward specific tasks, such as interacting with peers and discussing academic concerns with faculty. Astin (1984) expanded the concept of quality effort through his introduction of student involvement theory. Student involvement is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Harper and Quaye (2009) suggested that

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involvement theory deals more with the behavior of students and what they do and less with how students think, feel and make meaning of their experiences. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) added that at the core of Astin's involvement theory is the belief that students can learn through involvement and both the student and institutional environment contribute to the learning process.

In terms of the similarities and differences between involvement and student engagement, Harper and Quaye (2009) argued "Although conceptually similar, there is a key qualitative difference between involvement and engagement: It is entirely possible to be involved in something without being engaged" (p. 5). Further, the authors suggested that factors such as action, purpose, and cross-institutional collaboration are requisites for engagement. That is, in order for students to achieve the optimal benefit from engagement, psychological efforts such as purpose and resources, provided through institutional collaboration, must be intact. In Gerlach's (2008) study examining the impact of African American students' involvement in campus affinity organizations, the author suggested that involvement was the foundation of engagement. She differentiated that involvement referred to the investment in objects that could "range from general holistic experiences to specific interactions with one faculty member" (p. 25), whereas engagement specifically involved co-curricular activities and students' involvement in effective educational practices as described by Chickering and Gasmon (1987) (e.g., prompt feedback, time on task). Based on these perspectives, another differentiation between the two concepts may be the specificity of the activity (e.g., preparing and conducting a class presentation) and the extent to which the student is involved and gains

from the experience (e.g., the student creates the PowerPoint from the presentation and acquires new technical skills through the process).

The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE)

Another aspect of student engagement research involves the utilization of assessment tools and data collection. Scholars have investigated how institutions utilize assessment data to inform practices and policies to promote higher levels of student engagement (Del Rios & Leegwater, 2008; Porter & Swing, 2006). In particular, there has been a concerted effort to inform and educate higher education leaders and practitioners about the importance and value of using data from student engagement assessments such as the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) and Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) to guide campus practices and policies around student engagement (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991). This body of work has been primarily relegated to investigating African American student engagement on PWI and HBCU campuses, and not exclusively to students attending public HBCUs.

NSSE is a well-known, comprehensive project that invites educational institutions across the United States to administer the College Student Report, a survey instrument, to assess the time and effort students dedicate to their academic studies and other co-curricular activities, and the manner in which institutions manage venues of participation that will ultimately lead to student success (Kezar, 2006; Kuh, 2001). To date, approximately 1,400, diverse postsecondary institutions across the country have voluntarily agreed to use the NSSE to collect information directly from undergraduate students to "assess the extent to which they are engaged in educational practices related to high levels of learning and development" (Kuh, 2001; NSSE, 2009). NSSE

benchmarks include the level of academic challenge, student interaction with faculty

members, active and collaborative learning, enrichment of educational experiences and

supportive campus environments (Kezar, 2006). The benchmarks are based upon 42

questions designed to assess students' experiences predicated on key student behaviors

and institutional features known to enhance learning and personal development (NSSE,

2009). For example, the academic challenge benchmark assesses activities and behaviors

such as the "number of assigned textbooks, preparation for time for classes, number of

written reports more than 20 pages, and coursework emphasizing, synthesizing and

organizing ideas" (Kezar, 2006, pp. 90-91). NSSE has been used to examine an array of

topic focused on student outcomes such as differences in student engagement based on

factors such as race, gender and institutional type.

A 2009 NSSE report comparing the responses of White and non-White students

attending HBCUs inferred that these two student populations do in fact engage and

experience college on HBCU campuses. Table 1 illustrates the mean differences between

White and non-White students' responses on variables associated with academic

intellectual experiences.

Also, the non-White students' mean scores were higher in several areas associated

with academic and intellectual experiences, time usage, perceptions of institutional

environment, and educational and personal growth. Non-White students were more

inclined to work with other students on projects outside of class, participate in a

community-based project, and receive oral feedback from faculty members outside the

class. In contrast, White student responses were statistically more positive to questions

on overall college satisfaction. The data illustrated in Table 2 demonstrate that White

students reported higher satisfaction with their overall educational experience and would

be willing to attend the same institution again at higher response rates than non-White

students.

Table 1

HBCU Mean Comparisons on Educationally Enriching Activities

In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very often			White at HBCU	Non-White at HBCU	
Academic and Intellectual Experiences	Variable	Class	Mean [a]	Mean [a]	Effect Size [c]
Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	EMAIL	FY	3.26	3.15	.13
		SR	3.43	3.39	.05
Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	DIVRSTUD	FY	2.72	2.51	.20
		SR	2.90	2.65	.25
Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	DIFFSTU2	FY	2.66	2.61	.05
		SR	2.86	2.72	.15

The report does provide baseline data to assess how randomly selected White students

attending different HBCUs perceive their own engagement and the institution's capacity

to facilitate engagement. The report also offers a valid starting point to raise questions

and conduct qualitative inquiry into how White students engage as temporary minorities

in majority African American settings. For example, the data showed that White students

were more likely than non-White students to exercise or participate in physical fitness

programs. These data indicate that White students attending HBCUs exercise more, but

it does not tell where they exercise. Do White students exercise and participate in

physical fitness programs on or off campus? Such questions can be explored through

qualitative research methods, as those used in this current study, to delve deeper into how

students engage on HBCU campuses.

Table 2

HBCU Mean Comparisons on College Satisfaction

NSSE 2009 Mean Comparisons
HBCU Grand Analysis

Satisfaction	Variable	Class	White at HBCU Mean [a]	Non-White at HBCU Mean [a]	Effect Size [c]
How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?	ENTIREEXP	FY	3.02	2.90	.15
		SR	3.08	2.99	.11
If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending?	SAMECOLL	FY	2.95	2.80	.16
		SR	3.01	2.92	.09

Kuh (2009) explained that the "combination of decades of empirical findings

documenting the importance of student engagement…and the press on institutions to be

more accountable for student learning and its improvement led to the development of the

widely used NSSE since 1999" (pp. 685-686). Institutions across the United and States

and globally have used the NSSE survey and the data presented through its *College*

Student Report to assess and improve undergraduate education on their respective

campuses. Using the benchmarks associated with the National Student Survey on

Engagement (NSSE), the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) research

team sought to assess levels at each of the participating institutions in the following areas:

(1) academic challenge; (2) faculty-student interaction; (3) education experiences; (4)

supportive campus environments; and (5) experiential learning experiences. For the

public HBCUs in the DEEP study, results showed that programs such as pre-college programs and first-year orientation programs played an integral role in the shaping as well as transitioning students into the new campus community (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005). Through further analysis of NSSE findings and the administrative support from the Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students (BEAMS)[2] project, public HBCUs, such as Norfolk State University, used data to develop a more structured program and approach to address the needs of their first year students (Bridges, et al., 2005). This is just one of many examples demonstrating the ways that assessment data instruments, such as NSSE, can be used to improve undergraduate education and as well as maximize the capacity for higher education institutions to facilitate student engagement.

High impact educational activities.In 2009, NSSE reached a major milestone. More than 1,000 institutions across the country had used the instrument at least once to assess the quality of undergraduate education on their campuses. Project researchers reported that the findings were significant to the understanding of engagement and the implementation of strategies to enhance the quality of students' college experiences across the country (NSSE, 2009). From the project's inception, each year survey results had increased the understanding of student engagement and offered evidence

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[2] BEAMS is a multiyear joint initiative of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education. The goal of the project is to assist minority serving institutions (MSIs) overcome obstacles through the use of NSSE data (Bridges et al. 2005).

strengthening the influence of engagement on students' collegiate experiences. Examples

of annual, noteworthy findings included evidence supporting that, "(1) Engagement

yields larger payoffs in terms of grades and retention for underprepared students and

historically underrepresented students relative to other comparable peers (2006), and (2)

Certain high-impact educational practices and experiences correspond to higher student

participation in deep approaches to learning (2007)" (NSSE, 2009, p. 8).

The latter finding is significant and resulted in more detailed and a comprehensive

study and report by George Kuh and American Association of Colleges and Universities

[AAC&U] (2007) recommending that undergraduates should engage in at least two high-

impact educational activities to gain their most from their undergraduate education

careers. High impact educational practices are activities that have been proven to

increase student retention and engagement rates by educational research (Kuh, 2008). In

2007, the AAC&U initiated a project called the Liberal Education and America's

Promise (LEAP) to encourage colleges and universities to more actively and consistently

apply effective educational practices, "featuring ten potentially 'high-impact practices'

that make a claim on student time and energy in ways that channel student effort toward

productive activities and deepen learning" (Kuh, 2009, p. 687). The ten high impact

activities include first-year seminars, learning communities, writing-intensive courses,

common intellectual experiences, service-learning, diversity and global learning,

undergraduate research, collaborative assignments and projects, internships, and capstone

courses and projects (Kuh, 2008, 2009).

The practices are deemed high impact based on six principles: (1) the practices

demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks; (2) the

nature of the activities require students to put themselves in situations where they have substantive interactions with faculty and peers; (3) participation in one or more activities increases the chances for diverse interactions and exchanges between students from different backgrounds; (4) the frequency and timeliness of feedback about students' performance; (5) opportunities for learning in different settings, both on and off campus; and (6) participation in one or more activities that enable students to view and understand themselves relative to others and the larger world, such as study abroad programs, service learning, or internships (Kuh, 2008). Further investigation of these practices and the characteristics of students who do them have resulted in "strong direct effects on engagement, especially the NSSE scale of deep learning" (Kuh, 2009, p. 689). The most critical factor regarding the delivery of high impact practices is that institutions must demonstrate they are capable and willing to structure the curriculum and activities so that at least "one high-impact activity is available to every student every year" (Kuh, 2008, p. 20). This institutional requirement is consistent with the student engagement process that requires student action and purpose as well as the appropriate organization and allocation of resources so students can achieve their highest levels of engagement.

Academic and social learning outcomes. There are numerous studies that have examined the linkages between student engagement and specific benchmarks within the *College Student Report*. Specifically, NSSE data sets and other methodological approaches have been used to examine the impact of student engagement on student development and learning. The scholarship in this domain informs that student engagement can take place in various forms, such as faculty interaction, inside and outside the classroom (Bean, 1980; Littleton, 2002), involvement in student organizations

and structured programs such as the band and choir (Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Hutcheson & Kimbrough, 1998; Pike, 2003), and through peer interactions (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996). These forms of engagement and others have the propensity to increase students' success inside and outside the classroom.

Strayhorn (2008) conducted various descriptive and multivariate analyses to "examine the relationship between engagement in educationally purposeful activities and social/personal (e.g., values, character) learning outcomes among college students" (p. 9). From these analyses, students' social/personal learning gains were positively influenced by peer interactions, faculty-student interactions, and active learning. In this study, peer interactions and peer groups had the most profound influence on the participants' reported personal/social growth and learning. These findings are consistent with studies documenting the positive impact of faculty and peer interactions on student achievement (Anaya & Cole, 2001), social and academic integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978), and college persistence and satisfaction (Bean, 2005; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Tinto, 2000).

HBCUs and Student Engagement

With the exception of a few recent studies (Harper et al, 2004; Nelson Laird et al., 2007) little is known about the engagement of students attending HBCUs. Even less is known about the engagement of emerging subpopulations such as White and Latino/a students on HBCU campuses. This represents a significant gap in the higher education literature compared to the vast literature on the experiences and engagement of Black students attending PWIs. Within the limited literature, key findings indicate that African American males are less engaged on HBCU campuses and lack a presence in popular student organizations such as fraternities (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). In a comparative

study using NSSE data, Nelson Laird et al. (2007) found that African American seniors were more likely to be engaged at HBCUs than their counterparts attending PWIs. Specifically, the study revealed that African American students were engaged to a greater degree in effective educational practices and reported gaining more from their college experiences. Finally, Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek (2004) explored gender differences in student engagement among African American undergraduates at HBCUs. The guiding research question was "Who gets the most of the college?" Contrary to previous studies, the findings suggested that women and men are experiencing comparable gains on eight dimensions that included activities such as the nature and amount of academic work performed and participation in out-of-class activities. The authors noted, "It therefore appears that women have overcome the engagement odds and social passivity of years past." (p. 279).

The Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) study, coordinated by NSSE and AAC&U, included HBCUs in their longitudinal study to better understand how these institutions foster student success (Kuh, 2009). The results indicated that minority serving institutions, such as HBCUs, required students to participate in effective educational activities and employed faculty and staff to ensure more frequent, meaningful contact with students (Bridges et al., 2008). A study, such as the current investigation, provides a platform for more in-depth inquiry to examine the experiences of non-Black students attending HBCUs and how these institutions approach facilitating diversity for not only African American, but all students on campus.

Additional Factors for Student Engagement

Faculty-Student Interaction

The student and faculty interaction benchmark within the NSSE survey is described as the interaction between students and faculty members both inside and outside the classroom. The benchmark specifically analyzes the amount of time and the nature of the interaction between both parties. Examples of interaction include the discussion of career plans and internships with faculty, ideas emerging from concepts discussed in class, and receiving feedback from a faculty member on academic performance or a specific project (Kezar, 2006; Kuh, 2000, 2001). A plethora of studies examine the particular aspects of campus life that influence students' academic success, social adjustment, and career goals. Alexitch (1997) proposed that quality and frequency of student-faculty contacts, through processes such as faculty advising and mentoring, are two factors that influence positive student outcomes such as academic performance and interpersonal skills.

Svanum and Bigatti (2009) examined student engagement as it related to student behaviors such as academic course involvement and attending class lectures and completing reading assignments. They found that students who were more academically engaged outpaced students who were less engaged in completing their undergraduate degrees. Based on these findings, the authors suggested that "advisor [academic or faculty] encouragement of student course engagement and programs designed to enhance course engagement would likely have broad and favorable consequences" (p. 131), such as increased graduation and retention rates. These findings suggest that engagement between faculty and professional advisors on important academic matters such as course

selection and feedback on performance can lead to higher levels of student engagement in the classroom and increased graduation rates.

Cokley, et al. (2004) asserted that student-faculty interactions are essential to the intellectual and personal development of students. Astin (1993) postulated that the faculty interactions serve as a means of encouragement and inspiration for students. The frequency and quality of faculty-student interaction is a critical component of the relationship. However, the research findings linking the frequency of interaction to student outcomes have been mixed. Some studies suggested that on average, outside classroom contact between faculty and students is limited and direct contact normally lasts less than five minutes (Fusani, 1994; Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Cokley et al. (2004) argued that more positive and meaningful interactions can be established between faculty and students when teachers are accessible and willing to serve as mentors to students.

Finally, other factors such as race and accessibility cues can impact the manner in which students and faculty interact with one another. Allen (1992) and Nora and Cabrera (1996) found that minority students (particularly those within majority White institutional environments) who experienced or perceived the college environment as racially insensitive were more likely to have less faculty contact and demonstrate indicators of academic development. Wilson (1975) and Anaya and Cole (2001) acknowledged the impact of the classroom setting through "accessibility cues" on faculty and student interactions. Specially, accessibility cues included faculty behaviors and student experiences and perceptions of the classroom may positively or negatively influence a students' desire to interact with a faculty member outside of the classroom.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicated that African Americans attending HBCUs reported significant self-reported gains in the areas of critical thinking and analytical skills. The authors purported that critical thinking can be enhanced when "an institutional environment that stresses close relationships and frequent interaction between faculty and students and faculty concern about student growth and development" (p. 206). Black colleges have been credited for "their culturally and psychologically supportive and nurturing climate for African American students" (Allen, 1987, 1992; Fleming, 1984, 1985; Kim, 2002). Thus, this environment may innately encourage students' critical thinking through frequent interaction with faculty members.

Student Organizational Involvement

Astin (1993) and Kuh (2001) suggested that active involvement in curricular and co-curricular activities can lead to greater personal growth. Additionally numerous studies examining the experiences of African American students in college, have reported positive effects and benefits of student participation in organizations on outcomes such as retention and student development (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Stewart, Kupo, & Davis, 2008). Colleges and universities offer a number of clubs and organizations including Greek-letter, intramural sports, and debating teams. Often times, students become engaged on campus through membership in a student organization based on their interests and needs (Holzweiss, Rahn, & Wickline, 2007).

Involvement in activities such as student organizations has been positively linked to satisfaction and persistence (MacKay & Kuh, 1994), retention (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola (1999), and academic achievement (Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994). In essence, involvement is a viable tool to assist students in adjustment and transition into

the college environment. Baxter Magolda (1992) suggested that students' participation in organizations also served as an impetus to creating friendships while providing opportunities for leadership and skill development. Holzweiss et al. (2007) surveyed more than 200 students on a predominately White campus to examine the differences between academic and non-academic organizations. Their findings revealed students' primary reasons for joining a non-academic organization (e.g., social organization) were to meet other students and engage with individuals outside of their major.

The research literature also addressed the impact of engagement through structured groups such as athletic teams and Greek-letter organizations. Studies examining the relationship between athletics and involvement have yielded mixed results. Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) reported a positive association between participation in intercollegiate sports for both men and women; whereas Pascarella, Bohr, Nora and Terenzini (1995) found negative effects between the learning and development of male athletes in reading and mathematics at the end of their first academic year. In terms of Greek-letter organizations, the research has revealed that the relationship between intellectual and cognitive development is not strong (Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999). There are, however, studies documenting positive relationships for non-White students participating in Greek-letter organizations. On HBCU campuses, fraternities and sororities are some of the most popular forms of outside class activity (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Moreover, membership in these particular organizations has a positive influence on leadership development (Hutcheson & Kimbrough, 1998).

Nontraditional and Adult Learners

Historically, White students attending HBCUs tend to be older, nontraditional

students (Elam, 1978; Hazzard, 1989; Libarkin, 1984). Nontraditional students, as

described in a 2002 NCES report, possess at least one of seven characteristics: (1)

delayed college enrollment one or more years after high school graduation, (2) enrolled

part-time, (3) employed full-time, (4) financially independent of parents or guardians, (5)

have dependents other than a spouse, (6) a single parent, and (7) does not have a high

school diploma. Adult learners are often considered nontraditional students, yet not all

nontraditional students possess nontraditional student characteristics (Compton, Cox, &

Laanan, 2006). Some researchers have suggested that adult learners are a unique

population and little scholarly attention has been given to their needs as students.

Characteristics associated with adult learners include enrollment in programs leading to a

vocational certificate or degree; focused goals on education in order to enhance work

skills and career goals; and self-perception as workers and not students (Compton, et al.,

2004).

Adult learners and nontraditional students often possess attributes associated with

transfer, commuter, and returning students, and have fewer opportunities to engage with

faculty and their peers due to limitations associated with family and work demands

(Graham & Gisi, 2000; Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999). However, recent

studies have shown that the more adult learners are engaged in courses and other learning

activities as well as college organizations (Graham & Gisi, 2000; Wasley, 2008).

Existing studies on serving the increasing adult learners population offer

recommendations and perspectives based on deficit models—meaning adult learners

enter the collegiate environment unequipped with the necessary tools for academic success and positive social transition. Compton et al. (2006) maintained adult learners are, in fact, a valuable resource to campuses and strategies should be employed to more effectively integrate them into the social fabric of the university. Adult learners are typically more diverse and bring lived experiences that can enhance the learning environment.

There is also an emerging body of literature on the involvement of adult learners outside of the classroom setting. Whitt (1994) found that adult learners felt they gained more from their college experiences due to their out-of-class activities and involvement. The major barriers impeding involvement included "availability of time, family or career commitments, and the strong need for faculty encouragement to being involvement" (Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999, p. 189). Silverman, Aliabadi, and Stiles (2009) coined the acronym CPTR (commuter, part-time, transfer, and returning) students to better represent and describe the diversity within the commonly known adult learner and nontraditional population. Due to work obligations and multiple life roles, CPTR students are often unable to take advantage of important relationships with other students and faculty that could enhance their educational experiences. Silverman et al. (2009) suggested that the establishment of a commuter student lounge, daytime activities, and commuter student organizations are examples of strategies to more effectively serve this growing population on college campuses.

Interaction with Diverse Peers

The increasing diverse population in the United States coupled with increasing numbers of diverse students on college campuses have created a unique opportunity for

individuals from different backgrounds to socialize and interact. Astin (1993) found that

for undergraduate seniors socializing with diverse peers positively influenced students'

perception of growth and capacity in their careers. This finding suggests that the

opportunity to participate in diversity experiences positively impacted students' lives

during and potentially after college. Diversity experiences are most commonly defined

as students discussing racial or ethnic issues or attending a racial or ethnic workshops and

seminars (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Sallee et al. (2009) argued that it is important

for White students, in particular, to become engaged in multicultural programming. The

authors noted:

> Students are involved in a range of co-curricular activities, from student clubs to
>
> sports teams to fraternities and sororities. Whereas some racial/ethnic students
>
> are active in multicultural activities, White students often do not gravitate toward
>
> such activities. By encouraging White students to participate in such programs,
>
> institutions can provide students with 'opportunities to confront racism and
>
> challenge White privilege'. (p. 200)

This type of strategy and success would be an example of a diversity experience

available to students in college. Chang, Denson, Victor, Saenz, and Misa (2006) reported

that numerous studies have supported the powerful interaction and learning that can take

place between close friends of a different race or ethnicity. Not only do diverse

relationships and interactions shape a diverse student body but other benefits such as self-

confidence, motivation, cultural awareness, and commitment to racial equity.

Harper (2009) proposed "race-conscious student engagement" as one effective

way to encourage racial minorities to become more engaged in educationally enriching

activities. He also challenged faculty and staff to serve as the conduits of this experience by avoiding the use of colorblindness and tokenism. The basis of his argument is that when educators and administrators begin to take the responsibility of engaging diverse students seriously only then will mutual benefits for the institution and students become realized.

These studies emphasized the importance of campus diversity and the interaction and engagement of diverse peers, which are factors supported by the literature as practices proven to enhance student learning and growth. However, very few studies have considered these issues and practices from minority-serving institution (MSIs) environments (Harper et al., 2004; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Much of what we know about student engagement is based on the experiences of students attending PWIs. Closson and Henry (2008b) noted a similar observation upon reviewing publications focusing on college classroom teaching, campus social climate and social adjustment. The authors affirmed, "Based on the literature we reviewed, we found that diversity when discussed, whether it be about the classroom or about the campus environment, refers almost exclusively to the experience of African Americans, Asians, and other people of color in White environments" (p. 16). Scholarly inquiry considering and examining the experiences of Whites and other non-Black students attending HBCUs can lend meaningful insights into the discourse of diversity in higher education.

Institutional Environment

Researchers have acknowledged the importance of institutional characteristics and context as major influences on student engagement (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2007)

purported that institutional context "comprises an institution's organizational characteristics, structures, practices, and policies, and the campus's faculty and peer cultures and environments" (p. 277). Other researchers argued that conceptual frameworks such as Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Output theory and the National Study of Student Learning may omit institutional context as a key factor influencing students' engagement. The incorporation of the institutional context in analyses of student engagement is a critical component since engagement includes the active participation of institutions through the allocation of resources and actors, such as faculty and staff.

Kezar and Kinzie (2006) examined the approaches used by 20 institutions to engagement by exploring the differences based on institutional mission. Their analysis combined organizational theory and student learning and engagement theories to discern the different ways institutions can create engagement. The focus of the study was to share documented strategies as a model for other higher education institutions as they considered mechanisms to "further examine the degree of congruence between their mission and practices that promote student learning and can better implement approaches to student engagement" (p. 150). A critical finding was that an institution's individual, distinctive mission directly impacted how administrators developed policies and programs related to engagement. For example, special mission institutions such as HBCUs and women colleges, have served historically, oppressed groups such as African Americans and women and thus, tend to offer programs and structure policies designed to "emphasize empowerment, service and leadership" (p. 168). In this particular study, one HBCU's approach to addressing one of the five NSSE benchmarks, such as enriching

educational experiences, was through the enhancement of leadership development and political activism. The institution's goal was to encourage students to become change agents and provide leadership and service within the communities where the students had close ties or relationships.

Kezar and Kinzie's (2006) findings aligned with Ryan's (2008) observation of the ecological fallacy represented in the extant literature on student engagement and involvement. Ryan (2008) described ecological fallacy as the assumption or suggestion that similar patterns and levels of engagement "have the same effect across different students at different kinds of institutions" (p. 14). As Kuh (2008) inferred, student engagement occurs differently for all students based on a number of factors including institutional size and type. Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, and Holmes (2007) asserted that although students have significant control and ultimately determine their levels of engagement, "institutional culture, climate and practices play a role in determining how and how much students get engaged" (p. 39).

Nelson Laird et al. (2007) focused on the engagement of students attending HBCUs and Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) by analyzing measures of student engagement in effective educational practices. Their findings were consistent with other research studies reporting African American students attending HBCUs are more engaged in enriching educational experiences. Such activities include participating in student organizations outside of class and having conversations with peers from different ethnic backgrounds, religious faiths and political orientations (Kuh, 2008), and therefore gain more from their college experiences than their counterparts attending PWIs. The findings resulted in the opposite outcome for Hispanic students attending HSIs. Senior,

Hispanic students were less engaged than their peers attending PWIs. One particular characteristic attributed to this finding was that Hispanic students attending HSIs are typically older and possess less education. The authors' recommendations included the importance of assessing current programs and policies to alleviate barriers and increase opportunities for engagement on campus.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of literature pertinent to examining factors influencing the engagement of White students attending public HBCUs. Five major bodies of research were examined. The chapter started by providing a brief contextual background of HBCUs. Then, the influence of higher education desegregation laws on White student presence at HBCUs was presented. Next, a discussion on White student enrollment trends and literature on White identity development was provided, and finally studies and literature relating to student engagement were highlighted. The findings from these bodies of scholarship provide insight and context for the current investigation. In Chapter Three, the research methodology is presented. Chapter Three includes a summary of a pilot study describing strategies used to test the initial interview protocol and practice my interviewing skills. Additionally, the research design, data collection procedures, including document analysis, individual and focus group interviews, used to examine factors influencing the engagement of White students attending public HBCUs, will be discussed. Brief profiles of each research site will also be introduced.

Chapter III

Methodology

This study used a multiple case study design to investigate factors influencing the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending two public HBCUs. Since the study focused specifically on understanding student engagement, a qualitative research approach provided the best means to examine individuals in social settings and assess how they understand, rationalize (or cope) with their surroundings (Berg, 2007). Through the use of document analysis, 22 individual and two focus groups interviews, I discovered factors that influence the engagement of White undergraduates on HBCU campuses.

Qualitative research is both exploratory and descriptive, employing intensive fieldwork through interviews (individual and focus group), observation, and document analysis (Creswell, 1998). The exploration process enables the researcher to be an active learner versus an expert. Through data collection, the researcher utilized herself as an instrument to collect information, build trust with participants, and become immersed in the process. To acquire the most substantive information, I traveled to each research site and arranged interview space on campus in order to interact with participants in their natural setting. The primary goal was to establish trust with participants to retrieve rich, deep, and substantive descriptive information through active participant involvement.

The multiple case study design "involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). The case study methodology is distinctive from other qualitative approaches in that it specifically focuses on a "bounded

system, which can be characterized by an individual, a specific program, a process, an institution, or a relationship" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 53). For this study, the bounded system was characterized by the two institutions and each individual's student engagement. The inquiry was shaped by focusing on White, undergraduate student engagement at two distinct public HBCU campuses. Thus, each campus and its students are considered a case allowing for multiple perspectives and rich comparisons between each case for analysis.

Finally, the multiple case design provides a forum for a cross-case analysis and strengthens the external validity and generalizability of the study (Merriam, 1998). The inclusion and analysis of multiple cases are intended to strengthen understanding and the ability to develop theory in a broader context (Berg, 2007). Yin (2003) postulated that the use of multiple cases is often times considered more compelling and robust.

Pilot Study

This study emerged from a pilot study I conducted in spring, 2007 at a medium-size, liberal arts historically black university located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Through a convenience sampling procedure, I worked directly with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs to identify students for an individual interview. Two White students, Katherine and Jackie[3], responded to the email requests and agreed to participate in the individual interviews. From these interviews, three primary themes emerged from the data: (1) strong student-faculty relationships; (2) varying levels of

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[3] Katherine and Jackie are pseudonyms for the participants in the 2007 pilot study.

student engagement on and off campus; and (3) the influence of students' pre-college experiences on college transition.

Interview questions concerning the level of academic challenge and interaction with faculty members generated rich responses. Both participants revealed that faculty members were responsive and supportive as it related to their academic concerns and performance. Faculty reportedly encouraged visits during office hours and opportunities to discuss grades and academic progress. The participants also mentioned the manner in which faculty served as coaches and mentors by recommending research and internship opportunities. These examples provided evidence that students felt supported and encouraged by faculty members in numerous ways, particularly through feedback on academic performance and advice on career advancement. Furthermore, the students found themselves challenged through the coursework and motivated by high academic standards set forth by the faculty members. Both students agreed that they increased the number of credit hours and altered course schedules only after consulting with a faculty or staff advisor.

There were varying degrees of engagement between the two students. Katherine was a commuter student and Jackie lived on campus. This residential factor was significant as Jackie was clearly more aware of campus happenings and activities than Katherine. Katherine also maintained a steady part-time job as a real estate agent in a community within a 35-mile radius of the campus. Her professional obligations and entrepreneurial pursuits potentially required more time off campus than did Jackie's and influenced her experience and engagement within the campus community. To this end, Jackie was more involved in social activities (i.e., candidate in a fraternity pageant,

orientation leader, residence hall committee member), whereas Katherine was more involved in academic-related activities such as tutoring and mentoring.

Finally, both students noted that their childhood or high school experiences offered interactions with diverse communities. Therefore, being a minority in a majority-minority campus did not present a shock or extreme feelings of isolation for them. Prior to the pilot, I had not considered pre-college racial and diversity experiences. This finding in the pilot was instrumental in my exploring this issue in my study. As evidenced in the research literature, pre-college and prior diversity experiences may influence student engagement. Pre-college experiences could potentially influence how and to what degree students become engaged on campus (Adelman, 1999; Arbona & Nora, 1997).

Despite the small sample for the pilot and time constraints, the experience and data gathered provided a strong foundation for the current study. Through that experience, I was able to test my interview protocol and interviewing skills. I gained a better sense of the more relevant questions and omitted those that did not garner pertinent information. The process also enabled me to gain experience in approaching institutions to gain access to participants and other individuals who could provide support and direction throughout the study.

Research Site Selection

The National Association for Equal Opportunity (NAFEO) is the umbrella membership organization for the 103 HBCUs recognized in the United States. The membership base is comprised of HBCUs, both private and public, and emerging Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs), representing both two and four-year institutions.

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The member institutions are located in 25 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Brazil (NAFEO, 2008). Data from a 2006 NAFEO report delineating full-time, undergraduate enrollment report by race and ethnicity, indicated that 33 out of 96 NAFEO membership institutions possessed enrollments of White, undergraduates with 100 or more students. See Table 3 in Appendix C for a complete list of institutions. These data indicated that institutions with the most full-time, White undergraduates tended to be at community colleges and located in the North Carolina. Table 3 also shows that public, more often than private institutions, have more full-time White undergraduates. Therefore, the number of possible public HBCUs was limited as well as those campuses with significant numbers (in this study, more than 100) of White, undergraduate students.

Given the context, Gulf Coast University (GCU) and Heritage University (HU) were selected as research sites through a purposeful selection process. Purposeful sampling is defined as the selection of information rich cases where the researcher can gather in-depth information about issues central to the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling is also appropriate for site selection when the available sample is small or limited. Light, Singer, and Willett (1990) argued that when a limited number of sites are available, the use of purposeful sampling is more logical than "relying on the idiosyncrasies of chance" (p. 53, as cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 89).

Both institutions were viable and credible selections as they met the criteria I established to "reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 62). The primary research criterion required that each research site be located in one of the original ten *Adams States*. The *Adams*

States comprised ten domestic states required by law to institute and implement strategies to diversify their student bodies and faculties as mandated by desegregation plans (Brown, 2004; Marcus, 1981). Additional criteria required that each site be (1) determined as an HBCU as defined by the government, not a predominately Black institution (PBI); (2) determined a state institution and preferably a member or unit of the overall state higher education system; and (3) possess a proven record of increasing White undergraduate student enrollments during the last 10 years (1998-2008). Each institution is considered a comprehensive, regional, public institution and has undergraduate enrollments over 3,000 students. The primary differences between the two sites are their locations. Although both campuses possess an HBCU designation, they are dramatically different in terms of the history, location, and student body composition. Heritage University is located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States within a major metropolitan city. Gulf Coast University is located in the southeastern part of the United States within a historic city.

Prior to selecting HU and GCU as research sites, I attempted to secure public HBCUs with White, undergraduate student populations comprising 100 or more students or 5% of the total student population. My original goal was to secure institutions with more White, undergraduate students in an effort to yield a larger sample and students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., student athletes, varied socioeconomic statuses, nontraditional vs. traditional) and experiences. Gaining access and identifying an ambassador to support my research endeavors were difficult tasks. I initially contacted a public HBCU located in the southeastern part of the United States, with a White, undergraduate enrollment of 722 students, representing 8.3% of the overall undergraduate

student body (total undergraduate enrollment of 6,026 as of 2006). I contacted a senior administrator from the institution who encouraged me to apply for the internal review board (IRB) approval and provided the names of individuals within the institution to assist me in identifying student participants. After the IRB approval, I contacted the Office of the Registrar, a representative of the Office of Institutional Research, a student activities administrator, and a faculty member to obtain assistance in contacting students for the study. These individuals either referred me to someone else or did not respond to my request for student contact information. Furthermore, these representatives were unwilling to send an invitation to the targeted population to participate in the study.

My undergraduate alma mater, also a public HBCU with a White, undergraduate population representing 6.6% of the total population, presented a similar challenge. I contacted several former mentors, a faculty member, and two administrators. In both cases I was met with some resistance. A senior, academic administrator responded to my request for support stating, "requests from external constituents were not a priority". This was the response I received even after revealing my alumnus status and active involvement with the national alumni association and the university honors I received as a student and former student government association president.

Berg (2007) recommended that novice researchers should be strategic and intentional in the selection of research sites. In addition to identifying sites reasonable in size, the researcher should embody the appropriate complexity to ensure the study is completed on time and within budget. The researcher should additionally seek sites where "(1) entry or access is possible; (2) the appropriate people (target population) are available; (3) there is a high probability that the study's focuses, processes, people,

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programs, interactions, and structures that are part of the research question(s) will be available to the investigator; and (4) the research can be conducted effectively by an individual or individuals during the data collection phase of study" (Berg, 2007, p. 40). Based on these conditions, the proposed timeline, and the obstacles encountered, I chose to identify research sites other than those with the highest, White undergraduate student enrollments and considered institutions where I had established relationships with colleagues who could serve as gatekeepers or those who would formally connect me with students.

Jones et al. (2006) described gatekeepers as individuals who "know individuals and/or settings that meet the sampling criteria determined by the researcher" (p. 74). Often times, these individuals hold informal or formal positions in the hierarchy of the organization and can assist or hinder the researcher's access to participants and other information. For example, professionals such as secretaries can heavily influence a researcher's ability to successfully conduct a study. Berg (2007) postulated that although individuals in clerical positions may not hold as high status and authority within certain units, these individuals may be helpful in navigating the campus and gaining access to students. Thus, I turned to a colleague employed at Heritage University in securing HU as a research site. I responded to a professional's interest from Gulf Coast University to inquire further about the possibility of GCU as a research site.

My colleague at HU was both interested and supportive of my investigation and helped me to gain access to student data through official records from the Office of Institutional Research and Technology. I had an opportunity to meet the Vice President for Student Affairs at the second research site at a national meeting and he suggested I

consider his institution due to their success in attracting non-Black, undergraduate students. He offered to support my research efforts upon receiving IRB approval. These relationships enabled me to not only easily and quickly identify potential participants for the study, but they also introduced me to other supporters on the respective campuses (e.g., Director of Residence Life, Chief of Navy ROTC).

Heritage University

Heritage University is a public, historically Black university located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States with an undergraduate enrollment of 6,114 (Opening Fall Enrollment Report, 2008). Although Heritage University is a historically Black institution, it has served students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. In 1972, HU witnessed exponential growth in its White, graduate student enrollments and enrolled a significant number of White students at the undergraduate level (Heritage University Strategic Plan, 2007). By the 1980s the campus' total enrollment decreased due to the development of other regional campuses in the state and increased competition. HU's enrollments rebounded significantly in the late 1980s. As of fall 2006, the institution's undergraduate student enrollment was 5,955 and 167 students identified as White, representing 2.8% of the total undergraduate population (Heritage University Fall 2006 Student Demographics Report, 2006).

Gulf Coast University

Gulf Coast University is a public, historically Black university located in the southeastern, coastal region of the United States with an undergraduate enrollment of 3,340 (Gulf Coast University 2008-2009 Fast Facts & Figures, 2010). Chartered by the state in 1890, GCU was established for the education and training of Negro students. As

the oldest, state-supported, public HBCU and institution of higher learning, GCU has served an increasingly diverse student population. The 2007-2008 academic year enrollment information reported a full-time equivalent enrollment of 3,535 students with a non-Black undergraduate student population of 5% (155) students. The non-Black student population has ranged from between 5% and 10% from 1997-2007. Additional information and a more detailed description of each research site will be presented in Chapter Four.

<div align="center">**Sample Selection**</div>

Between both institutions, 22 students were identified from a possible pool of 145 meeting the selection criteria. I contacted key administrators on each campus to identify 10-15 White, undergraduate students. Although White student populations are increasing on HBCU campuses, the overall numbers of these students are still relatively small when compared to the larger, majority African American student populations (Healy, 1996; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). Through the assistance of campus administrators, I requested a roster of White, undergraduate students meeting the following criteria:

(1) Participants must have sophomore, junior, or senior standing;

(2) Participants must identify themselves as White/Caucasian;

(3) Participants must return to the institution in fall, 2009 and/or graduate in December 2009;

(4) Participants must live on campus or live within a twenty mile radius to campus if they are commuter students;

(5) Participants must have full-time (FTE) student status; and

(6) Participants may be male or female.

Once the roster was established, I separated the students by gender for balance. This is one of the first steps of a process known as stratified purposeful sampling. Similar to stratified random sampling, stratified purposeful sampling is a process where "the sampling frame is first divided into strata; then, a purposeful sample is selected from each strata" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 114). Researchers typically employ this technique to "ensure that a certain sample of the identified population under examination is represented in the sample" (Berg, 2007, p. 42). For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to maintain gender balance and identify both male and female, undergraduate students to gain different perspectives. Thus, the stratified purposeful sampling process afforded me the ability to obtain a list of potential students for the study and then purposefully select students based on gender.

The lists were divided based on gender and numbered. I then randomly selected every other student (i.e., 1, 3, 5, etc.) until I reached a total of 10-15 participants. These students were the first to receive an invitation to participate in the individual interview on campus. The first email invitations were sent in late April, 2009 to recruit GCU participants and late May, 2009 to recruit HU students. I requested that students respond within five days if they were interested in participating in the study.

The first set of email invitations to participants resulted in low response rates. For example, the first email and second email invitations to GCU students only yielded four students who expressed an interest in learning more about the study or agreeing to participate. In order to increase the response, I resent the email invitation to all the possible participants and included language about a $25 gift card as an incentive. This process was repeated until at least five students, which was half of the targeted

81

population at each campus, were confirmed to participate in the individual interviews. The remaining participants were identified through snowball sampling. The snowball technique is a strategy that involves "asking each participant or group of participants to refer you to other participants" (Merriam, 1998, p. 63). This is an approach commonly used after data collection has begun and involves recruitment of new participants by those who have already participated in the study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). A total of 11 students from GCU were identified and agreed to participate in the study.

The process to recruit HU participants was similar. The first round of email invitations was sent to potential participants and yielded three responses. In an effort to recruit more students, a second email, again with language identifying a $25 gift card incentive, was sent a week later and two additional students responded with an interest in the study. Individual interviews were arranged for these students while constantly sending email reminders to recruit more participants from the list. After each individual interview, I employed the snowball technique to identify additional student participants. From this process, four more students were identified. This resulted in a total of 11 participants from the HU campus. Table 4 provides as a snapshot of the students interviewed; pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through document analysis, a demographic survey, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. The primary data collection points were through individual student and focus group interviews. The individual interviews afforded opportunities to build trust and engage students on a personal level regarding their

engagement. The focus group interviews provided a forum to explore themes and other issues that emerged from the individual interviews.

Table 4

Student Participants

Pseudonym	Institution	Age	Classification	Major
Alice	HU	32	Junior	Architecture
Bradley	HU	23	Junior	TV Production
Brett	GCU	28	Senior	History
Corey	GCU	19	Sophomore	Marine Biology
Cynthia	GCU	28	Senior	Marine Biology
Davina	GCU	32	Junior	Environmental
Emily	HU	22	Junior	Social Work
Fred	GCU	20	Sophomore	Business
Gary	HU	30	Junior	Political Science
Jack	HU	30	Senior	Communications
James	GCU	26	Junior	Accounting
Jeremy	HU	22	Senior	Fashion
Larry	GCU	26	Senior	Engineering
Laura	HU	47	Junior	Architecture
Michelle	HU	27	Senior	Human Resources
Myles	HU	22	Junior	Hospitality
Ralph	GCU	20	Sophomore	Communications
Sara	GCU	35	Junior	Public Administration
Seth	HU	35	Senior	History
Shelia	GCU	26	Senior	Accounting
Stan	HU	45	Junior	Nursing
Ted	GCU	26	Junior	Marine Biology

Each research site campus had administered the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) survey for two or more years. The most current reports and results from each institution were used in the document analysis. The availability of multiple data sources enhanced the triangulation process. Connell, Lynch, and Waring (2001) contended that triangulation strengthens the research findings through validity and increases the possibility of generalization and extrapolation. Further, HU and GCU both met the criteria that I established for research sites.

Document Analysis

The first step of the data collection procedure was document analysis, a procedure that involved the examination and interpretation of data retrieved from documents relevant to the study. Examples of documents may include university records, photographs, meeting minutes, strategic plans, letters, and media accounts (Schwandt, 1997). Document analysis is a useful technique to supplement other data collection methods such as interviews, participation observation, and field notes (Connell, Lynch & Waring, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Prior to and throughout the data collection process, I obtained available NSSE reports from the universities, institutional websites and web pages (specifically, the home page, student activities, academic departments, and athletic pages), strategic plans, and some hardcopy documents from the admissions and development offices.

The NSSE reports from HU and GCU provided a scant view of White student engagement. For example, in the most recent HU NSSE data reports, few students responded but their responses to questions concerning diversity and engagement with

diverse peers were positive. My goal was to assess the levels to which White students had previously indicated their engagement both inside and outside the classroom.

Through this strategy, I anticipated gaining a better perspective of how many White students took the survey and identify any specific trends by White respondents. Although a wealth of knowledge was not gained specifically about White student engagement, I was able to assess how White students in general perceived and experienced engagement on campus.

Strategic plans, university websites, and student program calendars were also used as part of the document analysis process. The strategic plans were available from each institution's website for the next five years. Each report included a mission and vision statement along with projected goals and objectives as to how the institution planned to achieve them. In both university strategic plans, the recruitment of non-Black or diverse student populations was listed as an institutional priority to be addressed and improved by 2012. For GCU, the objective to address the decreasing enrollment of White and non-Black student enrollment was listed under the recruitment and retention goal. Each site's mission or vision statement also included language describing the institutional commitment to diversity and the cultivation of a multicultural campus.

University websites were also analyzed. Particular attention was given to the review of the university main page, along with individual sites devoted to student affairs, athletics, and academic departments. These respective sites did not possess language concerning diversity within the departments. However, the visual and graphic images depicted representations of diverse students and faculty as well as their interactions with one another.

Demographic Survey

Each participant completed a brief demographic survey prior to the individual interview. The survey was developed based on data collected during the pilot study as well as the initial reviews of NSSE reports from one of the research sites (see Appendix B). Thomas (2004) stated that "demographic information is descriptive information about the respondents such as gender, ethnicity, age, prior experience of some kind, or level of education" (p. 24). The specific data used from demographic surveys are often based on the purpose of the study and used during the data analysis process (Thomas, 2004).

This survey included questions such as "What is your major?" and "Describe the diversity composition of your high school." These two questions stemmed from the research literature on White students attending HBCUs and data collected from the pilot study. Research studies have revealed that one of the key motivations for White students attending HBCUs was due in part to the availability of quality academic programs (Conrad, et al. 1997). In this study, 16 of the 22 students interviewed indicated academic major or reputation of academic program as one of the reasons they chose to attend GCU or HU. Further, participants from the pilot study indicated that they attended diverse high schools, grew up in multicultural residential communities, and were members of diverse families (e.g., one participant's stepfather was African American). During the individual interviews, many students explained how these experiences eased their transition and ability to successfully attend an HBCU.

Individual Student Interviews

Individual, in-depth interviews were the primary data collection source for this study. The format for the individual interviews was semi-structured which is the median between unstructured and structured interviews. This format enables the researcher to pose a set number of predetermined questions in a specified order but offers the flexibility to probe questions beyond the set order of questions (Herman & Reynolds, 1994). The format also allows the researcher to "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74).

The NSSE survey seeks to specifically assess two key components: (1) how students engage; and (2) what institutions do to facilitate engagement on their campuses. In particular, engagement addresses the time and energy students devote to educational practices and how institutions facilitate best practices to introduce students to the most appropriate activities that will elevate or enhance their student experiences (Kuh, 1993, 2009). The five benchmarks from the NSSE survey represent a robust set of behaviors and activities that are indicative of effective educational practices (Wolf-Wendel, Ward & Kinzie, 2009). Based upon the goals of the NSSE survey and the practices represented by the NSSE benchmarks, I hypothesized that using the NSSE benchmarks as a basis to develop the individual interview protocols focused on academic and social engagement would be appropriate to assess White, undergraduate student engagement.

The use of the NSSE benchmarks was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, the NSSE instrument and benchmarks are widely- recognized and valid tools for assessing engagement (Kuh, n.d.). Second, the benchmarks, rather than

individual NSSE questions, were more aligned with the foci of the current investigation.

Finally, NSSE critics have suggested that student self-reports can be subject to the halo

effect—"the possibility that students may slightly inflate certain aspects of their behavior

or performance" (Kuh, 2003, p.3). These reasons guided the researcher's decision to

utilize the NSSE benchmarks in this qualitative study. My assumptions were that by

using the benchmarks, rather than the survey questions, I could lessen the likelihood of

halo effect occurrences and capture richer data that cannot be ascertained by NSSE's

quantitative reports. For example, the individual interview protocol shaped by the

student-faculty interaction (see Appendix B) included questions, "Describe your

interaction with faculty members outside of class" and "What type of discussions do you

have with faculty?" These open-ended questions, opposed to dichotomous questions that

yield "yes" or "no" responses, required participants to think deeply and intuitively about

their interactions and relationships with faculty.

Once the stratified purposeful sampling process was completed, eligible students

were invited to participate in a 60-90 minute interview scheduled at a time and place

most convenient for each student on campus. When students arrived to the designated

located, I introduced myself, welcomed the students for taking the time to come out, and

offered them a comfortable seat. Once participants were seated, I explained the purpose

and goals of the study and provided them a copy of the letter of invitation that I sent via

email.

After review of the letter of invitation, each participant had the opportunity to

review and sign the letter of informed consent and ask any questions. I then invited each

participant to complete the demographic survey, and upon completion, immediately begin

the formal individual interview. Each interview was recorded on a digital recorder.   I

began each interview with a review of the process including interview format, time, and

their right to discontinue participation or omit any questions they did not want to answer.

Using the interview protocol, I constructed an interview guide which listed each question

provided space for note-taking and comments.

During our time together, I posed questions, allowed participants to respond

freely and followed up with additional questions for clarity, if necessary. I took copious

notes and referenced body language, tone, pitch or other characteristics in my informal

observations. At the conclusion of the interview, I asked each pa1rticipant if they had

additional comments or items to share. I would formally end the interview and cease

recording. Finally, I presented the participant with the $25 gift card and thanked him or

her again for their time.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups were a major secondary point of data collection. Berg (2007)

suggested that focus group interviewing is an effective mechanism to better understand

how participants talk about a particular phenomenon of interest. Additionally, focus

groups are specifically designed for small groups to garner deeper insights into the

thinking, motivations, and behaviors of a target audience. They are also ideal to create a

forum for group dynamics and enable participants to brainstorm and build off each

other's ideas (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005 as cited in Watkins, Green, Goodson,

Guidry, & Stanley, 2007). For this study, the focus group interviews were utilized for

triangulation purposes and to further explore themes and concepts revealed collectively

from the individual interviews. Further, Morgan and Spanish (1984) asserted that the

utility of focus groups is multifaceted and can be used "as a source of data in and of themselves or as an adjunct to other forms of data collection" (p. 253). In this study, the focus groups served as an additional form of data collection providing insight into responses from the individual interviews.

Five to seven students were purposefully selected and invited to participate in a 60-90 minute focus group interview to inquire more about their experiences and engagement specific to each campus. The focus group with students from Heritage University was held on campus on Thursday, July 30, 2009 and the second focus group was held at Gulf Coast University on Monday, September 14, 2009. Based on the demographic profile and themes that emerged from the interviews, I sought to invite a diverse group of students representing different ages, residential statuses, classification, major, and organizational connections. I was intentional about inviting individuals who were not in the same clubs or roommates. So, the focus groups included participants from the individual interviews as well as other students who met this investigation's criteria.

Students who agreed to participate received an email providing details about the study, purpose, expectations, and incentives. Selected students were also informed that the focus group interview would include three to four additional students from the institution meeting the participant criteria. As the participants arrived for the focus group interview, they were offered light refreshments as we waited for everyone to arrive. Once all the students arrived, I provided a welcome, an overview of the process, and explained the purpose of the focus group interview. During the 90 minute focus group interviews, students were asked to introduce themselves and respond to questions

regarding their engagement as White, undergraduate students on an HBCU campus (see

Appendix B for the focus group interview protocols). Focus group consent forms were

distributed after the introductions and students were provided time to review, sign, and

ask any questions. Once the consent forms were signed and collected, the focus group

interview began. Students were reminded that they could discontinue participation in the

focus group interview at anytime.

Direct Observation and Field Notes

Direct observation occurred with visits to each research site. Unlike the in-depth

immersion by the researcher associated with participation observation, direct observation

can range from formal to more informal activities. Informal forms of direct observation

can take place in classrooms, factory work, and the like (Yin, 2003). During each visit, I

waited in a public area, such as the university center lobby, student activities center, or

high-traffic areas on campus to observe student interactions on campus and the student

participants' interactions before we officially met or began the individual interview.

Merriam (1998) suggested that written accounts of observation constitute field notes (p.

104). Observations were recorded on a field note form (see Appendix B) and contained

sections to document people in attendance or being observed, a diagram of the interview

setting, and an area to jot down notes of the researcher's feelings, reactions, hunches,

initial interpretations and initial assumptions. Immediately following the individual and

focus group interviews, I reviewed and typed the field notes. Qualitative research experts

recommend that researchers review and type field notes after leaving the research site so

that lag time between the actual interview and typing the notes can be avoided (Creswell,

1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). My short term memory played a critical role in the

development of initial concepts and themes I noticed evolving prior to the submission of interviews for transcription.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was an iterative and rigorous process requiring the reading and rereading of transcripts and notes from the actual interviews and observation notes, analysis of the documents, coding and recoding of emerging and constant themes, and the employment of the constant comparative methodology throughout the process. Maxwell (2005) proffered that, "the experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research, stopping briefly to write reports and papers" (p. 95). This illustrates the process I used to review, assess, and reassess the data throughout the data collection analysis process.

Prior to the first individual interview, the data analysis process began. First, I retrieved documents such as strategic plans, mission statements, and reviewed specific areas of the each university's website to develop a strong context and setting for each case. Information retrieved from these sources shaped my understanding of the historical context of the institutions, campus constituents, and, in some respects, the progression (e.g., new initiatives and leadership) of the institution that was not available from the respondents in the study. Second, I constantly listened to the audiotapes at the end of the day to create memos in my research journal as well as cleaning the notes. I jotted on the interview guides for each student. Emerson et al., 1995 (as cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 96) purported that reading transcripts is the initial step in qualitative analysis along with any other documents or notes collected during the data collection. In addition, listening

to raw data, which in this case was audio files, prior to transcription is an opportune time to make additional notes and critical point of analysis as well (Maxell, 2005).

The second step involved listening to the raw, audio files and jotting notes in the margins of the interview guide at the end of each individual interview. Through this process, I identified and documented key words or experiences shared by each student. To organize and accurately record these initial ideas and concepts, I developed a database using Microsoft Excel© and created separate worksheets denoted with each of the five, NSSE benchmarks: academic challenge, student interaction with faculty, active and collaborative learning, enrichment of educational experiences and supportive campus environments. Any words, phrases, or descriptions from the raw audio files that correlated with specific activities under these benchmarks were placed under the appropriate benchmark and student participant. This strategy enabled me to store data and to assess if there were additional activities specific to these students that may fall under the NSSE benchmarks. It also offered the opportunity to consider and develop any new themes such as interracial interactions and relationships that may fall outside the auspices of the five NSSE benchmarks. This ongoing process challenged me to revisit my interview guide notes, and Microsoft Excel© sheet before sending the raw, audio files to be transcribed and begin a formal coding process using NVivo 8, a software package used for organizing and analyzing qualitative data.

Once the individual interviews were completed, the raw audio files were transcribed verbatim by Verbalink©, a professional transcription company. When the transcripts were returned, I reviewed each transcript and checked for accuracy of data. Next, I reread and reviewed all individual interview transcribed while listening to the raw

data from the audiotapes. This particular process enabled me to read while identifying

any gaps or missing words that made have been absent from the documents. This form of

"spotchecking" was useful due to the lack of clarity in some of the audiotapes. The

transcriber would place a short line (-) to indicate language that was not clear and place

words in red if they were unsure about a phrase or jargon. Close examination was given

to these areas to ensure accuracy and the validity of statements. This was a critical step

in the analysis process because in each transcript there were areas highlighted where the

transcriber could not understand the speaker, words spoken, or how to spell a word or

words that may have been unfamiliar. Listening to audio files and reading

simultaneously allowed to me to include appropriate language to clarify statements or

remarks during the interviews.

After the second reading and review, each transcript was uploaded to NVivo 8 to

organize and manage the data for analysis. This software consists of features that offer

researchers the ability to code and identify relationships between themes. There are also

mechanisms embedded in the software to develop charts and other graphics to illustrate

the frequency of words and phrases from imported sources such as individual and focus

group interview transcripts. Using the software, I placed the individual interviews into

separate files based on the institution. One folder was labeled as HU and the other was

labeled as GCU. The focus group interviews were placed into a folder titled, focus group

interviews. I created free and tree nodes based on the topical themes that emerged from

the pre-transcription notes and audio files. In NVivo 8$^©$, nodes are defined as sources

one gathers from content, such as transcripts, audio files and websites, relating to a key

concept. Specifically, content information related to one concept is referred to as a node.

Free nodes represent information that is pertinent but does not have a clear connection with other nodes. Tree nodes, however, are developed in a "hierarchical structure, moving from a general category at to the top (parent node) to more specific categories (child nodes)" (NVivo 8 Guide, 2008, p. 11).

Using the overarching NSSE benchmarks and additional data collected in the Microsoft Excel sheets, there were several preliminary primary and secondary themes to assess and consider. Examples of the themes were faculty-student interaction, interactions with faculty outside of class, pre-college experiences, and perceptions of Whiteness. Using the NSSE benchmarks and the data from the initial phase of analysis, I developed tree nodes and free nodes using the software prior to uploading the individual and focus transcripts. Figure 1 consists of examples of both tree (barriers to engagement) and free nodes (perceptions of Whiteness) developed from the analysis of the interview audio files before they were transcribed, interview guide and observation notes.

Figure 1. Sample of Nvivo8© Tree and Free nodes

Thus, prior to coding the individual and focus group transcripts within the NVivo 8 software, I inserted the predetermined concepts and themes to better facilitate the coding process within the software. This process is often referred to as open coding. Berg (2007) characterized open coding as a process where the researcher opens inquiry widely and tentatively holds interpretations, questions, and answers that may emerge

during analysis. Strauss (1987; 1990) as cited in Berg (2007) compared the open coding process to the traditional manner educators have demonstrated writing papers:

> You begin with a wide opening, a broad statement; narrow the statement throughout the body by offering substantial backing; and finally, at the end of the funnel, present a refined, tightly stated conclusion. In the case of coding, the wide end represents inclusion of many categories, incidents, interactions and the like. (p. 318)

Using this technique, I analyzed the interview transcripts line by line and highlighted the frequency of words or short phrases most frequently noted throughout the documents (e.g., distance from home, financial aid, academic program, convenient for full-time work obligations). For example, when students described their interactions with faculty during office hours, after class, or in other public areas on campus, such as the library and student center, I highlighted words, phrases, or even the entire description of the faculty interaction and coded it under the tree node, *Faculty-student interaction,* at the child node called, *Interaction outside of classroom.* A child node represents a more specific category of a broader, general category (NVivo 8© Handbook, 2008). I was also able to generate queries based on the word frequency and key concepts to assess how students referred to their student experiences.

Credibility, Trustworthiness, and Validity

Multiple methods were employed to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Through peer debriefing, member checking, and reviewing raw data for accuracy, the data were reviewed in order to verify the information retrieved from collection. Maxwell (2005) recommended member checking as a useful and influential strategy to acquire

feedback and input from the participants. The completed transcripts were forwarded to each participant for their review, feedback, and corrections. The focus group interview transcript was forwarded via email to the participants for review as well. Students were encouraged to thoroughly review the documents to confirm and approve the transcript and make any additional comments. Two respondents, one from HU and one from GCU, returned their transcripts with substantial corrections and explanations. In both cases, the participants inserted phrases such as, "Well, this is not what I meant here, or "What I was trying to explain was." In these instances, I clarified statements and communicated with participants until the transcripts read correctly.

Peer debriefers were also identified as part of the triangulation process. Three higher education professionals were identified to serve as peer debriefers. Two individuals are faculty members in educational policy and higher education departments and one individual was an administrator who received her doctorate degree from an HU graduate program. These individuals possessed some familiarity with relevant research and trends in higher education associated with student engagement. Additionally, all of the peer debriefers were White. The transcripts were divided and sent via email to each peer debriefer for review. I also shared with each debriefer the four primary themes consistent from initial analysis. Those themes were: faculty-student interaction, pre-college experiences, involvement through student organizations and university-sponsored organizations, and self-motivation.

From one of the focus group interviews, the data illuminated issues that may be considered barriers to becoming involved and engagement on campus. Specifically, the students at HU collectively discussed how the lack of communication and information on

student services prohibited interest and involvement in engaging in activity external to the classroom. I highlighted this finding in my email to the peer debriefers and requested that they review the transcript to see if there was validity in the finding. Merriam (1998) emphasized the importance of peer examination for internal validity by "asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge" (p. 204).

The feedback from the peer debriefers was substantial and insightful. Their review and feedback from reading the individual interviews as well as insight on the preliminary themes I established enabled me to think about the data from different perspectives. The debriefers agreed with the four primary themes and indicated that the faculty-student interaction and pre-college experiences were heavily supported by students' experiences from the interviews. Additional debriefer comments were in the form of inquiries and recommendations of other possible themes. One debriefer in particular asked if the study would include a section on identity development and specifically White, identity development. Her belief was that in order for students to engage or become involved, they had to be comfortable with themselves and have formed an adequate sense of identity. This inquiry led to the inclusion of White identity development research into the literature review and analysis of this dissertation.

The peer debriefers also were essential and critical to the analysis because they were able to identify themes or comprehend some of statements from the student participants differently than I was. For instance, in a memo from one of the debriefers, she noted that in the beginning she interpreted several of the student's statements conveying, "I am not a racist" and that the students appeared to be cautious in their responses to race-sensitive questions. In one particular instance, an HU participant

discussed exposure to diversity prior to attending college. The student explained that although his hometown did not have structural diversity, its constituents were open and receptive to diversity. The peer debriefer indicated in her reflection memo, "I think he feels it is important to explain that he is from a rural area, but there are good people there. He seems implicitly concerned that his hometown will be seen as "close-minded" or as "hicks" or "something like that". When I reread this particular portion of the transcript, I recognized that based on my background, experiences, and role as researcher, I may not have considered or interpreted the participant's statement in that particular manner.

Researcher Positionality, Reflexity and Bias

When I decided to pursue this inquiry, I was highly concerned about my role as a researcher, the ability to exercise the goodness of the study through reflexivity, and the emergence of any personal, unconscious biases during the study. Jones, Torres and Arminio (2006) stressed the importance of reflexivity and how goodness is achieved when researchers recognize themselves, their relationship with individuals in the study, and connection to the research topic itself.

Conducting the pilot study also enabled me to realize that one major limitation for me as researcher pursuing this topic could be my race. Essentially, I am an African American woman interviewing White students. For example, during the interview with Katherine, she was very thoughtful and intentional in most of her responses. When I inquired about how faculty members give feedback on performance, she eventually told me about negative remarks written about her by some of her classmates on Facebook but she was initially hesitant to do so. She would say, "never mind, I don't want to say that" and "I don't want to say anything bad". As I reviewed the interview and observations

notes later in the day, I wondered if Katherine would have provided more details if we were of the same race or if I had not revealed that I, too, attended an HBCU as an undergraduate. Although I do not have information to substantiate or prove reasons for Katherine's response, I felt that her decision not to expound on the matter was based on my position as a researcher, race, and perceptions she thought I may have developed based on her response.

Researcher positionality is another important concept within qualitative inquiry. Jones, et al. (2006) described positionality as the "relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and his or her topic" (p. 31). Based on this concept, it is important for researchers to recognize power and privilege innate in the researcher role and the relationship between participants. It is imperative to pay attention to not only what is being said but what is not being said. Having an understanding of how the context of a setting or situation contributes to the researcher-participant relationship is essential to positive exchange and communication as well as providing accurate information. For instance, the importance of researcher positionality emerged as I conducted the individual and focus group interviews on the HU campus. At the time of the study, I was employed as a coordinator in an academic unit of a college. During two of the individual interviews, students expressed frustrations with academic administrators and faculty on their campus. Prior to expounding on situations, these students asked me, "Are you going to tell [the president] about this interview?" or "Is this interview going to be shared with [administrators]? I don't want my book scholarship taken". I later realized that on the HU campus my researcher positionality was questionable because in the eyes of the students I held two roles – one as a campus administrator and the other as

a researcher. As a rule, with the subsequent interviews, I spent more time in the

beginning to explaining my position as a doctoral student conducting research and how

this role did not conflict with or inform work associated with my professional role. This

transparency was integral to establishing trust with the participants in this setting.

Summary

The next three chapters present the specific findings for HU and GCU, as well as

cross-case results. Chapter Four will provide an introduction and background of Heritage

University, a profile of each participant, and a presentation and analysis of the findings.

Similarly, Chapter Five will also include an introduction and background of Gulf Coast

University (GCU) along with a profile of each participant and the findings and analysis

specific to this campus. Finally, Chapter Six will offer an analysis of the cross-case

results. Specifically, this chapter presents key findings that were distinct across both

campuses.

Chapter IV

Findings and Analysis: Heritage University

The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing the student engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. This chapter begins with a brief contextual background of Heritage University, including my conceptualization of the campus culture and a description of White student presence on the campus. Next, detailed student profiles are provided for each Heritage University participant. Then, the findings are presented including the results of the document analysis, and the relevant themes that emerged from both the individual and focus group interviews. Additional discussion as to how participants believed they were perceived by others is also offered.

Heritage University

Heritage University's (HU) origin and progression has been shaped by American and African American history, the needs and interests of the region, and its leadership over a 140 year period. Prior to officially becoming designated as the State's public urban university (NAFEO, 2008), the institution's evolution occurred through four major institutional phases of growth, first as a seminary (1867-1890), then a normal school (1890-1939), later designated as a liberal arts college (1939-1975), and finally, a university offering baccalaureate, master's, and doctorate degrees (1975 to the present) (Amos, 2009).

Theological institutes and normal academies for the education and training of freed Black men, such as Heritage Seminary (HS), were common throughout southern states. Churches, through the support of their denominational boards, began establishing,

financing and operating academies, normal schools, and colleges for the education of Black Americans (Cook, 2006). This trend made its presence in the North through the interests of Black and White Methodist leaders in seeking to provide opportunities for the spiritual training and development for "new emancipated freedman" (Amos, 2009, p.6) at the peak of the Civil War. The proposed curriculum for HS was specifically designed to prepare Black freedman to become pastoral and community leaders.

The Methodist Church approved the establishment of Heritage Seminary in 1866 and accepted its first class of students in 1867 (Amos, 2009). For the next 23 years, Heritage would struggle with identifying ministerial placements for graduates and felt pressure to respond to the more urgent labor needs in the African American community. In response to external pressures, HS revamped and created a new curriculum that maintained the theological focus, but added normal and preparatory courses (Amos, 2009, p. 7). The new curriculum offerings had a reverse effect on the persistence and interest in theological education. Enrollment in the theological branch of HS decreased significantly as students desired more college preparatory classes. HS changed its mission and name with a generous monetary gift from Reverend Dr. L. Mumford[4], a HS board member. With this support, HS began offering primarily collegiate level courses and became Heritage College to honor the donor's significant financial contribution and support for institutional change (Amos, 2009).

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[4] The names of key leaders and places have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity and confidentiality of the research sites.

Heritage College remained a private institution until 1939. It was only after successful fundraising efforts under the leadership of Heritage College's president, Dr. Cummins[5], that the College began to pursue opportunities to increase its capacity as an educational entity in the State. Generous donations from philanthropic organizations, such as the Carnegie Corporation, combined with ongoing financial support from the Black and White Methodist conferences, enabled Heritage College to construct new academic buildings and to increase its enrollment with Black servicemen returning home at the end of World War I (Amos, 2009). During this era, the State's legislature began to take an increased interest in Heritage College, particularly as it related to expanding educational opportunities available to its Black citizens. In 1935, a young, African American man was denied admission to the then segregated State's Law School. He was directed to attend Heritage College or leave the state to pursue his legal education ambitions. This individual retained the legal services of a highly-regarded civil rights attorney, who argued there were no other law schools in the State comparable to the State's Law School. As a result of this case, the flagship predominately White institution in the State had to accommodate the student (Amos, 2009). This case was the catalyst behind the State's conducting a state-wide study to assess the educational access for African Americans. The results were significant; the State obtained authority over Heritage College in 1939 and it became a public campus open to all races (Williams & Ashley, 2004).

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[5] The names of key leaders and places have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity and confidentiality of the research sites.

As Heritage College experienced continued success as an emerging liberal arts college, it became a valuable, educational commodity for the State. After Heritage was purchased by the State, a report by a state-appointed Commission found the institution's faculty to be capable and as highly qualified as faculty at the State's flagship institution (Heritage University Strategic Plan, 2007, p. 9). With state and federal funding, the college was also able to expand its facilities with new academic buildings and residence halls. Under the leadership of Dr. Michael Jerkins[6], Heritage College succeeded in recruiting more talented faculty, enhanced the institution's curricular offerings, and added programs such as Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and the Urban Studies Institute in 1964 (Amos, 2008). In 1975, Heritage College was renamed Heritage University (HU) by the state legislature to reflect the institution's expanded mission and scope (Heritage University, 2010b).

Today, HU is a comprehensive, urban university enrolling approximately 5,600 undergraduates and 500 graduate students. Thirty-five percent of the undergraduate students are classified as out of state students, many from the neighboring states in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions of the United States (Heritage University, 2010a). The most popular and highest producing majors at the university include engineering, architecture, and the recently added nursing program. The dominant majors for HU student participants in this study included business, political science, and communications (broadcasting and public relations). There are 436 faculty members at

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[6] The names of key leaders and places have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity and confidentiality of the research sites.

HU, the majority of which teach full-time; there are 143 tenured faculty members and

222 faculty members are on a tenure-track (Assistant or Associate Professor). In terms of

other full-time, faculty characteristics, there are 265 men and 171 women members of the

faculty. The majority of the faculty members are African American (272) and White

(104). Collectively, Native Americans (2), Asian Americans (33) and Latino/a members

(24) represent 13.5% of the faculty (Heritage University, 2008). The student-faculty ratio

is 18:1 and a recent Office of Undergraduate Admission and Recruitment publication

noted faculty mentors as an integral influence of student success. A statement from the

publication depicting faculty as the student's greatest resource read:

> Teaching, however is their first priority. You can be sure that, inside and outside
>
> the classroom, they'll have your interest at heart, in one-to-one discussions with
>
> you in their offices over coffee, an informal conversation as you're crossing the
>
> campus together, you'll find your professors to be knowledgeable mentors and
>
> caring advisor. (p. 6)

Campus Culture

Students describe HU as an "open, commuter" campus. The students believe HU

is different from other public HBCUs because of its location in a major metropolitan city.

Some students suggested it is very easy for students and especially, non-students, to drive

or walk through the campus because it is essentially part of the city. Situated in the

northeast section of the city, just minutes away from downtown, major streets run

throughout the campus and longstanding communities are integrated into the campus.

Academic buildings and the campus' executive leadership offices are situated at the

north, middle, and south sides of the campus. Residence halls, additional academic

buildings, the student center, library, physical education facilities, and a multipurpose complex, which houses most student services, are located on the south side of campus. Two bridges connect the north and middle, and middle and south sides of the campus. With its bearings in a major metropolitan city, the campus is always busy and bustling with shuttle busses, pedestrians crossing major street intersections, and students walking across "The Welcome Bridge" on campus to get to academic buildings located in the center of campus. The "Welcome Bridge" is a haven for student interaction as well as the distribution of flyers and announcements to promote campus activities and events in the local area.

The University's location in the city also makes it a highly decentralized campus. For example, the student center is a separate entity from the primary student support services building, referred to as the Multipurpose Complex. Often referred to as "Multi" by students, the complex houses student support service offices, such as financial aid, the bursar's office, and the registrar's office. The Student Center, however, is the hub of student activities and programming on campus. The Office of Student Activities and Student Government Association offices are both housed in the Center. There is also a theater, where movies are offered throughout the week, a game room, and an eatery. High volumes of student traffic and interaction can be observed throughout the day in the Student Center.

The Student Center and residence halls are areas where most students convene between and after classes. From my observations, there was a strong presence of Black students. During the day, there was a more visible presence of White students in the buildings where engineering, telecommunications, and nursing classes were held. During

the interviews, the participants constantly referred to the HU campus and community as a "fashion show". Two participants, Michelle and Emily, described how wearing and possessing the latest fashion trends dictated one's prestige and status on campus. Although fashion trends between both student populations [Black and White students] were not prominently discernable, there was one apparent trend related to clothing that was overwhelmingly present—the universal display of HU paraphernalia in the form of clothing, book bags, hats, and other accessories.

At this particular research site, I had the unique opportunity to interact and to observe not only some of the student participants in the study, but also students within the general body. On a daily basis and in different areas on campus such as the Student Center, recreational building, and Multipurpose Complex, I observed an obvious demonstration of school pride through the display of paraphernalia. Both Black and White students alike regularly wore clothing bearing the HU insignia and university mascot. Other campus administrators have indicated that the panorama of school pride has increased since the university's basketball team won a national championship and defeated the State's flagship university's basketball team during a pre-season game.

Students may select from more than 100 clubs and organizations to become involved on campus. These organizations include fraternities and sororities, social groups including music and fashion, academic related clubs, and honor and professional societies. The Student Government Association (SGA) was a strong and prominent student agency on campus. The organization worked directly with the Office of Student Activities in planning major university programs such as Homecoming Weekend, Black History Month, and "I Love HU" Day in the spring. SGA was also responsible for

hosting biweekly meetings for all registered student campus organizations. Representative student leaders from the organizations comprised the Student Congress, and during these meetings, leaders are updated on new policies or procedures.

Some participants in this study believe the irregularity in student involvement is influenced by the openness of the campus and heightened concerns about campus safety. Several student leaders also believed the majority of Black students resided on campus and are more fully immersed in major student events and programs, such as Homecoming and SpringFest, than White, undergraduate students. Step shows and events organized by the Black Greek organizations and the modeling troupes are also popular on campus. These events are largely attended by Black residential students.

White Students at Heritage University

Intentional and strategic efforts to recruit White students to HU occurred under the leadership of Dr. Marlin Cooper, who served as president of then Heritage College from 1939-1975. Dr. Cooper was as an exceptional leader with an integrationist vision. Faced with the challenges and pressures of integrating the student body by federal and state mandates, President Cooper aggressively responded to external criticisms and organized a campaign to recruit more White students to campus (Amos, 2008). The majority Black student body responded with protests, but Dr. Cooper maintained that by recruiting more White students, Black students would "learn to function in society and learn how to '[a]ppeal to the conscience of the majority', to bring about lasting social change" (Amos, 2008, p.10). Thus, Dr. Cooper's actions, in lieu of a climate of social and political activism, ignited efforts to recruit more White and other non-Black students to HU's campus.

Increased recruitment of students from diverse populations remained an institutional priority. Focused strategies to increase campus diversity were evident in the University's current strategic plan. HU has always had a presence of White students even during its years as Heritage Seminary. Wilson (1975) reported that "pious young White men who applied for admission [to HS] and were accepted" (p.160). Further when Heritage Seminary later became HU College, Reverend Henry L. Parker, an alumnus of Centenary, recalled his student days and the presence of White students during his matriculation. Such classroom integration was not uncommon during the late 1880s as HBCUs rapidly began to appear across the northeastern and southern parts of the United States.

HU's student diversity has fluctuated but sustained in certain ethnic groups over the past 10 years. The *2009 Cougar Facts* publication described the racial student demographic to be "89.8% African American, 2.9% White, 1.1% Hispanic, 0.7% Asian, 0.2% Native American, and 5.3% Foreign (p.9) (Heritage University, 2010c). A report produced by the [State] Higher Education Commission (2009), indicated that there were 100 White, full-time and part-time, undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at Heritage University. The data also reflected the increase in student enrollments in all reported ethnic categories. From 1999-2008, there have been gradual increases in all student, ethnic groups. However, among White, Latino/a and Asian American student populations, the enrollments have almost doubled. Figure 2 reflects the growth.

Figure 2. Heritage University, undergraduate enrollment by race, 1999-2009.
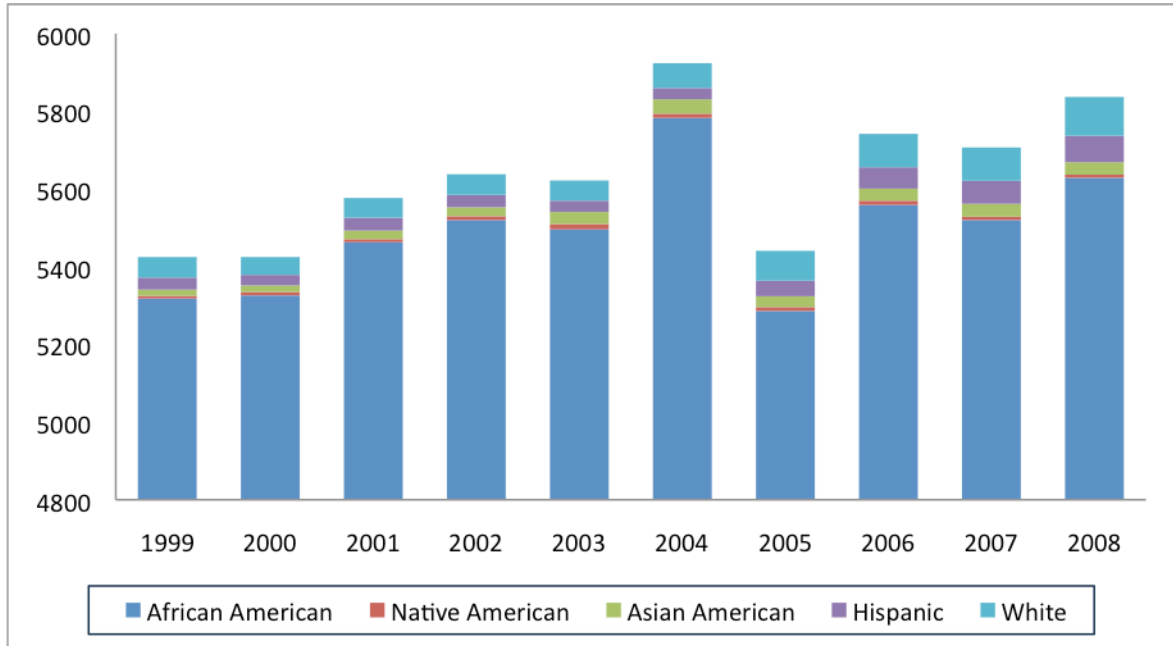
This graph demonstrates that HU's White and Hispanic undergraduate student populations have almost doubled over a ten year period. Asian American and Native American populations have also grown during the 10-year period. The Asian American undergraduate population doubled over ten years and the Native American student population, has been represented by an average of 10 students enrolled per year.

Profile of Heritage University Participants

Eleven students responded and agreed to participate in the study from Heritage University. Four women and seven men participated in the individual interviews. A total of four students, two women and two men, participated in the follow-up focus group interview. One student who identified as Caucasian through initial email conversations, later identified as Latina during the interview. This particular interview is still included in the analysis since the participant initially met the selection criterion in terms of race—

she self-identified as White or Caucasian. Other salient characteristics included transfer

and campus residential status. Seven of the eleven student participants transferred from a

community college or another four-year university. Additionally, three student

participants lived on campus at the time of the interviews. This is significant because

only five participants of the 22 students interviewed in this study indicated they lived on

campus. The following outlines individual profiles based on the participant responses

from the demographic survey and information provided through the individual

interviews.

Student Profiles (Heritage University)

Alice is a senior, architecture major at HU. She transferred to HU based on a

recommendation from one of her community college professors, who regarded the

institution's architecture program as one of the best in the State. She lives off campus

and works part-time in a local architectural firm. At the time of the interview, Alice was

not receiving any type of scholarship or financial aid. The high school she attended was

very diverse and she is a first-generation college student. Her stepfather is Muslim and

she was raised on the basic principles associated with the religion. After graduating from

HU, Alice plans to enroll in graduate school to pursue a master's degree in Architecture.

Alice explained that she is relatively quiet in class and primarily interacts with

faculty during office hours to discuss coursework, registration, and internship

opportunities. Her interactions included discussions with departmental faculty and she

developed a strong relationship with the program's Dean. This relationship led to her

successful application for a competitive internship program designed to advance students'

understanding of design and construction management. Alice regarded the faculty highly

and was confident in her ability to secure employment after graduation or gain entry into a reputable graduate program. She explained that since her enrollment in the program, she and her colleagues have had the opportunity to present three professional presentations to major architectural firms—a typical experience for most undergraduate architectural students. Alice recalled how they were required to dress professionally and prepare handouts and portfolios to distribute to the entire class.

Active participation in campus activities and organizations was not a priority for Alice. As a transfer student, she has prioritized establishing strong relationships with other students in the program and faculty to successfully complete group projects requiring an inordinate amount of time and creativity. She described the program as very competitive and believed the most successful students are those who are focused, organized, and willing to invest additional time on major projects. Within the department, Alice interacts most frequently with Black, female students. She stated Black women treated her like a "sister" and always invited her to social events and programs outside of the classroom.

Alice has not experienced any direct instances of racism or isolation as a White student, but she did mention issues associated with White privilege and class. Compared to her own financial situation and challenges, Alice felt most White students in the program came from well-established, high-income neighborhoods, and did not have to work as hard to negotiate certain situations in the manner she does. Further, she believed that many of her White counterparts chose to attend HU because it was convenient and not because the institution offers quality programs.

Bradley is a second semester junior majoring in television production. He transferred from a four-year institution and commutes 30 minutes to campus daily. He is employed part-time to offset college expenses. Bradley is a first-generation college student and described his high school as somewhat diverse. His primary reasons for attending HU included driving distance, cost, and the experience he would gain from attending an HBCU. Bradley attended two other predominately White institutions prior to attending HU.

Bradley's level of interactions with faculty and other students is very high. He explained that group projects and teamwork are essential components of the curriculum and a requirement for television production majors. In class, he is an active participant and confident in sharing his views on complex issues such as slavery and socioeconomic class in the United States. Bradley believes his active participation has strengthened his relationships with faculty as a transfer student. It is not uncommon to find him in a faculty member's office between classes discussing his concerns about the lack of appropriate equipment in the department or having a dialogue about the latest conscious rap groups in the country. In fact, he believes his ability to interact effectively with faculty has positively impacted his success in the program.

Most of Bradley's involvement is associated with the television production station and department. Bradley is interested in becoming more involved on campus but his daily commute and part-time job responsibilities impede active engagement and participation. He has also considered on-campus housing, but costs have prohibited his ability to apply. Bradley believes if he resided on campus his awareness of campus programs and activity would inevitably increase. During the interview, Bradley spoke at

length about his perceptions of race and class in society. He did not grow up in a very diverse neighborhood, but he has always developed friendships with people from diverse backgrounds. He characterized being a White student at HU as a unique opportunity to experience the "flip side" as a minority in a predominately Black setting. Bradley specifically mentioned wondering if he is being discriminated against because of his race in the classroom setting. On a few occasions, he recalled being intentionally overlooked to answer a question or offer an opinion during a class discussion. Although he does not feel he is treated differently by faculty and students, he contends it is only natural to expect you will be disregarded or "called out" because of race at times.

Emily is a second semester junior majoring in social work. She transferred from a four-year liberal arts college in North Carolina in 2007. She works part-time in the city, lives off campus, and is attending college full-time. She described her high school as somewhat diverse. Emily's parents attended college. Her family encouraged her to move back home after difficulty dealing with health issues. As a native of the area, she had no reservations about attending HU and receives some tuition remission through her father's faculty benefits at another local state institution. Emily decided to apply to HU because of the availability and reputation of the social work program.

Previously established relationships also influenced Emily's decision to attend HU. She attributed these relationships to her ability to navigate the campus more easily and independently. When she initially transferred to HU, she joined a longstanding women's faith based organization on campus and at the time was the only White member in the group. Emily joined the group per recommendation of one of her African American, female friends and met great people through the organization's social events

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and activities. When asked how she felt she was initially received by the group members, Emily stated everyone was very nice but she was constantly asked if she played on the softball team or had a full-tuition scholarship. Currently, her work commitments and course schedule demands do not allow her to be as involved with the faith-based group or other groups on campus.

Relatively quiet during the interview, Emily shared her frustrations about the university's policy on transfer credits and some of the discomforts she has experienced as a White student on campus. Emily expressed frustration with the university's stance on accepting certain general education courses typically accepted at other universities, such as English and diversity classes. In particular, she indicated understanding the importance of classes such as the African Diaspora but did not understand why it was a mandatory course requirement for all students. Emily stated, "I took a class just like this at my other school so I don't why they would not let me transfer the credit for that class here."

As a White student on campus, Emily explained that daily encounters with other students in the University Student Center or while crossing the "Welcome Bridge" can be extremely intimidating and isolating. Emily posited that fashion, specifically the way students dress and ensure they possess the most popular accessories, drive social interactions on campus. Emily stated this is not the feeling or sentiment from Black and other students in the classroom, but it definitely exists in social contexts of the university. Since her acceptance into the social work program, her involvement has been limited to campus and athletic events such as football and basketball games, and Homecoming—an annual alumni development driven event with a plethora of activities designed to bring

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together staff, faculty, students, and alumni to reflect on past collegiate experiences and celebrate the advancement of the institution.

Gary is a second semester senior majoring in political science. He transferred from a local community college two years ago and resigned from his full-time job to attend college full-time. He is a recipient of the institution's diversity grant and described his high school as somewhat diverse. His primary reasons for attending the institution were based on location, scholarship package, and low tuition cost. Gary defined himself as a nontraditional student and is primarily concerned with completing his studies to become a high school teacher. He is actively involved in the political science association supported by the department. With the guidance of a faculty member, Gary was also able to obtain an internship as a legislative aide in the state's capital last summer.

Gary is deeply connected to his academic department and allocates approximately 20-25 hours per week to studying and preparing for classes. The majority of his time is spent in classes and working with the political science association. Gary conveyed that he would like to have an active role in the organization but his daily commute and class schedule do not permit extensive involvement. He has also found that other students in the department have great ideas for the association, but lack the willingness to invest time necessary to maximize the organization's potential. Gary shared an idea to develop a program showcasing liberal and conservative views of the recent presidential election.

Gary described feeling isolated in the classroom when faculty members situate discussions in favor of African American students. He stated, "The professors tend to

gear discussion toward African Americans. They tend to gear the class towards things that they would be interested in, things that would affect their lives."

Jack is a senior communications major. He lived on campus for three and a half years and is currently employed full-time. Jack did not attend any other institutions but did apply to other institutions such as New York University and Penn State University. He is a first-generation college student and described his high school as somewhat diverse. Jack's primary reason for attending HU was due to the financial aid package he was offered by the university. Jack expressed the strong friendships he has cultivated with other HU students has made his college experience most memorable thus far.

Jack believed his affiliation with the university band made it easier to transition into the campus environment. He played the saxophone and lived with a group of band members in the residence hall. Jack explained that band members typically only interacted with one another and did not make efforts to engage with other students on campus. He, however, did not model this behavior and described how he sought opportunities to interact and engage with different people and groups. Jack specifically stated, "If there was a band party and another party going on the same night, I am going to check both of them out because I have friends in both groups-inside and outside the band." He stressed the importance of meeting and makings friends with individuals from multiple social networks on campus and not just one group.

Thus, Jack's college experience included forming positive relationships with other students on campus which supported his ability to further explore and cope with his identity as a gay male. He admitted he has only come out since being a student at HU and his family has not been extremely supportive. Through the availability of a lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) student organization, Jack explained that he has been able to become engaged on campus in ways he would not have typically imagined.

Jack's description of relationships with faculty was varied. He holds college professors to a higher standard of expectations than his high school teachers. He argued that faculty members are paid to offer a product to students, who are clients, and they should therefore be willing to assist students by any accommodation. He described his African Diaspora professor as a great instructor and indicated that he enjoyed the class structure allowing for constructive and reflective dialogue on difficult issues such as race and gender. Jack is an avid proponent of community service and works with a human rights organization in Washington, D.C. He was recently involved in a major fundraising event to raise awareness and support for issues related to the LGBTQ community. As a career goal, Jack stated, "Ultimately, what you want to do is to get a job that pays well so you can make a major difference in the lives of other people. Money speaks louder than picket signs when working to make change."

Jeremy is a junior fashion merchandising major and also an active member of the Fashion at Heritage University (FAH) club. He has lived on campus since his freshman year and HU is the only institution he has ever attended. Jeremy is a second generation college student and described his high school as not diverse. After being denied admission to another institution in the State, Jeremy's guidance counselor advised him to consider HU as a college choice. He clearly recalled his guidance counselor stating that, "'One thing about HU is it's an HBCU', and I was like—honestly, the realization that it was a predominately Black school never phased me."

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Jeremy is involved in an array of clubs and organizations on campus. He is a member of the intramural lacrosse team and actively involved with organizations such as FAH and Live Squad—a volunteer, student-run pep group to support HU athletics, especially football and basketball games. Jeremy was most active in FAH, a highly visible student-run organization that sponsors numerous fashion shows and informs students about the latest fashion trends. The organization is directly connected to an academic department with emphasis on fashion merchandising and design. He found experiences in the organization to be extremely positive and made several friends through his participation in the group. In addition to his positive experiences through co-curricular activities, Jeremy also attributed increased maturity and self-efficacy to living on campus. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to address specific situations and approach goals, tasks, and challenges (Bandura, 1986). As a residential student, Jeremy learned more about becoming independent and how to share with others. Having grown up as an only child, Jeremy's interactions with his roommates, both positive and negative, all nurtured his ability to respect other people's space and personal property.

Jeremy has not experienced any racial incidents on campus, but admitted that it does feel lonely on campus at times. Similar to Emily, he talked about the stares he receives when he walks across campus and in class, especially when there are debates on slavery or race-sensitive topics. When asked how he thinks Black students perceive him, Jeremy stated Black students who know him love him. However, he has discovered that Black students, particularly freshmen, who are not as familiar or accustomed to seeing White people at Black colleges, view him differently. Jeremy stated, "I feel like

sometimes I'm looked at like, 'Why are you here? This isn't your place'." Such experiences have not caused Jeremy to consider transferring to another institution or leaving HU. He continues to be actively involved with several campus organizations and is in the process of applying to graduate programs in graphic design. Jeremy informed me he would prefer to pursue his graduate education in a diverse, metropolitan city such as Los Angeles.

Laura is a junior, architecture student. She considers herself a nontraditional student and lives off campus. She is a first-generation college student and described her high school as somewhat diverse. Originally from a mid-Atlantic urban city, she has experienced and been exposed to diverse populations. As a young, single mother, she raised her children in a local subsidized housing community in the city. Laura transferred to the university through a two-plus-three, architectural program partnership between a local community college and HU. Her decision to attend HU was based on the academic reputation of the program and reasonable tuition costs. Further, she stated the professionalism and positive interaction with the advisors at HU coupled with the support of her community college professors, made the transition from a two-year to four-year institution seamless.

Laura stated that being a White student on a HBCU campus is not unusual and previous life experiences have equipped her to adapt. She did, however, admit that her spouse and children were concerned for her safety due to the university's location and high crime activity associated with the area. To ease her spouse's concern, Laura was intentional in involving him in her college experience. She stated, "I was like let's just go up there. So we went up there and walked around and he was uncomfortable. I'm like

you're uncomfortable because you're the only White person here." Laura explained after orientating her husband to the campus environment, he became more intrigued with her projects and even assisted with large-scale projects.

Laura was one of the only HU participants to divulge the actual names of professors and staff members she interacted with on a daily basis. Within the interview transcript, she alluded to eight faculty and staff members and mentioned one faculty member ten times. She has not experienced any racial incidents, but reported overhearing comments from Black students and faculty that she found perplexing. For example, she says one of the most well-known faculty members in the department often says to the students, "You are messing with me because I am a Black man, aren't you?" Laura found this comment interesting because the faculty member appeared to correlate students' concern and complaints about inadequate space for studio classes with his race. Another incident she described involved hearing a faculty member inappropriately yelling at four Black girls about the importance of being just as bright and competitive with White kids who attend Harvard. She disclosed that these particular students were struggling academically in the program and it disheartened her to hear the faculty member demean them by making such a comparison.

Laura also voiced concerns about specific university processes and student support units. In addition to her frustrations, she did compliment the university's communal atmosphere and the faculty's support of students' with families. Periodically, Laura brings her two grandchildren on campus while she is in class to accommodate her daughter's work schedule.

Michelle is a senior, human resource management major and identified as a White undergraduate student. She lives off campus and works part-time in an internship she has held since her junior year. Michelle is a first-generation college student and described her high school as somewhat diverse. She is also one of the only students who indicated HU was her first choice for college and she did not apply to any other institutions. Her primary reasons for selecting HU were its reputation and course curriculum in the business program. Michelle credits her family and their unyielding support for her success as a college student and timely graduation next year.

Michelle also identified her age (nontraditional) and prior military experience as factors assisting her academic success and social transition as a college student. During the interview, she identified as a biracial, Latina. Although Michelle did not meet one of the selection criteria—being White—she is still included in the analysis of this study for two reasons. First, Michelle did in fact self report as White; she was listed as a White undergraduate when I originally requested a listing of subjects from the Office of Institutional Research. Secondly, her story illustrates the complexity of race and identity development in higher education, specifically as it relates to being a temporary minority in an HBCU setting.

During the interview, Michelle emphasized the importance of developing strong relationships with departmental advisors and faculty. She predicated her successes as a human resources management major on the relationship she fostered with the department chair early in her college career and involvement with departmental organizations. Michelle believed her networking skills were strengthened through participation in the Human Resources Club and led her to the current internship she holds. Further, she has

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found the faculty to be confident in her abilities and thus, she has no problems asking for recommendations or securing other means of support. In fact, outside of family support, Michelle shared that the faculty were instrumental in assisting her as she went through an arduous divorce while attempting to maintain her grades.

Michelle was the only HU student who communicated an interest in joining a sorority on campus. Acknowledging age may be a detriment, she stated pursuing membership is highly unlikely because of the difficulty she has experienced developing relationships with Black women on campus. Michelle stated, "I would join a sorority. I would love to experience that but I didn't know how accepted I would be into it." Her concern about belonging and the perceptions by Black students is consistent with those expressed by Emily and Jeremy. However, her rationale included race as well as age.

Family and the importance of setting an example for younger siblings was a prominent theme in Michelle's interview. She provided rich examples of how her mother constantly reinforced the importance of education in order to live a better life than she and her family members. Michelle reflected upon growing up without luxuries which compelled her to manage her time better and to make a difference for herself and her family. She also acknowledged the pros and cons of acquiring an education and the conflict it can cause among family members. In reflecting on a conversation with her mother about graduation, Michelle shared, "And I think my mom was worried about at one point once I got my degree I would think that I'm better than her. I told her, "No, I was like it's because of you that I'm here."

Myles is a junior hospitality and tourism major at HU. After completing a successful internship program with a major hotel chain in Charlotte, North Carolina over

the summer, he was able to secure an internship with more responsibility. Following graduation, Myles plans to pursue a career in hospitality management or with a major airline carrier. His parents attended college and he received a band scholarship and diversity grant to attend HU. His primary reasons for selecting HU were the university's music program and, specifically the opportunity to join the university marching band. His second college choice was Tuskegee University. Myles's desire to attend an HBCU was driven by his passion and interest in becoming a part of the drum line—the percussion section of a band typically encompassing instruments such as drums and symbols and often referred to as the "heartbeat" of organized musical ensembles. HU was his first college choice and he has lived on campus for three years.

Myles spoke extensively about his involvement in the band and insisted that being a part of a tight-knit group eased his transition into the university. He specifically stated, "When you are in the band and you play percussion, nobody is going to mess with you." The membership process he described to become a regarded and legitimate member of the percussion section was akin to new member intake processes traditionally associated with Greek-letter organizations. He inferred that the process was a challenging and humbling and enabled him to learn more about himself. Myles believed this process fortified relationships between members of the group and allowed them to present themselves as a unified front on campus.

Another unique experience Myles had was participation in the university's pre-college program. The program is an alternative admissions program designed to ease the transition of prospective students who did not meet the mandatory, university grade point average and standardized test score requirements for admission. He was the only White

student enrolled in the program of approximately 300 students. Through the six-week, intensive program, Myles was able to transition to campus and meet friends before the start of the semester. The purpose of the pre-college program also resonated with his parents. Myles' parents, who both served in the military, were impressed with the opportunity for prospective students to be exposed to college teaching and campus life prior to the fall semester. He thought one of the major benefits of the program was small group work and acquiring study skills techniques. As a student, Myles prefers courses requiring hands-on projects and participating in activities that stimulate critical thinking. Myles is hopeful these analytical skills combined with his internship experience will make him a top candidate for full-time, professional positions after graduation.

Seth is a senior history major and in the process of applying to graduate history programs in the northeastern part of the United States. Similar to Gary, Seth resigned from his full-time job to pursue his undergraduate education fulltime. He is a second generation college student and described his high school as not diverse. During the interview, Seth indicated his exposure to diverse populations, prior to college, were not embedded in Black and White relations but White and Native American relations. Seth grew up with Native Americans in his neighborhood and attended high school with Native American students. He attended five schools before attending HU and stated being a student in the history department is one of the most phenomenal experiences he has ever had. Seth selected HU because of the university's location.

Seth was strongly connected to the faculty, staff, and students in the history department. One of his most memorable experiences was the orientation for new students in the department. Seth discussed how it was an informal and unintimidating

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opportunity to become better acquainted with faculty personally and to discuss specific research and topics in history. He also indicated the department chair was an integral force in assisting him with acquiring an internship with the state archives and the rewarding experiences he gained from that opportunity.

Seth actualized his college experience and connection to the university through his academic pursuits. He spoke proudly about the intellectual prowess of the faculty members and compared their scholarship in history to faculty members at Ivy League institutions such as Harvard and Yale. Seth stated, "I've obviously never gone to an Ivy League school, but I can't imagine that an Ivy League school has a better set of professors." In particular, he spoke at length about how much he admired one faculty member whose research investigates historical student movements since the late 1800s and how they shaped and cultivated student activism on college campuses. He specifically enjoyed how the professor taught the class and introduced students to student movements during the reconstruction and then into the post reconstruction. He was fascinated by the various cases depicting organized efforts by students to ensure access and opportunity for future generations.

Seth is also a member of the History Club and the department's historical society, but admitted he is not very active. Seth was knowledgeable of each organization's programmatic efforts such as social mixers and hosting movies within a historical context in the student center theater. He indicated time constraints and family responsibilities have impacted his ability to be more involved. Seth explained that although his activity in the organizations is minimal, he and his family take full advantage of the rich, cultural offerings through museums and theatrical performances in the city. Most of the

exhibitions and performances he attends are historical. He shared that he has encouraged

the faculty and administration to pursue partnerships with agencies such as museums to

introduce students to these affordable and valuable resources. When asked how he thinks

Black students on campus perceive him, he responded, "I don't know and I have not

thought about this. I have not had any problems with them." He also emphasized that he

has learned a great deal from this experience as a White student attending an HBCU

campus. Seth expressed that there is value in being a minority, where you "take yourself

out of that and allow yourself to be placed into a position where you're no longer

dominant or part of that dominant group."

      Stan transferred from a local community college and is a junior nursing major.

He characterized himself as a nontraditional student because of his age and intensive

focus on completing his undergraduate degree in a timely fashion. He is currently

unemployed and resides off campus. Originally from a small town in West Virginia,

Stan's parents attended college and both taught for several years in the public school

system. His high school was not diverse and primarily attended by White students from

his community. HU was a viable option for him due in part to the location and the cost.

      Stan's background and experiences represent an array of interactions of diverse

people from the domestic and global world. Prior to attending HU, Stan served in the

United States Peace Corps as a hospital volunteer for two and a half years in Lesotho. He

spent another year and half in Zimbabwe pursuing personal interests and hobbies such as

backpacking and hiking through a dozen other African countries. Stan credits his parents

for exposing and introducing him and his siblings to diverse people and cultures outside

of the small town where he grew up. He described his childhood community as "very

homogenous, filled with very closed-minded people who are not open to diversity or new ideas." His parents, who were both educators, ensured their children were exposed to diversity by planning summer vacations to historical sites throughout the United States each year.

Stan's perceptions of and interactions with faculty have been extremely positive. When asked about interactions with faculty inside the classroom, he stated, "I've had great teachers, actually. I have had better teachers at this school than at [neighboring private elite research university]. I think that the teachers here want to teach, as compared to some bigger institutions who are more into their own research." Throughout the interview, he provided examples about how the HU faculty are intellectually prepared and view each person as a student not just a "number in the book". Despite his demanding schedule, he has worked diligently to become involved outside of the classroom through departmental organizations and positions such as class officer. Last year, his peers asked him to serve as the class president or vice-president, but he declined due to an ongoing conflict he has been having with the department chair.   More details regarding this particular situation will be discussed later in the chapter.

Stan believed his "age" was more of a prohibitive factor to involvement and interaction with students than his race. He stated his most frequent interactions were with African students who are 21 years of age and older. The relationships he established with African students have been influenced by his experiences with the Peace Corps and capacity to share similar stories and lived experiences with these students. Stan's motivation to succeed is driven by his desire to get an education and eventually pursue a professional career in nursing outside of the United States.

The HU participants represented a diverse composition of students from various educational, socioeconomic, cultural backgrounds, and social and academic interests. Although, they each identified as White/Caucasian, their specific reasons for attending HU and perceptions and experiences as students varied. Table 5 provides pertinent background information drawn from the demographic survey completed by each student participant. The table demonstrates the diversity within this population despite their ethnic identity.

Table 5

Heritage University Participants

Student	Age	Major	Classification	Transfer Student	Financial Aid	Employment Status	Residential Campus Status	Parents Attended College
Men								
Bradley	23	Television Production	Junior	Yes	No	Part-time	Off	No
Gary	30	Political Science	Junior	Yes	Grant	No	Off	Yes
Jack	30	Communications	Senior	No	No	Part-time	On	No
Jeremy	22	Fashion Merchandising	Senior	No	Grant	No	On	Yes
Myles	22	Hospitality/ Tourism	Junior	No	Band Scholarship	Part-time	On	Yes
Seth	35	History/ Political Science	Senior	Yes	Grant	No	Off	Yes
Stan	45	Nursing	Junior	Yes	No	No	Off	Yes
Women								
Alice	32	Architecture	Junior	Yes	No	Part-time	Off	Yes
Emily	22	Social Work	Junior	Yes	Partial Scholarship	Part-time	Off	Yes
Laura	47	Architecture	Junior	Yes	Scholarship	No	Off	No
Michelle	27	Human Resources	Senior	No	Military Grant	Part-time	Off	NA

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Heritage University Findings

Overview

Each of the 11 participants shared experiences specific to their interactions with faculty, staff, and students on campus. The primary themes from the data included interaction with and perceptions of faculty; involvement in departmental activities and programs; impact of nontraditional student status; and barriers to engagement. HU participants reported consistent interaction with faculty both inside and outside the classroom. Specifically, the students described how faculty members were readily available and willing to discuss classes and course registration, as well as offer advice at any time. Several students described how faculty have an open door policy and welcome students, regardless of appointment, to discuss issues relevant to the class or career aspirations, especially recommendations for internships. For example, Bradley and Michelle both commented on their experiences of a welcoming environment offered by faculty to discuss personal, career, and academic issues during their office hours:

> In my production class, for the teacher who teaches that class, you know, I've gone and sat down in his office and just talked with him; he showed me work that he's done, we'll talk about stuff I've done, just talk about cameras in general (Bradley).

> Dr. [professor] teaches operation and production management in the human resources program. I loved her class and the way she explained the practical side of inventory management. She encouraged me to apply to graduate school at HU or somewhere comparable. And she was like if you need me to I will write you a letter of recommendation (Michelle).

The HU student sample was comprised of more transfer and nontraditional age college students (see Table 5). Seven of the 11 participants transferred from a community college or four-year institution and their ages ranged from 22-47. The

median age for students in this multiple case study was 30. Thus, some students, such as Stan, Laura and Alice, believed their age was more of a barrier to engagement and involvement than their race. Further, the nontraditional student participants emphasized how interactions with faculty and activities within academic units influenced their transition and success on campus.

The final finding describes HU students' experiencing barriers to student engagement. In both individual and focus group interviews, students discussed how the lack of communication and timely information from the university, inefficient student support services, particularly in the areas of financial aid and the bursar's office, and the location of the institution collectively impacted the amount of time students participated in and devoted to activities outside of the classroom. Next, a more detailed explanation of these findings with supporting evidence from the data is presented.

Document Analysis

At Heritage University, I reviewed university print publications such as admissions brochures, academic catalogs, and alumni newsletters. In addition, I analyzed web based documents and materials on the university's website. These included the home page and departmental web pages, particularly the intercollegiate athletics and student life departments. I also reviewed the university mission and vision and strategic plans. Heritage University emphasizes educating citizens from an array of diverse backgrounds, while maintaining its tradition and commitment to educating the very best prepared students and those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. This priority was clearly reflected throughout its print and web publications and materials. While there was often language alluding to Heritage's commitment to diversity, often times, this

commitment was not embedded visually through documents. For instance, the admission

brochures highlighted African American student profiles. In addition, other print

materials and web pictures showed same-race (African American) faculty-student and

student-peer interactions. One noteworthy observation is that there were depictions of

White students on the university's intercollegiate athletics page, particularly with team

sports such as men's tennis and women's softball.

Individual Interviews: Emergent Themes

High Interactions with and Perceptions of Faculty

Several HU students stated their participation and involvement on campus was

limited due to time constraints associated with work and family. There was, however,

significant evidence of high interaction with faculty and activities offered by academic

departments. Consistently, students described interactions with faculty, staff, and other

students within the academic departments and different programs they participated in.

Most importantly, students depicted faculty members as highly capable, competent,

supportive advisers who were willing to make recommendations for internships and other

opportunities. The students had frequent interactions with faculty in the classroom and

co-curricular activities such as the political science association. In the classroom,

students described and praised faculty for exhibiting creativity in their teaching styles and

delivery. Further, students discussed how faculty members were effective in managing

classes as well as difficult conversations that emerged in the classroom setting.

Stan, a nursing major, applauded departmental faculty for structuring course

assignments to be engaging and creative in a field where creativity is often not invited:

> She [a nursing faculty member] gave us a subject and we were supposed to research and present it as creatively as we could. I found it refreshing in a nursing program that they encouraged creativity, at least this one professor did. So, my group actually wrote a play about this historical person and acted it in class.

Gary, a junior political science major, described how one professor begins each class by engaging students through interesting class dialogue. Gary valued this type of teaching because he is able to hear different perspectives and counterbalance different ideas. He explained:

> One of my professors, she starts most of her classes asking, "What's in the news today?" Like when I was taking American government, she would start the class by saying "What's in the political news for today?" This semester, I was taking her class for comparative government and she'd ask, "What's happening in international news today?

Seth, a senior history major, also expressed admiration for the faculty's teaching and facilitation styles with in the history department. Specifically, he explained that he preferred more interactive discussions than lecture classes:

> It was great. The professors, I would say all, but maybe one or two, really expected the class to engage the professor. So there was a lot of communication back and forth—very little straight lecture. So it was nice because we had the ability to hear other peoples' thoughts and get an interaction going based on those thoughts and then kind of see what other people thought. And for history you don't find that, I believe, very often.

Bradley, a junior TV production major, shared that one of his professors had an ability to assess the tenor of difficult conversations in class and provide support to ensure all students are comfortable participating in the class discussion:

> One of my teachers, he's actually very aware…some of the students would say, the "White man" or stuff like that in reference to the missionaries. And my teacher would correct them and he pulled me off to the side of the class and said, "Hey you know, I just wanted to let you know that sometimes the kids just go with the book and then go on a tangent.

Bradley assured me he was neither uncomfortable with the class discussion nor the comments made by Black students, but he did appreciate the professor's concern and commitment to making sure he was not feeling isolated from the discussion.

The classroom is a critical and important campus space for learning and engagement. Farrell (2009) suggested that research has linked retention to classroom involvement and that the classroom often times serves as the only place that many faculty and staff interact on a consistent basis. Fleming, Howard, Perkins, and Pesta (2005) argued that the classroom setting is the second most important factor to the development of incoming students behind social environments. The authors suggested that the classroom environment is significant because it provides a springboard for developing new friendships; offers structured and regular learning opportunities; and provides continuity for students, especially first-year students. Finally, the authors portend that the effectiveness of the classroom is heavily dependent upon how the faculty member engages students in the learning process:

> Classes in which the professor establishes a class structure that actively engages students in the learning process benefit new students more than large, dry, sterile lecture classes. For example, faculty members who actively engage students might encourage classroom discussion, engage students by using their names, and regularly take roll to demonstrate that attendance and success go hand in hand. (para. 21)

The research literature has also indicated that HBCUs offer nurturing environments and faculty tend to be more concerned with teaching than scholarship and therefore offer

more close attention to students and their academic needs (Berger & Milem, 2000; Bohr,

Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Effective Classroom Management

The participants also described the mandatory African Diaspora course as a forum

for high interaction with faculty and students despite the tendency to feel isolated by

some discussions. Myles and Gary discussed the professors' effectiveness in

encouraging student participation on controversial issues during class discussion. He

found that faculty actively encouraged different perspectives so all students, not only

Black students, could grow intellectually from the discourse. Myles indicated the course

was rewarding because of the process the professor used to spark debate during class. He

stated:

> It was only isolating when the debates occurred on topics like racial profiling and
> role models for Black people in the community. There was another White student
> and an Asian student in the class and I can tell they were looking at me like,
> 'Good, I am not the only one in here.' But the professor was excellent in
> facilitating the discussion in the class to make sure we were able to learn from
> each other.

Gary was comfortable with professors' focusing class discussions on the impact of race

and class on the progression of the African American community. He explained that

non-Black students should expect or at least anticipate this type of teaching by virtue of

attending an HBCU. He explained:

> The professors tend to gear towards – since the majority of people are African
> Americans, they tend to gear the class towards things that they would be
> interested in, things that would affect their lives. It doesn't really bother me. It's
> a different point of view. As long as we cover the big picture, the important stuff,
> and then if you use it as examples it really doesn't bother me that they go into
> different stuff. It's an educational experience to learn something new that – a
> different point of view. I really like getting into the class discussions over issues

'cause you definitely learn a different point of view and a different perspective on issues.

In contrast, Jeremy shared that he took an English course during his freshman year and that a White faculty member actually made him feel excluded in the course. He explained that the issue of slavery was not a core component of the class but emerged as an example for one of the concepts. Jeremy explained that his discomfort arose not because of the material presented, but rather the manner in which the faculty delivered the information. He stated:

> I did feel that before, my first semester, freshman year, and it was actually by a white teacher made me feel excluded. The way he would say things –it's hard to describe because I'd sound crazy if I tried to describe it, but it was the feeling I got in the course. Like the way he presented the material and would talk about it, made me feel like I could not raise my hand and talk about it. Being white, I feel like I can't raise my hand and talk about that because I'm seen, like the subject of slavery, I'm seen as part of the problem and in some of the material that we would study. So, sometimes I don't feel like I can share it. Now, when I was in English another time. I had a teacher who was in the same type of material, but he presented it in a way that I felt like I could contribute to that class. It's all about the teacher. And so ever since freshman year, I've learned to just deal with it, and that's part of being here.

Jeremy's comments illuminate a same-race, faculty-student interaction that influenced his comfort level in participating in class discussions. Much of the research literature largely addresses the impact and experiences of interracial interactions between faculty and students as it relates to racial minorities, such as African American students and White faculty, and Latino/a students and White faculty (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). However, the research is limited as it relates to the experiences of both Black and White faculties interactions with students in classroom settings on HBCU campuses. Anaya and Cole (2003) argued that:

College student and faculty experiences may vary as a function of differences in race-related experiences, awareness of race, ability to deal with racial diversity, and differences in understanding of racial issues. Consequently, student and faculty perceptions and evaluations of their interactions with each other may vary. Because interracial interactions reflect the experiences of the individuals involved, they can shape the course of student-faculty interactions, which hypothetically are associated with student educational outcomes. (p. 99)

Although Anaya and Cole (2003) are referring to different race relationships and interactions, the core of their argument is critical. The assumption that interactions reflect the experiences of individuals involved parallel Jeremy's statement "It's all about the teacher". Hence, how students and faculty interact is influenced by race, but also by each individual's personal experiences and perceptions.

It is also important to emphasize that all interactions with and perceptions of faculty were not depicted as positive. The students shared experiences where their interactions with faculty were confrontational and contentious. However, such encounters did not cause students to disengage from their participation in class or with other students and activities in the department. In most cases, the less positive interactions students had with faculty enabled the students to think about situations differently. Bradley provided an account with a faculty member regarding the administration of a test for class. He argued with the professor about the necessity to attend class for the exam when it was to be posted online. The discourse became heated and the professor eventually told Bradley he would need to leave class or visit him during office hours to discuss the issue further.

Myles, who insisted he has had a great experience as HU student, did not think

some professors were serious about teaching, setting high academic standards, and

effectively managing the classroom. During the interview, he reported that he had

witnessed several instances of cheating, both in class and on Blackboard assignments.

Myles was confident that there was no way faculty could not be aware of the rampant

cheating based on the number of students who do not attend class or submit assignments

on time.

Similarly, Stan discussed a parallel situation with the chair of the nursing

department. Throughout the interview, he expressed his frustration with the lack of

course offerings in the department and communication to the students, specifically from

the chair. The strained relationship resulted in numerous meetings and letters of

complaint to senior university administrators. Further, he felt that because of this

contentious relationship with the chair, he is limited in capacity to discuss other issues

openly and serve as a student leader in the department. Stan stated:

> Well, in the nursing program, they asked me to run for an office. They wanted to
> elect a class president and vice president, and type of thing, but I declined because
> I have some personal issues with our department chair. We didn't get off to a
> good start, the department chair and I, so I didn't think it would be that
> productive. But I definitely told them I would help them in any way, and I have
> been sharing information and giving suggestions to the people who were elected.

Alice and Michelle believed, at times, Black faculty members showed favoritism

toward Black students compared to equal treatment exhibited by non-Black staff, such as

Asian and White faculty members to all students. Respectively, the students shared their

different experiences:

> I have noticed like the foreign professors really push you to do your best. And
> sometimes like the black professors, they tend to ignore you if you're not a black

student. I think the foreign professors actually push equally their students. They don't really show any favoritism, and they expect a lot out of them. So but definitely it's [academic work] very challenging, and it does prepare you for real-life experiences (Michelle).

African Americans are more privileged and get higher grades in class no matter what they do, no matter what they do. If I compare with my White friends, they work very hard. They are hard workers. They put excellent creations in architecture, I mean really excellent. On the other hand, my Black friends do not do a lot work, sometimes one guy does not even come to class and he has the same grade as my White friend who worked so hard, long hours. I think it might be a strategy of the university, I guess but I may be wrong (Alice).

From their perspectives, there was a difference in how Black faculty treated Black and non-Black students. Specifically, the student participants felt Black students were shown favoritism despite their work ethic and class attendance. These particular criticisms, however, were not directed toward the ability of the faculty, but their perceived biases toward Black students. In their respective interviews, both women indicated their programs of study were challenging and the faculty, even if they did not have the best relationships with them, held high expectations of students and, as students, they felt prepared for the workforce.

The extant literature on student development learning has unequivocally linked positive student academic outcomes and intellectual growth to frequent interactions with faculty (Anaya & Cole, 2003; Harper et al., 2004). Studies, using different methodological approaches, have reported that a variety of student-faculty interactions positively influence and enhance students' learning. The research has shown students tended to perform better when students perceived faculty as helpers and supporters (Astin, 1993; Endo & Hapel, 1982; Nelson Laird, et al.; 2007) and that seniors, specifically, were influenced by direct faculty contact (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Terenzini

& Wright, 1987). The voices from the HU students reflect high interaction with faculty members in and out of the classroom. The interactions take place in the form of academic and career-related concerns, as well as general inquiries regarding academic policy and personal matters. Such interactions appear to guide participants' decisions and perspectives on complex matters like race relations and slavery.

In this study, students' perceptions and regard for the faculty members reflect their ability to be creative, engaging, and nurturing in the classroom environment. These characteristics are consistent with the depictions of HBCU faculty in the research literature and specifically to perceptions and experiences White students have shared in recent studies (Closson & Henry, 2008b; Sum, Light & King, 2004). These abilities appear to contribute to meaningful dialogue between faculty and students within the classroom as well as interactions between peers within this setting. Closson and Henry's (2008b) study examining the social adjustment of White students at HBCUs found the influences on academic relationships with faculty as a dominant theme. In this study, White students described the faculty as encouraging and as advocates for student success. Further, the general sentiment for HBCU faculty was positive for White students and they did not indicate a preference for same-race faculty members.

This finding is significant and consistent with the overall perception and sentiment of the White students interviewed in the current investigation. In referring to faculty members and their experiences, participants seldom referred to faculty by race. In fact, in several instances, I had to inquire about the race of the faculty member to gain clarification on some of their responses. Thus, it appears that faculty positively influence

the experiences of White students on HBCU campuses and the race of the faculty does not directly hinder or impact their ability to effectively teach White students.

Faculty as Supporters and Nurturers

HU students also described faculty as supportive and nurturing when they encountered personal or academic difficulties. Specifically, students described their interactions with faculty outside the classroom, especially during office hours or via email. They provided several examples of faculty availability during office hours and support of their career endeavors, such as writing recommendations for internship programs. In a few instances, where students perceived the faculty as treating them differently because of their race, they still described the faculty members' efforts as an attempt to be supportive and caring for them.

Laura, a junior architecture major, compared her feelings and approach to communicating with faculty at HU to those she had with faculty members at her community college.   She described the difference in requesting recommendations from faculty at the two institutions:

> I mean it's like a daily basis when you come in and—before if I needed a recommendation from my teacher, I always felt like I was really imposing. But I went in and I just sat down and talked to [professor], and he was like no problem. He would write me a recommendation for a scholarship, anything I needed, no problem.

Gary also found faculty members available during office hours and outside of classroom. In addition to taking time to talk about grades and coursework, Gary believed it was helpful to talk about current events and societal issues with faculty, particularly those who were not from the United States:

For all the professors that I've had classes with I've always gone to them during their office hours and I've always sat down and had discussions with them about coursework and getting extra help and assistance. Even when I'm done and there is a long line for one professor and another professor is available I can just go in there and talk about whatever is going on. We get along pretty well…Some of the professors in the political science department are not from the United States and we talk about their experiences and what things are like in the country that they grew up in.

Seth, a senior history major, indicated he did not frequently visit faculty during office hours or outside of class, but clarified that all his professors stressed the importance of communicating with them if students needed advice or feedback. The students consistently mentioned that the faculty would offer more than one mode of communication to make contact with them if needed:

Every professor that I had, bar one, always said, if anybody needs anything and you can't make it to my office hours, email me. We'll setup a time. Contact me after class, you know, whatever. Whatever you need, we're gonna make sure that you understand what's going in class that you're gonna make it. I think this was just terrific.

Seth reiterated that the small, communal, familial atmosphere of the history department attributed to the success of students. Due in part to the organization and offering of intimate activities within the department, students were able to easily connect with each other and faculty. The communal connections were extended through contact with program alumni after they graduated through social, informal activities such as dinner outings and cookouts. He also added that this network was an invaluable tool for professional opportunities after graduation.

Emily, a junior social work major, also found the faculty to be incredibly supportive but also stringent in terms of classroom management and course expectations. She recalled an experience with a faculty member who had a policy to decrease students'

grades that were late to class. His policy was embedded in the philosophy that social

workers cannot be late to meetings or site visits when they become full-time

professionals. Emily shared:

> I was worried this semester I had a C, because our teacher was like, 'if you come
> to class late, your grades does drop'. It was a night class and I came from work
> late and I was worried about my C grade because I did not want this grade in my
> average. I went to talk to him about and he was really nice. In the end, I got an A
> because I did all the work. It was just the lateness, because his thing is about
> being a social worker you cannot be late to anything.

Michelle, a senior human resources management major, also shared varying experiences

with faculty members but her most memorable experience was that she received personal

support from a Black female, faculty member in the department support during her

divorce. She stated:

> And it was at that point in time where I was missing the maximum classes
> because I was just overwhelmed with emotion. I was like I can't do this. And I
> had missed an exam, and it was like the fourth time I missed class, so I went to
> her office. And she's like is there something going on. And that's when I broke
> down. And she was a Black professor, very nice, from Florida originally. And
> she was like you're a very bright woman. She's like is there something going on
> with you? And that's when I broke down and cried and told her everything. And
> she's like, honey, I've been there. I've been divorced. I have two children. I have
> had to support them when I went to school. She's like you can do this.

Emily also found faculty to be more willing and competent to assist with issues

associated with registration than the academic advisers. She recalled an experience

where an academic adviser was not able to assist her with a registration issue and

described how the department chair intervened to resolve the matter:

> When I went in there for a problem this semester, she [academic adviser] did not
> really know about changing classes or dropping and adding. I didn't know the
> whole process either and was kind of working off other students' advice and
> talking to the lady at the front desk in the social work office. [Professor] made
> sure I got through everything, like she met my mom once and told her everything.

She tries to make sure every student in the major gets through it, so she's pretty much on top of every student.

In contrast, Jeremy, a senior fashion merchandising major, appreciated faculty for being supportive and accommodating, but felt uncomfortable when he perceived faculty were being over accommodating because of his race. He discussed a situation in his psychology class where he described the faculty member as being sympathetic toward him because he was a White student. He explained:

> I had a psychology teacher who treated me a little special because I was White, because she took me aside and asked me, "I know it is has to be hard being here being a White student at an HBCU. Do you need anything? Do you need someone to talk to?" I appreciate it but I just wanted to be treated like everyone else. I don't want to be seen as different.

In Jeremy's case, the faculty member was presumably attempting to be supportive by initiating a side conversation with Jeremy. Unfortunately, he was vexed by the faculty member's approach and felt she was "singling him" out by being overly concerned about him as a White student in a predominately Black classroom environment. In contrast, Bradley expressed a similar situation, where his professor pulled him aside after class to be sure a classroom discussion did not berate or make him feel uncomfortable. In Bradley's case, he appreciated the faculty member's awareness regarding the situation. Thus, Jeremy's reaction may in fact be an example of how the support and accommodation of diverse students attending HBCUs may have an adverse effect on students.

In sum, the HU student expressions depicted their comfort in approaching faculty regarding personal issues and for advice with career and academic matters. In each instance, faculty members were described as readily available and willing to assist

students in solving their issues and advancing their goals. Faculty approachability is an important aspect of relationships between students and faculty (Cokley et al, 2004; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The research literature extensively addressed the importance of frequent contact between faculty and students and revealed how interactions within the classroom can positively or negatively influence students' motivation to engage faculty outside of the classroom (Cole, 2007). With the HU case, the data revealed that in most instances, faculty members were successful in effectively teaching and engaging White students in the classroom environment. For several students, these positive experiences resulted in interactions outside the classroom and often times increased interest and involvement in departmental activities and organizations. This is consistent with other research which has suggested HBCUs provide supportive and nurturing teaching and learning environments (Bridges et al., 2005; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Swail, 2007).

Involvement in Departmental Activities

White students attending HU were primarily involved in academic organizations and most often participated in activities within their respective academic departments. Holzweiss, Rahn, and Wickline (2007) found that students involved in academic organizations were motivated to join clubs that would increase their knowledge in their major and eventually prepare them for careers. Michelle, a senior human resources management major, explained how she approached the chair of her department to inquire about the reactivation of a club within the department. She was concerned that there were large active organizations for business and accounting majors, but few for students majoring in human resources management:

> I went to the chair of the department a few months ago and I said I know we have
> an HR club on campus, but it's not active. I was like, how do the accounting
> majors have such a big club and not any other majors? He said a lot of people go
> to that club to do networking. I said, you know what, we can do the same with an
> HR club. I told him that I would take the time and make it a project of mine and
> make it an active club.

Bradley and Gary described how a staff and faculty member encouraged them to join an academic and professional organization. Bradley explained how he did not join due to the membership fees. Gary reported that he is involved in the political science association, but not as active due to time constraints:

> [Professor], she had a meeting with the National Association of Black Journalists,
> and she did say, "Hey, you're more than welcome to join too. We're not going to
> discriminate against you." So she did, you know, kind of encourage me to join
> that as well. And I would love to; I just didn't have the money, It was like $40.00
> or $50.00. (Bradley)

> A professor I had is the adviser for it [the political science association] and she
> designated someone from one to come to one of my sociology classes to share
> information about the association and the meetings. It was rather convenient to
> attend because the meetings were an hour or two after my class and before my last
> class. I am able to participate because I don't have to drive home and come back.
> (Gary)

Student involvement has been linked to student success and satisfaction (Kuh, Kinzie, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Recent surveys administered by national student activities associations, including the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) and the Association of College Unions International (ACUI), concluded that student involvement matters on college campuses across the country. Specifically, the surveys indicated that although there is no significant relationship between attending campus events and student success, students that are actively involved report enhanced academic skills and higher grade point averages (Kruger, 2010).

The HU students were interested in joining professional and academic organizations and encouraged, in some instances, to join by faculty and staff members. Stewart, Wright, Perry, and Rankin (2008) suggested that student organizations such as the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) can offer African American students "much needed support and social interaction with others who have common experiences, interests and goals" (p. 27). The authors also reported that at public HBCUs such as Central State University, located in Ohio, students are encouraged to become involved in at least one co-curricular activity or organization outside of class. In the context of HBCUs, the encouragement of participation in student organizations and involvement appear to be a way to encourage students to assume leadership roles and experiences that can prepare them for such positions after graduation. The HU faculty and staff seemed to embody and apply the same philosophy for White students in this study. As Bradley and Gary indicated, they were encouraged or persuaded to join an organization within the department. Other students such as Michelle, however, took the initiative to inquire about the possibility of revitalizing an organization to advance the interest of human resources management majors. The slight variation embedded in these responses was that the HU faculty and staff also used student organizations as a means to socially integrate students into the department and the university. In earlier studies on the experiences of White HBCU students (Elam, 1978), strategies such as encouraging involvement in academic and social organizations was a common practice to transition White students into their new environment. In Brown's (1973) study, 40% of 626 White

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students attending 18 public HBCUs reported participation in non-academic activities such as student organizations.

The involvement of HU students in academic organizations and departmental activities appeared to provide them with more access and frequent interactions with faculty and their peers outside the classroom. This level of involvement could have enhanced or strengthened the relationships that several of the students established with faculty in the classroom. In fact, a second dominant theme from the HU data was a high comfort level interacting with faculty both inside and outside the classroom. A fairly representative comment from the students was "I am always in her office or I will go down to his office to get clarification on a topic." Participants provided examples of how faculty were available and encouraged students to take advantage of office hours.

Again, Gary and Bradley's interviews offer evidence to support this assumption. Gary indicated that he joined the political science association per the recommendation of a faculty member who he had taken a course from before who served as adviser to the group. For Bradley, although he did not join the NABJ, he did mention his involvement with the university's television station and the relationships he has developed with other students:

> I believe that I'm considered part of the HU TV. HU TV does like little TV skits and little news things on the Website. I've helped out here and there and thought of myself as a member. But when they did pictures of the yearbook and stuff they wanted me in that. So, you know, most of the kids I hang out with are a part of that.

Gary acknowledged that his time was limited to participate in the political science association, but he still found time to contribute because of his interest in the field. During the interview, he shared and described, in detail, other ideas he thought would be

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beneficial to students in the department. Examples of projects and programs he was

interested in coordinating included a panel discussion to discuss African Americans in the

Republican Party and a voter registration drive. Gary was encouraged by faculty

members to get involved in organizations such as the Political Science Association and

the Sociological Society and sought out organizational opportunities on his own. During

his first semester, he met with the Director of Student Activities to inquire about the

presence of a College Republicans organization. He was informed that there was no

College Republicans organization, but that there was a College Democrats group on

campus. Gary's goal was to confirm if the two groups were registered on campus and

invite them to participate in a conversation on the Obama and McCain presidential

campaign.

Bridges, Kinzie, Nelson Laird, and Kuh (2008) found three patterns that

distinguished minority-serving institutions, such as HBCUs, from other institutions: "(1)

high levels of student-faculty interaction, (2) supportive campus environment, and (3) a

blanket of intrusive educationally effective policies and practices" (p.231). The authors

postulated that programs and practices were effective because they influence meaningful

contact between faculty and students through activities linked to academic departments.

Particularly, they proffered that "Faculty members' willingness to be available and work

with students through enriching, educational experiences such as academic clubs, service

learning and community activities help engage students in tasks that lead to success,

retention, and graduation" (pp. 231-232). Similar findings concerning the efficacy of

HBCUs in student development and achievement have been reported in other research

literature as well (DeSousa, 2001; Evans, Evans, & Evans, 2002; Gray, 1997; Kim, 2002;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Willie, Reddick, & Brown, 2006). The current inquiry

offers evidence that the more interaction and contact students have with faculty inside

and outside of the classroom leads to improved relationships and trust between faculty

and students.

Involvement in Non-Academic Activities

Few HU students were members of organizations or participated in campus-wide

programs and events such as Homecoming or activities offered through the Office of

Student Activities. Emily explained her involvement on campus was driven by her

relationships with friends she had prior to attending the university. Although she rarely

attended any campus-wide events, she has attended the annual Homecoming Weekend

festivities for two consecutive years. During the interview, she discussed her attendance

at a Homecoming concert and disappointment with the organization of the event:

> I have attended maybe one football game prior to the Homecoming game. I went
> with friends and with Mr. Barney. I went to one Homecoming show and I did not
> like how it was presented. It was with TI and Fabolous. I usually go down to
> A&T's homecoming and it was so much better with at least 6 or 7 artists. Here TI
> did not show up and we were just standing around and then they had to get
> Fabolous. It just did not feel like a concert and it was not organized. I was
> standing there like $25 for two artists and one person is late, it just was not
> organized.

With the exception of Jeremy, Jack, and Myles, HU students were neither

involved in organizations outside of academic departments, nor aware of campus-wide

events and programs. Jeremy, Jack, and Myles were privy to campus-wide events due to

their affiliation with clubs such as the lacrosse team and the university band. Emily was

familiar with campus-wide and local events due to her friendships with individuals prior

to attending HU and being a native of the city in which the University was located. Thus,

it appeared the availability of information about student organizations, programs, and resources influenced their level of engagement and interest in such activities.

Holzweiss's et al. (2007) study explored the differences between student participation in academic and social-oriented organizations at a large predominately White institution. Within this particular context, participants were primarily juniors and seniors and reported that their involvement and persistence in academic organizations was due to the potential benefits of networking, honing their social skills, and getting to know their departmental peers better. More significantly, this study revealed that 92% of the students surveyed believed faculty were supportive of academic organizations while 79% believed faculty were advocates for non, academic organizations. Although this study was situated in the context of a PWI, the results are consistent with the characteristics and reported experiences of White students in academic organizations at a public HBCU such as HU. The HU students commented on how staff and faculty have been intentional in ensuring students are involved at the departmental level and get involved in organizations that will benefit their understanding of respective disciplines and serve as a resource in securing internships and jobs after graduation.

Overall, students were connected with one or more faculty members through classroom interactions or outside the classroom. Through academic advising, discussions regarding careers, internships, and graduate school, and even consultation on personal issues, participants were comfortable approaching faculty to discuss an array of issues pertinent to their academic success and social transition into the academic departments. The students were confident in the faculty's intellectual capacity and teaching ability. Throughout the individual interviews, the students made statements such as, "[Professor]

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is an expert in the field so this is a quality program" or "I really liked the way the instructor sparks discussion and debate in the class." With the exception of two students, Alice and Emily, participants indicated they were active in class discussions and found faculty members appreciated this level of participation. The HU participants also felt this level of engagement in the classroom enhanced their relationships with faculty members. As Stan, a senior nursing major, affirmed, "Actually, he [the professor] became more personable to me when I asked more questions. I got the perception that he liked the fact that I wanted to know more than what he was telling us".

Impact of Nontraditional Student Status

Eight of the eleven participants possessed characteristics associated with nontraditional students. Nontraditional students have been historically characterized as students over the age of 21 who commute to and from campus and do not live in the residence halls (Switzer & Taylor, 1983). Today, that definition has evolved and students considered as nontraditional possess at least one of the following characteristics: "they delay postsecondary enrollment one year or more after high school graduation, enroll part time, are employed full time, are financially independent of their parents, have dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, or do not have a high school diploma" (NCES, 2002). Eight of the participants met one or more of these criteria. Additionally, seven of the participants transferred from another college or university. Five students transferred from community colleges and two transferred from four-year institutions.

There were no sophomore students from this research site. Further, half of the participants attended one or more institutions prior to enrolling at HU or transferred from a community college. During the individual interviews, several participants constantly

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stated," I am older and I am more focused" or" I have more responsibility and family to

take care of." Work and family commitments were the primary reasons students

indicated limited engagement, or having little interaction with other students, of

traditional or nontraditional age, on campus. Stan and Seth felt their limited interactions

with other students were because of their age, not race. When asked if he had ever

experienced or witnessed a racial incident, Stan, a junior nursing major, explained:

> That's a good question. I don't know if there was actually racism, it might be my
> age as well, because I'm older, but people unless they know me, they don't seem
> to open up. I mean that's not the word I'm looking for. They don't seem to
> interact with me.

Seth described his knowledge of activities hosted by academic groups in the department

but reported his priority of family as a prohibitive factor for deeper engagement:

> As far as meetings go, there were not a lot of students who showed up. I didn't
> make it to very many meetings, to be honest, but I'm married and I have a family,
> and so when I'm not on campus I don't just come back for a 30-minute meeting.

Conversely, Laura did not directly allude to age as a barrier to engagement in the

classroom or with other students, but expressed difficulty interacting with other students

in the department, particularly Black women students. During classes, she noticed that

students in her studio design architecture courses seemed to intentionally self-segregate

based on race and age. Initially, she thought the class segregation was based on pre-

established relationships. For example, Laura transferred from her community college,

along with three students to the HU architecture program. The other students in the class

had been HU students since their freshman year. As the semester progressed, Laura

indicated that she realized that the distant relationship between the two student groups

was not a result of personality differences, but rather level of knowledge acquisition in

the course. She believed the class segregation was a result of the significant differences in knowledge and technical experience of students who transferred from the architecture program at the community college and the HU students. Laura explained:

> At the community college, we learned at lot about computer programs and technical information. Where here they were just learning key concepts and they did not have a lot of the computer programs down. So we [community college transfer] students came in and we started producing projects at a higher level…Then in a lot of the other classes it seems like we knew the answers and were achieving higher on the tests. I mean it was like we were separated. I mean it was like you could almost see the separation.

When asked how she felt this impacted the perception of White students by Black students, Laura responded she thought it created tension in the class but she took the effort to talk to some of the HU students and share her knowledge about computer designs. She discovered by taking the initiative to get to know the students and inquire about their progress with certain assignments, the division between the transfer and HU began to dissolve.

Stan recalled a similar experience in a history course. He observed that most students, who were usually nontraditional age, did not speak to him until the end of the semester:

> There are a lot of students in my class that didn't really talk to me until the end of the semester, but again, I guess that's like I said before, people are guarded and not really knowing where I'm coming from, and then once they understand that I'm here to get a good education, they open up to me a little more. They'll come and ask me about assignments in class and that type of thing, but it takes awhile. I don't know if that's racism or ageism.

Laura's and Stan's experiences parallel some of the findings in the research literature on nontraditional and adult learners. Richardson and King (1998) argued that nontraditional students are equally, if not more capable, of learning than their younger

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counterparts based on the use of their prior experiences to process new ideas and information. Thus, in this particular situation, Laura was able to create a bridge between herself and the more traditionally aged students in the class. In contrast, Stan waited for students to become more comfortable before engaging them.

More than half of the HU participants were transfer students and also possessed characteristics associated with nontraditional, commuter, and returning students. Wasley (2008) and results from the 2007 NSSE annual report indicated that transfer students, in particular, face challenging adjustment issues and are less likely to engage activities. Research studies have revealed institutions, particularly four-year institutions, tend to group transfer students with new freshmen. The transfer students receive minimal support with regard to their unique advising and residential needs (Swing, 2000). Two-year institutions, specifically community colleges, often have a transfer facilitation focus to prepare students for the workforce. Additional emphasis should be placed on ensuring a more cohesive transition process, particularly with the changes in articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions (Wasley, 2008).

Finally, results from NSSE (2008) survey revealed that senior transfer students view their learning environments as less supportive, and compared to their peers, did not participate in high-impact activities such as student-faculty interaction, collaborative learning activities, and educational enriching practices. The report suggested these students could have "missed out on some early experiences in their college career that facilitate engagement and connection with the institution" (p. 15), and that institutions should be intentional about engaging these students, particularly with academic departments and associated clubs and organizations.

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Contrary to these findings, HU transfer student participants were extremely involved in their respective academic departments and organizations. For example, Gary transferred from a community college and was heavily involved in the Political Science Association club. In Gary's case, the institution offered resources and opportunities to engage on campus through the academic units. An element absent from the HU data was institutional resources and organized initiatives specific to transfer and nontraditional students from a campus-wide perspective. From the document analysis results, there were no programs or website pages dedicated to transfer student issues or services. There are full-time professional staff members in place to assist with transfer student related issues, but none of the participants mentioned or discussed these individuals during the individual or focus group interviews.

The HU participants did not convey that the institution's infrastructure was too complex to understand, but they did indicate it was difficult to navigate due to the lack of organization and information (e.g., updated information on billing deadlines, drop/add registration periods). Specifically, the students mentioned how the lack of or poor organization of new student orientation made adjusting to the campus difficult at the beginning of their matriculation on campus.

Barriers to Engagement

In addition to offering insight to factors that may influence the engagement of White students attending HBCUs, HU participants also described barriers that limited or restricted their engagement, especially outside of the classroom. From the individual and focus group interviews, students identified inadequate student, support services, difficult or negative interactions with administrators and staff, campus location and landscape, and

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lack of consistent, campus-wide communication as key factors that diminished their interests and ability to be engaged on campus.

A major barrier reported by all the students was the difficulty conducting business transactions and interfacing with professional staff in the university's primary student services building, the Multipurpose Complex. Key offices such as the Office of Financial Aid, Office of the Bursar, and the Office of the Registrar are located in this building. Students' concerns ranged from unfamiliarity with the processes for receiving refund checks to the necessary paperwork to remedy a dropped class schedule. Emily expressed difficulty trying to resolve the posting of a grade from a class she took during winter term. She described her experience as "going on a chase" due to lack of support and information from administrators in the building:

> So then, I had to do the whole chasing around the school, like Multipurpose made me chase everyone, like I had to find the teacher because she had to add the grade. And then, they send me over to the building next to the [academic] building. They sent me over there, and then Multipurpose, before they sent me over there, they didn't even know the person that I need to see had been fired, so they were just like, "Oh, okay. Well, can I have the person I sent her to, then?" Because first, like I didn't want to go on the chase. I was like, 'Can I just do it here?' and they were like, 'No. It's past the semester. You have to go over there.'

She asserted that staff members are nice and helpful depending on how you initially approach them. Gary, a junior political science major, also described administrators as helpful but the processes and office infrastructures appeared unorganized and inefficient. He explained:

> The people over at [Multipurpose Complex], especially financial aid, they're willing to help, sit down and talk and listen to what I have to say, but it just seems like the way operations are conducted over there, it seems inefficient. I feel like a lot of times I feel lost when I go over there and it's like you're just sitting. When you go to someplace you're just sitting around for a while. Once the people get with you then things move along.

Jack described an intense confrontation he had with financial aid representative. He

noted the encounter did not cease until various staff and faculty entered the hallway to

ease the situation that had drawn the attention of several onlookers:

> I was with a friend trying to take care of business with financial aid. My friend
> then was like this is why Black colleges have such a bad reputation. The woman
> then comes back and says "excuse me. What did you say, you are just a student".
> I then pushed my friend out of the way and said, 'what did you say!". She then
> slammed the door in my face. I opened the door back and said, 'What is your f—
> ing name, I am just a student that pays your paycheck'. I need all the bosses out
> here right now before I turn this place out.

This incident influenced Jack's decision to secure an additional job to avoid the need for

financial aid in order to pay for college. Further, he indicated such situations caused him

to focus more on school so he could expedite the process of obtaining his degree and

graduating as soon as possible. Other students also recalled difficult experiences

interacting with administrators who were primarily responsible for allocating and

ensuring financial support was available to cover their college expenses. Students who

were a part of the university's honors program spoke at length about their dissatisfaction

and difficulty with the policies and individuals responsible for the administration of the

program.

Institutional factors, such as staff administrators and units delivering essential

services such as financial aid counseling and business transactions, can definitely impact

the way in which students encounter and perceive the campus environment, especially if

it is new environment. Typically, student affairs administrators, full-time and part-time,

as well as graduate students, play an integral role in providing services in these particular

units. Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink and Bennett (2006) investigated the roles of student

affairs administrators at HBCUs and identified three themes contributing to the professional lives of individuals delivering direct service to students: (1) lack of resources; (2) sense of duty and devotion to students; and (3) devotion to racial uplift. More than 75% of the respondents described their work as highly stressful and attributed it to long work hours, managing multiple tasks, and few staff members to share the workload. Further, HU's recent strategic plan acknowledged the poor condition of the Multipurpose Complex and the students' concerns regarding the services housed in the complex.

The challenges associated with student support services, coupled with possible stress associated with staff workloads, may have contributed to the lack of communication, organization, and frustration the HU participants described. Complexities such as these are often invisible to students and the process for acquiring resources to make improvements can take several years and even more time to implement changes. As one participant from the Hirt et al. (2006) study stated in response to questions regarding stress:

> Oh, the lack of resources. Not getting our fair share of the pie has always been [a problem for HBCUs]…..Between now and 2025 there's some HBCUs out of the 103---some of them are going to fail. (p. 667)

Therefore, the concerns from HU participants with regard to service and adequate appear to be challenges for other HBCUs as well.

Four HU students received a diversity grant or some funding from the institution, such as the Honors Program scholarship. University Honors is a comprehensive academic program with advanced level courses designed to challenge students, and

engage them in activities to stimulate critical thinking and analysis. Special opportunities are developed and offered for students to participate in internships, study abroad activities, community service, and early enrollment in graduate-level courses. The majority of honors students receive scholarships as well.

Seth and Jeremy were admitted to the university as honors students and shared their respective frustrations with the administrative leadership within this unit. Their descriptions suggested the program administrator may not have liked them because of their age or race. When asked how Black students might perceive him on campus, Seth responded everyone has been nice and friendly with the exception of an administrator in the Honors Program who did not like him and a few other older students because of their age. He further explained that when he transferred to HU, he was to receive a full honors scholarship but the administrator denied receiving his admission application and other information. Seth contacted individuals in the financial aid office and confirmed that all the required documentation was on file and had been forwarded to the honors program administrator. By the time Seth collected the necessary paperwork to present as evidence, the administrator informed him it was too late to receive a full scholarship and would be awarded a partial scholarship the following semester. He noted that other students in his age group, 30 years of age and older, had similar experiences but he was the only White student among the group.

Jeremy, on the other hand, decided to totally disengage from the Honors Program based on negative interactions and perceived feelings of racism from the administrator. He admitted his grade point average dropped significantly after the first semester and it is the program's policy to withdraw funding based on low grade point averages. His

primary concern was not with the policy but how the money was withdrawn and his

perception of the administrator's attitude. Jeremy explained:

> My whole floor was all honors, and so when we'd go over there, he would speak
> to them, and I just felt like he would speak to me – was very, very short with me.
> Wasn't very polite with me. I just felt like he treated me differently than
> everybody else. It's something I can't prove. I can't give you the thing, but that's
> just the feeling I got from him. I just felt like he didn't treat me very good, and so
> I don't like the honor's department here…Even if I was offered it back, I
> wouldn't. They make you jump through hoops too. Like if you miss a
> convocation, they pull part of your money. They take $100.00 out every time.

In addition to responsibilities outside of school and living off campus, students

also indicated the campus location and landscape were significant barriers to their

engagement on campus. Bradley revealed living off campus along with work and family

obligations were key detriments to being engaged on campus. Bradley inferred he would

like to be more involved, but working two jobs coupled with a long commute did not

afford him opportunities to socialize on campus or attend special events, such as step

shows:

> So in a way I feel like it [living off campus] pulls me away from student activities
> and pulls me away from interacting with kids as much. You know, towards the
> beginning of the semester here I was so busy that people were asking me where I
> was every time they would see me, like, "Where have you been?" I'm like,
> "Man, you know, I go to work and I drive here, go – I leave and go to work and
> go home," so I'm not here that often. But towards the end my schedule started
> opening up and I would spend more time on campus and stuff. And, you know,
> that's when, you know, I'm around enough to hear, "Hey, we're having game
> night at the house. Do you want to come over?" and this and that.

Seth believed the university's location in a large metropolitan area is a distraction, in both

positive and negative ways. He observed that due to the activity in the city (e.g., social

events, shows, museum exhibitions, nightlife), students may not feel compelled to remain

and participate in campus activities:

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I think it's difficult here because we're in an urban setting at [HU]. And even with the black students, it's really difficult, from what I've seen and heard, to get them interested and engaged in kind of campus activities because there's so much going on outside the campus. [HU city location] has so many things to offer, and [nearby metropolitan city] is close and [nearby metropolitan city] is not that far. So there's a lot to do, and I think that makes it a lot harder. When you take a place like [peer HBCU], for example, they've got great student activities going on all the time, but it's because there's not a huge city right there.

Emily agreed that the university's location as well as its design also attributed to potential barriers to engagement. She stated that she very often gets weird stares from Black students who are not her friends. She described the university student center and, the "Welcome Bridge" as intimidating places where non-Black students stand out. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the bridge attracts a large amount of student, foot traffic each day. It is also the primary means students use to cross to attend classes in academic buildings, go to the residence halls, or travel to student parking lots and the campus garage. On the bridge, student organizations or entertainment promoters distribute handbills announcing upcoming parties and social events. Some participants described how they keep their hands in their pockets when they cross the bridge so they do not end up with a pile of colored paper by the time they get to the end of the bridge. Emily contended these two places are major social points of the campus and those who are not considered as popular are not acknowledged or even stared at:

> They're just trying to talk to you or hand out fliers. Like, you know when they hand out fliers, they skip certain people, like you can see that. It doesn't even matter what race you are. They are certain people, I think, they try to skip or if you're not cute to them. You know how they are…And in the student center, when you walk past those guys just stare at you hard. I mean they just stare, you see a lot of people staring but they don't want to say anything to you. The outgoing people are staring but they have their social groups so you can tell they don't want to be associated with you.

When Jeremy was asked how he felt the Black students perceived him on campus, his descriptions of the "stares from students" paralleled those described by Emily. He expressed:

> Incoming freshmen always look at me as—oh, they'll look at me as a threat, or I feel like sometimes I'm looked at like, "Why are you here?" This isn't your place". Others who know me love me being here. I have some great friends here but I also feel like, like when I walk across campus, I feel some eyes on me like, "What are you doing here? You don't belong here. But I am able to adjust because I grew up in an area just like this.

To no surprise, most of the "stares" described by the participants were most often experienced in highly concentrated, social areas on campus and not within the classroom. Mallinckrodt and Sedlack (2009) suggested that the use of campus facilities such as the student union may also influence retention. This is not to suggest that student retention and engagement are analogous but they are definitely correlated in several ways. Student unions and centers are often the hub of social activity and a meeting place for students. For example, studies have found that minority students (on PWI campuses) use the student centers as a principal meeting place and source of information regarding campus events and programs. Further, new students have been found to use the student center more than those who have been students longer on the campus (Webster & Sedlack, 1982; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1985). Therefore, the experiences White students have within these facilities could impact how they engage or not outside of the classroom environment.

Myles, Stan, and Jack shared how the lack of communication and knowledge about organizations and services (e.g., campus bus shuttle schedule, library hours) curtailed their ability and sometimes desire to become involved and engaged. The

students also believed the loose organization of the orientation program contributed to

students' lack of understanding of university processes and policies. For instance, Stan

and Emily described their orientation experiences and lack of knowledge about campus

organizations.

> We had a guy who was supposed to lead us from the student center to our department, and he just kind of dropped us off and said, "It's up there somewhere." We walked around for a long time looking for our department. I don't know. I guess the information, as far as the groups that you're talking about on campus, I had no idea about those – library services, that type of thing. (Stan)

> Like when I came in, I didn't really feel like I knew this school. Like I knew the area, or whatever, but coming in, when you transfer, they're supposed to give you that tour and you meet the advisors and teachers. Eventually, the tour, I made my friend give it to me because that day, when I came in, there was like nothing (Emily).

> Gary's orientation experience was different from Stan's and Emily's. He stated

that although there was an abundance of information shared, it was actually

overwhelming and after the orientation presentations he was confused. Gary disclosed he

did not know what he was doing or where to go on campus. Essentially, he described the

overall orientation as unorganized. In addition to being a transfer student, he was also

admitted as an honors student and there were different classes to register for and program

requirements to be fulfilled. Gary was not confident he had accomplished all of the

required tasks to ensure preparation for the start of classes:

> I felt really confused after the campus tour and the orientation. There were so many people there to talk, you just could not remember everything. I was also a member of the Honors program and there are different things you need to do as a member of that program. If I had not asked certain questions, I would have done my schedule wrong and prepared to start classes on time.

Stan conveyed frustration with the lack of communication provided by the university and

the availability of classes through the institution's newly established nursing program.

He has taken all the classes currently available, but is unable to enroll or take a full

course load in the fall because faculty are not available to teach the next series of courses.

He has written letters of complaint about the Chair of the Nursing Department to the all

the senior administrators on campus, including the President, Provost, and Vice-President

for Student Affairs.

Finally, Bradley and Laura voiced concerns about the lack of instructional space

and adequate equipment and illuminated how these factors can inhibit engagement both

inside and outside of the classroom. Bradley has been challenged in his major studies

due in part to what he characterized as deficient equipment in television production. He

is concerned that limited access to modern equipment and technology in his field will

leave him less prepared for a competitive job market after graduation. He further

explained:

> I feel like being a White student at HU. It's really fun but being a White student in
> HU's TV production program is frustrating. You know, we all have complaints
> about the equipment rental, you know, and the equipment that they give us. I feel
> like I complain more than most. I don't know if they're just – I've heard, you
> know, in the middle of complaining one time somebody said, 'Welcome to HU.'
> I said, 'It shouldn't be that way. It shouldn't have to be that way. And it
> shouldn't take a White kid to say that for you guys to not be okay with it.'

Laura expressed difficulty completing homework on campus and working on major

architectural projects in small groups. Because of limited space and inappropriately

designed facilities, the architecture students used an auditorium for several of their

required classes during her first semester in the program. Laura emphasized how the

physical space and equipment encumbered her ability to do the best work:

> Like you look at this little room, we had 30 people in here for a site planning
> class, which really the ideal thing would have been to have a place where we can
> sit down and draw and look at that. And it's like so they have the auditorium and

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that's where they've been using as the studio. So when we started at the beginning of the semester they had—I know one of the finance or accounting classes or whatever, had the auditorium. So for the first two weeks or week and a half were somewhere else and we had to find a classroom to work in. So you're always overcoming those obstacles here.

The campus environment, specifically classrooms, laboratories, and libraries, are directly linked to student life and academic programs (Astin, 1968). For HBCUs, limited and scarce resources often hinder the ability to renovate or improve key campus facilities such as classrooms and laboratories (Green, 2004; Sav, 1997). From Laura's description, the HU auditorium is the primary space designed for studio classes but also used for other academic course registration. She appeared to be willing to deal with the inadequate class accommodation but referred to them as obstacles. Pace (1979) argued that the college environment is a critical factor in influencing the "successful or unsuccessful transition of students into the setting." Although college impact researchers contend students do have a responsibility for their own learning, Pace believed the "environmental characteristics make up for the institutional context and stimulus for the amount, scope and quality of students' efforts" (Moos, 1979, p.128 as cited in Fleming et al., 2005). Given these factors, the paucity of funds and resources to maintain public HBCUs facilities could, in fact, have a major impact on the student success, retention, and engagement of students attending these institutions.

Barriers to student engagement was a finding I did not anticipate emerging as a key factor influencing engagement during the data collection process. However, the voices from the students illustrate and convey the frustration and challenges associated with a lack of understanding of university processes and procedures, geographic location within a major, metropolitan city, and sufficient communication regarding course

availability and classroom space for instruction and group projects. Although not absolute, these factors clearly influenced the students' interest and ability to become more engaged within the larger context of the university. Based on the descriptions of the high faculty-student interaction from participants, one could assume students were more comfortable within their academic department and encountered more barriers externally on campus.

<div style="text-align: center">Focus Group Interview: Emergent Themes</div>

Focus group interviews, coupled with observation notes, served as a second point of the data collection process. Four students (Emily, Laura, Gary, and Myles) from the 11 HU participants interviewed agreed to participant in a 60 to 90 minute focus group interview. The questions were drawn from their collective individual interviews and experiences on the HU campus (see Appendix B for HU focus group interview protocol). The interview questions specifically addressed the mandatory African American course requirement, campus orientation for new and transfer students, and involvement within academic departments. The prominent themes that emerged from the data included barriers to engagement, enhanced learning and life perspectives through classroom experiences, and navigating the campus through pre-established social networks and departmental organizations.

Barriers to student engagement was a dominant theme from the focus group interview as reflected in the individual interview data. Students expressed frustration with HU's effectiveness and efficiency as it related to the organization and delivery of key student support services through administrative units such as the financial aid, registrar's and bursar's offices. Eight students mentioned problems or difficulties with

staff or services one or more times during the individual interviews. As described

previously, most of the support service units and representatives are located in the

Multipurpose Complex. Consistently, students provided examples of difficulties they

have encountered with staff in these areas as well as not understanding specific policies

and programs related to simple processes such as receiving a refund check to identifying

all the appropriate signatures for a change of grade form. During the focus group, Laura

stated:

> You know, because I don't know, it was just like unorganization seems to be a
> theme throughout this university. There were other things that I needed to take
> care of as far as financial aid and bills and we just never got instruction on that.

Laura's comment paralleled comments from other focus group participants, particularly

as they pertained to student support services located in the Multipurpose Complex. At

one point during the interview, there was actually an exchange between three of the

participants regarding the lack of organization and customer service exhibited by staff in

key student support service areas:

Emily: It's just Multi that everyone complains about.

Laura: It's just a lack of organization.

Myles: I mean for the whole accounting system, their whole way of getting
information out. You know, it's just the lack of organization.

Emily: And attitudes.

Laura: Why don't they just communicate to one another? They just don't really
communicate with each other.

Myles: Things needs to be streamlined, just get things streamlined.

Laura: It's the attitude up there. Sometimes they will help you and sometimes
they won't.

From the document analysis, it is also evident that the students' concerns and frustrations about services in the Multipurpose Complex are not foreign to the campus administration. One component of the *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Vulnerabilities* section of the institution's recent strategic plan reads:

> Customer service is not rated as a strength by HU's students. To some extent this may be a function of the difficulty students have in making financial arrangements to enroll, register for classes, and secure housing. It certainly is a function to some degree of the location of most student service functions away from the main part of campus and the poor condition of the [administrative services] complex in which most of these services are housed. However, students express a variety of other concerns that the campus needs to address. This issue has grown in importance as the preference for good service by students and their parents has grown in priority. (p. 23)

This documented weakness by the institution indicated that HU has conducted self-assessments to gain a better picture of what resources and changes are necessary to better serve a changing dynamic student body and increase academic program offerings. Further, it gives legitimacy to some of the concerns raised by the students during the focus group interview.

Participants also inferred that the lack of an organized and structured new student orientation program may have impeded their engagement. With the exception of Myles, the remaining focus group participants were transfer students. Their concerns ranged from a limited amount of information being shared on important administrative processes to being overwhelmed with so much information that students could not remember or

recall it once classes started. For example, Gary shared his experience with the transfer

orientation program and the lack of clarity regarding how his registration would be

different due to his enrollment in the honors program:

> Well, when I came here for my transfer orientation, I was really kind of lost
> through the whole process. It's like you sit in an auditorium and you get a bunch
> of people giving their speeches and it's really a whole bunch of information
> dumped on you at once. If you remember 25% of that when you walk out of there
> you're doing pretty good. I just felt really lost like I really didn't know where I
> was going…At the end of the day when I was leaving campus I was like I don't
> know if I have accomplished everything that I was supposed to when I was here.

In retrospect, Myles admitted to a more favorable process and that he, in fact, was

"babied into the university" through the Pre-College, summer preparatory program.

Hicks (2005) found that structured summer programs such as the Pre-College and

summer bridge programs are particularly helpful for students who may need remediation

in subjects such as math and English prior to college. Further, Strayhorn (2009) by

referencing the Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe's (1986) study, suggested that freshmen

orientation programs are an effective mechanism to socialize students into the collegiate

environment. During orientation or summer programs, students have the unique

opportunity to learn more about the campus, academic offerings, interact with faculty in a

real college classroom and, most importantly, meet and develop friendships prior to the

beginning of the academic year.

The focus group also confirmed the positive experiences students had in the

classroom environment and academic departments. During the interview, participants

constantly shared how they gained new perspectives from the classroom environment by

both listening and participating. These exchanges appeared to occur most often in the

African Diaspora class or those courses in the social sciences such as political science

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and history. When asked about comfort and participation in the mandatory African

Diaspora class, students indicated that their level of engagement was largely dependent

on the faculty member's teaching style and instructional delivery. Emily stated that when

she took the class, the professor utilized a direct lecture teaching style, understood the

course content, and demonstrated this through his ability to memorize facts. She added

that, in many instances, students could stop him in the middle of a sentence and he was

able to address the students' point and pick up right where he left with the lecture. Myles

and Bradley found the class to be intimidating when heated debates arose in class but felt

the professor's management of the class was strong. Further, they both indicated they

learned a great deal from the course. Myles praised the faculty member but also

explained periods of discomfort:

> I just had a great professor for the African Diaspora course. We used the book and watched movies and stuff, so really hands-on, and that's how I learn. But when it came to debating in class, there's just a lot of heated discussions, and that was the only intimidating part. And I was not the only minority in that class. There was another Caucasian student as well as a Middle Eastern student, but it seemed like the teacher came to my liking just because I wasn't the type of student that would just sit back and just absorb all this, I would get involved in the discussion. You know, it wasn't hate, but it was just a lot of discomfort on the topics that we were discussing at times.

Cole (2007) suggested that teaching practices, such as engaging students in the learning

process and linking out-of-class social events with in-class content, coupled with an

active learning environment may be useful when addressing diversity issues. Myles'

description implies that despite instances of intimidation in the class, the professor was

effective by maintaining student engagement during heated class discussions and

demonstrating appreciation for students' comments and contributions to the discourse. In

Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund and Parente's study (2001) examining the

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influence of structural diversity in the classroom on students' development of academic and intellectual skills, the authors contended that although their findings were far from conclusive, they did suggest a small, statistically significant "link between the level of racial/ethnic diversity in the classroom and students' reports of increases in their problem-solving and group skills" (p. 528). Gary shared his experience debating different issues in class and learning from such experiences:

> I think it's [HU] a great learning environment for seeing different and diverse points of views through, you know, discussions and debates. You know, I generally try to take a middle-of-the road kind of view, and most people in the class, you know, they generally tend to side on a Democratic side of the issue. I always try to argue and push people to see both sides of an issue, fairly evaluate both sides and then make an informed judgment. It is important for people to understand that the different sides and people on both sides really care about things, they just have different philosophies about how to go about achieving results.

Gary's response is indicative of how the African Diaspora class may have, in fact, served as a forum to engage students through the discussion of complex diversity issues in the classroom setting.

Finally, focus group members, on average, were primarily engaged in the classroom setting and exclusively with their peers within their department or from previously formed networks, such as the transfer students in the architecture program. When asked if their involvement occurred among pre-established networks and friends, all the students responded yes. In fact, none of the students participating in the HU interview had seen or met one another prior to the focus group.

Myles suggested that his friends and networks were mainly composed of individuals within his major, from the summer pre-college program, or the band. Specifically, he stated:

> I do know some other minority [White] students, but my sophomore year I formed my group and they were not White but just other African American students. But more or less if you're in my major or in pre-college, then you are who I'm going to stick with.

Laura and Emily shared similar sentiments and reported that they primarily interacted with individuals they knew prior to enrolling at HU or before college in general. Laura explained that a core group of students transferred along with her for the university's architecture program:

> Now, 'cause when I came from – when I transferred in there happened to be like five or six other students, where we all went to school at community college together and we all came at the same time, just ended up like that. So I guess we kind of have like that core group, but we still – I mean we've met other people, we've socialized with other people, but we ride back and forth together, you know, and we kind of know what each other knows and know we can go to them and get this answer. But we still, I mean we made other friends.

Emily is a native from the city in which HU is located and maintained friendships with some of her high school friends. However, due to conflicting class schedules among the group, she rarely sees them and made friends within the social work department:

> I know most of the people from high school, but they are all in other departments, so I hardly even saw them once I was on campus. So basically I met people in my department or around campus.

Dickerson and Bell (2006) suggested that undergraduates self-segregate in college for numerous reasons including as a "means of support for marginalized groups or groups in culturally unfamiliar circumstances" (p. 123). This type of self-segregation or cohesiveness can be key to a positive college experience and utilized by all different racial and ethnic groups, minority, and majority. This type of segregation also seems apparent in the networks and friendships the White, HU students established on campus and within academic departments. It is possible that as individuals or a group they found

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themselves in "culturally unfamiliar circumstances." Standley (1978) postulated that for

White students attending HBCUs, many had attended majority White high schools and

had limited contact with Black students or people. Specifically, she stated:

> Now they are faced with a multifaceted new experience-an experience in which
>
> the white student must accept a "minority" position in the classroom, in the
>
> lunchroom, on the athletic field, in the library—everywhere on campus. There
>
> are no "White student unions" or "White studies programs" where campus
>
> identity with other Whites can be sought. Instead the student is immersed in the
>
> Black college climate, at least for the time devoted to classroom activities. (p .6)

Since several HU participants were transfer students and three of the four focus group

participants were also transfer students, it is possible that their social networks and

friends served as a coping mechanism to facilitate their dual statuses as temporary

minorities and transfer students. The literature examining perceived social cohesion or a

"sense of belonging" has been linked to academic and social integration as well as

persistence (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Students seek to socially

integrate through memberships and specific interactions on campus such as connecting

with individuals from previous experiences or who share common affinities such as an

academic major or band. Furthermore, some research has suggested that nontraditional

students have a greater enthusiasm for learning and as students they are able to make

more meaning of their college experience which leads to increased self-efficacy and

autonomy (Podesta, 2009). Therefore, HU students may have used involvement through

academic units and organizations to not only engage and connect to the campus, but also

to establish a sense of belonging.

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Perceptions as White students at HU

The final set of individual interview questions was developed to assess students'

perceptions of race, campus race relations, and their experiences as White students on a

predominately Black campus. With each student, the responses varied based on the

context of their pre-college experiences, interactions with diverse populations throughout

their lives— specifically in K-12 educational settings and work environments—and

family and social networks. Consistently, participants made general comments such as "I

am not sure what Black students think of me," "I have always had Black friends and

never had any trouble with them" and most profoundly statements like, "I don't see color

and don't subscribe to using terms such as "Black" and "White" because they describe

skin color and not someone's cultural background. Bradley professed because there are

so few visibly White students on campus, non-White students are sure to have

impressions and stereotypical views but overall Back students view him in a regular way

to the extent he is even comfortable making racial jokes:

> For the most part the ones that I've connected with, I feel like they think I'm just
> the regular guy. I mean some of them I feel like think of me as that goofy White
> guy. I'm glad that I found friends and I found people that are okay with making
> jokes and them being racial jokes, it doesn't matter…I don't know how many
> times I've been called, you know, the wrong name, you know. And it's the only
> other White kid in the communications building I've been called, and I'll turn
> around and they're like, 'Oh no. Oh, it's Bradley. It's Bradley, not Andrew.'

Jeremy expressed that for students who know him they love him but freshman,

who have not been exposed to Whites, may view him negatively. He constantly

reiterated that his prior experiences, which included growing up and attending church in

predominately Black environments, has contributed to his ability to transition on campus

and develop coping skills:

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> Well, the ones that know me know – I mean the ones who know me love me. They see me as – I have a lot of friends who don't even see me as white. But now like incoming freshman – 'cause, you know, incoming freshman are always a little, I guess dumb is the best way to put it. They're not – they're from their own little bubble. They're maybe a little ignorant. Incoming freshman always look at me as – oh, they'll look at me as a threat, or I feel like sometimes I'm looked at like, 'Why are you here?'

Jeremy also commented about perceptions in the classroom setting and explained how, once again, with students who do not know him, interactions begin awkwardly but later the tension lessens:

> 'Oh, why is this White student raising his hand?' If anything, like some students will look at me like, 'Oh, there's that White student trying to get a good grade.' Although I've made a lot of great friends from being in class. So, I always feel like as a class, at the beginning of the year, they're like, 'Oh, there's a White student in our class.' Then by the end of the class, I'm cool with the people in the class. That's the cycle that it goes. At the beginning of the year, people look at you differently. Then they get to know you and they realize, 'Oh, he's just the same as me. Just a different color'.

Researchers have also found that pre-college factors such as students' demographics, academic preparation, skills, and attitudes influence their academic achievement and persistence in college (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Pre-college characteristics include "collective high school experiences, academic achievement, financial circumstances, and specific psychosocial experiences factors that are developed both in the home and school environment" (Arbona & Nora, 2007, p. 250). Jeremy's and Bradley's pre-college experiences were similar to Jackie's and Katherine's in the pilot study. In particular, Jeremy, very similar to Jackie and Katherine, indicated that he had grown up in diverse neighborhoods and even had a diverse family (e.g., Black stepfather, White mother). Therefore, adjusting to the HBCU was not difficult due to their previous exposure to diverse individuals and environments.

Milem and Umbach (2003) indicated that students' precollege experiences and backgrounds are key predictors of how students view diversity. The participants in Milem and Umbach's (2003) study reported that "they thought it was likely or very likely that they would try to get to know individuals from diverse backgrounds during their first year of college" (p. 617). However, when the responses were analyzed based on racial backgrounds, White students were less likely than African American and Latino/a to participate in activities reflecting their own cultural background or enroll in a course devoted to diversity. That study was conducted through a survey of first-year students attending a public research university in the eastern United States and students of color only represented 29% of the 2,911 survey participants. As White students within an HBCU environment, the roles of societal dominant groups are reversed and the ability for White students to self-segregate is more difficult. Therefore, it appeared for HU students, such as Jeremy and pilot study participants like Jackie, that they relied on their previous experiences with diverse students and personal interests to deal with difficult situations.

Myles and Michelle were the only HU participants that alluded to Black Greek fraternities and sororities on campus. Myles believed Black students, at times, viewed him as a token for their membership organizations. He stated that he felt the members of the Black Greek fraternities attempted to recruit him because of his race and for tokenism purposes. Myles specifically stated, "They wanted to choose me as their token White person but I am not sure if I am interested in doing so because I did not think that my background fit with the history of Black Greek fraternities." He decided not to accept or pursue membership in any particular organization, but is in the process of joining a Masonic lodge in the local area. In contrast, Michelle was interested in joining a sorority

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on campus but felt her relationships with Black women were negative. She felt these

relationships would stifle her ability to be accepted into an organization. She also had

several episodes of Black students assuming she was White:

> I would like to join a sorority. I would love to experience that, but I didn't know
> how accepted I would be into it. I was willing to try a little bit of anything at one
> point in time… But I think a lot of the sororities do exclude non-black females. I
> think sometimes intentionally because they don't feel like we have a right to be
> here, that this is their campus and why are you here.

Michelle and Myles offered different opinions regarding their involvement in

Black Greek-Letter organizations as White students. Myles felt he was being recruited

because of his race and Michelle felt she would potentially be excluded because of race.

White student membership within Black Greek letter organizations has become

increasingly more common (Hughey, 2008). Several White members have indicated that

they admire what Black Greek letters stand for in terms of community service, sisterhood

and brotherhood, and the advancement of justice for African Americans. Brian, who is a

senior GCU student, and a member of a historically Black Greek letter fraternity, will be

presented in Chapter Five. His experiences reflect openness to diversity, as influenced by

his background and perceptions of personal similarities and capabilities with Black men

in his fraternity.

As Hughey (2006) found through a qualitative investigation of Howard University

students' perceptions of the establishment of a White fraternity on campus, some students

regarded the possibility of such an organization on campus as a multicultural victory

while others labeled it as a "troubling incursion" and threat to traditional Black Greek

Letter Organizations (BGLOs). The larger issue, as articulated by Hughey (2006), was

macro social forces shaped by race, education, and identity politics. The confluence of

these forces, situated in the context of an HBCU, could contribute to Michelle's and

Myle's perceptions of BGLOs at HU as well as influenced Brian to successfully obtain

membership at SSU. In sum, environmental factors, such as students, faculty,

administrators, and programs can all influence student engagement.

The questions in this study centered on the Black students' perceptions of White

students and feelings of isolation also garnered varying responses from the HU

participants. Michelle commented on feeling isolated and the presence of a double

standard for Black and non-White students on campus. Although she indicated a

preference for socializing with people from diverse backgrounds, particularly Black

people, her relationships with Black women were contentious. These relationships

influenced her decision to forego pursuing membership in a Greek-letter organization as

well:

> I think sometimes being slightly – isolation. Sometimes, and I think you kind of
> have to walk on – you feel like you're walking on eggshells because you have to
> be politically correct because if not other students will take offense to it, but yet if
> it's their own, it's okay. I think there's a double standard sometimes.

Stan experienced instances of isolation during the first week of classes, but suggested by

the end of the semester students would initiate more engagement:

> Yeah, I've been the only White student in the class, and I've got to say my first
> semester I felt a little isolated. I didn't know anybody coming to this campus, so I
> didn't have any friendships established here, but that didn't take long to change.
> [When would you say you began to see the change, where you started to meet
> people and maybe even make friends here?] Probably by the end of the first
> semester. You know, people themselves are guarded, so it takes a little bit of
> warming up, and once they see how you act or react in class towards teachers,
> people become more open.

Emily reported she only felt isolated in high traffic social areas such as "The [Welcome]

Bridge":

I mean the only place is sometimes in the Student Center, when you walk past, is those guys just stare at you hard, and you're just like, 'Um, yeah I'm trying to go to class or the bookstore,' but they just stare. They don't say anything. That's the one problem you just see a lot of people staring but they don't want to say anything, and the outgoing people, you can tell they're the outcasts because they're out there.

Overall the students did not report instances of racial discrimination or harassment but three students mentioned they had, at minimum, overheard negative comments or remarks about White people by Black students. Bradley and Gary were two participants who shared examples:

I'm trying to think. I overheard a conversation walking to class one day, I don't know who it was; I was just walking behind them, or walking past them. I think they were walking to my left and walking past me, and I just caught the tail-end or in the middle of a conversation saying, 'That's why I can't stand White people. I would never be able to live with them,' or something to that nature. Other than that, I've never really heard anything, you know, anything more than that. (Bradley)

I haven't heard anything where someone has used anything in a derogatory manner, but I do often overhear people using the "N" word an awful lot. I'm not really offended so much just by hearing it, but for me it's like I try to follow one fair standard policy that everyone should follow. It's not something that I could get away with saying, and on grounds like that I find it disturbing that they don't uphold a higher standard on campus. (Gary)

With respect to Black students' perceptions of White students, the general sentiment was "the students who know me like me and those who don't may look at me funny." Bradley and Gary considered both the disadvantages and advantages of being the only White student in the classroom setting. Bradley stated his class absences are noticeable because of his race and Gary indicated he is able to connect more easily with faculty and place positive impressions upon them because he stands out during discussions as the only White student in class.

Emily indicated there are typically two questions she received from Black students and other White students on campus. Those questions inquire about her relation to an athletic team or status as a scholarship recipient:

> I mean the first question I always get is, 'Are you a softball player,' or – Or, like, a tennis player, or what else do they ask me? Yeah, like when I went to the YWCA event, it was in the library for the aids, and we were up there doing the board game thing, and the first question people asked me, 'Oh, are you on the softball team?' I was like, 'No. I'm just a regular student here.' Yeah, or like that's mostly how they see most of the White students that come to HU, as like the athletes, or they ask, 'Are you here on a full scholarship?' That's the other question.

Emily's comments are interesting and parallel the perceptions and stereotypes reported by Black students attending PWIs. In Fries-Britt's (2004) study of high-achieving Black collegians, Black student participants believed they were perceived as lazy, ignorant, and involved in crime by White students. Further, a Black male student in Fries-Britt's and Turner's (2001) study on Black student stereotyping on PWI campuses indicated that students assumed he was an athlete based on his physical experience. The student explicitly stated:

> I know that there are stereotypes every time I go into a classroom. Everybody
>
> expects that I am on the basketball team. I have enough to deal with then there
>
> are the athletic stereotypes if you are playing sports here. So I have to fight that
>
> every time I go into a class. (p. 426)

Emily's experiences mirror this particular student's experience as it relates to being confronted with stereotypes as a minority student within a majority environment. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) argued that assumptions of academic inferiority and low socioeconomic statuses may accompany Black students who are stereotyped as athletes.

The difference in Emily's case, however, may be that the Black students' assumptions were she may be academically inferior or from economic disadvantaged background but that she chose to attend HU based on a diversity athletic scholarship. This was evident from the participant responses in Peterson's and Hamrick's (2009) study on White male consciousness at public HBCUs. In that particular study, participants did not report a need to prove themselves worthy of attending an HBCU. The authors noted this was a critical discrepancy between their study findings and previous studies of Black students at PWIs (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, & Thomas, 2004; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996).

Other students, such as Jack, believed race relations have improved and that race does not play a major factor in forming relationships. Jack believed living on campus was a pivotal point in his development and taught him how to interact effectively with students regardless of their age and ethnicity. When asked how he thought Black students perceived him on campus, Jack responded that people in this generation do not see color and ethnicity like people did in previous years. During the interview, we also had an interesting conversation around race and he stated he does not believe in identifying based on color, such as White or Black, because color does not include a person's background or cultural affinities.

Jeremy's comments on diversity and conceptualizations of race mirrored Jack's ideologies. Jeremy was opposed to the way society "lumps" people into categories without regard for their unique cultural backgrounds:

> It's a dumb thing to me, because between White and Black people, there's not that much difference. There's really not. But what there is there's preconceived – 'cause like society ideals – 'cause someone will look at me and see the entire

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history of the White population. You know, it's a joke for my friends, 'cause they'll joke about, 'Oh, your people caused slavery.' But I don't identify with them because, personally, my family were family immigrants. My family came here in the 1900s from the Ukraine, Germany, and Ireland. They came here in like the 1900s, and so like I don't feel like a part of all White culture. I don't like being grouped into – I don't even like the term "White", 'cause it's a big grouping of people that I don't identify with. I don't identify with Europeans. I think it's just too many generalizations. I also don't like the term Caucasian. I think it's a stupid term. That's just me.

Bradley agreed with Jeremy's position on using certain terms, such as "White" and "Black" to describe or even refer to people:

You know, you saying a White guy and me saying a Black guy is not politically incorrect; I'm not going to say African-American, because not everyone is. And I would feel more ignorant saying that to somebody than saying, 'Hey, look, that Black guy' to you. I'd rather say I'm White than I'm Caucasian. I would never call myself Caucasian. I don't feel like thrown off if somebody says, 'Hey, are you Caucasian?' They're just trying to be polite; they don't know that I don't care.

Gary suggested he does not see the color of people's skin, just people. He explained that he does not walk around campus acknowledging people as "Black" or "White" but similar to the way Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., renowned civil-rights movement leader, addressed race and the importance of a person's content and character in his famous "I have a dream" speech:

Well to me it's not – I don't really differentiate things like that. To me the whole racial aspect is something that I think is really – I don't want it to come off sounding bad, but inconsequential somewhat. As Dr. King said it's the content of a person's character that matters. It's not the color of the skin. So to me I really don't walk around the campus and be like, it's black, it's white. That really doesn't come into my mind really. The only thing I can say that's really unique about being here is it was a different experience no longer being one of the crowd, blending in with the crowd.

Jack, Jeremy, Bradley, and Gary are all White males and their responses range from race not being an issue for them to their disregard for labels or categories such as Caucasian or

White, and African American. Jack's belief that racism is an element of the past and does not currently impact people is an ideal held by many Americans (Scheurich & Young, 2002 as cited in Reason & Evans, 2007). Studies examining White identity and issues of color-blindness indicated that racism for Whites may typically be regarded as overt racist behavior to another person. Therefore, if an individual perceives that he or she does not commit racist acts, then he or she is not considered racist. Such ideologies and beliefs are associated with what Forman (2004) defined as color-blind racism, a behavior that stems from a lack of knowledge or contact with discrimination. The HBCU environment may serve as a forum for White students to assess and further develop their racial consciousness, particularly as it relates to privilege and White societal norms.

Alice was the only participant throughout this entire study that mentioned the issue of privilege of White students. During the interview, she shared that White students in her program and White peers outside of class come from high socio-economic backgrounds and they do not have to compromise. Essentially, White students elect to be here but when they leave campus they are no longer considered a minority. She explained that their attending HU was not an issue of access or the institution's being their only choice, but in fact several of them [White students] are attending HU because it is the best deal for the amount of money. As Gary stated, he chose to attend HU because of the transfer scholarships available and the academic program.

> So I mean I chose to come here because of the scholarships that they offered for transfer scholarships and that was really the best package in the State schools were offering. HU had the best deal for transfer scholarships. So that's why I picked this a number one on my list.

From a Latina perspective, Michelle conveyed that she noticed that Black students on campus, and people in general, take their educational opportunities for granted. Similar to other nontraditional students participating in this study, Michelle alluded to immature behavior and disrespect by younger, undergraduates in the classroom. She also stated that in some of the classes she does feel isolated and that she has to "walk on eggshells" when it comes to political discussions and, specifically, conversations based on race. Michelle also mentioned the African American Diaspora course. She enjoyed the course but was frustrated by numerous conversations in the class. She stated that Black students need to understand that "they are not owed anything and you have to do what you have to do."

In sum, aside from general accusations or innuendos regarding race, HU participants offered a range of perceptions of themselves and the perceptions Black students may have of them. Overall, participants indicated Black students, especially those who knew them, did not treat them differently and viewed them as equal peers. The students did admit to periods of isolation, but felt such experiences were inevitable as White students in an HBCU environment. Further, the students acknowledged that they stood out because of their race but did not necessarily view this as a disadvantage. Finally, students did not report any racial incidents or experiences causing them to feel excluded from the campus environment or imposing the need to transfer to another university because of discomfort. Most importantly, their status as White students or temporary minorities did not negatively impact their academic performance. In fact, all of the participants reported average to high grade point averages and regarded high

academic achievement as a priority and means to successfully graduate and achieve post-graduation goals.

Summary

The HU participants represented a diverse group of undergraduates in terms of student characteristics and varying degrees of engagement on campus. The characteristics of the HU student participants closely resembled students described in previous studies on White students attending HBCUs in terms of age, campus residence status, and employment status (Carter-Williams, 1994; Elam, 1978; Hazzard, 1989; Standley, 1978). The average age was 30 and there were no participants between the ages of 18-21. Students were mainly commuters and only three lived on campus. Seven students transferred from other institutions, such as community colleges, and indicated HU was attractive due to its location, tuition costs, and high-quality academic programs. The student sample consisted of seven juniors and four seniors. Six students were employed part-time and seven students received some form of scholarship or grant aid, such as a partial diversity scholarship. However, only two participants were recipients of full scholarships.

In summary, the following findings were drawn from the HU data collection and identified as factors influencing the engagement of students on this particular campus:

- High and frequent interaction influenced the engagement of HU student participants. Through relationships developed in the classroom and interactions outside of the classroom (e.g., advising, email communications, informal gatherings such as departmental receptions); students were encouraged to participate in academic organizations such as

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the political association and history club. Further, interactions with

faculty included discussions regarding class performance and advice for

internships and research opportunities.

- Involvement in academic organizations and departments was also a factor

  influencing the engagement of HU students. Involvement within

  academic organizations and with classmates in their respective majors was

  a mechanism students used to navigate campus.

- Barriers to engagement, mainly students' nontraditional and commuter

  statuses and inefficient student support services, were also factors

  influencing the engagement, or lack thereof, of students attending HU.

  Consistently, students with families or work demands were aware of

  departmental programs and some campus-wide activities, but did not

  participate due to these responsibilities. Further, students' frustration with

  conducting business in key student service areas such as financial aid,

  registrar's, and bursar's offices were described as reasons for limited

  engagement.

In spite of students' dissatisfaction with general university operations, HU was a

positive and opportune place for participants to achieve their academic goals. Overall,

participants were satisfied with their academic programs and faculty instruction, and

consistently reported strong relationships with faculty on campus. Evidence from the

data suggested that faculty played a critical role in their transition, knowledge and

involvement in activities outside of the classroom, and acquisition of opportunities after

graduation. Several students indicated that they felt challenged in their course work and

reported that on a scale from one to five, with five being the most difficult, they would rate the academic rigor of the courses and curriculum as a four. These expressions are consistent with participants in current studies exploring White students attending HBCUs and vignettes from White students attending Black colleges in the media (Abraham, 1990; Elam, 1978, Conrad et al., 1997, Sum et al., 2004).

Other important observations drawn from the HU data involved students' interactions with their peers and their own perceptions as White students on an HBCU campus. Interaction with peers or diverse peers did not frequently occur outside the classroom. In most cases, HU participants interacted and navigated the campus through previously established relationships or within departmental organizations.

The African Diaspora course and the classroom settings in general, were a forum for participants to interact with students from other backgrounds and challenged them to think about racial issues from a different perspective. Some students, such as Myles, Bradley, Gary, and Stan, were very comfortable in the African Diaspora class and felt the environment invited the sharing of diverse thoughts and ideas. For others, such as Jeremy and Michelle, the course and the classroom environment appeared isolating and, at times, hostile. However, in both cases, the students indicated they learned a lot in the course, particularly about slavery and its economic impact on the United States of America.

Finally, students perceived themselves as members of the campus community and comfortable interacting with Black and other non-White students from the student body. Emily and Jeremy were the only participants who revealed a level of discomfort in high-traffic student areas such as the "Welcome Bridge" and the Student Center. The other

participants suspected that as White students attending an HBCU, they would, inevitably, be confronted with some instances of prejudice. However, the examples they provided did not reflect any direct conflict or confrontation from African American students. In most instances, the students shared that they had often heard Black students using the "N" word or referring to each other as niggers.

The findings presented in this chapter represent a snapshot of the types of White students attending an urban, public HBCU and their personal perceptions of their engagement. The student's involvement varied based on personal interests and motivation, pre-college experiences, and interactions with various institutional actors such as faculty, staff, and students. HU students certainly benefited from similar programs (e.g., academic majors) and practices (e.g., engaging and interactive class discussions) in different ways. However, there were some obvious consistencies in response to questions focused on student learning and the influential role of factors such as faculty's teaching and an engaging classroom environment. Such a practice is one of many that may enhance the engagement and college experiences of increasing diverse populations on public HBCU campuses.

In the next chapter, the findings and analysis for Gulf Coast University are presented. As with HU, this chapter includes a brief contextual background of the university, current campus description, student participant profiles, and findings applicable to participants within this setting.

Chapter V

Findings and Analysis: **Gulf Coast University**

The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing the student

engagement of White, undergraduates attending public HBCUs. This chapter offers a

brief contextual background of Gulf Coast University, including my conceptualization of

the campus culture and a narrative of the White student presence on campus. Then,

detailed student profiles are presented for each Gulf Coast University participant.

Afterward, the findings are presented including the results of the document analysis, and

the emergent themes that surfaced from both the individual and focus group interviews.

Additional dialogue regarding how participants believed they were perceived by others is

also offered.

Gulf Coast University

GCU's origin and expansion as an educational entity has been influenced by

federal land grant aid and state policy designed to eliminate dual systems of higher

education and program duplication across public institutions. Prior to GCU's becoming a

Master's degree-granting institution, the university experienced four transformative

phases as an industrial college for colored youth (1890-1931), two state colleges (1932-

1949) and (1950-1995) and now the Gulf Coast University (1996-present).

GCU was originally established in 1890 as the Coastal State Industrial College for

Colored Youth with the passage of the Second Morrill Land Act Grant. The 1890 Morrill

Land Grant was an extension of the first 1862 Morrill Land Grant and was created to

"secure a balance of federal support for African American and White students in public

higher educational institutions" (Richardson & Harris, 2004, p. 371). Thus, the 1890

Morrill Land grants were integral to the establishment of numerous public HBCUs in the

southern states and served as a catalyst in offering educational access for Black children

and Black teachers in segregated public school systems (NAFEO, 2008; Wennersten,

1991).

Upon the approval by the State's General Assembly to establish the Coastal State

Industrial College for Colored Youth, the school was first located in another major city

within the state and before relocating to its current location where Rich R. Albright[7]

would be appointed its first principal (president) in 1891. The historical landscape of

GCU was heavily influenced by his visionary leadership and his aspirations to make the

college a credible, educational commodity to advance not only the vocational training,

but also the intellectual development, of members of the Black community. Albright, a

well-educated teacher and intellectual, was heavily involved in political and social

organizations in the State. He used these ties to convey the importance of both African

American higher education and the training of Black professionals in order to prepare

Blacks and transform their capacity to survive and thrive in a hostile, segregationist

society. As president, Rich Albright provided leadership and advocated for equity based

on the ideology that the educational development of Blacks should be harnessed by Black

teachers using books and instructional delivery created by Blacks (Patton, 1996).

President Albright served the college for 30 years. The institution's name changed

to Southeastern State College under the leadership of its third president, Alfred L.

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[7] The names of people, places and artifacts (such as buildings) are replaced to pseudonyms to protect the

confidentiality and privacy of the research sites in this study.

Winnford. Until 1947, Southeastern State College served as the State's land grant institution for African Americans. Southeastern State College changed its name to Gulf Coast State College in 1950. For a span of almost 45 years, the institution would be lead by seven different presidents, all of whom contributed to the enhancement of the university through major accomplishments such as Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation and the addition of new curricular programs and facilities (Elmore, 2005).

As with the mid-Atlantic state in this study, this southeastern state was one of the southern states identified in the *Adams v. Richardson* (1972) case. *Adams v. Richardson* was initiated by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) alleging "10 states still operated segregated and discriminatory higher education systems" (Brown, Richard, & Donahoo, 2004, p.15). The NAACP further asserted that the Office for Civil Rights within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare did not inform institutions they were in violation of federal mandates emanating from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Essentially, the Act stated that no person, regardless of race, color, or national origin could be denied access or participation in any program or activity receiving federal funding. Such a program or activity included higher education programs and a person's right to attend any college or university and participate in its programs.

In response to the Civil Rights Act legislation, the state developed a plan where GCU and a neighboring public institution serving a majority White student population would cease offering academic programs in the same subject areas. GCU was relegated to offering all business programs while the neighboring university offered and awarded

all teaching education degrees (Elmore, 2005). As a growing commodity in the state, the Board of Regents granted GCU university status in 1996 and also changed the institution's name to Gulf Coast University (University State System Newsroom, 2008).

Today, the campus has an undergraduate, student enrollment of approximately 3,456 students and 116 graduate students. The institution continues to expand its capacity as a premier educational entity in the state. The campus community prides itself on aesthetic beautification and recently erected a new social sciences building, added a volleyball pit near the student center, and unveiled a "5ft long, 2ft tall bronze [mascot] statue" in the middle of the university's athletic arena (Jackson, 2009). Jackson, a student journalist for the campus newspaper, noted:

> [Gulf Coast University] has long been known for its beautiful campus. Palm trees, green lawns, and historical buildings are what this school prides itself on. The university has a unique setting of a live oak forest next to a salt marsh estuary. People from around the country recognize the strides the university makes to maintain the attractiveness of the campus, which not only attracts students, but also donations.

In fall 2007, GCU offered 23 undergraduate programs and five graduate programs through its Colleges of Sciences and Technology, Business Administration, and Liberal Arts and Social Sciences" (NAFEO, 2008). Undeclared majors represent 13% of the student body followed by large-degree granting programs such as management, biology, mass communications, accounting, and criminal justice.

A 2007 ethnic enrollment report by major also reflected marine science as a major with high, minority enrollment major. The report includes all non-Black students in a

category referred to as "minority" in the document. Minority students enrolled in marine science represented 46% of the 52 students in the program. Other degree programs with high minority student enrollment include history (11%), mechanical engineering (16%) and social work (12%). The only other degree programs with high minority enrollment were in graduate-degree granting programs such as the Master's of Business Administration.

The GCU faculty representation is reflective of the student body. The university's most recent viewbook boasts its faculty-to-student ratio as the lowest in the region at 22:1. Faculty are described as outstanding and providers of "personal mentoring support in an atmosphere of intellectual interaction that extends far beyond the classroom walls" (Gulf Coast University Viewbook, 2008). A Faculty Demographics Report from the State University System Office of Research and Policy Analysis of the Board of Regents reported a total of 154 faculty members employed at the university (2008). One hundred and twenty-six of those faculty members were full-time and 58 held part-time positions. In terms of ethnicity, 50% of the faculty is African American. Thirty-seven percent of the faculty were reported as White and the remaining 26% were listed under a category entitled "other". With respect to gender, there are 82 male and 72 female faculty members. Sixty-one of the teaching faculty members have earned a doctorate degree and 31% possess a Master's degree. Further, faculty members of assistant professor rank (59) represent the largest cohort of faculty members followed by professor rank (33), and associate professor (32).

Campus Culture

GCU is a mid-size campus on approximately 173 acres of land. The campus is situated within a historic city in the state and the neighboring township, Tinsdale[8]. Tinsdale is a small town encompassing only 1.3 square miles and a population of 2,340 citizens. The location of the university makes it an interesting experience for students when interacting off campus. Tinsdale, like the campus and the historic city, has its own policies as it relates to infractions such as traffic violations and loitering. The student participants emphasized differentiation in laws and close proximity can make "town and gown" relationships confusing and difficult at times. Town and gown, common terms often used within the higher education community, characterize the relationship between a university and its surrounding communities (Warfield, 1995).

As one enters the east or west entrances of the campus, there are secured gates staffed with security officers checking each car for a university decal or to allow visitors to enter. Once cleared through security, there is an approximate 2.5 mile corridor aligned with apartment-style residence halls, academic buildings, the university baseball field, and the Naval ROTC main office. The two-mile roadway channels directly into a circular roundabout that is adorned by palm trees, covered with moss and older buildings such as the main administration building, the university student center, and the social sciences building.

Among the most prominent characteristics of the university's landscape are the areas designated for Greek organizations referred to as "plots," situated in the center of

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[8] Tinsdale is a pseudonym used to protect the actual name of the town

campus. Kimbrough (2003) described plots as the largest symbols of Black fraternalism and found on HBCU campuses. Plots are structures developed to distinctively represent each organization and are most commonly constructed "with bricks and concrete in the shapes of letters or some symbol linked to that organization" (p.130). GCU's Greek plots consist of painted concrete structures representing organizational Greek letters with chairs and benches for the members to sit and congregate during special events such as homecoming and founder's day festivities. Undergraduate members view these structures as places where they can reflect on the history of the organizations and socialize among themselves (Larkins, 2006). There are eight plots representing each of the eight Black Greek organization on the GCU campus. The plots are in the center of campus and directly in front of the university student center. A circular road wraps entirely around this area so it is easy to see each respective Greek organizational area on a daily basis.

This area is an active and central part of campus driven by activities and student traffic in the university student center. The Vice-President for Student Affairs' suite and other student activities offices are also located in student center. The university center café is filled with students during the lunch and dinner hours. When I observed campus interactions, there were a myriad of posters on the university center walls for the freshmen class campaign. In fact, the Ms. Freshmen pageant was held on the same evening of the GCU focus group interview. Several students, particularly small groups of women, were buzzing throughout the center with their dresses, make-up containers, and other accessories to prepare for the big event. As I sat in the student center, I overheard conversations from students reconfirming the time and place of the event and inquiring about the style of clothes individuals had selected to wear for the evening. Key student

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affairs staff and administrators, such as the Assistant to the Vice President, also walked

through the center in preparation for the Ms. Freshmen pageant.

GCU has a historical and communal atmosphere. Many of the original buildings

remain on campus such as Pelman Hall[9]. Pelman Hall was originally erected in 1901 and

is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Gulf Coast University Viewbook,

2008). The building was built by students studying blacksmithing and it has been used to

house the university's bookstore and library. The National Register of Historic Places is

a national program authorized to protect America's historic and archeological resources

(National Register…, 2010). GCU symbolically embraces diversity and the student

center is adorned with flags representing different countries and nations. The student

body and traffic seen on campus during the day definitely signifies that this is a majority

African American institution, however, as one passes or watches students walking to their

class buildings or playing baseball, the presence of non-Black students is also evident.

White Students at Gulf Coast University

The mandatory development and implementation desegregation plans required the

state to not only strategize to alleviate duplication of academic programs across public

campuses, but to also pay attention to the diversification of its respective, public

institutions' student and faculty (Marcus, 1981;Taylor & Olswang,1999; Wenglinsky,

1996). Gulf Coast University was diligent in employing strategies to increase White and

other non-Black student enrollments on campus. Enrollment reports from the state

University system indicated that GCU has experienced a steady undergraduate enrollment

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[9] Pelman Hall is pseudonym to protect the identity of the research site.

ranging from 2,900-3,200 since 1999. The increase, however, has not been true for its

non-Black student enrollments, particularly White students. From fall 1999 to fall 2008,

White, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian undergraduate enrollments

have declined from, 7.9% to 3.2%, 1.4% to .5%, 1.3% to .5%, and .1% to .0% (State

Board of Regents, Ten-Year Enrollment Report, 1999-2008). The system reports also

indicate Bellman State University, another public HBCU in the state, is the only other

HBCU with White undergraduate student enrollments more than or equal to White

student enrollments at GCU. The increase and retention of White undergraduate students

at GCU was best from fall 1999 to fall 2004.

Enrollment records beginning in fall 2004 indicated that the White student

declined to 116 (.4%) and as of fall 2008, the enrollment for this population was 110

students representing 3.2% of the total undergraduate population (see Figure 3). In 2005,

White student enrollment increased by a small measure to a total of 118 students (GCU

Semester Enrollment Report, 2006). The university's 2009-2018 strategic plan

acknowledged the decrease in White undergraduate students and participation and has

challenged administrators and faculty to address the importance of recruitment and

retention and specifically set a long term strategic goal to "expand recruitment and

reenrollment of Hispanics and Caucasians to redress shrinking minority participation"

(Gulf Coast University Strategic Plan, Vision 2018, p.13). This strategy included

increasing minority participation across campus activities as well. Although GCU

institutional reports do not provide a rationale for the decrease in White and other non-

Black student enrollments, some reports, such as those from the *Journal of Blacks in*

Higher Education [JBHE] (2001) argue that those public HBCUs experiencing a

"whitening" of campuses in the 1980s have experienced a reversal in these enrollments in the 1990s.

Figure 3. Student enrollment trends by self-declared ethnicity, GCU.
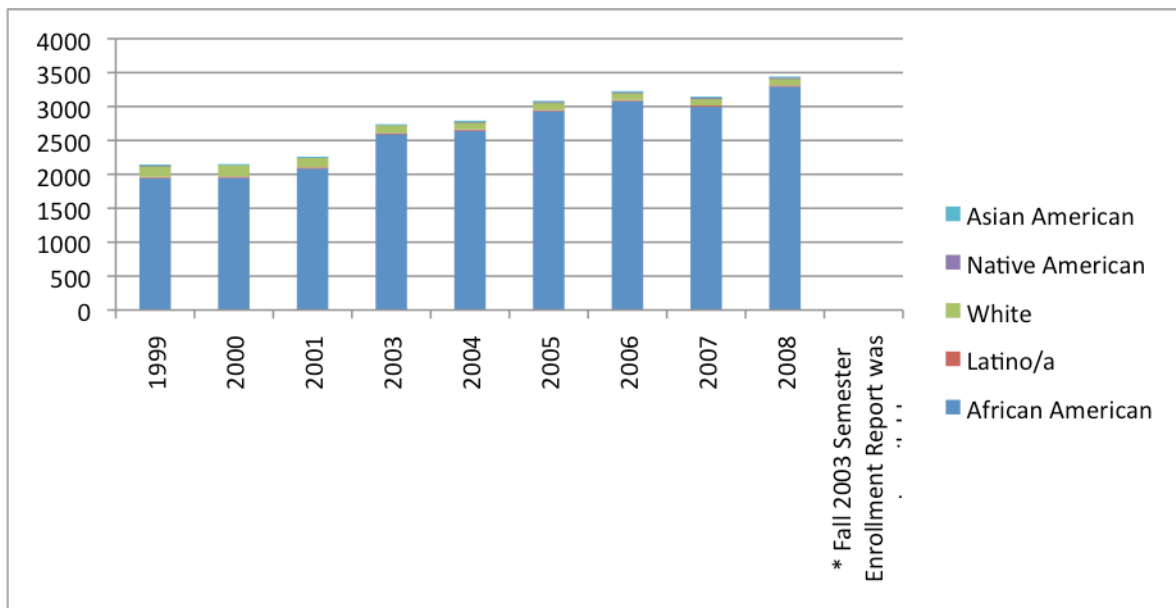
Gulf Coast was one of the twenty public HBCUs identified with a drastically declining White student enrollment (JBHE, 2001). The JBHE (2001) report indicated that the White enrollment decreased from 17.4% in 1980 to 5.1% in 1997. Some of the reasons proposed for the drastic decrease include the relaxation of state political pressure for those states that have demonstrated sufficient integration as required by desegregation plans and the dominance of a "distinctly Black culture and tradition that may be unappealing to large number of white students" (JBHE, 2001, p.10) attending HBCUs. The report implied that despite the influx of White students, the dominance of Black traditions may cause them to feel uncomfortable and discourage others by sharing

experiences through the state university system and feeder high schools designated for recruitment of prospective White students.

Profiles of Gulf Coast University Participants

Eleven White students from GCU participated in the study. The participants shared a variety of stories relevant to their experiences as White students on campus. The primary themes emerging from the data included: (1) high interaction with faculty and administrators; (2) strong presence of student life and community; and (3) engagement through the development of relationships and interactions with diverse peers. The latter finding appeared to be the result of students involved in university-sponsored programs such as the baseball team and the Navy ROTC. GCU student participants reported consistent and high interaction with faculty inside and outside the classroom. Most significantly, the participants provided rich descriptions of their positive relationships with faculty and indicated that the academic relationship often turned into mentoring relationships and friendships. The students also described strong relationships with campus administrators such as the President and Vice President of Student Affairs.

The data also revealed a strong and prominent presence of student life on campus. Specifically, the role of Greek-letter organizations and umbrella organizations such as the Student Government Association (SGA) were consistently emphasized in the individual and focus group interviews. Most notably, the student participants tended to be aware of and more engaged in campus-wide events such as the annual Homecoming celebration, Ms. GCU Coronation, freshmen and transfer student orientation, community service projects, and athletic events such as basketball and football games. All GCU participants had attended one or more of these events. The third emerging theme was the

relationships the students developed with other students from diverse backgrounds. The participants recalled experiences and provided explanations of how they were introduced to individuals from diverse backgrounds through their engagement in university-sponsored programs such as the NROTC or academic clubs and organizations. Their experiences suggested that the relationships enhanced their ability to transition and adjust to campus.

The age of the GCU participants ranged from 19-35 and the mean age was 27. Five of the 11 participants transferred from a community college or four-year institution. The remaining six students were first-time, traditional-age students and GCU was the only institution they had attended. The only sophomores in the entire study were a part of the GCU student sample. These individuals were also members of the university baseball team. Marine biology and accounting were the dominant majors among the 11 students interviewed. Finally, only one student participant lived on campus. The other student participants were commuters, but six indicated they lived less than 20 minutes from campus.

Student Profiles (Gulf Coast University)

Brett is a senior political science major and plans to attend graduate school following graduation next year. He described himself as an active, nontraditional student who attended a very diverse high school. Brett is works to offset college expenses and did not apply or attend any other institution prior to GCU. His parents did not attend college and the key factors influencing his decision to attend GCU included location, programs of study, and the history of the institution. During the interview, Brett compared his collegiate life to a character named "Jalessa" from the 1980's popular

sitcom, *A Different World*. On *A Different World*, a spin-off from the *Cosby Show,*

Jalessa was a friend one of Cosby's daughter Denise, at the fictitious Hillman College.

Jalessa was a 26-year old divorcee and Denise's roommate during her first-year at

Hillman. As the show progressed, Jalessa would become a residence hall director, role

model, and source of support for Denise and other freshmen women in the hall. Brett

stated his experiences were analogous to Jalessa's due to his life experiences, academic

focus, and maturity as a college student. He believed his experiences in the military and

as a father shaped a different perspective on life than those perspectives held by an

average 18 to 21-year old attending the university.

　　Brett is an active student on campus. He is also a member and the chapter

president of a traditionally, African American fraternity on campus. He is the first White

member in the chapter and the institution's history. Brett is committed to the mission and

purpose of the fraternity and also articulated a strong affinity to GCU. At the beginning

of the interview, he stated, "I am serious about the business of Sigma Alpha Omega

Fraternity[10] and I bleed Panther's [the school's mascot] blood". Brett also discussed how

the university's orientation program and first-year experience classes were integral to his

successful transition as a nontraditional, first-year student. During his freshmen

orientation, the first person he spoke with was the university president. Brett recalled,

"He just pulled up in his parking spot, came up to me, shook my hand and we sat there

and talked for about five minutes."

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[10] The name of the fraternity has been replaced with a pseudonym to protect the identity of the student

participant and organization.

Brett talked at length about his relationships with faculty members and the rigor of the academic assignments. The examples he offered included his Islamic and governance course and the preparation required for his senior thesis. Brett believed the faculty in his department encouraged students to "stretch themselves" in order to prepare for graduate school. On average, his papers and those of his classmates ranged from 30 to 50 pages in length. He added that in some classes he has been able to breeze by, but more advanced classes required critical analysis and the ability to defend ideas through class presentations. Brett had such a high regard for some faculty at GCU that he enrolled in classes taught by two professors more than once. He credited his academic success to his engagement and having a strong focus on wanting a real college experience.

Corey is a sophomore, marine biology major. He is currently on a full scholarship with the university's baseball team. Corey is a second-generation college student and his primary reason for attending GCU was to play baseball. He grew up in a small city in the lower tier of the state in which GCU is located. Corey attended somewhat diverse middle and high schools. Active in sports since a young age, Corey is a part of the starting lineup on the baseball team and reported that the team has a winning record. He also shared that he has positive, but not close, relationships with faculty members.

Although Corey did not describe his relationships with faculty as strong, he did share that he takes full advantage of faculty office hours to receive feedback or clarity on assignments. He also stressed the importance of frequent communication with professors due to the frequent travel with the baseball team. Corey explained that he is not reluctant

to approach faculty to discuss grades, and more often than not, faculty are supportive and helpful. He stated, "I haven't had any problems with my teachers so far, but, you know, all the teachers seem to be really nice and willing to work with you if you just come to them or you show them the effort."

When asked how Black students perceived him on campus, Corey responded that Black students on campus perceive White students as either athletes or marine biology majors. He recollected that during his first semester on campus Black students would approach him and ask if he was a member of a university athletic team. Corey thoroughly enjoys sports and believes students should demonstrate pride in their institutions. As a proponent of school pride, Corey asserted that GCU students, especially Black students, tend to be apathetic. He further stated it is difficult for him to take pride in a school, particularly an HBCU, when the Black students do not even take pride in the institution.

The lack of "school pride" concerned Corey so much that he decided to make it the focus of his first-year seminar project. As a major assignment, first-year GCU students are required to create an organization to inspire change or make a difference on campus. He proposed a project to increase school pride and awareness at GCU. Corey believed an increase in student pride would ultimately increase morale and decrease student transfer rates to other institutions. The only students or groups he felt displayed pride were members of the Greek fraternities and sororities. Corey was familiar with the pride and activity of these groups through his association with African American baseball team members who are also members of Black Greek fraternities. Through his close association and frequent interactions with African American, Greek members, Corey

understood the function and structure of all Greek organizations which he referred to as the "Divine Nine"[11] and believed these groups were strong influences on student life.

Cynthia is a senior biology/pre-med major. Originally from California, she lives off campus and works part-time. Her parents did not attend college and she receives no financial assistance outside of student loans. Cynthia described her high school as not diverse and she has not attended any other colleges or universities. Her decision to attend GCU was primarily influenced by professionals in the local community who had high regard the undergraduate biology program.

Cynthia had the most interaction with faculty outside of the classroom among students interviewed in this study. Throughout the initial coding phase, she specifically named six university staff and faculty members, including the institution's president, Dr. Young[12]. Further, she provided descriptive examples of her interactions with departmental faculty, such as a biology professor and her academic advisor. She referred to her biology professor as both an esteemed and highly-qualified scholar in the field of reproductive biology, and a friend and mentor. The professor and Cynthia have collaborated on research projects and are currently co-authoring an article for submission in a scientific journal. Her recollections of an academic advisor were similar. She recalled how a departmental faculty member made her uncomfortable during labs with

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[11] The Divine Nine is a term to describe the nine international fraternities and sororities under the national umbrella organization of the National Pan-Hellenic Council. The organizations include entities such as Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta sororities and Alpha Phi Alpha and Omega Psi Phi fraternities.

[12] The names of all faculty, staff and other administrators have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity and confidentiality of the students.

excessive touching on the shoulder and by sitting close to her during office visits. She informed her advisor about the situation and appreciated his immediate support and attention to the matter. In addition to discussions about her biology professor and academic advisor, Cynthia mentioned other faculty members and senior administrators and described how those individuals have made her feel like an integral part of the GCU community.

Cynthia is also an active member in the departmental, honor society exclusively for biology and marine biology majors. Cynthia noted that she is one of two White members of the organization. In fact, she added that the second White student in the society is also a female and became the first White member of a Black Greek-letter sorority on campus. Last year, Cynthia was elected by her peers to represent the honor society in the 2008 GCU Homecoming coronation. She defined this honor as her most memorable experience at GCU. Cynthia remarked, "When I was a queen at coronation and we [she and her male escort] did my little curtsey in front of the President of the University as the first White queen, it was like the hugest thing to me. During the coronation, he [the President] even came up and gave me a big hug and told me how proud he was of me." She said that she would remember and value this experience for the rest of her life. After graduation, Cynthia plans to begin taking graduate courses. She credited her academic and social experience at GCU for instilling the confidence and motivation to pursue and prepare for graduate education.

Davina is a junior, environmental science major and native of the State. In 2008, she decided to attend college full-time with the support of her family and part-time employment. Davina is a second-generation college student and described her high

school as very diverse. She is not involved in any campus organizations due to her demanding schedule and responsibility for two young children. Davina indicated that although she is not involved in campus organizations, she perceived herself as engaged because of the time and energy allocated to academic work and her relationships with other students on campus. Unlike the other GCU student subjects, Davina indicated that if she had the opportunity to select a college again she would not choose to attend GCU. She described some of the courses as "lax" and some of the faculty members as subpar. This response is quite different from the students who described GCU faculty as knowledgeable and well-educated. Throughout the interview, Davina mentioned more than five times "that things are jacked up here" and stated that she supported the idea of a merger between the neighboring predominantly White institution and GCU.

Originally from the southern part of the state, Davina felt she was not a typical native of the southern State region. She explained that people from the east region of the state were often perceived as racists and close-minded. Cynthia described her nature as imaginative and said that she would ask about things she did not understand. She described herself as more open-minded and liberal than most individuals in her childhood community. At the time of the interview, Davina was enrolled in the university's mandatory African American history course and applauded the instructional style of the faculty member. Specifically, she appreciated the forum the class afforded to ask and pose specific questions about aspects of the slave trade. Through class discussions, she believed her generation could advance positive race relationships in society.

Davina's relationships with faculty have varied since she transferred to GCU. She is currently enrolled in more of her major classes and discovered organic chemistry

consumes much of her study and class preparation time. She stated, "It's all about organic. Everything else I can figure out and get by…I do what I gotta do and push it until the last minute…but organic is all day every day." Davina believed that there are constant power struggles between her and two of her academic major professors. She believes that one professor does not connect with her because she is a White woman and that the other professor is more concerned with his personal comfort as a teacher than ensuring students understand course content. In spite of these tensions, her responses were positive when asked if she thought faculty were more or less helpful and how she would rate the rigor of academic work on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being less rigorous and 5 being most rigorous. She indicated that she would rate academic rigor as a 6 and that she believed the faculty were generally helpful.

Fred is a sophomore, business marketing major and a member of the baseball team. He recently moved off campus and is not employed. He is a second-generation college student and described his high school as not diverse. He is, however, from the city in which GCU is located and stated that although his high school was predominately White, the elementary and middle schools he attended had an equal share of White and Black students. Fred was originally contacted through the first email invitation to potential student participants for this study but he did not respond. After completing the interview with Corey, another baseball team member, I discovered they knew each other and were friends. I employed a snowballing technique by asking him if he would inform Fred about the study and extend an invitation on my behalf for him to participate.

Fred spoke most directly about the experiences afforded through his freshmen seminar course. He emphasized the exposure to writing final papers requiring more than

20 pages as well as compiling a portfolio for grading. The first-year seminar course offered significant opportunities to participate in community service projects in the local Savannah community. Fred explained that since being a student at GCU, he is now knowledgeable of several community service based organizations on campus as well as service-oriented projects available to university students throughout the academic year.

Fred was candid in his reflections on being a White student attending an HBCU. He felt being a White student at an HBCU was intimidating especially when it involved class discussions. Fred is not involved in much campus life outside of classroom activities. Most of his community service was relegated to programs offered by the business department or coordinated by the baseball team. Fred mentioned that he has never experienced a racially-charged incident on campus but admitted he has witnessed racial jokes exchanged between Black and White baseball teammates. He stated, "Other than little skirmishes we've had on the baseball team which starts by joking and then gets to something more I have not seen much [racism]. After about an hour or so everyone is ok and friends again." Fred believed his affiliation with the baseball team enabled him to meet and interact with Black students on a more consistent basis. Prior to attending GCU, he indicated his elementary and middle schools were diverse but the environments were often socially segregated which hindered frequent interaction.

James is a senior accounting major and is employed part-time with a local investment firm in downtown Savannah. He resides off campus and transferred from a state PWI to live closer to his family. James is a second-generation college student and described his high school as not diverse. Upon his relocation, he discovered GCU had one of the best business programs in the region. James is heavily involved on campus

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and with regional and national community service organizations such as the March of Dimes. He had also recently been nominated to be the financial officer for the university's student government association for the 2009-2010 academic year. When I asked him how he received the nomination, he stated it was through networking with one of the SGA senators during a community service project at the Salvation Army. In addition to campus participation, James also had experiences working with community organizations to organize city-wide, annual events such as the city-wide marathons and being selected by the March of Dimes as a student ambassador. James emphasized how participating in community service has not only allowed him to give back but also provided invaluable professional experience.

James, similar to his GCU counterparts, described the business program and accounting major as challenging and the professors as highly qualified. Based on the ideology that there is no such thing as a stupid question, James has cultivated strong and close relationships with the faculty and designates time in his schedule to visit them periodically during office hours. He is also the President of the Accounting Association at GCU. James sought out the opportunity and expressed, "I just sought it [the President's position] out; I wanted the experience for resume building and applications." During his tenure, James has received positive feedback from professors in the department suggesting that this is the best year the Accounting Association has ever had. Now, he views the position as more than just a resume enhancer, but also as a mechanism to strengthen his networking skills and develop meaningful relationships with students in the department.

James was candid about his views and perceptions as a White student on a public HBCU campus. When asked what words best describe being a White student on a predominately Black campus, he responded, "If I had to use one word, I would say honorable…I have learned a lot about myself, so I would also say educational." He explained that by being a minority student, he has learned that stereotypes about African Americans he believed to be true as a child and even as a student at another state institution were false. He added that his experience as a student at GCU has aided him in reflecting on his own experiences growing up with a moderate to low social economic class background and the challenges and perceptions that accompany that status.

Larry is a senior, electrical engineering major attending GCU. He has lived on campus for four years and is a member of the Navy ROTC (NROTC) program. Larry does not work in order to focus on his academics and adhere to the demands of the NROTC program. He transferred from a college in West Florida because of his family's new military assignment. Larry is also a first generation college student and he described his high school as very diverse. The availability of the NROTC program is another reason Larry decided to attend GCU. He is very active in the program and attributes his campus involvement to his affiliation with the NROTC unit.

Larry believed his involvement in NROTC and living in the residence halls influenced his ability to become an active part of the campus community. During the interview, he asserted, "I know almost everybody from my class. We've at least seen each other's faces because we are so involved on campus." As an active student on campus, Larry has been invited by Greek-letter organizations to participate in skits during the step shows and has assisted with freshmen move-in annually. He admitted he has

been tempted to join a fraternity due to frequent interactions with members during fundraisers such as barbecues for new freshmen. Larry's mentor, who is African and a Greek fraternity member, also increased his interest in joining a fraternity. He believed the university needed to hire more people with characteristics resembling those of this mentor, who is committed to supporting freshmen during their first-year. Larry stated, "I think that's what the university has lost, people like my mentor, that are there for students." Based on the positive experiences imparted by his mentor, Larry is now determined to have a similar impact on freshmen and other students through mentoring and establishing a freshmen support group.

Larry's engagement and commitment to the welfare of students on campus was illustrated through rich examples describing his interactions with diverse students, relationships with Black women, attendance at church services at a predominately Black Baptist Church, and a confrontation with off-campus Black males from the local area during his sophomore year. His experiences at GCU have been shaped by his engagement inside and outside the classroom and as a residential student. Larry indicated having Black friends all of his life. Therefore, he found engaging with students of color to be natural, which helped his college transition. Larry was grateful for his experiences as a minority at GCU because he has been able to witness, first-hand, discrimination and harassment toward African American males. He believed that had he not personally witnessed some of these incidents, he would not have believed such acts to be possible. Larry referenced specific incidents involving his African American male friends being approached and treated unfairly by the campus and Tinsdale district police.

Ralph is a sophomore, baseball team member who recently declared a major in mass communications. He is interested in pursuing a career in sports entertainment and securing a position as a correspondent for a sports channel or network. Having attended a very diverse high school, Ralph is accustomed to interacting with students from diverse backgrounds and indicated he does have Black friends. When asked how he would describe his experiences as a White student he stated, "Now, I mean, obviously being White here stinks 'cause, you know, you don't see other White females or other guys that you have most in common with, but it really doesn't bother me. No one says anything." Ralph was not an early recruit for the baseball team. He stated that GCU was not his first choice and had it not been for a last minute tryout opportunity for the GCU baseball team he would have chosen to attend a community college. After a successful first year on the team, the athletic department granted him a full-year baseball scholarship. Ralph admitted he did not necessarily enjoy being a student at GCU but he does love playing baseball and having the opportunity to get a free education.

Ralph commented that his relationships with faculty have not evolved to the level of his relationship with his academic advisor. He expressed strong relationships with his athletic academic advisor but observed that the majority of faculty, particularly White and non-Black, appear to be intimidated by Black students in the class. Ralph added that [Black] students were immature and disrespectful in classes. He stated, "Some of the students are disrespectful and I can tell when teachers get really mad, people just keep walking out of class and, you know, keep talking."

Another interesting component of Ralph's interview was his responses to race-based questions. For example, when asked if he had ever experienced a racially-driven

incident on campus, he stated, "A guy on the baseball team, he's Black, but his girlfriend, I don't know but I think she is White, but she is not Black. And let me see others, um I think there's a White girl here but she acts like—I mean, she doesn't—you know, I think she thinks she's Black." Ralph described interracial interactions but not instances depicting his personal involvement in racially-driven incidents or interactions.

Shelia is a senior accounting major. A native of California, she relocated to the GCU area with her husband, who was on active duty in the Navy in 2007. Shelia is a first generation college student who described her high school as not diverse. Due to Shelia's work schedule, we met in the lobby of my hotel for the individual interview. This arrangement afforded her the flexibility to bring her children to the hotel while we conducted the interview.

Parental responsibilities and a tight daily schedule were the primary reasons Shelia offered for her limited engagement in departmental activities outside of the classroom. Shelia was also a strong proponent of students' taking the initiative to become involved and developing a path for meaningful college experiences. She believed White student engagement was not stifled by race and that it was more directly linked to the extent to which students wanted to be involved. She did not see or experience any racial barriers at GCU that would prohibit White or non-Black students from active, campus participation.

Shelia's involvement in departmental and campus-wide activities and programs was also limited. She was aware of sorority life and had been invited by two friends to attend interest meetings for two different sororities on campus. Shelia indicated an interest but decided not to attend due to her age and forthcoming graduation. With regard

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to departmental activities, she acknowledged the professional presentations and programs offered through the business school and accounting department. Shelia recalled, "I mean if you saw one of the teachers in the hall they'd say 'did you hear about the meeting?' If the accounting professors thought I'd be interested they'd say, 'hey are you gonna try to go to that'? They were definitely trying to get you involved." Faculty members and students also encouraged Shelia to join national professional organizations such as the National Association of Black Accountants and reassured her that race was not a factor for membership. Despite the encouragement, Shelia decided not to join. She asserted she felt kind of weird joining the organization although she knew race was not a requirement.

Sara is a junior, public administration major. She described herself as a nontraditional student. She works with her husband in a successful, family-owned plumbing business in the city. Sara is a second-generation college student and described her high school as somewhat diverse. She spoke extensively about her impressions of the faculty and the importance of getting a quality education. She also mentioned that attention to her academic work was paramount. Sara described the teaching faculty as highly competent and excellent instructors. She also commented on the complexity of her course work assignments. On a scale of 1-3, she rated the difficulty of capstone homework assignments as a three stating that, "The papers this semester, they were really hard."

Sara is not engaged outside of the classroom environment. Due to time constraints and demands associated with self-employment, she has not sought out activities at the university or within the department. However, she has connected with

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other women her age through classes, including a young woman from Nigeria who tutors her on a regular basis. Sara shared mixed reactions when asked about racial experiences on campus and any instances of isolation as a student. The only experience she could recall was a discussion that took place in an African American Studies class. Sara stated, "It was really weird. I am a White student coming to a Black college from Wasilla, Alaska…I just remember once when we were talking about Obama and I had said…I just think he has too little policies." Sara, similar to the other participants, shared her experiences in an African American Studies or African Diaspora class and described her feelings of awkwardness and trepidation in the courses, despite having a high level of confidence in her ability to do the work and a sense of her identity as a White female.

Sara enjoys being a student at GCU and values the experiences she has had thus far. Her perspectives on Black and White relations were quite intriguing and did not reflect those of the other participants. For example, she characterized members of the Black community as forgiving, accepting, and humorous. Further, she felt Americans should be indebted to African Americans for their contributions to society. She believed American and African American should not be studied separately but collectively. Sara stated, "…My forefathers were George Washington, but my forefathers were also Black...I believe my forefathers are Martin Luther King and Crispus Attucks."

Ted is a junior economics and business double major and a member of the University's NROTC. He transferred from state community college and described his high school as somewhat diverse. Ted is attending college full-time to concentrate solely on his academic work. He grew up in a military family and with pride, he described how

many family members had been enlisted in the military. Ted's ultimate career goal is to become a commissioned officer in the United States Navy.

Ted identified the faculty as very supportive and helpful when it came to academics. He spoke most highly of his physics professor, Dr. Zingy, who provided guidance and support in his labs and classrooms. Similar to the members of the baseball team, most of Ted's interaction and engagement outside of the classroom and on campus took place with the NROTC unit. For questions inquiring about involvement or engagement outside the classroom, he answered with the pronoun "we." Ted described volunteering at the concession stands during step shows and doing service outreach painting houses or washing cars with the unit. When asked about feelings of isolation, Ted admitted that initially being a GCU student was a culture shock but not in a negative way. He provided examples at the step show and a cookout during the annual homecoming celebration. In reflecting on last year's homecoming, Ted stated, "Last homecoming, I was cooking for us on the grill underneath our Blue Angel Plane and whenever I had to walk through the crowd to get to the unit, it was kind of isolating. It was like swimming through a sea of people. Like I said it does not bother me much anymore." The Blue Angel Plane is a replica of the planes used by the United States Navy for flying demonstrations. The plane is also a major landmark on the campus and located directly across from the building where the Department of Naval Sciences is located. Navy ROTC members often convene under it for significant ceremonies and social events during homecoming. Ted's recollection of walking from the building to the plane is an illustration of the "long walk" through a large group of African Americans during a major campus event.

Being a student at GCU has been an eye-opener for Ted, especially as it relates to interacting with people from diverse backgrounds and considering different perspectives. His interactions with African Americans in the Navy ROTC unit, participating in activities where the attendees are predominately African American, were new experiences. These encounters obviously challenged some of his ideologies about diversity and people of color. Ted grew up in a relatively small town in rural Virginia and around people who he described as "closed-minded" and often making racial jokes. In response to questions about racial incidents on campus, Ted described an incident he caused during physical training with the NROTC unit. He explained that he made a joke about Black History Month that offended one of his African American peers. He stated, "It was just a two minute joke that went wrong. It comes back to your background. I thought it was a joke, he took it as offensive…" Ted shared that he did not realize his comment was inappropriate until another NROTC member pulled him aside to discuss the matter following physical training. He felt the incident made him and the African American student more mature and that they both got over it and became good friends.

Table 6 provides a snapshot of selected characteristics of the Gulf Coast University participants. The table categories were derived from the demographic survey each student was required to complete once they agreed to participate in the study. As reflected in the table, more males than females participated in the study. The participants' characteristics varied across several variables but three students were marine biology majors, a popular academic program on campus. Further, the participants were largely nontraditional, adult learners who lived off campus. The next section presents the key findings from the data collection.

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Table 6

Student participant characteristics, Gulf Coast University.

Student	Age	Major	Classification	Transfer Student	Financial Aid	Employment Status	Residential Campus Status	Parents Attended College
Men								
Brett	28	History	Senior	No	No	No	Off	No
Corey	19	Marine Biology	Soph.	No	Scholarship	No	Off	Yes
Fred	20	Business	Soph.	No	Scholarship	No	Off	Yes
James	26	Accounting	Senior	Yes	No	Part-time	Off	Yes
Larry	26	Engineering	Senior	No	NROTC Support	No	On	No
Ralph	20	Communications	Soph.	No	Scholarship	No	Off	Yes
Ted	26	Marine Biology	Junior	Yes	NROTC Support	No	Off	No
Women								
Cynthia	28	Marine Biology	Senior	No	No	No	Off	No
Davina	32	Environ. Science	Junior	Yes	No	No	Off	No
Sara	35	Public Admin	Junior	No	No	Self	Off	Yes
Shelia	26	Accounting	Senior	Yes	No	Full-time	Off	Yes

Gulf Coast University Findings

Overview

The primary factors revealed from the data suggested that frequent interaction with faculty and staff, involvement through departmental and university-sponsored programs, first-year experience programs, and the strong presence of Greek Life influenced the student participants' engagement in and outside the classroom. Three of the eleven students were sophomores and members of the university's baseball team. These students were the only sophomores in the entire study and their experiences reflect the impact of first-year experience activities and inform their evolving relationships with

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faculty members. Additionally, the students' perceptions of race and themselves as White students were also influenced by their engagement and interaction with other students on campus. This section provides details to illustrate the primary themes drawn from the data collection.

Document Analysis

Archival and electronic documents were analyzed as a part of the document analysis process. In particular, hard-copy documents such as admission, development, and student life brochures and calendars were obtained to assess the presence of White undergraduate students on campus and institutional initiatives emphasizing diversity. Additionally, electronic documents such as the university website which linked to academic departments and student support services were also assessed as part of the analysis. Finally, institutional documents such as university strategic plans and data reports available for GCU's Office of Institutional Research were obtained online as a means to identify and assess important data such as past and recent enrollment trends, popular academic majors, faculty and student demographics, and class enrollment (e.g. sophomore, junior senior).

The document analysis of these materials revealed three consistent themes: presence of interactions between White students and non-White students on campus; White student participation in campus athletics; and White students living in residence halls. For instance, the Freshmen Living and Learning Center, a first-year learning community, offered first-come, first-serve housing for first-year students and a range of programs to advance academic and social integration on campus. This program is highlighted in the university's print materials as well as on the website.

On the home page of the website, there are pictures from the fall move-in, showing assistance from orientation leaders. The presence of Greek life was apparent from GCU students and within electronic and hardcopy documents produced by the university. From the document analysis, the university calendar included at least eight photographs of students wearing Greek paraphernalia as a primary depiction of student life. Further, university documents such as the student events calendar and the athletics page on the university website portrayed White students as athletes. The student program calendar, in particular, primarily displayed White students as athletes, especially in action shots. In general, the document analysis for GCU revealed that the institution's commitment to engagement fostered a sense of community. Like in the case of HU, one noteworthy observation was what appeared to be an overrepresentation of White students visually depicted on the university's intercollegiate athletic program web pages.

Individual Interviews: Emergent Themes

High Interaction with Faculty and Staff

Students experienced a high degree of interaction with faculty members, including academic advising meetings, class debriefings, and social outings. Students discussed the ways in which faculty influenced their intellectual growth, guided their career aspirations, and offered personal support. In general, participants praised faculty for their scholarship and intellectual prowess. James, a senior accounting major, was confident in the reputation of the faculty and had even developed coping mechanisms to manage the variance in their teaching styles and expectations:

> It differs and I've seen both styles. I've seen professors that don't do a whole lot of explanation in class. They expect you to basically be completely familiar with the material when you come to class, and then it's more like a brief overview cap

in class. And then so a lot of the work in those types of classes have to be done outside of class. Then I've had other teachers, like Mrs. Whatley, who she teaches some of the beginner accounting courses like Intro to Financial and Intro to Management, and she explains things a little bit more in detail. But I still think that with her, you still have to do a lot of studying on your own outside of class in order to do really well; in order to get A's and stuff. But her teaching style is a little bit different.

Ted benefited from in-class interaction with a physics professor in the classroom environment. He expressed:

> Dr. Jung likes to walk around and she'll look over your shoulder and just make sure you're on the right track and then she sees something messed up she doesn't hesitate to say 'where did you get this' or 'what did you do to get here' and then kind of get you back on track. She does monitor. If you get in a tight spot, she will say, 'Hey, no, no, no divide here instead of here' or 'move this here or your setups messed up a little bit' so you can catch the mistake before you hit a dead end or are totally lost.

Cynthia recalled her first class meeting with one of her professors and mentor. Her story demonstrates a high level of respect and regard for the professor's teaching and classroom management practices:

> And I remember the first time I met her was in my second Biology course, and in the room, and she came in, and she had this beanbag thing in her hand. Somebody was on their cell phone, and she threw the beanbag at 'em and told him that was strike one. 'Cause if you're caught with your phone in class, she throws things [like beanbags] at you. You know, that's your warning. And if you get caught with a phone again, you're gonna get so many points, 'cause she gives you these points that are yours for bonus points to help you bump up your grade, or they can be your points that you can lose, you know, with the beanbag.

James, Ted, and Cynthia's experiences characterize the important role of faculty within the classroom and the importance of functional interactions. Functional interactions typically occur for a "specific institutionally related purpose" (Cox & Orehovec, 2007, p.353) and can include students asking faculty about academic assignments or working with faculty on research projects. Through these specific

interactions, the students were receptive to different teaching styles and engaged in active

learning. Furthermore, these interactions enabled the students to establish strong and

favorable perceptions of faculty and their ability to manage the college classroom.

Some participants considered faculty and staff as mentors and personal friends.

Brett suggested faculty and staff are an integral part of the campus community and

everyone, from the President to the custodial staff are supportive of his academic

endeavors:

> It's all-inclusive. It's from grades to mentorship to family to when I've got
> problems I can go talk to advisors and mentors here, different ones for different
> perspectives and what have you. It was almost immediate, like they kinda reach
> out to you. Maybe they see something in you and they do that, but I have
> professors, everyone from professors to vice-presidents of the university to the
> former president of the university to all the way down to administrative assistants
> and custodians asking how things are going, how my daughter is, how my fiancée
> is, and it's pretty amazing. You go to someone working a concession stand and
> say, "Hey, how's your girl? How's the baby?" "She's doing good. How do you
> remember this?" So I mean it's pretty amazing.

Brett's description of the range of support provided by staff and faculty mirrors

the perceptions of students held by HBCU staff in the research literature. Hirt, Amelink,

McFeeters, and Strayhorn (2008) found that HBCU student affairs administrators

believed relationships nurture students in a family-like manner as influenced by an ethic

of care. The ethic of care is a component of a larger concept called overmothering that

describes "cross-familial patterns of care found in the African American culture" (Hirt et

al, p.217). Specifically, the ethic of care is characterized by the attentive and emotional

response given by staff and administrators as a part of "one's own engagement with

students" (Hirt et al, p.218). Brett referred to the staff and administrators as a family and

stated that they reach out to you because they see something in you as a student. These

meaningful relationships as experienced and perceived by the White students attending

HBCUs illuminate the responsibility administrators believe they have to students. This

particular finding also supports the findings suggesting that HBCU student affairs

professionals value their distinct in loco parentis[13] roles. In Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink,

and Bennett's (2006) study exploring the nature of student affairs work at HBCUs,

student affairs professionals reported they felt like parents and extended family members

to students. Furthermore, they believed "their work environment is student-centered

because the campus is "family-oriented" or "like a really big family" (Hirt et al, 2006, p.

670).

Cynthia's recollection about her relationship with a professor included

collaboration on a research article and the professor even attending her wedding. She

possessed a high regard and admiration for this professor as a professional and a

colleague:

> She is just so charismatic, and she steps into a room and demands like the
> audience just – that's her. She's – and she's not the type of person that's like
> flashy and flamboyant or anything, but she just walks in, and when she starts
> speaking, she speaks with an eloquence that is like "Oh". You just want to listen
> to her. She's like the human dictionary of Biology. You can ask her anything and
> she's got it. And if she doesn't have it right away, she'll remember it later and
> tell you.

Cox and Orhevoc (2007) also described personal interactions and mentoring as

relationships between faculty and students that are meaningful and linked to student

success. Specifically, the authors found that when there were personal interactions

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[13] In Loco Parentis is a Latin term that describes a person who is not a natural parent but acts as a parent or

guardian (http://www.duhaime.org)

between students and faculty, the students felt valued and they could sustain relationships when faculty were viewed as their friends. Conversely, mentoring relationships were influenced by three primary variables: career and professional advice; emotional and psychosocial support, and role-modeling (Anderson, Dey, Gray, & Thomas; Jacobi, 1991). Brett's and Cynthia's perceptions of faculty-student interactions convey that they felt valued by and important to faculty members. In these students' specific experiences, it appeared that their interactions that began as personal often evolved into stronger personal or mentoring relationships.

Another key observation was the students' relationships with faculty originated in the classroom and were influenced by certain in-class cues transmitted by the professors' attitudes, values, and nonverbal communication (Lamport, 1993). Research studies have examined the link between class teaching behaviors and faculty-student interaction outside the classroom (Cole, 1982; Cole, 2007; Wilson, Woods & Gaff, 1974). In particular, student perceptions and increased interactions with faculty outside of the classroom are often guided by the faculty members' demonstration of empathy, personality style and comfort in sharing personal information with students. Cynthia's description of her professor illustrates how a faculty member's personality can be effective not only in their teaching but engaging students in their learning and overall college experience.

Student interactions with faculty also extended beyond racial lines. Although, the prominence of diverse faculty is significant at HBCUs **(**Foster, 2001; Foster, Guyden, & Miller, 1999; Gasman, 2009; Louis, 2005; Willie, Reddick & Brown, 2006), the students in this study most frequently described their interactions with Black faculty members. As

noted in the background information on GCU, 50% of the faculty members are African American. Further, some student participants informed me that most White and international faculty hold posts in the business, marine biology, and other science-related programs in which eight of the participants majored. From a follow-up email to clarify some of the data, nine participants stated that two or more faculty members teaching their courses had been African American or of an ethnicity other than their own. Interracial interactions reflect the experiences of the individuals involved, influence student interactions, and thus impact student educational outcomes (Anaya & Cole, 2003, p. 99). Students such as Corey suggested that despite racial differences, the faculty were extremely helpful:

> Well, the teacher that I was talking about that I had was my speech and communication teacher. He was an African American teacher, and he was, you know, nothing negative. Everything seemed to be good. I just went and talked to him about what I could do to bring my grade in the class up, you know, and he seemed to really, I mean, be willing to help me out. I actually ended up making an A in the class. So I don't mean, nothing more than that. Most of my teachers, I guess probably because I'm in the marine biology field are White.

In contrast, Sara, a junior public administration major, and Brett, a senior political major, reported different experiences with faculty of different backgrounds. In Sara's African American history course, she felt the professor "went overboard" in infusing her opinions on the issue of slavery:

> I loved the history class and I didn't agree with the professor on the issue of slavery. The Black struggle, the things that happened, stuff I didn't even realize was so horrible and so hideous. I think to bring in her own feelings, hurts, and angers cheapened the experience…I just don't think that a classroom should be a soapbox. Even though she is Black and it is the Black experience, but I think there needs to be a little bit of an emotional distance.

Sara's comment reflected her interest in the African American history course but questioned the manner in which the professor conveyed her opinions as an African American woman on issues related to African Americans. Specifically, Sara provided examples of how this particular professor utilized the classroom as a forum to discuss current political issues such as the Obama and McCain elections and emphasized how Obama's position in the race was a major landmark in Black history. To this end, Sara also commented, "And I understood this is a Black history class and this is a historical moment, but I just felt like she crossed the line." Boone (2003) suggested that because most faculty who teach at HBCUs are African American, some of these professors may employ a distinctive African American speech pattern referred to as "call and response" as a means to "unite the speaker and audience in a collective display emphasizing the community rather than the individual" (p. 213). In the context of the HBCU classroom, Sara's African American history professor's statements would be characterized as "calls" and the expressions and responses from the students would be defined as the "responses." Sara's comment indicated that the professors "calls" appeared to resonate with her Black peers but not with her. Considering Boone's (2003) argument, it is possible that the call and response communication enabled the faculty member and the African American students to bond, within the classroom, through culturally relevant conversations and ideologies that differed from Sara's. This may have contributed to Sara's feelings that the professor crossed the line in sharing her opinions, and, from Sara's perspective, presented unbalanced views on important issues such as the presidential elections.

Brett believed there were Black professors who he felt did not like White students. He shared an issue that his fiancée, who is African American, encountered

prior to her graduation. Brett was confident the professor's lack of support for his fiancée

was predicated on her relationship with him and her strong relationship with a White

advisor. He explained his position:

> There's another faculty member that without a doubt, the woman just doesn't like
> White people, and she kinda makes statements that aren't blatant, but she talks
> around the subject. Well I've never taken her. It's secondhand, but she also
> doesn't like men so much. But she's an English professor and in a department,
> and that's probably the only department here at Gulf Coast that's 90% White, the
> faculty…And maybe some of her comments aren't directed at racism toward the
> White faculty or just the fact that she believes there should be more Black faculty,
> which there probably should be. My fiancée really had a hard time this semester
> with her because of her advisor, her mentor is a White professor and she kinda
> held that against her. Then the fact she's engaged to me, so she had issues. There
> have been other complaints about this professor and just the fact that she says
> things that are uncomfortable.

In these particular cases, the White students were referring to their interactions

and perceptions of Black faculty. Corey, apparently, had a positive experience

interacting with a Black faculty member whereas Sara and Brett had less than positive

perceptions of some Black faculty on campus. There are several studies that examine the

relationships between Black students and White faculty within the PWI context (Allen,

1996; Chelser, Wilson & Malani, 1993; Davis et al, 2004; Fleming, 1981; Fries-Britt &

Turner, 2002; Katz, 1991) but limited studies have addressed experiences and

interactions between White students and Black faculty at HBCUs. To some extent, these

students' experiences support the notion that race does matter and can influence

relationships of White students and Black faculty at HBCUs. For instance in Hickson's

(2002) study investigating the role faculty play in the retention of HBCU students, the

participants reported that having faculty as mentors increases their chances of completing

college. Less than one percent of the students felt college professor mentors should be of the same race.

Most studies examining the experiences of White students on HBCU campuses have revealed that students have positive interactions with faculty members both inside and outside the classroom (Closson & Henry, 2008b; Libarkin, 1984). However, there have been some instances, when White students have reported high levels of hypervisibility or feeling like a "stand out" in the classroom and social settings within the HBCU environment (Peterson & Hamrick, 2009). Some GCU student participants shared instances where they felt uncomfortable discussing issues in class due to race and at times, were ostracized for having a certain opinion or perspective as it related to issues surrounding race. These feelings impacted the way White students learned in particular courses, their interactions with non-White students and the perceptions White students had of some Black faculty members based on their interactions with them. Rucker and Gendrin (2003) argued that "race is a defining element of the communication context at HBCUs and has been a profound determinant of individuals' senses of self-identity and social interactions in academic settings" (pp. 213-214). Given this context, for those students who believe their race is central to their self-concept, they may establish a stronger identification with faculty members of their own race than with those of other backgrounds (Rucker & Gendrin, 2003). This is a critical aspect of the students' college experience because HBCU faculties tend to be highly diverse and increases the probability of White students' interactions with faculty from other races. Cole (2007) found that although interracial interactions between faculty and students were not directly linked to students' intellect or self-concept, they were a key factor in developing faculty-

student interactions and ultimately relationships. The variance of the GCU students

experiences with faculty further illustrate the important role faculty have in shaping the

college experience and inevitably influencing student engagement.

Interactions with Staff and Administrators

Another significant theme that emerged through the analysis of data was

frequent interaction and relationships with staff and key administrators on campus.

During the focus group interview, all students in attendance were transfer students. In

addition to acknowledging the prominence of faculty, students also made references to

staff and administrators who supported their integration into campus life and encouraged

involvement. Cynthia, a senior biology and pre-medicine major, and Brett, a senior

political science major, recalled interactions with the university President during events

or times they defined as their most memorable as GCU students. Both students were

impressed with the president's personal approach and genuine interest when engaging

students. Specific examples were evidenced by Brett's initial introduction to him during

new student orientation and Cynthia's momentous experience during Homecoming

Coronation when she represented the honor society as their organizational queen.

Other GCU participants found staff members supportive and interested in their

academic success. James described student services within the business school and the

support by the front desk staff:

> It's like at the business school, there's an office for student services, and there's
> one particular person who is extremely knowledgeable about the coursework, and
> she is not officially an advisor, but I will definitely see her to help with my
> planning process to kind of audit my decisions. And then I'll just go to the
> professor to get the advisement sheet signed so that I can get placed in the classes.

Fred, a sophomore marketing major, did not have frequent interaction with staff

administrators but found the members of the athletic staff to be intentional in their efforts

to ensure that student athletes are progressing academically:

> Yeah. They're rather helpful. We have a – I think he's assistant athletic director over academics and stuff like that. He'll have us fill out a progress report, get our teachers to fill out progress reports like two times a semester just to make sure we're keeping up, and if we're not then he assigns us study hall, which a lot of people aren't gonna like, but it does help especially when you're absent from class and you can get lazy and not wanna do anything.

Ralph concurred with the Fred's evaluation of the Athletic Director and appreciated his

open door policy:

> And he just sat down and listened and stuff, and then the new athletic director. He's always walking around interacting with us. I don't even know him that well but I can go in, talk to him in his office about just what his plans are 'cause we actually done that before.

The experiences of James, Fred, and Ralph emphasize the role of academic advisors and

professional staff members, and administrators in this particular process. Academic

advising and support play a significant role in the persistence and retention of

undergraduate students (Kramer, 1999). Specifically, academic advisement plays an

important role before and during enrollment and should provide information to provide

clarification and deeper understanding of university programs, activities, expectations,

academic requirement and strategies for success (Craig, 2006).

GCU utilized a hybrid model of academic advising where students could receive

assistance from both faculty and professional advisors. Essentially, the institution's

academic advising requirement influences the frequency of interaction between students

and faculty or staff and thereby strengthens their relationships. With regard to James,

Fred, and Corey, the GCU hybrid model of academic advisement allowed them to receive

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both developmental and prescriptive advising. Developmental advising is defined as a

collaborative, processed-oriented relationship between a student and faculty member or

professional advisor designed to provide holistic guidance for the student's academic and

life goals (Alexitch, 1997). Prescriptive advising is more outcome-based and typically

involves the advisor directing and making decisions for the student (Alexitch, 1997). The

integration of these two advising techniques, developmental and prescriptive, enabled the

students to further acclimate to campus life and achieve their academic goals.

Davina, a junior environmental science major, experienced difficulty with spring

registration and believed her academic advisor was not conveying the correct

requirements and she resorted to seeking assistance from the Vice President for

Academic Affairs:

> The issue I had recently started at the advisor level and figuring out my degree
> evaluation. I mean it was all wrong. It's wrong in the catalog, it was wrong when
> he told me what I needed to take from day one. The Vice President of Academic
> Affairs sat down with me for a long time. It wasn't necessarily like he had a
> choice. But he did help me work it out.

Although Davina was clearly frustrated, her response indicated that she was still able to

obtain help to resolve her issues. Other administrators and staff referenced during the

interviews were the Provost, Vice President for Student Affairs, Director of Student

Activities, Athletics Director and first-year seminar instructors. The students believed

these individuals had the best interests of students at heart and demonstrated their support

by helping them solve problems and transition into the campus environment.

The students' experiences further align with Hirt et al. (2008) findings examining

the relationships student affairs professionals form with students at HBCUs. In this

particular study, student affairs administrators' used their professional roles and personal

investment in student development to encourage cultural advancement, necessary to retain students and reinforce the value of HBCUs in the higher education landscape. From the students' descriptions of staff and faculty, it is evident that staff members' efforts in supporting students were directed to helping them to solve problems and not sending them on a chase around campus to resolve their issues. Such behavior was embedded in Davina's difficulty with a degree audit and the Vice President for Academic Affairs' intervention to assist her. Ted described the manner in which his physics instructors monitor lab sessions to ensure students do not make mistakes during the process that will damage the final results. These behaviors are examples of staff and faculty members' exhibiting care and guardianship to support students and retain a familial campus environment.

Other research studies have highlighted the important role of student affairs professionals and administrators within the HBCU environment. In Gasman & Palmer's (2008) study on Black males at a public HBCU, participants described both administrators and faculty members as accessible and supportive. That is, the students in their study emphasized the role both faculty and staff played in demonstrating care about their academic success and participation in student organizations, internships and student support services. On the GCU campus, student affairs professionals were present from new student orientation through freshmen orientation classes, and available in high-traffic areas such as the student union and athletic buildings. The students reported that these professionals, as a group, were like a family and constantly encouraging student involvement.

The presence and active engagement role of student affairs professionals and other administrators was important for the White GCU participants. The time spent outside of class often included interactions with staff, especially student affairs professionals, in business units such as the bursar's or registrar's office or in the residence halls and often included interactions during academic advising. Regardless of the place of the interaction, staff members are in prime positions to engage with students and serve as facilitators of student learning (ACPA, 1996).

Student Life: First-Year Programs

First-year experience programs and Greek-letter organizations influenced how participants engaged and experienced the GCU campus. Larry and Brett described how their new student orientation experiences were integral to their transition to campus and enhanced their ability to develop a respect and affinity for the campus community. Larry, a senior electrical engineering major, defined his most memorable college experience as new student orientation. He reminisced on the African rituals and familial values incorporated into the program:

> One of my first impressions when I first got here during new student orientation was there was a ceremony and a lot of faculty were there. Everybody was there and it was an African ritual where you become a part of the family. You do this dance, you sing the song, you walk through the arch, you shake everybody's hands, and some part in there was like it doesn't matter what race or religion you are. You're part of the family now. They incorporate a lot of African [history] into it. For some reason that stands out.

In addition to meeting the President in the parking lot, when he arrived for new student orientation, Brett also recalled the student organizational fair held in the student center. It was during this event, he was able to be introduced to campus organizations, such as the Greek-letter organizations. Brett explained that as a mature nontraditional student, he

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conducted a test to see how he might be received by some of the historically, Black

Greek-letter groups:

> And at the freshman orientation they had a student organization fair. I'm not
> dumb. Greek life by definition is discriminatory because they look for people like
> them. So I wanted to conduct a little experiment of my own at the organization
> fair. They had all the Greeks there along with other organizations on campus, but
> you know these incoming freshmen are flocking to who they identify with. I did
> none of that. What I did was walk through all the tables, walked around, and I
> wanted to see who was gonna reach out to me. Members of one particular
> organization walked all the way across the way and grabbed me to listen to their
> sales pitch. So I went over and I listened and they made the first impression on
> me, and early on that's who I paid attention to. If you're willing to look past the
> color of my skin then I wanna see what you're about.

Brett's test was a behavior most new freshmen may have been uncomfortable trying but

with his background and life experiences, he was aware and confident in what he desired

in an organization. The freshmen orientation program offerings allowed him to initiate

this exploration early in his college career at GCU.

Both Larry's and Brett's experiences with first-year activities were shaped by new

student orientation. Specifically, Larry's recollection of the African ritual confirming all

incoming students as official members of the GCU university community aligns with a

concept that Gallien and Hikes (2005) referred to as the "fusion of curricular and co-

curricular affairs." Through the fusion of curricular and co-curricular efforts,

administrators, faculty, and staff members embrace the unique opportunity of creating

and maintaining institutional traditions and achieving student success. Using Spelman

College, a private HBCU for women, as a case study, Gallien and Hikes (2005) reported:

> From its ten-day orientation for first-year students through the seniors' final walk
>
> through the arch of the historic oval, Spelman women are surrounded with images
>
> that keep the institution alive. Students, alumnae, faculty and staff are constantly

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reminded of their sacrifices and accomplishments. Each student becomes a part of

that history and assumes some responsibility for the future (p. 9).

The GCU administrators, faculty and students created this familial and welcoming

environment for White students. The research examining the importance of orientation

programs indicates that well-structured and organized programs provide students with an

opportunity to meet with faculty and staff as well as learn more about academic programs

and policies. Furthermore, students have an opportunity to develop relationships with

peers prior to beginning classes (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Formal new

student orientation and the two-semester, first-year seminars were signature initiatives

that enabled White GCU students to transition into the university better informed and

engaged.

Five students referred to participating in a first-year experience activity (outside

of orientation) at least one time during their matriculation. The three sophomore

participants constantly referred to their first-year class instructor and described the value

of opportunities to participate in community service projects and complete assignments

relevant to their interests. Community service was another facet of the experience for

GCU participants. Students participated in community service projects with local

organizations such as the March of Dimes and the Boys and Girls Club. The freshman

seminar course and activities planned by student organizations were essential for

engaging students in community service. Fred and Ralph recalled gaining community

service experience through the freshmen seminar course:

> When I took my freshman experience class we had to do like 20 hours or
> something like that. It was like a Boys and Girls Club I think it's towards

downtown and it was kind of like a prime time after school that. We just kinda played with the kids and stuff like that (Fred).

They don't, you know, make me want to do it, but like if there was someone like Mr. Dawson. He's the athletic academic advisor, and he's the freshmen experience teacher. He always, you know, gets out and does stuff. And actually a part of his class is to go out and give back to the community and stuff (Ralph).

The freshmen seminar course also provided a forum for students to practice and enhance writing skills and demonstrate their creative critical thinking skills. When asked about the academic preparation and rigor of classes, Fred explained his first introduction to "serious" collegiate work was through a 35-page portfolio assignment required for the freshmen seminar course. Corey appreciated the opportunity to develop an idea to address a campus problem. For this particular assignment, he submitted a proposal to increase school pride at GCU:

Here's my take on it, and I've written in my freshman experience class a couple of project proposals because we had to do project proposals in my freshman experience class, I've written a couple about trying to get people to take more pride in the school. When I transferred to my high school, my second high school that I ended up graduating from, there wasn't much going on. Nobody cheering at basketball games, no school spirit, anything like that, and me and a friend, we just kind of went into that school and took it over and made people take pride in the high school and what not.

Freshmen seminar courses are commonly used strategies to assist first-year students' transition into the campus environment (Upcraft et al., 2005), and afford opportunities for students to connect with faculty and professional advisors early in their college careers (Darling & Smith, 2007; Strayhorn, 2009). Further, Hunter and Linder (2005) suggested that the freshmen seminar offers a "logical structure for encouraging and intrusively demanding active student involvement in learning and in the life of the institution, for examining and discussing student-institutional fit, and for facilitating

social and academic integration" (p. 276). On the GCU campus, the freshmen seminar served as an extended orientation and allowed for the opportunity to learn more about the campus, its constituents, and the surrounding community. Extended orientation seminars are typically taught by faculty and campus administrators and often count toward students' major or graduation requirements (Hunter & Linder, 2005). GCU's freshmen seminar extended over two semesters and students received academic credit for successful completion.

Kuh (2008) postulated that high-quality first year experiences are those that "place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies" (p. 9). Furthermore, Porter and Swing (2006) found that first-year seminars including content areas such as academic skills and engagement had a substantial impact on student persistence. The GCU students described assignments that involved collaborative learning through team projects and frequent writing assignments and exercises that afforded the opportunity to enhance critical analysis and synthesis skills. Most importantly, the writing exercises provided a forum for students to creatively express their ideas and argue certain viewpoints. This was most evident in Corey's freshmen seminar paper on the importance of campus pride.

Finally, the freshmen seminar provided an opportunity for students to interact with students from diverse populations and learn more about the institution. Brett, a senior political science major, served as a teaching assistant for one of the courses and described his experience encouraging freshmen students to engage students outside of their normal cliques:

I was a TA [teaching assistant] for a freshman experience class, which was a leadership development course. I served as a mentor for the freshmen. It was mostly athletes and ROTC students and all that…A lot of them tend to be white, and it was funny because there were also golf players in there, but they all grouped together. We came in there and oftentimes we'd split, it was probably 60 students and we'd split 'em up into groups. I always gave them the hardest time…I'm like, "You're not all gonna get in the same group. I kind of forced that mixture to break down those barriers that they were keeping up for themselves. It's like you have to be willing to go beyond your own comfort level because once you leave this university or any university and you get out there in the professional world you're not always gonna be in your comfort level. This is quickly becoming a more globalized community and you got to be able to have some of those skills to chameleon yourself.

Brett's attention to racial and human dynamics and, more importantly, his leadership in assigning groups, illuminates the challenges and responsibilities higher education administrators face to enhance campus climates so that new students can view each other as individuals and not judge people based on preconceived notions and stereotypes. Jones (2010) asserted that many new students do not get along because they have not been taught how or been exposed to a forum for getting along. Further, Reason and Evans (2007) suggested that most White college students attend predominately White high schools and lack interaction with and exposure to people of color, such as African American students. Strategies such as those exercised by Brett coupled with intentional efforts and commitment to develop student awareness and participation in service learning, community service, and an understanding between formal curriculum learning and social patterns are examples of effective ways to increase diversity and the understanding of multiculturalism for first-year students.

First year experience programs have become increasingly popular on college campuses and are utilized as a primary means to ease transition for first-year and transfer students attending college. New student orientation and first-year seminars were

examples of activities participants described as effective conduits to transitioning into the university and for becoming an active member of the campus community. Within the context of HBCUs, first-year experience programs have been used as a means to provide activities ranging from ritualistic welcoming ceremonies designed to introduce students to the campus to small first-year seminar courses taught by faculty members (Kuh, Kinzie, Whitt & Associates, 2005).

GCU offered its students a comprehensive, multifaceted, and well- coordinated first-year experience in which all first year students are required to participate in. The university provides an extended orientation through activities such as the freshman seminar course and integrated learning and living through the Freshmen Living and Learning Center built in 2003. The first phase of the GCU course is designed to assist freshmen students in their adjustment and assimilation to the campus environment. A unique facet of this particular course was the inclusion of student and faculty mentors. Students were required to meet with their mentor three times a semester and submit a portfolio at the end of the course. The second phase of the course emphasized goal setting, career development, leadership training, and promoting computer literacy and competence. A critical component of this phase was cover letter and resume development reinforcing the career focus of the course. Most importantly, each course required ten hours of documented volunteer service. The well-coordinated activities and structure of the first-year program enabled White students to become more formally acquainted with the university through the development of early relationships with faculty and staff and the opportunity to engage formally with their peers.

Influence of Greek Life

Nine out of the eleven GCU students mentioned some aspect of Greek Life on campus one or more times during the individual interview. The prominence of Greek Life at GCU is evidenced not only by the students' familiarity with the presence of the Greek community, but also by the representation of Greek Life on the campus. As one enters and drives onto the campus, there is a large area of land dedicated to each Greek organizations plot and trees at the center of campus. The plots consume a vast portion of land and prominently stand out as a key feature of the landscape. The students did not suggest the Greek community was influential on campus (e.g., leadership positions) but did imply being Greek "was a big deal in Black college culture" and "Greeks are big on campus." These statements suggest members of the Greek community have a strong presence on campus and membership represents popularity and importance to some degree.

Corey, Ralph, and Fred, GCU baseball team members, reported that many Black members of the team are members of Greek organizations and after the games, they often perform "mini step shows" and encourage non-members to imitate or mock the stepping behavior to celebrate a game win. Ralph stated, "The Black guys are in the fraternities and they're always trying to get us to like twirl the baseball bat like it is a baton." Corey contended that Greek organizations were only students and groups demonstrating respect and pride for the school. He also suggested the organization's strong presence on campus:

> Nobody has pride in it beyond the fraternities and sororities. Now, that's, of course, that's a big thing in, you know, black college culture, the fraternities and sororities, you know, the Divine Nine. That's a big deal, you know. So, of

course, that's something that people take a huge pride in, but, I mean, there's not many things here that I would, you know, want to get involved in beyond that.

Cynthia and Shelia also mentioned being curious about Greek Life and receiving invitations to attend membership interest meetings. Shelia recalled a time where a friend invited her to attend an informational meeting for one of the Greek sororities on campus:

> One of my girlfriends was going to an interest meeting. I think that's what it is called and she wanted me to go. But I said, it was Sunday night, I'm just like I can't do it. I am already 25 and I already have kids so I am not in that college mindset of sorority.

Brett, as a Black Greek fraternity member with a leadership position, had the most insight about Greek Life on campus and confirmed its influence on his college experience. He is an active member and values being a member of the fraternity. Brett also stated that students often describe him by his race and fraternity affiliation:

> In it's [60-year history], and I am the chapter president. At numerous times when I was going through the process about the brothers told me how honored they were that I chose to do this, and it's not just here on campus. It's regional…And it kind of spreads through that circle of friends or what have you. Everywhere else on campus through the student body if they don't know me by name, the easiest way to identify is like, 'You know, the White guy in the Black fraternity. They tell you when you join an organization they don't care who you are, you lose your identity. You become so-and-so the Alpha, or so-and-so the Sigma, so-and-so the Delta, what have you.

White and non-Black membership in historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) is not a new trend. Some reports have indicated that the induction of the first White member into a Black fraternal organization occurred as early as 1946 (Hughey, 2008). Kimbrough (2003) reported that non-Black BGLO members largely consist of White, Latino, and Asian populations and represent 10 to 15 percent of the membership in individual national Black Greek organizations. Although viewed by some as a controversial issue for Black Greek organizations, White members in BLGOs,

such as Brett, have consistently reported that they chose to join the organizations due to

their commitment to community service and value of sisterhood and brotherhood.

During Brett's interview, he shared that he was interested in joining a Greek organization

because he wanted to experience every facet of the collegiate experience. Specifically,

he indicated that he was drawn to the fraternity due to the influence of an African

American member, who was a nontraditional student like himself and the president of the

chapter prior to his initiation. Brett further explained:

> Another individual, the one that had the most influence on me to join the
> fraternity was a nontraditional student like myself. He was a couple months
> younger than I was and in my first political science class. It was just the way he
> carried himself and the type of person he was. I saw a lot of myself in him and we
> just kind of hit it off. He didn't throw a sales pitch or anything like that. His
> attitude and leadership just stuck in my mind. As I looked around campus and
> noticed other campus administrators who were also in the fraternity I said to
> myself, "That's more of who am. I am a member already"….I had those
> characteristics and I shared them with the brothers. That's what led me to
> officially join.

Brett mentioned two accounts of his life similarities and interests to African Americans.

As mentioned earlier, in one instance, Brett referred to a nontraditional character named,

Jalessa, portrayed in the 1990s television sitcom, *A Different World*. With regard to his

interest in joining a fraternity, he refers to another nontraditional student with whom he

felt he shared similar characteristics and interests. This example is interesting as it

illustrates how Brett connected with other students on campus, not based on race, but age

and category (e.g., nontraditional). Based upon a typology Hughey (2008) developed as

a result of investigating the experiences and cultural reactions of 34 White BGLO

members, Brett would be considered a color blind collaborator. Hughey (2008) described

color-blind collaborators as White BGLO members who ignore the influence of race and

are immersed in racialized organizations. Explicitly, color-blind collaborators conceptualized their membership as a normal means of networking and social mobility (e.g., meeting new people, acquiring leadership positions). From the color-blind collaborators perspective, normal signified a "state of being in which race is somewhat absent" (Hughey, p. 325) and had no affect on their presence as White BGLO members. Brett's final comments regarding his BGLO membership was, "The more I grow in this organization there is no doubt in my mind that this is where I wanted to be and where I needed to be".

Beyond Brett's personal experiences as a White BGLO member, five other participants either attended a step show on campus or were invited to participate in a step show or work in a concession stand. Three students voluntarily informed me that there were at least two White undergraduate students on campus who they knew belonged to Black Greek organizations on campus. The confounding point of this finding is that White students, whether they were engaged in Greek-life activities or not, understood the significance of Greek organizations to its members and the role it played in shaping the campus culture.

The research on the influence and relevance of Greek-Letter organizations offers both positive and negative perspectives. Proponents of Greek organizations argue membership can result in leadership opportunities and a place for students to achieve a sense of belonging as well as acceptance from friends and peers (Jakobsen, 1986). There have also been studies indicating that students who join Greek-letter organizations are just as likely as their non-Greek peers to be involved in other aspects of campus and maintain high grade point averages (DeBard, Lake, & Binder, 2006). Critics of the

influence of Greek membership on academic success and social transition suggest these organizations serve as havens for deviant behaviors such as binge drinking, sexual assault, and acts of hazing often resulting in casualties (Kuh, Pascarella, & Weschler, 1996). Although this study does not offer findings to support or advance the results of previous studies, the GCU participants' depictions of Greek life suggest that it afforded an opportunity for White students to learn more about a culture different from their own. Essentially, the student participants did not reveal positive or negative perceptions of the organizations but they did exhibit interest in acquiring a better understanding of what organizations do and represent.

Larry, a GCU senior, had been influenced by mentors and friends who were members of Black Greek organizations. He stated, "If I pledged in a fraternity it would be strictly for the reason of holding the letters." Larry further explained that he wanted to join and be a role model to young students, because a member of a Greek letter organization had been his mentor. The prominence of Greek letter organizations could be influenced by several factors, such as small campus size and landscape. However, it is not clear whether the presence and popularity of these organizations positively influenced student engagement for these participants. The data do suggest that the prominence of Greek Life, through its members and symbols on campus, increased the participants' curiosity about the purpose of the organizations and their relevance in the collegiate environment. In one instance, Cynthia recalled being first introduced to Greek Life on campus and how one of her African American friends assisted her with better understanding:

One of my friends, Julie – I'm not a Greek person either – when everybody was pledging and doing their sororities, and one of the girls came in with her Delta shirt on, and I'm like, "What's DST?" "What are all these symbols?" And she goes, "Shh, shh. Don't say that." She was like, "Don't say that out loud. You need to understand that this is a very serious thing, and you can't insult the whoever's, the Sigma's, or this, or this and this." And I was like, "A what?" You know? "Okay." A total learning curve thing, yeah. And so, and I had no clue. You know, I'm like, "Okay." So, but they took care of me, you know, the girls and the guys.

Cynthia's remarks are significant in that her relationships with diverse peers enabled her to have a discussion about an area in which she was not familiar. Her African American friends helped her understand Greek letters and eventually Black Greek letter organizations. She informed me that one her good friends became the first White, female member of a Black Greek organization; and believed they shared the "first status" in common. Cynthia felt being nominated as the queen by a predominately Black national honor society and her friend's acceptance as the first White in the Black Greek sorority on campus was demonstrative of how the students and the campus community embraced them as peers. She also believed in being open, honestly inquisitive, and respectful of her friends from other backgrounds invited conversations about religion, music, and soul food recipes. Cynthia concluded that different backgrounds did not interfere with the opportunity for learning more about each other and strengthening relationships.

The data does not reveal that the strong prominence of Greek life influenced student engagement through an increase in White student membership in Greek organizations. However, it does offer some evidence that the strong presence of Greek Life at GCU influenced and increased cross-cultural interaction and understanding. Gurin (1999) characterized this type of cross-cultural interaction and learning as interactional diversity, which describes the extent that students from diverse backgrounds

come into contact and interact in educationally purposeful ways. Hu and Kuh (2003) found that interactional diversity has positive effects on all students, and can be most significant for White students attending liberal arts colleges on learning and personal development outcomes. The authors stated:

> It may be that these generally smaller, residential, more human-scale settings create interpersonal environments where interactions among students from different backgrounds tend to take place over extended periods of time….As a result, student are more likely to engage in mixed-race conversations outside of class about what they are learning, world events and current issues; which to a degree reflect the goals of any institution's general education program. (p. 330-331)

Greek life on the GCU campus promoted interactional diversity and appeared to serve as an impetus to stimulate inquiry and dialogue between Black and White students on campus. Through informal conversations, Black students were able to share background and history on the organizations and explain their importance to White students. At the same time, White students were able to learn about the organizations and understand the importance of the organizations to their Black peers. Corey had direct contact with Greek members on the baseball team and regarded them as students with the most school pride. Cynthia inquired about Greek letters and symbols with her Black friend and was better able to understand and apply its significance when her White friend joined a Black sorority. GCU students' exposure to and participation in Greek life introduced participants to a new experience and meaning through interactions with their diverse peers.

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Some studies have suggested that students' desire and ability to participate in diverse activities can be influenced by numerous factors including their pre-college experiences (Milem & Umbach, 2003). For the GCU students, it is possible that their pre-college experiences and prior exposure to diversity influenced their ability to engage in diversity and diverse experiences, such as participation and interest in BGLOs. On the demographic survey, seven students indicated that they attended a high school that was very or somewhat diverse as it pertained to the composition of their high school student bodies. Factors, such as the structural diversity of high school environments, may influence first-year college engagement and influence positive interactions among diverse peers (Cole, Kennedy & Ben-Avie, 2009; Jayakamur, 2008; Saenz, 2005). Given these findings, it is presumable that the GCU students' exposure to diverse environments and experiences caused them to be more open-minded and inquisitive about culture and activities outside of their own culture. Often times, the level of interaction students have with diverse peers prior to college enable them to acquire diverse ideas and perspectives (Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan & Landreman, 2002). The GCU students' curiosity and participation in Greek life and interest in its significance to Black students is particularly interesting when several studies have indicated that the majority of White students attending college come from primarily all-White neighborhoods and high schools (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Milem & Umbach, 2003) and may not be prepared to find interest in such diverse views and programs.

Interactions with Diverse Peers

Engagement and interaction with students from diverse backgrounds was also a dominant theme from the GCU data. Hall (2009) argued that engagement is a learned

behavior that can be shaped by "the structural diversity in pre-college environments" (p. 23) that affords unique opportunities for diverse peer interactions. The relationships described by the students ranged from intimate and close to more informal and collegial. Most often, participants worked with diverse students through collaborative group work and assignments in class. They believed the small, communal environment within the departments and organizations on campus contributed to their ability to develop strong relationships with other students. Ralph and Fred discussed working with a diverse group of students for projects in African American and global issues courses. Ralph acknowledged the group diversity and indicated that the group was successful and achieved a good grade, whereas Fred emphasized the value of working in diverse groups:

> Yeah. Actually I just got done with my African American history.   It was a group project, and me and then another guy, he's a senior He was a white guy from Canada, and he was in my group, and then we had the three black girls, and we just met in the library and just, you know, organized our stuff. But that was the only kind of group thing that we had. So, I mean, we would meet once a week and just organize what we needed to do 'cause it was like a three-week group project. (Ralph)

> We actually had a global issues project to do and it was me and one of my other baseball players, a black guy on the baseball team, and then we had a Spanish girl and I don't remember who the other person was, but it was kind of funny because it was like a white person, a black person, and a Spanish person, so it was like every ethnicity. It was kinda cool just getting to know people like that and getting to know other people from diverse backgrounds and things like that. We got an A on our project so we've gelled pretty good. (Fred)

There is also research that supports the linkages between students taking diversity-related courses and increased interactions between diverse peers (Chang, 2001; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1998; Milem & Umbach 2003; & Terenzini et al., 2001). Additional research has also suggested that a diverse undergraduate student body is linked to positive learning outcomes (Gurin, 1999; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). The

GCU participants reported interactions with diverse peers on campus and, in some cases, described how the relationships broadened their views and offered additional support. James, an accounting major and the accounting student association president, had also connected with students from different backgrounds through collaborative, business assignments. For one particular project, he and a classmate established a strong rapport based on their passion for music. He shared the following:

> I like music, so I'll just be having small talk with one of the members of my group project. His name's Greg. He happens to be African American. I found out that he likes to play the trumpet, so I say, "Well I've never played guitar with somebody." He plays trumpet. "Let's get together and hang out and play."

Davina, Shelia, and Sara were not involved in student organizations or programs outside of the classroom. These students reported that family responsibilities and work obligations were priorities and absorbed any time that could be allocated to co-curricular activities. The women did, however, define themselves as engaged students because of the strong, meaningful relationships they established with primarily African and African American students in classes.

Sara, a junior public administration major, has connected with other women who are her age or a little younger. She stated the following:

> Most of the students that I have met are Black. In the last class that I had, I had one girl that I talked with Jennifer and one girl that I talked with Betty. Betty's Black; I thought Jennifer was Irish, but she's half-Black…But she and all three of us were older students, and so we kind of bonded and enjoyed each other."

In Sara's case, she established relationships with women outside her race but it was not predicated on race as much as age. During the interview, Sara indicated the importance of understanding and learning about the experiences and backgrounds of people beyond their race.

Research examining engagement in the classroom and the benefits of diverse student bodies and views align with Sara's belief. Chang, Denson, Saenz, and Misa (2006) proposed that the persistent power of race can shape life experiences, racial and ethnic compositional diversity can create ".a rich and complex social and learning environment that can subsequently be applied as an educational tool to promote students' learning and development" (p. 432). Further, Kuh et al. (2008) suggested that the classroom is the most common and regular meeting place for commuting and part-time students, like Sara to have peer interaction and that faculty should maximize these spaces to create learning communities and success-oriented campus cultures. The integration of these two ideologies enabled students such as Sara to learn more about the diverse experiences and backgrounds of classmates. Classroom activities, that are effectively planned and managed, increase engagement and the opportunity for sustained and meaningful interaction between students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Chang et al., 2008). The classroom also establishes a forum for "students to explore issues of race and to interact with diverse others are essential to positive educational outcomes related to race" (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p.45).

In sum, the student participants engaged and interacted with diverse peers inside and outside the classroom. In some cases, the students' relationships extended beyond the classroom and evolved into deeper relationships. For others, the mere exposure and interaction with diverse peers served as a learning experience offering the participants new perspectives about students from backgrounds and experience different from their own.

Focus Group Interview: Collective Themes

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The Gulf Coast focus group interview was held on Monday, September 14, 2009. The goal of the interview was to convene selected participants to pose questions drawn from the individual interview data and assess any new themes that might emerge among students as a collective group. Five students were invited to participate in the interview and three students (Davina, James, and Ted) participated. The two other student invitees were university baseball players and were unable to attend the focus group due to practice.

The focus group questions specifically focused on the mandatory African American course requirement, diversity experiences prior to college, involvement on campus outside of academic departments and structured units, and reported tensions in some classes and campus activities during the Obama and McCain presidential campaign. The Greek life, involvement in departmental organizations and participation in university-sponsored programs were highlighted themes in the focus group interview as they had been in the individual interviews. Students collectively shared that they were most often made aware of programs offered by Greek organizations and athletic departments.

There were also new themes that emerged during the focus group interview. All of the participants were commuters and possessed characteristics of nontraditional and adult learners. The students expressed limitations to participation in co-curricular activities due to family obligations and course load demands. Two of the participants were parents and one participant had just been offered an internship in the city. Davina and Ted both agreed that their families took priority over involvement in campus organizations. Davina reported that her friends are always asking her to attend something

but she has to pick up her children and get them home for dinner. Ted shared a similar perspective:

> What I hear about is the ballgames and we don't have the best team so I am not really interested. I am not really into step shows, either. So it's partially my lack of interest in some of things on campus but primarily dealing with family and work while going to school is the other. So it's mainly time constraints for me.

In Graham and Gisi's (2000) study examining adult students' involvement in work, course-related activities, and student organizations, adult participants were willing to engage in course-related activities but work and family obligations hindered their ability to devote time to college activities and programs. Thus, it appeared that if activities were not related to academic course work, adult learners tended not to participate. Research has suggested that adult learners can make significant contributions to the campus community and student learning (Richardson & King, 1998) through their previous work and life experiences.

The students articulated that they were not only familiar with key administrators on campus but also knowledgeable of student services such as the writing center and support offered through federally-funded programs such as Student Support Services (SSS). The students indicated the writing lab was inviting and professionally staffed by graduate students. Ted indicated that he used the writing center on a regular basis and the NROTC unit strongly encouraged members to do so:

> I've used the writing lab the most. The unit would rather you get some feedback from one of the professors cause when you write a paper you've got your side of it and it's better to see somebody else's side of it just so the next person you hand it to can understand where you are coming from.

Davina and James agreed that the center was well run and referred to it as "one of the nicest student help academic places" they have even seen. The students wished for other

subjects to have such centers to provide support as well. Research has demonstrated that writing centers effectively impact students' ability to write and develop skills to work effectively with peer tutors and faculty (Jones, 2001). The physical environment coupled with the effective delivery of writing services may enhance students' academic engagement in the classroom, interaction with faculty and time spent on course-related work, such as written assignments.

The ease and support associated with transferring to GCU was also a highlight of the focus group. The students began to discuss the effectiveness and support provided by a staff member who serves as the campus transfer coordinator. They discussed how this individual ensured all the necessary transfer paperwork was processed and forwarded to the appropriate departments to complete class registration. Davina specifically stated, "She is just really efficient. I spoke to her over the phone several times to get my admission materials and registration straight. I just met her in person this semester." James and Ted showed agreement through nodding gestures and statements describing how the transfer credit coordinator's professionalism and knowledge about the campus policies eased their transition into the campus environment. Programs such as bridge programs, articulation agreements, and cooperative partnerships are efforts commonly used to facilitate the successful transfer of students into new college settings. However, King (2009) argued that these services should be used in tandem with support from individual advisors and staff to ease the transfer admissions process.

The students also revealed that their perspectives on diversity improved and that their lives had been enriched as White students attending a public HBCU. Specifically, the students discussed the impact of race on their daily interactions on campus. They

exhibited a high level of comfort discussing race issues by openly sharing how some of their views prior to attending GCU were premature and influenced by individuals and communities that did not value diversity. When students were asked if they believed their race influenced their level of engagement, the responses varied. Ted appeared to ignore people if they did not want to interact with him because of race.:

> I've never really looked at a person as far as race and never really cared about their personal issues. For the most part I guess I am here to get business done. If I'm in a class and someone doesn't truly like talking cause I'm White, then I will just talk to somebody else, but as far as those confrontations I really haven't had the problem either way. It's been fairly easy.

In contrast, Davina and James believed that engagement depended upon the people involved and that the extent of engagement is often a result of other students' wanting to interact and the nature of the environment:

> It just depends on the circumstance, the people. Sometimes it's probably easier because somebody wants to reach out to you. Like we want to make sure we don't leave her out because she's the only White person in here. Then of course, there are times when you run into someone who doesn't want anything to do with you and there's no apparent reason (Davina).

> I guess on a personal level engaging with the other race, like in high school, just didn't really bother me. I just kind of kept to myself and had a few friends. But being here it's like you almost don't have a choice and at the same time you just need to go with the flow and accept it (James).

In general, the students indicated that they did not have problems engaging but how they engaged depended on factors such as the people, the environment and location, and most importantly, their comfort level and perceptions of individuals. Davina and Ted mentioned during the focus group and individual interviews that certain aspects of the GCU campus can be intimidating as a temporary minority coupled with being new to the environment. As Davina stated:

No doubt! The first time I walked into the cafeteria, it takes a second. I was by myself and knew nobody. It would be that way regardless of race, but the race just added to it a little bit because I literally knew no one. It made it [engagement and adjusting to campus] a little bit harder and then we got the age difference which adds to it, but I don't know, it's hard to explain.

Chang (1999) examined the educational benefits associated with having a racially diverse student body. Study findings revealed a racially diverse student body has a positive effect on educational outcomes through diversity-related interactions and experiences. Conversely, the author noted the possible limitation that the widespread benefits of diversity may not be the same for all student groups. Chang recommended that "researchers should consider how the impact of a racially diverse student body might vary across racial groups or across other high-stakes categories such as gender or socioeconomic level" (p. 393). The campus diversity on the GCU campus is increasing but the student body remains predominately Black. The focus group participants may be able to manage diversity experiences or interactions, positive or negative, based on their age and status as temporary minorities. As Smith and Borgstedt (1985) suggested, "the Black college offers a unique situation for research in race relations for its social climate is exactly reverse: black-in-charge, white-as-subordinate" (p. 12). However, for White commuter, nontraditional students like Davina, Ted, and James, this role and climate changes when they leave campus as their roles convert back to the dominant racial majority.

Perceptions of White Students at Gulf Coast University

The perceptions White students had about themselves varied based on personal experiences and perspectives of each participant. Although students perceived

themselves as part of the campus community, a few students reported instances of isolation and discrimination. Students also expressed that there are stereotypes associated with being a White student on an HBCU campus, such as being affiliated with an athletic team.

Corey and Ralph, both sophomore baseball players, inferred that they are often approached by their peers and asked if they play sports for the university. When asked how Black students perceived them on campus, Corey stated, "Honestly, just another White kid playing sports. I mean, that's the best summary I could think of because I have heard that…if you are a White kid here, you either play sports or you are in the marine biology program."

Data from the participant observation notes also supported this finding. I was able to observe two baseball practices. From the bleachers, there were approximately 26 students on the practice field, 10 appeared to be White students by their skin complexion. Three of the players were the students (Corey, Ralph, and Fred) I interviewed earlier in the semester.

Students often characterized their status as White students with phrases such as "it's like experiencing the different side" or "it's the flip side of what Black students go through at predominately White institutions." Davina felt her experience as a student at GCU was valuable and a commodity other Whites would not share with her in the larger society and work world:

> Yeah, but I'm not typical. One of the coolest things I could take away from Gulf Coast State is being able to have an experience that I know most White people will not get to have, and even if they do, probably appreciate it because I feel how I appreciate it is from every angle. From what a Black student goes through to what it feels like being on the other side and what they get, my friends, get to go

through or learn by seeing me or getting to know me in a manner where they feel like I'm equal versus when they probably don't feel like there's an equality outside for Black people.

When asked how Black students may perceive him as a White student, Brett expressed confidence in himself and his frustration with White individuals who attempt to portray or assume an identity that is not their own:

> It's kinda hard for me to say. I don't like folks that self-promote or like, "I'm real", I embrace who I am. I'm confident in who I am and people see that and they accept that. One of my biggest problems about a lot of White people that go and try to be Black, I mean have a major issue with that because most of the time what they're trying to be is an image of African Americans that is stereotypical, is what you see on TV. If you're trying to be Black, that's really an insult, in speaking a certain way, wearing your clothes a certain way. It's like, is that what it means to be Black, to be unable to speak, wearing your pants down around your knees, disrespectful to everyone? It's an image that is ugly and what's that say about the individual that fakes that image or what have you? It's like be yourself and people will accept you regardless.

Shelia and Fred discussed isolation and reservation to engage in conversations around racial identity in and outside the classroom setting. Fred, who described himself as an active class participant in high school, reported reservations about being as vocal in the classroom as a White student. Shelia referred to a debate she overheard between two African American students about the Obama campaign and expressed her reluctance to voice an opinion or interject in a conversation due to her race:

> I remember the election, when it was getting close, there's a computer lab in the Business School where you can have Internet and print and all that sort of stuff and it's just open to anyone in the Business School. And a lot of times people would go in there and they would be talking about it and when it got really close they would start arguing about it. I mean I was just sitting there doing my work, I wasn't involved, I didn't want to get involved because I was the only White person in the room, I'm not gonna say anything. It got pretty tense and they'll yell, sometimes they would yell racially inappropriate comments at each other. It just kind of made me feel uncomfortable at times. Nothing I was really ever involved in.

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Fred was candid with his expressions regarding being a White student on a public historically Black university campus. He stated, "Being a White student at a Black college it's kind of intimidating to talk sometimes in college, but I've always been a talkative person so once I get in the class and I get the feel for everything I'll turn around and talk to somebody I've never met before."

Davina reported that she had experienced racial discrimination but it had been subtle instances such as being stopped by the security gate on a regular basis despite the fact that she has a university decal on the car and being treated poorly by the custodial staff. In reflecting on being stopped regularly at the gate, she stated, "It is nothing to make a big deal about, it is just so weird to experience this [discrimination] from this angle." She also acknowledged her privilege as a White woman in some instances on campus but believed her race can also be a barrier to more engagement. Davina also referenced how she is singled out in classes because she is White. Her exact statement was, "As the only White student in several of my classes, the professors always know when I am late and when I am not there." White male HBCU students in Peterson and Hamrick's (2009) study associated their hypervisibility with discomfort in the classroom. Hypervisibility is a term associated with racial spokesmanship roles or feelings of standing out due to characteristics, such as race. In Davis et al. (2004) study, Black students on a White college campus used this term to express their experiences of "being noticed or not being noticed, wholly as a result of being Black" (p. 434). Instances of hypervisibility or invisibility can impact students' engagement in the classroom and on campus.

When asked about feelings of isolation, Ted admitted attending GCU has been a culture shock for him but not in a negative way. He explained culture shock through examples like attending a step show during homecoming and walking across campus to the student center. He compared his feelings walking across campus to the reactions people generally have when they see a bright yellow car. Ted stated, "It's kind of like driving down the road. You see a yellow car, you kind of look at it and say "oh crap!, there's a yellow car." just because it's something different. You're not gonna hit the car, you just give it a lot of attention because it is different."

Finally, Larry believed the campus has not fully embraced the presence of a minority, non-Black population on campus. Although GCU is a predominately Black setting, Blacks are still considered minorities. Larry discussed his experience inquiring about a scholarship for students pursuing a major in science, technology, engineering and math:

> There's a program in the engineering department and it's kind of a scholarship thing like you get laptops out of the program and they give you I guess money here and there. So I qualify. Like I said, my department does not have that many people with a GPA above a 3.0. So I went over there like, 'Hey, I'm interested' and the lady told me –cause I know it's for minorities and she's like, 'Well it is, but it's primarily for African Americans,' I'm like, 'Well okay' and I walked away and left it at that. I got pretty used to being one of the only non-Black people at these events. Whatever event it is if I go up I always got friends there.

The students' self-perceptions as White students were shaped by their pre-college experiences, especially childhood, lived experiences as maturing adults and their interactions with other students on campus.

Summary

The GCU participants included a diverse group of students with varying degrees of pre-college experiences, perceptions of race, and engagement on campus. The students' characteristics such as age, academic major, and precollege experiences varied as well. The students' age range was 19-35 and the mean age was 27. Five students transferred from community colleges or a four-year institution. Three students were members of the baseball team and two were members of the Navy ROTC unit. Only one student lived on campus at the time of the individual interviews. Finally, four students received full scholarships or partial grant aid. The remaining students funded their education with family support, personal funds, or student loans.

In summary, the following findings resulted from the GCU data collection and were identified as factors influencing the engagement of students on this particular campus:

- High and frequent interaction with GCU faculty and staff influenced the engagement of student participants. Through interactions in the classroom and individual conversations regarding class performance and prompt feedback on collaborative projects, students were encouraged to be creative and think critically in the classroom setting. Further, student interactions with staff and key administrators, such as the university president began as early as the first day of orientation.

- Involvement in academic organizations and university-sponsored programs, such as the baseball team, also influenced the engagement of White students attending GCU. Students were primarily involved in academic or professional organizations linked to their academic majors.

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Through these entities, the students were afforded leadership opportunities and a forum to network with professionals in their respective fields. Programs such as the athletic teams and the Navy ROTC were also structures that enabled student engagement. Several students became more acclimated to the campus and aware of institutional resources through individuals coordinating these programs and mandatory volunteer requirements such as distributing programs at the annual homecoming game.

- Prominent aspects of student life, such as Greek life and first-year experience programs, were also a major theme drawn from the data collection. Every GCU student mentioned a Greek organization or member at least once during the individual and group interviews. In general, White students perceived Greeks to be influential on campus and representative of school pride. GCU also has a strong and clearly defined first-year experience program. The sophomore participants referred to their experiences with writing assignments, group projects, and community service as a result of the first-year seminar. Further, some juniors and seniors referred to their first-year seminar course as an impetus to become better acquainted with the campus life. In particular, the mandatory first-year seminar course and new student orientation were key aspects that resonated with students as they reflected on their engagement.

Other important observations from the GCU data collection included the students' willingness to reflect on their perceptions of Black students on campus and their own

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development as it relates to diversity and race relations. The students consistently discussed how the campus environment forced them to learn from others and to consider ideas from different perspectives. These experiences ranged from Ted's racial joke which caused tension within the NROTC unit to Sara's statement that she believed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Crispus Attucks were her heroes and ancestors just as they are to Black Americans. Further, the mandatory African American studies class introduced controversial topics and discourse surrounding race in the most recent presidential election. Some students were uncomfortable voicing their opinions while others invited the opportunity to share their views and have them challenged.

The findings in this chapter represent the complex process and nature of student development. These students realized and experienced engagement in various forms. Some students were engaged in tight-knit groups solely associated with single factors such as the Navy ROTC or an athletic team. Other students initially began their engagement within departmental organizations which eventually lead to increased engagement across campus. GCU was an institution that developed and offered opportunities for students to interact at different levels of the campus. Through mandatory courses, such as African American studies and the first-year seminar, faculty, staff and administrators gain the unique opportunity to introduce and emphasize the importance of engagement and enhancing intellectual growth through diverse interactions.

The next chapter presents the cross-case results between Heritage University and Gulf Coast University. Key similarities and differences among certain aspects of the campuses as well as the students' experiences will be compared. In particular, important

institutional and environmental factors such as campus size, landscape, and geographic

location will be analyzed as it pertains to student engagement.

Chapter VI

Cross-Case Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents findings and analysis depicting the factors that influenced

the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending Heritage University and Gulf

Coast University. The within-case findings and analyses presented in Chapters Four and

Five revealed the processes and conditions that occurred across both campuses.

Collectively, participants described the ways in which faculty-student interaction,

involvement in academic organizations and university-sponsored programs, and prior

diversity experiences influenced their engagement in academic and social settings.

Additionally, three other themes from the cross-case analysis emerged. The data

revealed that participants' self motivation, diversity within the White student population,

and institutional factors also influenced engagement. In this study, White students

balanced multiple roles and possessed characteristics germane to student athletes,

military veterans, and returning students. In several instances, the students described

experiences or perspectives indicating how those roles impacted their ability to engage on

campus. Institutional factors, such as available programs and resources, and the physical

campus landscape also influenced students' engagement. The students explained how the

campus location and environment can positively or negatively influence engagement.

The HU students discussed the challenges and benefits of the institution's urban location

(e.g., access to cultural events and other major cities, and issues associated with being an

open campus). GCU participants, on the other hand, referred to the intimacy of the

campus and the ability to more easily navigate through institutional processes such as course registration.

Further discussion looks at the impact of mandatory African American studies courses on engagement and participants' accounts of personal growth and enriched perceptions of race. Across both campuses, participants shared varying experiences within and related to the African American studies course setting. These experiences ranged from positive feelings of inclusiveness and freedom to engage in meaningful dialogue in the classroom, to negative experiences of isolation and alienation. Experiences regarding participants' personal growth and expanded scopes of other individuals, in terms of race, were also noteworthy and are explained in more detail later in the Chapter.

The results of this study were diverse and multi-faceted. HU and GCU participants reported both common and different factors that influenced the engagement of White students on HBCU campuses. In the Heritage University case, the data suggested that frequent faculty-student interaction, nontraditional student status, and barriers to engagement—or, institutional and environmental factors impeding participants' engagement inside and outside classroom—influenced students' participation on campus. In contrast, factors influencing the engagement of Gulf Coast University students included consistent and high faculty-student and staff interaction, participation in effective first-year programs such as freshman seminar and transfer student orientation, and active involvement in student organizations and university-supported programs, such as Navy ROTC and the university baseball team. These comparisons are further examined and studied next.

Participant Characteristics

A total of 22 students participated in the individual interviews and seven students participated in the focus group interview (i.e., four students from HU and three from GCU). There were 14 male and 8 female participants. Students with junior classification represented the majority of the group (10) and sophomores were the smallest group represented (3). Further, all the sophomore participants were enrolled at GCU. There was an even split in terms of age—11 participants aged 18-21 and 11 students were 22 years of age and over. Five students resided on campus and the remaining 17 resided off-campus. Fifteen students described their high schools as diverse and seven indicated that their high schools were not diverse. Eleven students transferred from either a two-year or four-year institution. The HU student sample represented the higher number of transfer students with seven participants. Table 7 provides a preview of select characteristics differentiating the student participants.

Thirteen students stated their parents attended college and nine indicated their parents did not attend any college. Fifty percent of the students received some form of financial aid through scholarships, state grants (often referred to as diversity grants), or support from external funding sources. The remaining students used loans to cover expenses or worked part-time or full-time to offset educational costs. Finally, the majors in which the students were enrolled varied on each campus and across institutions. However, more than one student was majoring in a science-related field such as marine biology and environmental science. There were also at least two or more students with majors in the field of communications and business.

Table 7

Select Characteristics of Focus Group Participants

Characteristics		HU	GCU
Total Sample		11	11
Sex			
	Males	7	7
	Females	4	4
Age			
	18-21	4	3
	22 and older	7	8
Transfer		7	5
Commuter		8	10
Returning		4	4
Military		3	3
College Choice (Top Reasons)			
	Location	4	2
	Major	2	3
	Special programs	0	4
	Low tuition	3	1
	History of Institution	0	2

Note: Some students possessed multiple characteristics (e.g., military, transfer, commuter)

Several observations and findings were evidenced from the document analysis, individual and focus group interviews, and participant observation notes suggesting factors that influence engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. Respondents openly shared their experiences and discussed how they participated in classroom settings and within the overall campus environment. The findings below are themes developed through the words and concepts expressed most

frequently and consistently throughout all the interviews and thus resulted in three main

identified themes across both institutional sites. Those themes are: high faculty-student

interaction, exposure to diverse communities and people prior to college, and

involvement in student organizations or university-sponsored programs.

Faculty-Student Interactions

Across both campuses, students reported strong faculty-student interaction as a

primary factor that influenced engagement. Students consistently shared how they

perceived faculty members to be highly competent and able to challenge and engage

them in classroom settings. Faculty members were often described as individuals who

encouraged involvement in departmental student organizations (e.g., accounting

association, business club) and provided recommendations for internship and research

opportunities. Gulf Coast University students reported how their positive relationships

with faculty inside the classroom led to even stronger relationships outside the classroom

where faculty became mentors and friends.

Cox and Orehovec (2007) argued that "faculty-student interaction is an essential

component of the college experience" (p. 343). Strong faculty-student relationships and

contact have been extensively documented in the literature and positively-linked to

students' academic growth (Nagada, Gregerman, Jonides, von Hippel, & Lerner, 1998;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Terenzini and Pascarella, 1980). Previous studies on

White student matriculation at HBCUs revealed to some degree that White students

reported strong relationships with faculty and an adequate comfort level participating in

in-class discussions and with faculty outside of the classroom (Abraham, 1990; Conrad,

et al, 1997; Hazzard, 1989). The student engagement literature has also suggested that

frequent contact and interaction between faculty and students has a direct correlation to increased student retention and academic performance (Alexitch, 1997; Anaya & Cole, 2001; Astin, 1993; Cokley et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008).

Although the GCU students demonstrated stronger relationships with faculty and more interaction, all of the participants referred to their interactions with faculty and shared how they felt the faculty members were knowledgeable, competent, and available to address questions about coursework or grades. Further, students provided rich examples about the relationships they developed with faculty as mentors and friends outside of the classroom setting. Overall, the students expressed that the faculty cared about students and demonstrated their care inside and outside the classroom. Brett commented on one faculty member who has been at the university for more than 20 years and is planning to retire:

> She really cared about the students. She pushed the students and held them to a higher standard, which a lot of times is lost and you can tell when the professor mean she's been here 20-something years I think, 26 years at this university, so I mean there's a lot of people that she's touched.

The faculty was credited for being a great resource for internships and research opportunities and others mentioned faculty members' encouragement for students to pursue graduate education as well. When I asked the students if they felt comfortable approaching faculty members for a recommendation, the responses were overwhelmingly positive with the exception of students who were sophomores at the time of the interview. Faculty members served as conduits in strengthening students' writing and critical analysis skills through academic work and capstone projects, such as senior seminar papers and independent study. In response to questions concerning time needed and

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spent on coursework as well as the level of academic challenge, students described the work as challenging and often times believed the knowledge they acquired would benefit them in the workplace or in graduate programs.

In the context of HBCUs, studies have indicated that faculty, and particularly Black faculty, are motivated by a strong sense of purpose (Willie, Reddick & Brown, 2006) and committed to serving as role models, educational liaisons to the community, and mentors for students (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Further, for Black students in particular, HBCU faculty have been reported to have a positive influence on their academic performance and motivation to succeed. Fries-Britt and Turners (2002) examined Black student academic experiences at HBCUs and PWIs. In that study, students reported they made meaningful connections with faculty and were energized by such interactions. This definitely appeared to be the case for White students attending HU and GCU. These students viewed the faculty as interested in their capacity to learn and academic success. More importantly, faculty members were perceived as approachable and willing to assist with their academic growth and career aspirations. Faculty-student interactions were cultivated primarily through teaching and advising opportunities and exchanges in the classroom setting. In the classroom environment, students reported that courses, such as the mandatory African American studies class, provided an opportunity for increased learning about themselves and the perceptions of others. The impact and influence of the learning and discussions that occurred within this specific course will be discussed within the focus group interviews section.

Classroom engagement and student learning. Participants' responses to the level of academic challenge and rigor varied. The general sentiment expressed was that

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the difficulty of classes and assignments largely depended on the professor and the content of the course. However, more often than not, students reported a substantial amount of time was spent on preparing and completing major assignments such as seminar papers and group projects and presentations.

Sara described the teaching faculty as highly competent and very good at class instruction. She also spoke extensively about the complexity and tenacity of her course work assignments. On a scale of 1-3, with three recognizing the most difficulty, she designated a 3 to the difficulty of capstone homework assignments. She stated, "My papers this semester, they were really hard, but I spent a lot of time on my paper, and the group projects they were not too hard." Other students also described their coursework as very challenging and specifically discussed the number of pages written for final projects and papers. Gary, a junior political science, discussed how he thoroughly enjoyed his African Diaspora class and was challenged by the assignments given by the professor:

> It was in the African Diaspora class and we had to read a book about any kind of experience dealing with the Diaspora…He gave the assignment to be something like 7-10 pages and I went through there and just going through all the chapters and stuff. I had to talk to him before I turned it in and I said, "I'm gonna be over the limit on your book report here" and he said, "It doesn't matter. I don't care how many pages your report is. Just turn it in." His biggest concern was just to get people to reach the minimum 'cause many students for 7 pages they'll turn it in and it'll be 6.25, so I turned my paper in and I had over 20 pages and he was really impressed with the work and effort that I put into it and I got a really good grade out of that. For the rest of the class he knew that I was putting the time and effort into his class.

Brett, a senior political science major, rated the difficulty and complexity of his senior thesis paper as a 6 on a scale of 1-5 with five representing the most difficulty and complexity. For most classes, he admitted to putting in minimal effort and doing just

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enough to get by. However, for one particular course his previous approach to

coursework would not suffice and it was necessary to increase his time and effort to meet

the challenging demands of the assignments. Brett explained:

> For this class, I had to dig in. I mean I had to do everything on this one. My paper
> was just under 30 pages and I could've done probably 30 more. I had a classmate
> of mine, was in the 50 page range…This spring for the new senior seminar class
> they [the faculty] were using our papers as the examples, so it kind of made you
> feel good that for applications for grad school we could submit that be
> comfortable with that work we did to pretty much go anywhere and compete.

Seth explained how he initially had a part-time job at the beginning of his first semester

but had to make a decision to either focus on college or work. His major courses in

history required an inordinate amount of time:

> In history courses it's always a big paper at the very end. And most of the time
> you've been writing smaller papers throughout the course. And then you know
> that half way through you're gonna get assigned your major paper for the end, and
> it's gonna be anywhere from eight to twenty pages. And it's gonna take a lot of
> research. And so I would say I typically put in between 100 and 150 hours
> working on those.

Jeremy shared similar experiences and stated that the classes are very difficult and he has

to really organize himself during the end of the semester in order to do well. In fact,

based on a scale of 1-5, with 5 recognizing the most difficulty assignments and tasks, he

assigned such assignments an 8:

> I'd have to say probably an eight, because they are very – the end of the year is
> very, very tough. I know every single – every single end of the semester is
> always very stressful for me, because I feel like I'm not gonna do well, but I
> always – somehow I always manage to do fairly well in the classes when I finish.

Academic courses emphasizing and requiring writing have been linked to outcomes such

development in quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and

even ethical inquiry (Kuh, 2008). Research focused on the impact of intensive writing

suggested that some students have found intensive writing, as assignment and practice, to be effective as it relates to learning course content, a useful tool for becoming better writers and thinkers, and integral to the amount of feedback received from professors and peers (Hilgers, Bayer, Stitt-Bergh, & Taniguchi, 1995). In this study, students were challenged by the assignments to the degree they were often stressed. This of course could have been the result of several reasons including academic challenge or lack of time management. Nonetheless, students were immersed in the written assignments and in some instances, produced papers that they believed could serve as writing samples for graduate school applications.

The three students who were identified as sophomores also indicated that their homework assignments, writing assignments, and final projects were challenging. Fred, a sophomore business major rated his capstone assignments, on a scale from 1-5, with five identifying the most challenging of assignments, as a 4. Fred shared:

> I would say 4. We had to turn a portfolio in for a freshman experiences class that was like 35 pages long. We also had to do a history, research paper for a final, which is like a final/test grade and it was a paper on Ghandi, which was like I think 14-16 pages. That isn't the most interesting subject so it felt like you were writing like 40 pages.

First-year seminar courses as well as courses linked to learning and living communities offer a forum for students to improve their writing and critical thinking skills. The courses specifically afford students the ability to focus closely on reading, work collaboratively in small groups, and write papers on a regular basis (Crissman-Ishler, 2003). These experiences expose students to the intricacies of college rigor and are valuable to students' academic careers and their selected fields of study.

It is important to note that all of the students indicated some preparation and time was necessary to complete assignments. This was true even for students like Davina, who described some of the classes as lax and faculty members subpar. She admitted that in some subjects, such as marine biology and organic chemistry, the classes are "as difficult or more difficult in comparison to other colleges that I'm familiar with." All students emphasized the importance of demanding coursework to facilitate a successful transition into the next phase of their academic programs and future careers.

Another important finding is the variance in academic challenge and demand students described across course offerings. In response to the questions about the academic rigor of coursework, 13 students stated the work was challenging but that in most instances, the degree of challenge depended on the nature of the course and the instructor. The students described rigorous courses as those where faculty articulated high expectations, creativity, and superior facilitation and instructional delivery. This finding is significant when some empirical studies have described HBCUs' academic curriculum as less challenging and rigorous compared to other predominantly White institutions (Foster, 2001; Fryer & Greenstone, 2007, Jencks & Riesman, 1967, & Sowell, 1972).

Pre-College and Prior Life Experiences

Pre-college and previous experiences in diverse environments and with diverse people were also prevalent themes reported by the student participants. Students, particularly those who indicated on the demographic survey that they attended very to somewhat diverse high schools, believed their experiences prior to college impacted their ability to transition and adapt as White students in an HBCU environment. Throughout

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the individual and focus group interviews, students made statements such as, "My high school was 50% Black and 50% White so this is not new to me," or "My best friends are Black and I get along with them." Other comments included "I grew up in the military so being around Blacks and other ethnic people is not new for me."

Researchers have consistently found that pre-college factors such as students' demographics, academic preparation, skills, and attitudes influence their academic achievement and persistence in college (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Pre-college characteristics include "collective high school experiences, academic achievement, financial circumstances, and specific psychosocial experiences factors that are developed both in the home and school environment" (Arbona & Nora, 2007, p. 250). In addition to pre-college experiences, prior life experiences such as military service, and living in low-income housing, also contribute to a student's ability to transition and engage on campus (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

Most students suggested that they grew up in diverse communities as children or were exposed to other environments such as high school and extracurricular activities. This experience largely impacted their ability to become engaged on campus and interact with other students. Invariably, students made statements such as "I have also had Black friends," or "I have never had any problems with people from other backgrounds." Corey, a baseball team member, explained that his experience playing sports with Black students in high school assisted in his ability to engage on his HBCU campus. He stated, "I am accustomed to being the only White person on the team and in the classroom. My football team was predominantly Black so this is not a shock." "I have never had problems with them" were consistent phrases found throughout the individual transcripts.

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Participants indicated that their experiences prior to entering college were ones which

introduced them to diversity and prepared them to be open and sensitive to their peers

from different backgrounds.

The majority of GCU participants reported that they attended high schools with

diverse populations or they grew up in diverse communities so transitioning into the

HBCU college environment was less difficult. Thus, in many instances, students credited

their previous interactions with diverse peers for their ability to transition and acclimatize

into an HBCU environment. They indicated it was not as challenging as it may have

been for White students who had not had similar experiences. However, there were

students who did not attend diverse high schools or had not lived in diverse areas. They,

however, indicated they did not experience difficulty transitioning into the HBCU

environment either. Bradley, an HU senior telecommunications major expressed that the

community he grew up in was not necessarily diverse. He also implied that the way

White children treated him in middle and high school prompted his tendency to connect

with Black and non-White students throughout his educational career. Bradley stated:

> My neighborhood, probably not so much [diverse]…It's just my neighborhood
> started to become more diverse with people moving in, but growing up I was
> basically growing up with a cul-de-sac of White kids, just like me, playing, riding
> bikes, throwing rocks and basketball, hockey, whatever. I had one Black friend
> growing up, from elementary school. My middle school was probably 50/50 or
> 60/40, so it was a lot more diverse there. I was told – I used to tell some of my
> friends that's where I really kind of opened my eyes, you know. 'Cause I used to
> get made fun of all the time…Yeah, it always seemed to be the White kids
> making fun of me. So that's where like I kind of – I don't know what that did to
> me internally, I can't really say.

Seth, a senior history major attending HU, stated that his childhood community was not

very diverse. He grew up in a small town outside of Eau Claire, Wisconsin and the

diversity composition was not Black and White but White and Native American. Seth

recalled his interaction with Native Americans in the town:

> I mean, in school there were always Native American kids. And I got along with them very well. Actually, we have Native American blood in my family. But I just – I remember that I never had any issue with students who were different from me, whether it be students that were going to a different church or Native American or looked funny, as kids do in elementary, you know.

He further explained that although his childhood community was not visibly diverse, he

believed its residents were open to diversity. He also made friends with all students,

including two Black students who attended his high school. Brett, a GCU student, grew

up in a diverse community and suggested that his upbringing coupled with his military

experience was an educational experience in itself:

> I grew up on the south side of Atlanta in Clayton County, which I laugh because they've been in the national news as like the only school system to lose their accreditation, but that was ten years after I got out of the system. Yeah, but it was before it started going downhill, but it was very diverse demographic. It was Whites, Blacks, Asians. You name it, we had it at our school. Then also spending all the time I did in the military where I like to tell people the military is the Utopia of what American society should be. There may be that underlying negativity with a small population, but for the most part the opportunities for anyone of any background and the interactions outweigh those differences. So I just looked at it as just another day.

> Laura, a 47-year old architecture major from HU, also purported how her life

experiences prior to attending Heritage University had assisted with her transition.

During the individual interview, Laura commented that she is from Baltimore, Maryland

and had actually lived in housing projects as a young, single mother in her late 20s.

Through this experience, Laura explained that being around Black people or individuals

from other ethnicities was not anything new and she was able to adjust.

There is an emerging body of research exploring the impact and saliency of pre-college experiences and student characteristics on students' interactions with diverse peers and experiences in college. Hall (2009) found students who are predisposed to and have a history of engagement with diverse peers prior to entering college, are more likely to experience positive interactions with diverse peers once in college. In another study, Saenz (2005) argued that the exposure and the quality of students' interactions with diverse people in their pre-college environments may influence students' interactions once they arrive on campus. In Saenz, Ngai, and Hurtado's (2007) study exploring the factors promoting positive interactions across race for African American, Asian American, Latino, and White college students, Whites, who reported more studying and interacting with diverse peers prior to college, were more likely to report higher levels of positive interactions in college. Further, the researchers found that for all ethnic groups "the frequency and extent of interactions with diverse peers in high school appear to offer opportunities for students to have experiences and develop skills that make it more likely for them to engage diverse peers in college" (p. 32). These findings support the notion that participants in the current study may have, in fact, been able to effectively adjust and navigate the campus, especially as it related to diverse interactions, based on their pre-college experiences.

Involvement in Student Organizations

Another key factor identified across both sites was involvement in organized clubs and university-sponsored programs (e.g., band, baseball team). There were few participants who were engaged in activities and programs outside of organized groups and clubs, such as the university band, athletic teams, or departmental academic

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organizations. Only two subjects indicated they took their own initiative to join an organization and obtain a leadership position. The other students were either members of departmental organizations or actively participated in major community service outreach projects such as the March of Dimes.

Astin (1984, 1999) suggested that involvement is more than simply being a member of a student organization or attending class. Meaningful involvement is defined by students' engagement in both the classroom and co-curricular activities where relationships between students and staff are formed (Stewart, Kupo, & Davis, 2008, p. 14). Deep involvement through the participation in formal organizations and leadership positions has shown to be an effective means to facilitate integration into the campus environment and enable students' ability to develop a sense a belonging (Stewart, et. al., 2008).

In this study, eight participants were involved or recruited to the university through a sponsored program or club such as the baseball team or university band. Other students were involved in student organizations primarily related to their academic department or major such as the Association of Accountants, The Marine Biology Club, the Political Science Club, and the Social Work group. Primarily, when students were asked about their engagement or how they were engaged on campus, it was mainly through university-supported and departmental organizations. For instance, Jeremy, Jack, and Myles (HU participants) who were involved in campus-sponsored organizations, such as the band and pep squad, discussed how their friends encouraged them to join or how by virtue of their affiliation they experienced memorable events such as touring the country or possessing a feeling of pride and even safety as members. For

GCU participants, students such as Cynthia, who was only one of two White students in the national marine biology honor society, was elected as organizational queen for the homecoming coronation. This experience and involvement did not necessarily lead to Cynthia's involvement in other student organizations, but it did expand her social network and interest in joining other campus groups. The same was apparent for the three baseball players and two NROTC members attending GCU. Their engagement was largely connected and facilitated through these university-sponsored programs. In most cases, these particular students indicated that their participation was the only reason they had become acclimated to the campus.

James, a senior accounting major at GCU, expressed he had sought out many leadership and organizational opportunities on campus. He was interested in enhancing his resume and pursuing a student leadership position and campus involvement as viable ways to achieve this goal. James was probably the most engaged student within his academic department as well as on campus. He is the President of the Accounting Association, was appointed the SGA Treasurer for the 2009-2010 academic year, and the student ambassador for an executive exchange program coordinated out of the Business School. James reflected on his involvement:

> When I heard about the ambassador position at [research site], I was definitely not gonna let it pass me by. So I went ahead and found out that they didn't have a student ambassador and they went ahead and let me do that. I filled that position and my boss now sits on the committee and she invited me over and asked if I needed an internship. I didn't even ask for pay but she offered me that too.

Brett, Myles, and Jeremy also had substantial and significant involvement in activities and programs outside of the classroom and within the larger context of the university. Brett was the chapter president of a Black-Greek fraternity on campus and the

first White male to serve in the position in the 60 year history of the organization. Myles was involved in the band as well as a support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Jeremy was an active member of the popular modeling troupe, Fashion at HU (FAH), the Lacrosse intramural team, and the Live Squad, a volunteer pep squad for university athletic events.

Each student shared their experiences in the organizations and how it influenced their college experiences and growth on campus. Brett, a senior and president of his fraternity chapter, described how his involvement through the chapter has extended to strong relationships with fraternity members throughout the state:

> It's like there's only one person in this chapter that can go throughout this state and people know who he is, not as White member or other brother. People know who I am. I'm a district officer and from the minute I came into this organization people have embraced me, have accepted me. I mean that same mentality I had here at Gulf Coast in networking and knowing the right people and being able to get things done I can do in my fraternity also. I can call up the district director and try to get things done. I can call up people all throughout this district, all throughout the district, and be able to get things done because I make it a point to form those relationships.

Similarly, Jack's experiences were almost solely embedded in the activities associated with the university band, which is locally and nationally known. He did not receive a band scholarship, but joined on his own due the positive experiences he enjoyed as a band member in high school. As an HU band member, he was afforded opportunities to travel extensively throughout the country and perform. Most interestingly, Jack shared how his membership in the band enabled him to better cope with his sexual orientation as a gay male and deal with resentment from his family:

> Nonetheless, the organization for the LGBT community is not that big here, but in regards to support in the dorms and in band there was a multiplicity of people that were in the band that were part of the [LGBT] community. Until this day we still

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speak and we laugh about how we used to go from state to state on the band trips, and we would just leave, the whole band to go out and party and to the mall. We were all about going out to see what this world's about," you know? So support in regards to that, I always had some type of support, had some type of friendships that could understand. So that was always a fun aspect of the band.

Other students also discussed the importance of clubs and organizations. Myles discussed the importance of the hospitality club as a network for students to get internships and jobs after graduation. He explained how he had planned to transfer out of the university due to personal problems, but the department chair took time to encourage him and suggest he stick it out in the program and join the hospitality club. The club focuses mainly on networking and offers events to expose students to the myriad opportunities in the local and regional hospitality and tourism industry. As a result of his participation, Myles acquired a summer-long internship with a major hotel in Charlotte, North Carolina. The internship exposed him to all facets of hotel management including food and beverage services, concierge, accounting, and bell services. Finally, Jeremy discussed how his friends encouraged him to join FAH which sparked his interest to get involved in other organizations and clubs such as the lacrosse team and the Live Squad:

> It was individual initiative. Like with the lacrosse team, I discovered that because I played lacrosse in high school. I discovered there was a team on campus, so I sought that out. And for FAH, I was actually invited by a friend of mine, because a friend of mine was in FAH, and he was like, 'Hey, you should go try out. You'd be perfect for it.' So, I tried out and I enjoyed it. The same thing with the Live Squad when I was involved with the Live Squad. I was at a football game. It looked like fun, so I went and tried out for it.

In each of these examples, students shared their involvement in campus-wide organizations and described how they took their own initiative to join. In Jeremy's case, he noted that a friend encouraged him to join the student fashion group but it was still his interest that made him to remain in the group. This was not the case for Emily, an HU

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student, who shared that she only joined one particular campus group because of her

friends and later totally ceased participation due to her work and course schedule:

> In the beginning, my friends made me join the [faith based women's organization], which I was there for one semester. I came in, fall '07, so I was in that for a little bit. Sometimes, I come on campus the week of homecoming, not homecoming day. I've come to a couple of those events, but usually, as soon as class is over, I usually just go home and go to work, or do my work.

Holzweiss et al.'s (2007) study exploring the differences between academic and non-

academic organizations found that although students demonstrated different motivations

for deciding to participate in one type of organization over another, the reasons

underlying their persistence in the organizations were similar. This means that, in most

cases, the students felt their expectations of joining the organization were met. For

students such as James and Jack, their responses reflect that they were satisfied with their

organizational involvement for professional and personal reasons. James was able to

obtain a leadership position that would advance his career goals in business. Similarly,

Jack was able to continue his passion for music through the band. Additionally, he was

able to develop friendships that aided in coping with family issues as a result of coming

out as a gay male.

Some participants shared different experiences regarding engagement through

student organizations and sponsored programs. Two participants, Bradley, an HU student

and Shelia, a GCU student, both indicated organizational advisors strongly encouraged

them to join national organizations associated with their majors. Both organizations were

national associations established to increase the participation of African Americans in

fields such as accounting and journalism (i.e., the National Association of Black

Accountants [NABA] and the National Association of Black Journalists [NABJ]).

Bradley indicated costs prohibited him from joining. Shelia, however, indicated she

never joined because it appeared the group, NABA, was for Black students although the

students assured her race was not a factor:

> Yeah. I never joined. I felt kind of weird even though I could. They always
> encouraged me to join and stuff like that but there's other national associations
> that I joined.

Ralph also shared how functioning within the baseball team, outside of practice

and games, had it pros and cons. For him, the positive aspects of belonging to baseball

team were embedded in being around people with whom you share something in

common with. The negative aspect for Ralph however, was the pressure he often felt. He

noticed his listening skills and performance were better in classes where there were no

other team members. Ralph stated:

> Yeah, just like you would probably think that all the White people want to, you
> know, click together and take all their classes together, you know…but like I
> found that, you know, I am always pressured, you know, 'Let's not go to class'
> and then I say ok, 'We're not going to go'. He continued, 'So when it's just me in
> the class, I'm just like, you know there are no distractions'.

Research examining the impact of extra-curricular activities on college transition

and adjustment has indicated that those activities with high levels of structures and

involve regular participation schedules, and which are guided by a set of rules, have more

positive influence on student involvement. These activities, usually led by an adult or

authority figure, place emphasis on the development of one or more skills (Tieu, Pancer,

Pratt, Wintre, Birnie-Lefeovitch, Polivy, & Adams, 2009). This research definitely

informs the way in which students involved in the NROTC unit and on the baseball team

responded to the interview questions and described their interactions on campus.

Regularly, the students, who were all males, discussed how they attended academic and social programs as a group and even university events such as Homecoming.

These students seldom mentioned attending events alone or with friends external to the team or NROTC unit. The baseball team and NROTC are two highly structured programs that are led by an adult figure directing students to participate in designated activities and abide by a set of rules. The rules could include activities such as uniform standards and standard physical training times for NROTC members and practice schedules and volunteer activities for the baseball players. Such structure may be viewed as a form of forced, self-segregation that is not necessarily intentional or negative. The students are a part of a structured group, characterized by a set of norms and practices that promote engagement on campus collectively. Such organizations may be beneficial to the engagement of White students attending HBCUs as long as students do not lose their identity within these groups.

Active involvement often led to engagement through organizations for participants. This finding was particularly evident through the students' participation in the groups and organizations that required certain activities and functions. For example, GCU students involved in NROTC often expressed their engagement and participation on campus through statements such as "We" and "with the unit." They did not describe their engagement from an individual perspective but as a collective group. James and Jeremy are examples of students, who through their own initiative, became heavily engaged in activities outside the classroom. James took the initiative to become involved in the accounting department which led to his nomination as an officer with the Student Government Association. Jeremy became involved with the Live Squad his freshman

year. Although he admits not being as involved as a junior, he stayed connected by

volunteering for certain projects such as designing the organization's T-shirts. Other

students discussed their capacity and opportunities to get involved with campus-wide

activities such as step shows and socially oriented activities such as homecoming.

In sum, students' participation in university-sponsored programs and

organizations seemingly built confidence and provided a "gateway" for students to

explore other opportunities on campus such as community service. For GCU student

participants, in particular, community service was a venue for students to get involved on

and off campus. These activities enabled the students to become familiar not only with

the campus but also the individuals residing within the external campus community.

Community service was not as apparent in the data collected from HU participants. Jack

was the only student who mentioned being involved in a human rights community service

group but this agency was located in a major neighborhood near the city where HU is

located.

<p style="text-align:center">Additional Themes</p>

Three additional themes emerged from the cross-case findings. First, self-

motivation was embedded in the HU and GCU individual and group interviews, but not

as profoundly as the other themes. However, it was an important variable as students

approached their work and opportunities that may advance their careers after college.

The students also felt self motivation was essential to meeting new people and learning

different ideas. Second, students shared and reported experiences that reflected the

diversity among the White student participants in the study. Lastly, the strategies and

resources institutions offered to facilitate engagement were apparent but varied on each campus.

Self-Motivation

Participants in this student constantly used phrases such as "I am here to learn" or "I am older so my focus is different" or "I have paid my money and I must get a quality education." These statements convey the importance of academic achievement and the individual's responsibility to ensure their goals are met and achieved. The students also stressed the importance of self-motivation on their engagement and in becoming an integral part of the campus community. Students believed the availability of campus resources supported student engagement and one's ability to not to be engaged was by choice. That is, students indicated that connecting and conversing with other students on campus was the best way to be engaged on campus. The research literature has characterized motivation as complicated and complex (Collins, 2007). Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) inferred that motivation and self-regulation influence student learning and goal attainment. Collins (2007) explained that if students are motivated about a particular subject, they are more likely to begin and successfully complete assignments. Further, if students are successful completing an assignment, their confidence increases and they may be motivated to learn more.

In the current study, students' self motivation was most often propelled by interactions with faculty and involvement with clubs and groups. Student participants aged 18-21 years appeared to engage on campus through the participation of groups or via the motivation of another individual. Fred, a GCU baseball player, and Ted, a junior NROTC member, indicated they attended campus lectures and events outside the campus

primarily with members of the team or unit. Ted also admitted had he not been a part of

the unit he would not have known as much about the campus or be involved in activities.

Jeremy, an HU student, believed having friends or people to be a part of efforts to

become engaged makes it easier for White students on campus. He stated:

> It's all about who they know too, because you feel a lot more comfortable as a
> White student if you have friends with you when you go to do things, because,
> personally, I wouldn't join things if it was just me going by myself, 'cause I
> already feel like I stand out. Then I've got to join another group where I'm gonna
> stand out with somebody else, so it's having friends to go with you. Knowing
> people and being comfortable having a group there that you can fall back on.

> Student participants also reported that being able to "jump into" and take

advantage of the college experience was key to engagement and that taking initiative was

not an option but a necessity. There was a strong belief that students should not wait for

anyone to hold their hands to take advantage of all the resources available to them but to

seek them out and get involved. Sara, a junior public administration major, strongly

conveyed the importance of White students making the first step to get involved on

campus. She stated:

> Another thing, though too, is I think it's a responsibility of the White students.
> They have to probably make the first step. They need to get involved. They need
> to reach out and become part of it, and another thing is White students have to
> understand you to have to be Black or act Black to be involved…And I think if
> students will do that, if they will just take the first step and they themselves
> become more involved, that would probably be a good thing.

Shelia, a senior accounting major did not feel that being White should prohibit students

from getting involved in campus. In fact, she believed that the only major differences in

the way or amount of energy students devote to campus involvement may be based on

their residential status:

I don't think it has anything to do with ethnicity. I think it's just how involved people want to be. And how many connections they want to make and what sort of networking they want to do. I mean for the most part I don't see many racial barriers there in terms of activities and stuff. It may be different for somebody who lived on campus because there's a whole other culture there.

Brett, a GCU student, commented on the need to intentionally meet people because, as a nontraditional student, he was taking classes and then immediately going home. He recalled:

My first semester was here and gone, but as I started meeting more people I developed friendships and ended up spending a lot more time on campus to where by the time I ended this past semester I was always on campus, so it's rarely at home type deal. There was somewhat of a strategy, but it was fluid. Just kinda went with what presented itself.

Factors influencing students' motivation included their sense of the importance of excelling academically as well as completing college to advance their own personal interests and help their families. Also, several students were paying some portion, if not all, of their education. Therefore, time to degree completion was also a factor as well. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors also influenced their motivation to succeed academically and engage in the social aspects of campus. Bandura's (1986) philosophy of self-efficacy also appeared to be a force driving motivation for participants. Self-efficacy is defined by an individual's belief that he or she can succeed in specific situations. Usher and Pajares (2007) postulated that self-efficacy is influenced by students' previous experiences and by other people. In this study, more nontraditional and adult learners appeared to convey and demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy leading to increased motivation and determination to succeed in college.

Gary, an HU participant, offered further justification for his motivation to become involved and noted the lack of initiative he observed on the part of other students:

They really wanted me to run for an officer position. I put my own ideas into the group and I basically run through and I work with my own ideas that I bring to the group and I try to set up maybe one big event per semester, which so far none of it has worked. Last semester, we didn't have much time to get through with it and this semester it ended up falling through. That's really what I work on and didn't feel like I had the time to do something like the president or the vice-president. It seems that everybody has ideas, but nobody wants to do the leg work. I really felt like I don't have the time to take the good ideas that a lot of them I like, but then I would have to do a lot of the work for it.

Michelle approached the department chair in human resources management about revitalizing the student chapter of the Society of Human Resources Managers (SHRM). SHRM is a national organization devoted to providing premier services, through training and education, to professionals in the field of human resource management. When asked to describe her interactions with faculty and staff, she explained:

I definitely have, especially with my chairperson in the school of business because I came to him a few months ago and asked about the HR [Human Resources] Club on campus and why it was not active. I told him I would like to take the time and make it a project of mine and make it an active club.

Michelle's and Gary's individual initiatives to become involved in clubs and campus activities are important to note. In both cases, the students were not only involved and playing an integral role in organizing innovative programming and reactivating dormant organizations, but also they perceived this a possible means to expand their networking opportunities and obtain internships. Michelle was specifically seeking to expand her professional network and Gary's efforts resulted in a summer internship with the State Senate. Again, the self-motivation displayed by these students was influenced by their interest in enhancing their future career endeavors.

Diversity Within the White Student Population

White students participating in this study possessed characteristics and roles that made them distinctive from each other. Fifteen students identified as nontraditional and adult learners. Nontraditional students include students who work full-time (35 hours or more), have dependents, experience delayed enrollment into college, or are financially independent similar to characteristics of participants in other research (Choy, 2002 as cited in Gohn & Albin, 2006). Seven participants indicated they had been previously enlisted in a branch of the military or were members of military families. Additionally, these students were largely commuter and transfer students. Eighteen students commuted to and from campus daily and twelve students transferred from a community college or four-year university. In fact, some students had attended multiple institutions, maintained full-time jobs, and decided to return to college full time to complete their undergraduate degrees.

Transfer students. The majority of the students participating in the study were transfer students, having transferred from a community college or another four-year college or university. Participants native to the research sites as well as those who were transfer students expressed some similar, but also differing experiences as White undergraduates attending an HBCU. Interestingly, participants believed the challenges they faced were predicated more on other factors such as age and maturity, and less on their transfer status. For instance, several participants indicated they were not as involved or engaged outside of the classroom setting due to multiple life roles or family and work obligations. Similar outcomes have been reported in other studies (Banning &

Hughes, 1986; Jacoby, 2000b; Wilmes & Quade, 1986 as cited in Silverman, Aliabadi, and Stiles, 2009).

Transfer students, in particular, face challenging adjustment issues and are less likely to engage in high-impact activities (NSSE, 2007). Further research studies have documented other challenges transfer students encounter at both two- and four-year institutions. For instance, in four-year institutional settings, transfer students are often grouped with new freshmen and receive minimal support with regard to their unique advising and residential needs (Swing, 2000). Moreover, results from the 2008 NSSE Survey revealed that senior transfer students viewed their learning environments as less supportive, and compared to their peers, did not participate in high-impact activities such as student-faculty interaction, collaborative learning activities, and educational enriching practices. The report suggested these students could have "missed out on some early experiences in their college career that facilitate engagement and connection with the institution" (NSSE, 2008, p. 15) and that institutions should be intentional about engaging these students, particularly with academic departments and their associated clubs and organizations.

Interestingly enough, the participants in this study who were transfer students were extremely involved in their respective academic departments and clubs and organizations associated directly with the department. For example, Gary, an HU political science major and transfer student from a community college, was heavily involved in the Political Science Association club and attempted to organize a political debate between representatives of the Democratic and Republican parties. James, a GCU accounting major and four-year college transfer student, was the president of the

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accounting club and recently appointed as treasurer of the student government

association. The participants did not convey that it was extremely complex or impossible

to navigate each college campus, but that it was difficult due to the lack of organization

and information. Students mentioned how the lack of or poor organization of new

student orientation made adjusting to the campus difficult at the beginning of their

matriculation on campus. This was more so apparent in the experiences of HU student

participants.

Student veterans. The seven student participants who had been enlisted in a

branch of the military prior to attending college or were from military families conveyed

that they were more mature and focused than traditional-aged, non-military students. The

peer debriefers for this study also highlighted this characteristic during the triangulation

process. Two debriefers felt that students with military experience would be more open

to diversity due to exposure to diverse populations and forced immersion into

multicultural environments through various military duty assignments. One peer

debriefer especially noted "the students at Gulf Coast University, particularly those who

were nontraditional and enrolled in the university's NROTC program, had a leg-up.

Their military experience alone introduced them to diverse cultures and people that your

average freshman or sophomore may not have yet been privy to. These students came in

equipped with more."

In this investigation, students with a military background were grateful to the

military for providing support to return to college and improve their lives for themselves

and their families. More specifically, participants believed that their military experience

exposed them to diversity and therefore transitioning into a majority Black environment

as a White student was not overwhelming or imposed some sort of culture shock. Larry, a GCU senior engineering major, stated that the military introduced him to diversity and taught him how to interact with people from different backgrounds. He also stated that his participation in the GCU's NROTC program has advanced his understanding of diversity and ability to interact with students on campus. Larry described that NROTC members are forced to interact:

> I definitely helped with diversity, not really diversity but to show that a non-African American student can really be a part of the university. ROTC helped with that a lot 'cause I was forced to interact with certain individuals and build those connections and a lot of people I guess were kind of stand-offish towards non-African American students, but because I'm required to talk to them they have to get to know me at some level, and I'm a decent guy. I'm real. So they benefited by that I believe if anything my involvement.

Ted, a junior marine biology major and a member of the NROTC unit, also believed his involvement in the program enhanced his transition to campus as a student veteran. Similar to Larry, Ted felt that without the GCU NROTC program, he would have been more reclusive and less engaged in campus life:

> I mean being in the unit has actually helped me become more open with people on campus because you are dealing with people on a daily basis. They put you in situations where you are doing concessions, you're doing parking for special events where you gotta deal with that kind of thing and make sure you grow up.

Seth, an HU senior history major, and Michelle, believed their military experiences not only exposed them to diversity and understanding, but also augmented their ability to focus and succeed as students. Seth received funding from a GI Bill, which, combined with other financial support, allowed him to focus solely on school and not work during his matriculation. Michelle felt she was more mature and able to handle complex

situations and able to multitask projects due to her military experiences. Brett, a GCU

senior, agreed with Michelle's sentiments and commented:

> Sometimes I wonder, but I have to thank my military background and to be able
> to multi-task and be able to take on more than you think you can handle and not
> being overwhelmed by it. I think also being an older student that helps. To be
> honest, nothing here was life and death. It's enjoyable. You go into work and you
> just keep it moving.

Military service, as a precollege experience, influenced the degree to which these

White students became engaged on a public HBCU campus. Although such experiences

were not pervasive from all the student participants, the discussion and reference to the

military emerged to a degree that it could not be ignored during the analysis. In

particular, returning students who had served in a branch of the military felt they were

more experienced and mature than traditional students. For example, a student

participant from DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell's (2008) study, who served in the

Marines, suggested that due to his exposure to diverse cultures and leadership positions,

he was more mature than most students in his classes. Specifically, he noted:

> Most [students] kind of whine over nothing. They don't really know what it is to
>
> have a hard time . . .They don't have people screaming at them to get things done
>
> at three in the morning. They sit in a sheltered dorm room and do homework. It's
>
> not too hard. You hear people complaining and you're just like, why are you
>
> complaining? (p.87)

Other participants in DiRamio et al.'s (2008) study reported finding support with

members of Greek organizations on campus. One participant indicated that students

understood his situation as a veteran and returning student and really embraced him. This

connection to a Greek organization is particularly relevant to this current study. Brett, the

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only White student who was a member of a Greek organization and Larry, a member of

the NROTC, whose interest to join a Greek organization was influenced by his member,

had both had previous military experience. Their affinity or desire to join these

organizations may have been related to increasing their sense of belonging or identifying

a peer group that could imitate or model the experiences they had within their respective

military units.

  Commuter students. The students' commuter status somewhat impeded their

ability to become more fully immersed and involved in activities outside of the

classroom. However, it did not appear to impact their willingness or ability to interact

with faculty and staff within designated units. The research literature has emphasized

that nontraditional students, particularly those who commute, have fewer opportunities to

meet with faculty members during office hours (Choy, 2002; Kortesoja, 2009). In this

study, commuter students' interactions were high and consistent with faculty, particularly

those within their specific academic majors. Consistently, these students discussed how

faculty and staff, such as academic advisors, assisted with reconciling issues with major

service units (e.g., billing, bursar's office) as well as provided direction on their career

goals.

  Students' commuter status, however, did hinder their ability to participate in

activities held in the late evenings or campus-wide programs on the weekends. For HU

students, in particular, participants frequently stated that they tried to accomplish their

daily tasks and business prior to leaving campus. The students conveyed that it is

difficult to come back to campus for events and programs due to distance or congested

traffic. In the pilot study, Jackie, an on campus resident, was more aware and involved in

campus activities. In fact, she participated and was crowned the winner of one of the

campus's Black Greek fraternities' pageants.   On the other hand, Katherine, who lived

off campus, was not aware of social activities and more involved in activities associated

with the new student orientation and admission offices for recruitment purposes.

Influence of Institutional Factors on Engagement

There were obvious differences reported with regard to the institutional campus

environment and available resources. For instance, a key finding from the HU students

was barriers to engagement which included gaps in receiving information from the

university and possessing a sufficient knowledge of the campus resources available for

students. This was not the case for GCU participants. GCU students were

knowledgeable of campus services such as student support services, writing centers, and

computer labs. Further, even if GCU students elected not to participate in certain campus

programs such as homecoming celebrations and athletic events, they knew when and

where those events took place. Students' responses also indicated that the physical,

campus landscape influenced engagement. Specifically, HU participants shared how the

location of the institution within an urban environment can be a distraction to navigating

the campus and participation outside the classroom.

Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) introduced a theory of reciprocal engagement,

suggesting that "students take active steps to become involved in their campuses, but

campus communities must embrace their students in their diversity, particularity, and

uniqueness" (p. 334). The essence of this theory was articulated through some of the

study participants' perceptions, on the GCU campus in particular, that the campus

community acknowledged the presence of White students and embraced them in the

overall university, family experience. Supportive campus environments is the fifth

benchmark assessed within the NSSE survey. As a benchmark, it is described as

collegiate environments that demonstrate commitment to students' success through the

cultivation of positive working and social relations among different groups on campus

(Kuh, 2009). Such behaviors may be realized through the quality of relationships with

other students, faculty, administrative personnel, and offices and an environment that

assists students with coping with non-academic responsibilities such as family and work

responsibilities.

Based on Kuh's (2009) definition of supportive campus environments, HU and

GCU both possessed characteristics of and facilitated practices to engage students on

campus. For example, Laura, an HU senior architecture major, mentioned how she

appreciated her institution's flexibility in allowing her to bring her grandchildren to class.

For all the participants, when asked if faculty or staff encouraged them to get involved or

attend an event, they all responded positively suggesting that it was common for faculty

and staff to remind students of a lecture or an event taking place on campus. Further, two

HU students, Myles and Emily, both shared how faculty and staff assisted them with

resolving academic and personal issues by directing them to the appropriate resources.

Myles specifically shared how he was in the process of making a decision to transfer to

another institution, but remained at HU because of support he received from the band and

support from the hospitality club. Emily talked about student affairs professionals, such

as the student government association advisor, as someone she could always talk with

and gain support from. Thus, the majority of participants, described the HBCU campus

environment as a supportive campus environment, as defined by Kuh (2009).

Fleming et al. (2005) argued that institutional factors such as size, type (private, public, liberal arts, research), and curriculum offerings shape an institution's characteristics and have a significant impact on the students within the campus environment. The authors further postulated that the institution's climate or the psychological or cultural feel also influence the relationship between the environment and the students. For instance, HU is an urban institution with a large commuter population. The HU students discussed how the open campus environment is both positive and negatives. Seth, a senior history major, indicated this during his interview:

> See, I think it's difficult here because we're an urban setting at [research site]. And even with the Black students, it's really difficult. From what I've seen and heard, to get them interested and engaged in kind of campus activities because there's so much going on outside the campus. The city has so many things to offer, and the other major cities are close by. So there's a lot to do, and I think that makes it a lot harder. When you take a place like Hampton University, for example, they've got great student activities going on all the time, but it's because there's not a huge city right there.

Seth's comments suggest that the location and campus climate do not foster students' ability or desire to become involved on campus. Major streets and residential communities are a part of the university setting. Students commented that there are several people on campus who are not affiliated with the University; this posed safety issues for participants. Seth also added that attending a university in an urban environment has major advantages because of all the cultural events available. Research has suggested that urban institutions, like HU, are in unique positions because urban environments offer opportunities to foster active and collaborative learning and capitalize on external resources, such as museums, major social centers, and libraries to create

opportunities for students (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). Seth inferred that the HU

administration could do more to utilize the social capital available in the city:

> Like I said this is such a great city for having museums of all different sorts. And
> there are so many different interesting things here. And I think if you could get
> little groups of students from each department that were interested that would go
> as a group to these different things, you may not be doing things on campus, but
> at least you're building that campus community and taking it outside.

Kezar and Kinzie (2006) studied 20 institutions to examine approaches to student

engagement by exploring differences by mission. One of the key findings from their

study was that the "individual, distinctive mission of a campus appears to impact more

policy and practices related to student engagement and success than the broad

institutional mission related to institutional type (yet there is no way to tell if prevalence

leads to it being more effective)" (p.169). GCU is a mid-size liberal arts institution

located in a suburban area. GCU also has a smaller undergraduate enrollment than HU

(3,169 students compared to a little more than 6,000 students). The institution's mission

also alludes to the importance of scholarship, service, educating students for a globally,

competitive society and adding value to the local region through these efforts. Further,

GCU offers a well-structured and organized first-year experience and orientation program

as well as living and learning communities to assist students with college transition and

enhance engagement. Although HU administrators have discussed the implementation of

a first-year initiative to achieve goals similar to those articulated in the GCU program,

there is no first-year experience program in place. Thus, GCU's mission shapes its

institutional approaches to being an engaged institution.

Focus Group Interview Comparisons

The data collected from both focus group interviews were also analyzed to identify similar and different trends and the emergence of new themes. The focus group interview protocols were developed to reflect themes and issues that emerged from the individual interviews. Therefore, the questions were not the same for both interviews. For HU students, the barriers to engagement theme was explored more during the focus group interview. With the GCU focus group, specific attention was placed on their pre-college experiences and the impact of the Obama and McCain presidential campaign on campus. The common experiences shared by all student participants were their experiences in the mandatory African American studies classes; engagement and involvement on campus through interactions with students from ethnic backgrounds; similarities in the perceptions of campus diversity; and the reported difficulty of academic coursework, especially capstone experience projects, final papers, and final exams. Finally, the status of nontraditional students also played a significant role in the engagement of students. Invariably, the students with nontraditional characteristics stated an interest in being involved, but were not able to due to prohibitive factors.

The dominant themes that emerged from the focus group interviews were: (1) experiences and new perspectives gained from the African American studies course, and (2) the personal growth and maturation as a White student attending a public HBCU. An analysis of these two themes is presented in this next section.

African American Studies Courses

Each institution required all students to take an African American studies course as a part of the general education curriculum. On the HU campus, the course was entitled

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the African Diaspora and on the GCU campus, the course was called the African American Studies course. Ten student participants were required to take the course whereas 12 participants satisfied the requirement prior to transferring into the universities. Within the African American studies classes, some students felt they were uncomfortable sharing their views or raising their hands at times. However, they still found the course to be informative and essential to shaping their views on the impact of race and class in society. In instances where students encountered a negative experience, they augmented their statements with how they learned from those experiences as well. The students, in most cases, commented on the faculty member's ability to balance the class discussion to ensure there was a forum of respect and safety for students to share their views and perspectives.

The discussion of the African American studies courses was mentioned throughout responses from the individual interviews. For instance, some students referred to the course when discussing academic rigor and collaborative group assignments, while others referenced the course when speaking of faculty interaction. During the focus group interviews, when the question was intentionally posed, the participants reported mixed experiences. In general, the students described the class as valuable and understood why the university would require a course for all students. However, the differences were evident in what the students experienced inside the classroom.

Cynthia and Sara, GCU student participants, experienced confrontations with Black students based on a comment they made around a discussion on slavery or political issues in America. Cynthia had a confrontation with a Black female student after a class

discussion during the third week of the semester. Sara reported being yelled at by

another student in class for stating an opposing view about the Obama and McCain

campaign. Sara explained:

> I just remember once when we were talking about Obama and I had said, during
> class discussion, I just think he has too little policies. And a girl said, "Well, that's
> just because you're White!

Sara, like several of the students, shared their experiences in an African American studies

or African Diaspora class and their feelings of awkwardness, despite their level of

confidence.

Cynthia experienced a more intensive confrontation, where a Black female

student approached her regarding a comment she made in the African American studies

course. She explained:

> It was African American History-because I knew that the content of the class was
> such a 'this is what happened in history because of White people'. And I'm a
> White person, and I'm in the class by myself as the only White person, so I really
> felt like people were looking at me like I was the one who did this kind of thing-
> you know, that's what I felt like. It was a difficult class for me to take. But again,
> I'm a very participating person, and I tried to make it known that I was trying to
> learn about your history…So this girl came up to me after and she was like, 'I
> don't know who you think you are.' You know she just got in my face. And I
> looked at her and I said, 'I don't know who you think you are, but you can't
> intimidate me'. And I told her, 'You might be smarter than me. You're prettier
> than me. You're more educated than me. But you're not going to intimidate me. I
> am who I am. If you don't like it, you don't got to talk to me. I am who I am. If
> you don't like it, you don't got to talk to me.' And she was like, 'Okay.' Turned
> around and walked away. It was the weirdest thing to me.

HU students, such as Jeremy, also felt they benefited from the course based on learning

content and material not presented in secondary school. However, he did express some

discomfort with the professor. He mentioned:

> I took the African Diaspora course in the fall. I like history and I don't know if it
> was the professor but I did feel excluded in that class a lot. I mean there were

other White students in the class, at least one more…It was not the material because I like history. When he would speak about White versus Black, I would feel like he would look at me. He would say something in a certain way that I just can't respond to as a White student. I mean some of the Black students know that I grew up deep in [neighboring county of research site]and used to be around Black people.

There is great variance in what Sara, Cynthia, and Jeremy experienced in the African American studies courses. In Sara and Cynthia's cases, they experienced negative reactions from Black students due to their race and stance on certain issues. The classroom presents a unique opportunity for student learning, especially through the introduction of new ideas and perspectives from diverse students. Hurtado et al. (1998) posited that structural diversity is a strategy to improve campus climate, however, it can also yield challenges among racial and ethnic minorities. Tatum (1992) suggested that racial identity development, at various stages for students, occurs in the classroom settings with race-related content. As a means to facilitate positive student development and enhanced interracial dialogue, Tatum (1992) offered four strategies: (a) "the creation of a safe classroom atmosphere by establishing clear guidelines for discussion; (b) the creation of opportunities for self-generated knowledge; (c) the provision of an appropriate developmental model that students can use as a framework for understanding their own processes; and (d) the exploration of strategies to empower students as change agents" (p.163). Although Cynthia and Sara did not specifically discuss the role the instructor played in these specific situations, it is plausible that guidelines for discussion and classroom interaction had not been established in these instances. The creation of a safe classroom space does not alleviate all anxieties or issues associated with

hypervisibility, but it does ease the tensions that often surround race-related discussions and facilitate positive communication and meaning-making for students in the classroom.

Jeremy, an HU participant, expressed his discomfort with how the African American studies course professor engaged him. He did not identify the race of the professor but insinuated that his discomfort was based on the instructor's method of facilitating the discussion and not the course content. Rucker and Gendrin (2003) argued that student learning is linked to immediacy. One definition of immediacy is the "combination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors working together as a system to increase or decrease the degree of physical, temporal, and psychological closeness between individuals" (Burgoon, Buller & Woodall, 1980 as cited in Rucker & Gendrin, 2003, p. 209). The authors indicated that although teacher immediacy can have positive impacts on student learning, immediacy can influence learning differently within the multicultural classroom. Additionally, Cole (2007) noted that accessibility cues, a term which characterizes students' experiences with faculty teaching style and classroom discourse, can impact students' active learning in class and influence out of classroom contact. Therefore, in classes such as the African American studies course, it is important for the class instructor to acknowledge the complexities of discussing race issues with students who may have never encountered such discussions and understand the importance of communicating openly and effectively to learn from multiple perspectives.

In contrast, Davina, a GCU environmental science major, was enrolled in the African American studies course at the time of the individual interview. She stated the class was, by far, one of the best she has taken at GCU, but the Black students in the class appeared to miss the larger context of race during class discussions:

I guess I could say even though I'm not surprised, I officially will always be surprised when someone makes comments like they do – just ignorant, I guess? One was made in that classroom. There was a documentary shown on how genetic genes of dogs. There's like three genes that determines all the types of dog hair and this one kid, all he heard was this White lady – you can tell she's White on the tape; you can't see her, but you know she's White. She said – she described the poodle's hair as being Afro and when the tape went off. That's all he got out of it. Nothin' to do with genetics, nothin' to do with anything. That may have run through his mind in a different course in a White college, but it never would have come out. You know what I'm saying?

Michelle, an HU human resource major, was also intrigued by the African American studies course but also found the African Americans reactions to some of the issues perplexing:

I think like African Diaspora, the required history class to graduate, I think that kind of brings that back. And when you have one, maybe one or two students that are nonblack in that class, that kind of makes it uneasy. There were mainly younger students, and it was me and maybe two other people that were nonblack. I found the class very fascinating. I was like, wow, I didn't know Arabics actually established slavery but not to the extent that the Europeans did. They [Black students] went to extreme, and I understand where you have resentment toward that, but you're not owed anything in life. You owe it to yourself to persevere in life, and you owe it to your family if they're depending on you to do that. They had this mentality of, oh, the government owes me this. I'm like the government doesn't owe you anything.

Davina and Michelle's comments represent their varying stages in White identity development. Referring to Helms (1990), Davina's comments resemble the characteristics of Whites in the contact stage. This stage is characterized by a lack of cultural awareness and institutional racism because of one's White privilege (Helms 1990, 1994). Davina did not understand the Black students' frustration with the tape and inferred that had he been in a class at a White institution, he would have never made the comment. It is possible due to her own privilege and limited interaction and

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understanding of the experiences of Blacks, and Black males in particular, the students' reaction was not justified and the student was in fact overreacting from her perspective.

Conversely, Michelle's comment parallels with Tatum's (1992) concept of meritocracy. Tatum (1992) considered this a source of student resistance to explore and discuss race based on the belief that the "United States is a just society, a meritocracy where individual efforts are fairly rewarded" (p.154). Michelle acknowledged the historical oppression of Blacks, but felt it did not justify their feelings of being owed something by the government.

Finally, during the HU focus group, students were asked additional questions to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences in the African American studies class. Myles, an HU hospitality management major, and Gary, an HU political science major, both enjoyed the class and indicated they learned a great deal. Myles inferred he was intimidated sometimes and Gary suggested he positioned himself as more of a listener in the class to hear different views. Students in the GCU focus group shared similar experiences, and stated they were comfortable during class discussions and faculty members invited their participation. In general, students from both research sites stated that the faculty members' teaching style and ability to facilitate heated debates enabled them to become more engaged in both the class and course discourse. Myles' and Gary's comments, coupled with the voices of the other participants, suggested faculty were effective as instructors and challenged the students' critical thinking and analytical abilities through coursework and dialogue.

Although students reported different experiences in the African American studies classes, they all admitted to enhanced learning and understanding by listening to the

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different perspectives of other. In some instances, participants acknowledged challenging their own ideologies about race and how their understanding has been influenced by racial interactions and perceptions. Dagbovie (2006) postulated that courses such as African American history are a useful tool to introduce White millennial learners to African American culture. Most importantly, African American courses "can help counter U.S. popular culture's routine misrepresentations of Blackness, thereby diminishing Whites' stereotypes and misunderstandings of African Americans" (p. 637).

The descriptions of the students' experiences in these classes also resonate with findings from research examining the impact of diversity experiences on students' educational gains in the classroom. Terenzini et al. (2001) found that classroom diversity positively influenced students' reported gains in problem-solving and group skills. Their findings also showed evidence that medium levels of classroom diversity (30-40%) positively influence students' learning and that "low or high levels of the classroom diversity may be negatively related to learning gains" (p. 527).

This evidence suggested that White students within a majority African American setting may gain significantly from classroom diversity, and more importantly in this diverse course content. However, issues of hypervisibility or being the only one person from a particular group in a class, may also cause students to withdraw or become defensive and thus not gain all they could from the class discussion. Tatum (1992) argued that as colleges and universities seek to become more multicultural and begin to examine multicultural representation in the curriculum, the process of discussing race in the classroom should not be ignored. Specifically, Tatum stated:

Unfortunately, less attention has been given to issues of process that inevitably emerge in the classroom when attention is focused on race, class, and/or gender. It is very difficult to talk about these concepts in a meaningful way without also talking and learning about racism, classism and sexism. The introduction of these issues of oppression often generates powerful emotional responses in students that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair. If not addressed, these emotional responses can result in student resistance to oppression-related content areas. (p. 150)

As diversity continues to increase on public HBCU campuses, attention to curriculum transformation and process will be imperative. This is particularly important for HBCUs, since their environments and curricula have been designed to focus on a majority African American population and operate as a mechanism to uplift the African American community and produce future leaders in the community.

Personal Growth and Enriched Perceptions of Race

As temporary minorities within an HBCU, many participants described how they personally matured through their interactions with students from other backgrounds. Students indicated how their perceptions of African Americans have changed through interactions with African American students in class and campus organizations. Further, students discussed how being a "reverse role"—White in a majority Black environment— has been a significant learning experience because it has caused them to encounter experiences and situations they may not have otherwise. James, a GCU accounting major, stated:

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And I've never had any sort of bias or racism towards anybody, but I hadn't been in a situation where I was forced to be with a large percentage of people other than my type of race, so I didn't know how I was gonna be treated and accepted and whatnot. But I come to find out that, you know, obviously we're all the same as far as we're all people. And I learned that equality is important – extremely important – and I have a newfound respect for diversity and acceptance and whatnot. And I think more so now I get angry when I hear racial slurs from people of the same race as me. When I hear other Caucasians say degrading things towards African Americans, it really pissed me off, 'cause I'm like, 'You don't have any idea. You're just going off of what you hear.'

In both focus groups, students were invited to share what they felt they gained from being a White student on an HBCU campus and what they have contributed. Collectively, the students shared how their experiences would be valuable in their future career aspirations and allow them to interact with diverse people in more meaningful ways. Myles, an HU student, indicated that he recognized he was putting himself in a challenging position but would not change the experience:

I came in here knowing I was going to put myself in a challenging role. I wouldn't change it for the world; it's been an experience. But I honestly would not take back the fact that I was the minority upon a group. So I mean I was in school where African-Americans were the minority, so now I'm kind of in their position and understand what they go through. And I understand the profiling, cause I was profiled here at school. So I mean now would I do anything different? Let's see. No, I really think it was – happened for a reason. I'm satisfied with everything. I wouldn't change anything. I was active both in my major in the band. It was fun; I had a good time. So I think I did a pretty good job.

Gary found that the classroom setting and specifically, the political science courses, presented unique opportunities for hearing different views and learning from various perspectives:

As the things I take away from here, you know, I think it's a really great learning environment for seeing different and diverse points of view, especially class discussions and debates. And in many of my political science classes, you know, we get into a lot of in-depth discussions and debates usually between myself and there's usually one other strong personality on the other side, and you know, the two of us will sit there and we'll go back and forth on issues. I always try to

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argue, you know, 'Well, this is what the other side is seeing.' I really want people to say, you know, look at the issue from both sides, you know, fairly evaluate both sides and make, you know, an informed judgment about where to go. And everyone kind of seems to be leaning towards one side and I'm trying to, you know, trying to get people, it's like, 'Hey, this is what the other side's saying. Try to look at it from this perspective.' And I get in a lot of discussions and debates. But you know, I've really learned a lot of things from different peoples' experiences and whatnot.

Ted believed one of the benefits of attending an HBCU was the ability to interact more directly with African Americans and develop friendships. He admitted he did not have many friends outside of his race in high school due to the beliefs of some of his family members and the manner in which students self-segregated in high school:

> Cause a lot of them [family members} are still stuck on the Civil War. My father was a confederate, whatever. Kinda' crap like that. I never really got into it. Really didn't care. I pretty much was just kinda' going through school and trying to make friends where I could 'cause I was new to the area. So I really didn't primarily have any Black friends. Most of them were White, but it didn't stop me from talking to them. I did have a couple confrontations with some Black people, but that was just along the lines of the racial thing.

> I guess on a personal level dealing with the other race I guess you can say. Before, like in high school I just didn't really bother. I just kind of kept to myself or whatever. I just kept a few friends, but being here it's like you almost have no choice and at the same time you just need to go with the flow and just accept it. So become successful by making a bunch of friends of the opposite race I guess you can say.

James and Laura felt they also benefited from their experiences at GCU and HU respectively. James believed he benefited professionally through interactions in the business school and Laura was confident that the HU architecture program has adequately prepared her for the work world.

> I've just gained a lot of respect. I just respect intelligence. I've been surrounded by a bunch of really intelligent people and I've never really viewed myself as being a minority because I see myself as being one of a human race and that sounds really cheesy, but it's the truth. So I've learned that it takes a big work ethic. It takes a lot of acceptance too of other people as far as from a racial

standpoint. So companies want that I think. So I'll be able to offer that and I'll be able to offer – like I've gotten leadership experience, too. That's a main thing. It's just leadership experience (James).

I'm glad that I picked [Heritage]. You know, I came here because, you know, I wanted a place where I could get some real-life experience. I mean I have gotten that, you know, because we go out around in the city and we're interacting with community organizations that are looking to do things. You know, so we're doing projects that could become an actual project, rather than just everything, sitting inside of a classroom based on theory, you know, and something that's not really ever going to happen. And that's what I wanted and that's why I came here, and I don't think I would change that at all (Laura).

In several of these responses, students emphasized how the structural diversity of the campus coupled with the diversity-related initiatives, such as core diversity requirements, had a direct impact on their learning and enhanced understanding and appreciation for diversity. Results of research studies (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem & Umbach; 2003) have indicated that structural diversity, diversity-related activities (e.g., core diversity courses), and diverse interactions (student exchanges with racially and ethnically diverse people) are not mutually exclusive and that each can confer significant positive benefits on students' learning outcomes. A few students suggested that within a majority African American student environment, it was virtually impossible to avoid interactions with persons who were not White. In Ted and Cynthia's situations, they were often the only Whites students within their programs or student organization. In more cases, participants were often one of three Whites or other racial minorities in the classroom setting. Therefore, the environment alone allowed students to engage in diverse interactions if they elected to remain with these settings.

It is important to highlight that research examining the experiences of Black students on PWI campuses has yielded similar perspectives identified in the current

investigation. Black students have associated feelings of isolation and stress with being

less represented on campus and in classroom settings (Allen, 1992; Davis et al, 2004;

Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001). The emerging research on

White undergraduate students attending HBCUs has suggested that these students

expressed no anxiety about attending an HBCU and have primarily experienced positive

interactions both inside and outside the classroom setting (Closson & Henry, 2008b).

Such experiences and perceptions may lend to the privilege or power Whites are still able

to consciously or unconsciously exert in a majority African American environment.

Davina stated that she thought she was already open-minded and accepting of

diverse cultures, but attending an HBCU proved that she still had much more to learn as

it related to diverse interactions:

> I have to agree with open mindedness, definitely. That's hard to believe that I can
> say 'cause I absolutely would not have thought that racially my mind could not be
> any more open, and it's got a lot to do with culture and just general college things.
> But then you throw the race on top of it 'cause the majority of the Black people
> that I've known in my life are from southern part of the state and it's not
> necessarily like that here. So you have different elements of race and what
> everybody brings with it. I'd never met anybody from Chicago and currently one
> of my professors is from there. So that's a totally different element and I'd have to
> say that I genuinely just appreciate the fact that I can see things a little bit
> differently and always have seen things differently and appreciative of the fact
> that it's even a little more different now.

Birnbaum (1983) suggested that HBCUs are valuable because they provide Black

students with an alternative to attending PWIs and an opportunity to engage with faculty

who understand the Black experience. Further HBCUs provide White students the

experience to function in a minority role. Birnbaum's assertion implies that there is

educational value to White students serving in these particular roles. The participants in

this study benefited in various ways by attending a public HBCU. For some students,

their pre-existing stereotypes were challenged and changed through interactions with students from diverse backgrounds in the classroom setting. For others, they encountered different interactions, such as stereotypical perceptions of being student athletes by Black students, which caused participants to gain a sense of what some Black students experience on PWI campuses.

The data revealed that students did experience something different and learned from matriculating in an HBCU environment. What was not apparent from these results was how their experiences influenced their personal and professional lives after college. Similar to the White male participants in Peterson and Hamrick's (2009) study, the participants in this study acknowledged difficulties in adjusting to and integrating into the social environment of an HBCU and credited the experience for their increased awareness of race and privilege, in some instances. However, the participants did not question benefits they incurred due to larger societal inequities nor did they voice a commitment to change inequitable systems. Thus, an awareness of race and equality was presented and heightened for students in this study, but there was no evidence of their role as possible change agents for increased diversity awareness and education in the larger society. Although specifically referring to classes and workshops designed to discuss race and increasing students' awareness of racism, Tatum (1992) argued that "heightening students' awareness of racism without also developing an awareness of the possibility of change is a prescription for despair" (p.165). Closson and Henry (2008b) also acknowledged that White students' short term temporary minority status, primarily in classroom settings, may not be sufficient to "penetrate their sense of unconscious privilege and stir conscious thoughts about what it means to be White" (p.531). Thus, as

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diversity continues to increase on HBCU campuses, the larger impact on White student learning and development can be enhanced through intentional efforts for these students to interact outside of the classroom through meaningful co-curricular programs and course offerings focused on race and identity.

Summary

The HU and GCU students described the ways in which faculty-student interaction, involvement in academic organizations and university-sponsored programs, and prior diversity experiences influenced engagement in academic and social settings. The data also revealed themes concerning participants' self-motivation, diversity within the White student population, and how their multiple roles as nontraditional, commuter, and veteran students also influenced how they perceived engagement and participated on campus. Further, institutional factors such as the campus landscape, facilities, and academic and co-curricular programs also influenced how students engaged on campus.

Data from both the individual and focus group interviews offered rich descriptions and examples of GCU and HU participants' relationships with faculty and references of the manner in which faculty supported their academic success through effective teaching, assignment of challenging projects, and performance feedback. Pre-college and diversity experiences were also a major factor influencing the engagement of White, undergraduate students. Although four GCU participants indicated that they did not attend middle or secondary schools that were diverse, each student eluded to the fact that due to the communities they grew up in and exposure to diverse populations through experiences such as the military has enhanced their ability to transition into GCU and

become engaged students. HU students noted similar experiences but suggested that the

university's metropolitan location allowed for daily interactions with diverse populations.

Involvement in student organizations and university-sponsored programs as well

as self-motivation also emerged as primary factors influencing White student

engagement. GCU students who were members of the Navy ROTC and the university

baseball team discussed that their involvement and engagement on campus was through

their membership in these structured programs. Students who were members of the

baseball team, such as Corey, Ralph, and Fred, and departmental organizations such as

Cynthia, all discussed their engagement outside of the team and organizations as an

activity they did with others (e.g., community service, passing out programs at the

football games, attending special events on campus).

Another important finding was the diversity within White students participating in

the study. Across both campuses there were students who possessed nontraditional

characteristics, including transfer, commuter, and student veteran statuses. In several

instances, the students provided examples of how these multiple roles and identities

shaped or influenced their engagement. Institutional factors and the manner in which the

universities allocated resources for student engagement varied between the two

institutions. Kuh (2009) explained that the second key feature of student engagement is

what the institution does to offer resources and facilitate engagement. Student

engagement is dependent on the active involvement of students and how they take

advantage of institutional resources such as learning opportunities, support services, and

curricula. GCU participants appeared to benefit more from the institution's efforts to

engage students. Through a mandatory freshmen seminar course, first-year experience

programs, living and learning communities, structured new orientation program, and the mandatory course requirements, such as the African American studies courses, GCU students were knowledgeable and understood how to access institutional resources to enhance their engagement and adjust to the university. HU students, however, repeatedly mentioned how they did not know what was happening on campus and often received the run around from key support service units such as financial aid and the bursar's office. Furthermore, these students described the new and transfer student orientation as overwhelming and unorganized.

Next, Chapter Seven provides a discussion of the study findings. Recommendations for future research and practice are offered.

Chapter VII

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study sought to explore factors influencing the engagement of White undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. This final chapter highlights significant findings and their connections to emergent themes in the research literature. The chapter is divided into four major sections. First, an overview of the study will be presented to emphasize the statement of problem, purpose, and significance. This section is followed with a review of the methodological approach. The third section provides reflective discussion and consideration of implications for five major findings: faculty-student interactions, staff-student interactions, involvement in co-curricular activities and programs, prior college diversity experiences, and first-year experience programs. Finally, recommendations are offered for future research and practice that may be beneficial for HBCU administrators and faculty.

Overview of Study

As student engagement is becoming an increasingly important benchmark of student success and achievement (Kinzie, 2009; Kuh, 2009; Ryan, 2008) and White students continue to be the largest non-Black student population on HBCU campuses (Carew, 2009; Gordon, 2005; Jefferson, 2008), I felt it was critical to explore and to identify those factors that influence the engagement of White students attending HBCUs. The extant literature significantly addresses the experiences of Black students attending HBCUs, however, little research about the experiences and engagement of White students exists. Although, there has been some research on aspects of engagement at HBCUs, this study is the first qualitative research study to focus exclusively on the

engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. The investigation was further warranted due to its contribution to the existing knowledge base and role in heightening the scholarly discourse on engagement and informing educational practices, particularly on HBCU campuses.

Review of Methodology

The guiding research question for this study was what factors influence the engagement of White undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. A qualitative methodological approach using a multiple case study design was employed. This method was determined most suitable as qualitative research designs typically provide researchers the ability to collect data through multiple techniques, such as individual interviews, document analysis, and informal observations. These techniques provide rich data describing participants' lived experiences.

Two public HBCUs, Heritage University (HU) and Gulf Coast University (GCU), were selected as research sites. HU is a mid-size, doctorate degree-granting institution located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States with a White, undergraduate student enrollment of 2.9%. GCU is a mid-size, liberal arts institution located on the southeastern coast of the United States with a White, undergraduate student enrollment of 3.2%. A total of 22 White students (11 from each site) participated in individual and focus group interviews. There were 14 men and 8 women and the mean age was 25 years. Other primary characteristics of participants in this sample included full-time, nontraditional and adult learners, the majority of the sample resided off-campus, and a little more than half were transfer students.

Summary of the Findings

Several themes emerged from this study. Themes from the HU data included interaction with and perceptions of faculty; involvement in departmental activities and programs; impact of nontraditional student status; and barriers to engagement. The prominent factors from the GCU data were frequent interactions with faculty and staff; involvement through departmental and university-sponsored programs; first-year experience programs; and the influence of Greek Life on students' engagement in and outside the classroom.

Across both campuses, several common themes were identified as influential factors for engagement in academic and social settings. These were faculty-student interaction, involvement in academic organizations and university-sponsored programs, and prior diversity experiences. The cross-case analysis also revealed that participants' self-motivation, diversity within the White student population, and institutional factors (e.g., landscape, building location variation, and proximity to the surrounding community) were additional themes impacting engagement. Another significant finding was the experiences of the White students in the mandatory African American courses on both campuses. Although the students' experiences varied, there was an interesting phenomenon that occurred as students articulated how and what they learned in these courses.

Collectively considering the findings respective to each research site, as well as the cross-case results, there were five factors that I determined were significant in influencing the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending public HBCUs: (1) faculty-student interactions, (2) staff-student interactions, (3) involvement in co-

curricular activities and programs, (4) prior college diversity experiences, and (5) first-year experience programs. These five factors were considered based upon pertinent aspects in the broader scope of the student engagement literature and my own experiences, both as a student and a professional at a public HBCU. These particular factors resonated with me and drive the forthcoming discussion.

Discussion and Implications

Faculty-Student Interactions

A consistent and dominant theme from the data was the role and importance of faculty in students' academic lives and adaptation to the HBCU environment. Specifically, participants described HBCU faculty members as the nexus between their academic experiences and co-curricular involvement, as role models and nurturers to students in both personal and professional capacities, and as effective teachers in the classroom setting. These descriptors characterized how faculty-student interactions influenced participants' engagement. Additionally, there is discussion involving the role of HBCU faculty who taught mandatory African American studies courses on each campus. The faculty-student discourse and interactions in these classes specifically, were critical to participants' classroom engagement and understanding of the cultural dynamics within an HBCU environment.

Faculty as a nexus.In several instances, faculty members were described as a critical link between students' experiences inside and outside the classroom. On both campuses, students' involvement was primarily relegated to departmental organizations and activities within academic departments. The Political Science Association, the History Society, and the Accounting Association are examples of organizations that

participants were involved in due to the encouragement of a faculty member within their respective departments. Furthermore, participants articulated that often times their participation in academic organizations or attending programs and lectures were a result of a faculty member's announcement during class or faculty individually approaching and suggesting that students attend. As GCU students indicated, often times, information regarding departmental lectures and events were shared through word of mouth by faculty or within informal settings such as "walking down the hallway" or "talking with a faculty member in a public place on campus." Additionally, the students commented that the small size of the departments allowed for frequent and active communication between students and faculty.

Cox and Orehovec (2007) characterized this type of faculty-student interaction as functional interaction. Functional interaction typically occurs for a "specific, institutionally related purpose" (p. 353). The functional interactions among faculty and students in this inquiry began as more functional but evolved into more meaningful relationships through personal interaction. In this study, the functional interactions often led to increased involvement in organizations and activities within the department. Such a finding informs how the role of faculty, as it concerns sharing information regarding programs and organizations, can heighten students' awareness and interest in co-curricular programs. It can also be assumed that because of a faculty member's validation of a program, students deemed the program worthy of participation or at least investigation of the opportunity to gain more details.

Faculty as role models and nurturers. Student participants also described faculty members as role models and nurturers. In many cases, and especially on the HU campus,

students reported that their connections or relationships with faculty were the reason they decided to remain at the institution despite some of the challenges they experienced as it related to gaining access to information or conducting business (e.g., financial aid, paying tuition, receiving refunds). Several participants indicated that faculty members were intentional in meeting their individual needs and often personalized their discourse with students. Participants emphasized the manner in which faculty supported and assisted them with academic-related issues, achieving their career goals, and even dealing with personal issues such as divorce or homesickness. These findings are consistent with research studies noting that student interactions with HBCU faculty result in positive student outcomes such as satisfaction with college (Davis & Young, 1982; Seidman, 2005), persistence and retention (McArthur, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and positive mentoring experiences (Hickson, 2002; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). These positive influences may be a result that HBCU faculty members primarily focus their efforts on teaching and nurturing students, rather than research agendas (Beach, Dawkins, Rozman & Grant, 2008; Johnson & Harvey, 2002).

These interactions were not facilitated by the institution nor supported by an intentionally structured program such as a living and learning community. Therefore, this finding is consistent with studies suggesting that students attending minority-serving institutions, such as HBCUs, experience higher levels of interaction with faculty and perceive the campus as supportive of their academic and social needs (Bridges et al., 2008, Carini et al, 2006; Hickson, 2002). Most significantly, this finding suggested that White students, similar to their non-White, HBCU counterparts, experience similar or comparable experiences with HBCU faculty. Again, many studies (Allen, 1992; Davis,

1991; Fleming, 1984) exploring the experiences of students attending HBCUs and perceptions of faculty have been mainly focused on the perceptions of African American students (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). This finding extends the results of existing studies by illuminating the influence of HBCU faculty on White student engagement.

Faculty as effective teachers. Finally, faculty members were described as effective teachers and facilitators within the classroom setting. The students reported that they were actively engaged in classroom conversations and assignments. In the classroom, the presence of strong faculty-student interaction served as the impetus for increased learning and intellectual curiosity. Although the responses regarding the classroom experiences were mixed, the more positive responses came from social science and humanities based classes, such as the African American studies courses that were a mandatory requirement on each research site.

Overall, the student participants regarded faculty as highly capable and effective instructors. There was clearly a respect and positive perception of the faculty, and in most cases, strong relationships. It is important to note that typically faculty-student interactions led to increased interactions outside the classroom setting and evolved into mentoring relationships discussed previously. In these cases, students often developed positive perceptions and impressions from the classroom. Some of the participants alluded to the manner in which faculty connected with students through the classroom management styles and instructional delivery. In specific cases, students asserted that these faculty set high standards for learning and respect among peers that inevitably led to the students' admiration and respect for the faculty member.

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This evidence highlights the importance and influence of the classroom setting as a vital commodity of the university setting (Hirschy &Wilson, 2002; Strayhorn, 2008). It serves as the central meeting point for interaction between faculty and other students and for some students, particularly part-time and commuter students, it is the only meeting location and time (Farrell, 2009; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). The classroom and the faculty member as the facilitator present a unique opportunity for both learning and encouraging interaction between diverse peers and building responsibility and independence (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen (1998). This was evident throughout the experiences shared by participants. In the classroom, students made early connections with faculty advisors and experienced positive interactions that led to similar interactions outside the classroom. For other students, it was the reverse. The students took a class from a particular professor and based on the interaction within the classroom, the relationships evolved through enrollment in other classes and out-of-classroom interactions.

Such relationships create a unique opportunity to further immerse faculty into engagement practices. This is particularly true for promoting critical thinking in the classroom environment and providing unique opportunities to understand more about race and the implications of race relations in the HBCU setting Bey (2004). The results from this study suggested the mandatory African American studies courses were the ideal forum for sharing diverse perspectives and discussing complex issues such as race and race relations. Students indicated that faculty served as effective facilitators for discussion around diversity and encouraged cross-cultural relationships through active collaboration and group assignments.

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African-American studies course mystique.The majority of the White student participants took a required African American studies course or a course focused on the lives and contributions of African and African American peoples. Although the comments were positive overall, there were instances where students indicated they felt uncomfortable or engaged in negative discourse with another student because of a certain topic discussed in class. These experiences ranged from students feeling the instructor caused them to stand out during discussions about race to a Black student confronting a White student about sharing a different perspective on racial issues.

Although the students' feelings of hypervisibility and comfort in these courses varied, most often the students felt the professors were efficient in facilitating class discussion and encouraging them to think more broadly. In most cases, participants described faculty as being savvy when heated debates occurred on issues such as the Obama and McCain presidential campaign, racial profiling, and the importance of Black leadership in America.

The students also shared how the African American studies courses challenged their existing perspectives on race and perceptions of people of color. In the African American studies courses and some social science courses such as sociology and psychology, White students described the debates on complex issues (e.g., race and race relations) as healthy conversations and a viable way to hear and learn different perspectives on array of topics. The class also offered an opportunity to discuss these issues with and among diverse peers. This discourse allowed for an opportunity that several students suggested does not become available or arise outside the classroom and in settings such as the workplace.

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This element of the faculty-student interactions can be extremely important in the context of these courses. First, the mandatory requirement of the class requires that all students successfully complete the course in order to graduate from the institution. Thus, the class basically forces students who may not engage at all on campus to interact at some level within a course based on diversity and perspectives of race. Therefore, the faculty member can serve as a facilitator of engagement between diverse peers and perspectives. Second, the role of the faculty member is critical in this type of course for several reasons, but particularly for matters related to learning and self-reflection. The experiences of White students in an African American studies course on an HBCU campus may influence how they engage with other students in the course and perceive their current and future campus experiences.

The faculty member is in a unique position to increase engagement through critical thinking and dialogue as well as encouraging interactions among diverse students. Diversity in the classroom is valuable because it affords the opportunity for engagement through dialogue and the sharing of different perspectives. However, these exchanges can result in more negative than positive effects if not managed correctly. Faculty-student interactions include activities such as providing feedback on performance and clarifying concepts from class discussions (Kuh, 2005). The more interaction faculty members have with students, the more their capacity to influence and encourage student learning and development increases. This would be primarily due to increased awareness and knowledge about the students and their abilities. This study provided evidence that positive interactions with faculty prior and after classroom engagement led to increased interactions. Specifically, in this study, for those students who made early connections

with faculty and faculty advisors experienced positive interactions that led to similar

positive interactions in the classroom. For other students it was the reverse. The students

took a class from a particular professor and if the interactions were positive in the

classroom, students were more likely to take a class from the same professor again or a

strong relationship evolved.

The regular meeting of the class allows the faculty member to interact more

frequently with the students and provides opportunities for instructors to invite White

students to office hours or external meetings to discuss issues that may have been

difficult to discuss in class. Such interactions also enable faculty to facilitate and manage

the emergence of negative feelings of "guilt, shame, embarrassment and anger that White

students can experience during discussions of race" (Tatum, 1992) so that they do not

impede student receptivity and learning. This process is parallel to the discussion of the

importance of race-consciousness educators use to enhance student participation in

educational enriching activities. Harper (2009) argued that effective educators

"acknowledge qualitative differences in the experiences of racial minority students,

especially when few are enrolled and same-race mentors are in short supply" (p.42).

Although Harper was referring to underrepresented students within predominately White

institutions, the same practice should be applicable within an HBCU context. Difficult

and complex discussions may present the opportunity for HBCU faculty to learn more

about White students in the classroom, thereby increasing faculty-student interaction.

This increased interaction may lead to higher comfort levels for faculty and students to

meet outside of the classroom to discuss questions raised in class and "brainstorm ways

in which they might collaboratively explore deeper insights into such questions" (Harper,

2009, p.43). From the participants' perspectives, the intentional and natural ability to approach and interact with faculty was a viable way to increase levels of engagement within and outside the classroom.

Staff-Student Interactions

Staff members and administrators also influenced the engagement of students in this study. Although the bulk of the data revealed more intentional and meaningful interactions with faculty members, some students did report positive interactions and relationships with staff administrators, particularly those employed within student affairs units. The students believed staff assisted with their transition and success into the HBCU environment. Most significantly, the data also suggested that staff-student interactions impacted both student engagement and disengagement. Disengagement is the opposite of engagement and is characterized by the lack of effort students direct toward effective educational activities and the institution's inability to channel students toward opportunities that could optimize engagement (Hu & Kuh, 2002). This variance was evident from the vast differences reported between HU and GCU students as it related to their interactions and engagement with staff. Positive interactions with staff members enabled students to adjust more seamlessly into the university community and focus on their academic studies. The more negative and challenging interactions contributed to a disconnection between the students and university community as well as negative perceptions of administrators from students.

The GCU participants reported positive interactions with university staff members, including student affairs professionals such as the director of student activities, transfer admission coordinator, and the university president. The perceptions,

interactions and, in some instances, relationships the students described with staff

administrators heightened their confidence and ability to engage in the classroom and

within co-curricular activities offered on campus. GCU transfer student participants

talked extensively about the role and efficiency of the transfer student coordinator.

Specifically, these students discussed how this professional staff member made their

transfer process seamless and commented on her availability to thoroughly answer

questions throughout the admission process. Students emphasized that the transfer

admission coordinator ensured all the required paperwork and administrative processes to

complete their admission were complete and accounted for when they arrived on campus

for the start of the semester.

Two GCU students also mentioned their initial and frequent interactions with the

university president. The students emphasized that the president's approachability and

genuine interest in their participation in the university community were evident from new

student orientation and extended to other major social events on campus such as

homecoming celebrations. These positive interactions with administrators enabled

students to feel welcomed into the university environment and increased their confidence

in perceiving themselves as key members of the GCU community.

HU student participants described their staff-interactions differently.   From their

perspectives, interactions with staff members were challenging and difficult. In several

instances, students characterized their experiences with staff and university

administrators as obstacles and barriers to obtaining information to complete important

tasks such as paying tuition, inquiring about scholarships, and adjusting course schedules.

Consistently, HU students referenced reoccurring cases of not having access to or

knowledge of information to appropriately facilitate administrative tasks such as processing financial aid and receiving refunds. Therefore, the barriers to engagement theme was illuminated by HU students' difficulty in acquiring information and interfacing with staff in key administrative units. Thus, these barriers hindered HU students' ability to successfully navigate and best understand the infrastructure of the campus.

Although GCU and HU student experiences with administrators, especially student affairs professionals, varied, they emphasized the important role staff members play in how students engage on HBCU campuses. From the GCU student experiences, student affairs professionals such as the transfer student coordinator, provided not only support, but genuine attention and interest to ensure a seamless process for transfer students. For HU students, experiences with staff and university administrators were the exact opposite with the exception of a few interactions with student activities staff members. In the case of HU students, their depictions of difficulty interfacing with staff provide some insight into their lack of understanding basic campus operations (e.g., campus shuttle service, location to receive financial aid refund checks) and motivation to seek out opportunities to engage in co-curricular activities. Thus, their disengagement was influenced by barriers, such as lack of support from staff administrators and acquiring accurate information regarding university policies and procedures. These barriers seemingly caused students to focus solely on their academic requirements and co-curricular offerings by academic departments and hindered their participation in the larger context of the campus.

The staff-student interactions finding is parallel with studies emphasizing the importance of the staff role with student transition and engagement on college campuses (Flowers, 2003; Kuh, 2009). However, this finding is also contradictory to certain aspects of research examining the role of HBCU student affairs professionals and their positive influences on students (Hirt et al., 2006). In the current study, staff members and administrators were critical in linking students and institutional resources. This is important because much of the research literature indicates that student engagement is twofold; it can only occur if students take advantage of the institutional resources and if the institution provides the necessary resources for students to engage (Bridges et al., 2008; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Kuh et al., 2005). Student affairs professionals are integral to this process because they are often the first university representatives students interact with on campus and serve in positions where they are responsible for introducing and offering key institutional resources and information (Clement & Rickard, 1992). This was definitely the reality for White students on the GCU campus. However, on the HU campus, student affairs professionals did not have a similarly strong presence in the experiences of White students which contradicts some research characterizing HBCUs as havens for "cultivating a culture of affirmation, aspiration, and achievement" (Bridges et al., 2008, p. 232). In such studies, HBCU staff and administrators considered themselves guardians and family members to students, and not just administrators (Hirt et al., 2006).

The significance of student affairs administrators was evident throughout the student experiences in this study. Several participants shared how staff members informed them of special events on campus; moreover, some staff would even volunteer to attend the event with students to ensure students would take advantage of institutional

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resources such as campus speakers and presentations. Kuh (2009) affirmed the importance of the role of student affairs professionals and their influence on student engagement. Kuh stated:

> Over the past twenty-five years, student affairs professionals have traditionally been among the first on campus to acknowledge, embrace and attempt to apply research-based innovative practices. To meet our obligations to students and institutions, it is imperative the student affairs professionals remain open to alternative interpretations of what at this moment in time seem to be near-paradigmatic understandings of what matters to student success and enthusiastically welcome evidence that points to other, better ways to define and measure student engagement. (p. 699)

In most instances, staff-student interactions in this inquiry led to student engagement in organizations and programs, and also increased interaction with students from diverse backgrounds. In contrast, the staff-student interaction factor was not consistent with the literature on the nature and perceptions of relationships between HBCU personnel and students. Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, and Strayhorn (2008) found that HBCU administrators believed that the relationships they developed with students were shaped by an ethic of care and means to contribute back to the Black community through cultural advancement. Further, in that study, the HBCU staff described their relationships with students as familial and believed such relationships served as a support network to ensure individual students were able to fully and successfully integrate into the college experience.

These findings are important to the current study for two reasons. First, a major assumption in the Hirt et al. (2008) study is that the students were Black and not White. This assumption is inherent through the HBCU administrators' moral conviction to give back to the Black community through developing meaningful relationships with Black students to ensure their academic success. Second, because studies examining perceptions of relationships between HBCU administrators and students primarily focus on same-race (Black administrators and Black students), it is unclear if HBCU administrators would have the same sentiments regarding White students. The absence of this perspective makes it difficult to determine or suggest if this is the reason the HU participants may have experienced less positive interactions with student affairs professionals than the GCU student participants. However, it does raise important questions regarding the experiences of White students at HBCUs and how the majority African American professional community perceives and facilitates their presence on campus. Closson and Henry (2008b) argued that the investigation of White and other non-Black students on HBCU campuses possesses the possibility of both positive and adverse results. Specifically, the authors stated:

> Examination of those who are temporary minorities has the potential to expose not only profound learning and consequent positive perspective transformation on the issue of racism, but the reverse is also a possibility. In other words, such research may reveal that White racism is entrenched following such an experience. (p.18)

Essentially, the authors' interpretation suggested that White students may experience racism in ways that counter well-documented research depicting HBCUs as

nurturing and supportive environments. The emergence of such investigative discoveries could imply that HBCUs offer positive campus environments for Black students, but not students from other diverse backgrounds.

Involvement in Student Organizations

Research has also shown that student involvement and participation in activities such as athletics and Greek life assist with transition and success on campus (Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2000; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimlings, 1996). Similarly, in this study, student organizations and university-sponsored programs such as the university band, baseball team, Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC), and the student government association also served as a conduit for White student engagement. In fact, at GCU, two participants expressed that the NROTC was an integral component in their successful transition and deeper immersion into the university community. The student participants were primarily engaged in departmental organizations and activities aligned with their academic majors and career interests. However, within these organizations some students assumed leadership roles and perceived student organizations as a tool to become more familiar with the campus and immersed in broader campus-based activities. Students who were members or affiliated with university-sponsored programs typically enrolled in similar classes and participated in similar co-curricular activities due to the practice schedules or other obligations that inevitably shaped their academic and work schedules.

With the exception of seven students, all of the participants were or had been involved in a student organization as either a member or student leader. These student organizations served as the catalyst through which students became specifically engaged

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within their academic departments and more familiar with members of the larger campus community. Further, organizations provided opportunities for participants to expand their social networks and hone their leadership skills. Seven students were members of university-sponsored programs. These students expressed that their programs offered opportunities to work in teams as well as interact with diverse peers. Specifically, these students believed had they not been affiliated with the programs, they would not have become familiar with the campus and its resources. Further the participants believed that their involvement and relationships with students from different ethnic groups have alleviated stereotypical views they may have had about students of color such as African Americans and Latinos. Baxter Magolda (1992) suggested student organizations provide a venue for peer-to-peer interactions that often times yield friendships, social support, and information to help members better navigate the campus. This concept was prevalent in this inquiry as well. For example, the members of the NROTC and the baseball team talked extensively about the friendships they developed within the group. These friendships served as social support, but most interestingly, led to members having a broader context and deeper understanding of campus culture.

Across both campuses, participants reported involvement in academic and professional organizations within the department. Within these organizations, students cultivated strong relationships, participated in community service, and benefited from professional development programs resulting in the enhancement of their career advancement and job opportunities. Although some students mentioned that they were informed or encouraged to join the organization through a faculty member, there were a few who sought out opportunities based on their own interests and motivation to advance

their careers or make a difference in the lives of other students in the department.

Despite students' approach to organizational involvement, the research has suggested that

students who view academic organizations as a means to enhance their professional

development skills and become more proficient in their major are prone to participate in

activities with these emphases (Holzweiss, Rahn, & Wickline, 2007).

Participants discussed both advantages and disadvantages of being members of

these university-sponsored programs. Some students reported that the established "group

and community structure" of these organizations offered a forum to connect with

individuals who shared similar interests to their own. Thus, making these connections as

new or transfer students made it easier to adjust to and navigate the campus. They shared

the benefit of not having to approach these tasks alone, but were often guided by a

professional staff member such as an athletic coach, a designated academic advisor, or an

upperclassman who served as a mentor.

Other students acknowledged the disadvantages of being affiliated and socializing

solely within a university-sponsored program. In general, those students expressed that if

they did not intentionally identify ways to interact with other students outside of the

programs, often times they did not develop new relationships. One of the GCU baseball

team members mentioned that the mandatory, first-year seminar course required group

projects that allowed for meeting and working with students with diverse ideas and

perspectives. Other students shared that it is easy to emulate bad habits of other students

within the group. For instance, one student admitted that he would not attend classes at

times if the other group members did not attend. This type of mimicking of behavior can

obviously proffer negative results such as poor academic performance.

The influence of university-sponsored programs on student engagement extends the line of inquiry in research and higher education discourse. Some studies have suggested such programs can limit engagement because they potentially separate members from the general population for inordinate amounts of time (Watt & Moore, 2001). Conversely, other research suggested that members of these groups do engage outside of the immediate group. Gayles and Hu (2009) examined the engagement of student-athletes based on four areas of student engagement: (1) faculty interaction; (2) interaction with non-student athletes; (3) participation in co-curricular activities, such as student organizations; and (4) preparation in academic-related activities. Their results showed student-athletes exhibited higher levels of engagement through interactions with students other than their teammates, than the other areas of student engagement. This is particularly important for White student athletes attending HBCUs, since several HBCUs use athletic scholarships as means to satisfy diverse student enrollments required by desegregation plans (Drummond, 2000).

The student organizations and university-sponsored programs is a compelling finding and it demonstrates how White undergraduate students connected with an academic or department organization as a means to connect with faculty, peers within the department, and develop their networking skills through professional committees and boards. Further, students affiliated with university-sponsored programs appeared to develop strong relationships with their peers within programs such as the band and athletics. These relationships often times resulted in the creation of a community or subculture for student participants and as an effective means for them to navigate through the campus.

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Prior Diversity Experiences

Participants' experiences prior to entering college was also a salient theme in this investigation. Essentially, the level of past experiences within diverse environments and interaction with students from diverse populations influenced participants' ability to engage. When asked to rate the diversity in their high school on a scale from no diversity to highly diverse, more than half of the participants indicated that their high school populations were somewhat to highly diverse. The purpose of this question was to assess and garner if students had in fact, been exposed to settings with high structural diversity. Structural diversity is a term that quantifies the number of diverse students within a given population (Chang, 1999; Gurin, 1999). Researchers have suggested structural diversity and a student's pre-college experiences can result in increased positive interactions with diverse peers while in college (Jayakumar, 2008; Saenz, 2005). Further, researchers (Hall, 2009; Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan, & Landreman, 2002) found that the more students are engaged with diverse peers prior to entering college, the more likely they are to be open to and to hold diverse viewpoints. In this investigation, student participants from both institutions described examples of how their childhood neighborhoods or co-curricular activities such as little league sports and girl scouts groups, enabled them to adjust and to transition into the public HBCU environment. Consistently, participants made statements such as "I get along with everyone 'cause I grew up with Black people" or "My neighborhood was diverse and the community was very receptive to people from different environments" and especially, "I grew up in a place where I was the only White so I am used to this [environment]."

This particular finding parallels a significant finding from the pilot study I conducted at a mid-size, public HBCU examining the engagement of two, White undergraduate women attending the institution. The participants' pre-college experiences were found to be a major influence on their adjustment and ability to engage on the campus. One student indicated that her community, as well as her immediate family, was multicultural. Another student indicated that her high school was not very diverse, but she found herself gravitating toward Black women who were more accepting of her as a high school student. The participants in this current study indicated that they were either accustomed to diverse students or relationships through interracial dating, clubs and organizations, or that their exposure was limited in interacting with African Americans specifically, but that they had other pre-college interactions with diverse communities and peoples.

This finding is also significant because it extends the discussion and findings from previous studies on White students attending public HBCUs. Earlier and current studies have indicated that White students tended not to be engaged on campus and often times established other communities external to the campus for social purposes. For instance, in Peterson and Hamrick's (2009) study, White HBCU male participants reported that, on weekends, they socialized more intimately with students from a neighboring PWI, rather than staying on campus and participating in activities in programs. This was not necessarily the case for the majority of White students participating in the current study. These students did not identify another campus in order to socialize, but rather shared that they were unable to engage due to factors such as family and work commitments.

Another aspect of students' prior college experiences was their veteran statuses. Five participants had served in active duty of one branch of the military or considered themselves "military brats" and talked about their exposure to diverse people and cultures. These students also indicated that their maturity and experience in the military aided them in transitioning into public HBCU campuses. The research on the presence of military servicemen and women returning to college is limited. However, a recent study by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) explored the experiences of veterans returning to college. The study organized 16 themes under the "Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out" adult transition model developed by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989). Students shared how they had experienced complex life situations, such as war and death, more than civilian students and therefore their focus and intentional approach toward academic work was more serious than those students who had not served in the military (DiRamio, et al. 2008). In this study, students who possessed veteran characteristics shared similar sentiments, specifically toward campus engagement. In fact, some participants suggested that they did not have a need to be as engaged as much as other students due to their military experiences. Moreover, they perceived many campus activities were designed for more traditional-aged students and did not align with their current interests and lifestyles.

This finding also bears significance for it supports evidence suggesting that students do not enter college as blank slates (Locks et al., 2008) and that their prior college experiences, do in fact, influence how they perceive and experience college. Moreover, the finding further revealed the level of diversity that exists within White undergraduate students as a subpopulation. Within this study, White undergraduates

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possessed multiple identities and assumed various roles in their personal lives. Some students were parents, veterans, student athletes, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students. Other student participants indicated they were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and grew up in predominately African American neighborhoods as children. Essentially, all of these various experiences influenced how students became involved and engaged on campus.

First-Year Experience Programs

First-year programs on the HU and GCU campuses played a significant role in the engagement and transition of White students. In some form, both GCU and HU have first-year experience programs with the primary goal of introducing students to the campus community and providing support for students to successfully navigate the campuses. The strong presence and structure of a first-year experience program was a key factor to students' ability to transition and become engaged on campus.

GCU has a comprehensive, multifaceted, and well coordinated first-year experience program that is mandatory for all first-year students. On the other hand, the HU first-year experience programs are more decentralized and segmented. This means, there is no campus-wide coordinated first-year initiative, but there are various first-year activities offered through academic and student affairs units. Through document analysis, I was able to search for the first-year program through the GCU search engine and found a dedicated page that captured all of the components of this program; it read "Welcome to the Freshmen Year Experience Program! (*Welcome to the Freshmen Year Experience, 2009*). When I initiated the same search on the HU webpage, a list of five different student affairs areas emerged with information about their first-year experience

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programs and efforts. Therefore, there was a clear presence of first-year experience opportunities on both campuses, however the scope varied. This scope of these programs influenced both how students experienced the program and what they gained at the beginning of their collegiate journeys.

First-year experience programs are designed in various forms but typically serve similar purposes. Well-known activities and programs such as orientation classes (first-year seminar), living and learning communities, peer mentoring programs, and parent advisory councils are examples of the mechanisms used to increase first-year student success on college campuses (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005). The results of this study offer evidence to suggest that first-year experience programs increase White students' ability to transition and to adapt to public HBCU settings.

The GCU students, in particular, referred to their experiences in the new student orientation program and first-year experience seminar. Both were vital components in their adjustment to campus and introduction to opportunities for engagement. The sophomore participants credited their knowledge about the campus to the first-year experience seminar. Specifically, they discussed how they were able to become immersed in community service projects and further introduced to campus organizations and resources.

HU students described new student orientation as informative, but in contrast to GCU participants, HU students often times felt the program to be overwhelming due in part to their perceived lack of organization and coordination. The first-year experience programs, such as a first-year seminar, did not play as pivotal a role at HU as it did at GCU. In fact, none of the HU participants alluded to the existence of a first-year

experience seminar. Subsequently, HU students did not discuss their involvement in high impact activities derived from the first-year seminar. It is not clear from this inquiry, if the HU first-year seminar was an influential factor to the engagement or disengagement of White students. There were several expressions of frustration with regard to a lack of first-year and transfer student support. Some participants commented the campus was difficult to navigate and sometimes staff members were not helpful. Therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint what aspect of the HU students' undergraduate experience caused what some research has referred to as disengagement (Hu & Kuh, 2002).

Based upon engagement and disengagement concepts, I deduced that HU, as an educational institution, may not have been intentional or strategic in its efforts to offer resources to engage White students on campus; whereas evidence from GCU portrayed it as more effective. As a practice, student engagement is realized through reciprocal behaviors on the parts of the individual student and the institution. Specifically, engagement occurs when students exert time and effort into their studies and co-curricular activities and the "institution allocates its resources and organizes services and learning opportunities to encourage students to participate in and benefit from such activities" (Whitt, Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, McDonald, & Wells, 2008). The discussion of implications and recommendations of student engagement and strategies to achieve it will be presented in the next section.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Student engagement occurred on both the HU and GCU campuses. As Kuh (2008) and Ryan (2008) postulated, student engagement looks different across campuses. That is, student engagement is demonstrated in different ways, for different students on

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different campuses. As evident in this investigation, some students were heavily engaged in the classroom, others were engaged in university-sponsored programs and organizations, while others' engagement was more so affected by prior experiences to college and experiences in the first year of college. Based upon factors identified in the literature and the findings from this study, I drew three primary conclusions related to the engagement of White, undergraduates attending public HBCUs.

First, student interactions with faculty and staff are critical to the engagement of White undergraduate students. Second, race matters. Although, there were no reported overt acts of racism, participants suggested they were at times reminded of their Whiteness. Notwithstanding, the data revealed that by virtue of being a temporary minority in an HBCU setting, participants learned more about themselves and they were able to develop new or different perceptions of people from different racial backgrounds, in particular African American students. Third, in this study student engagement was a reciprocal relationship that was driven by participants' awareness and utilization of available resources and opportunities. In this inquiry, student engagement can be characterized and defined as two distinct conditions—limited or extended. These modes of engagement were predicated on the level of intentionality and effort of both the institution and the students. Extended engagement was a condition where the effort and energy of both the individual and the institution were mutual and students tended to have multiple engagement experiences. Limited engagement was a condition where the intentionality and effort to engage more heavily relied on one party, either the institution or the student. Under this condition, students tended to experience engagement

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unilaterally. The next sections further discuss these conclusions and present implications, and offer recommendations for future research and practice.

Faculty-Student Interactions

HBCU faculty members have been lauded for their commitment to teaching and student development through supportive relationships (Berger & Milem, 1999; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Gasman & Palmer, 2008; Hale, 2006). In this study, the commitment of faculty to students both inside and outside the classroom was consistent with the depictions of faculty in previous studies as effective teachers, role models and nurturers, and mentors (Nelson Laird, et al., 2007; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Participants consistently mentioned the benefits of faculty approachability and emphasized their ability to explore their support and advice on career guidance and personal issues.

This study revealed that HBCU faculty members serve as effective teachers, role models, mentors and nurturers for White undergraduate students. At these two HBCUs, the faculty was an integral part of the students' experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. As a result, it could be assumed that the role of HBCU faculty is just as significant for White students as it is for African American students. Based upon participant interviews, if the students were not engaged or involved in any other aspect of the college experience, their minimum interactions were with faculty in the classroom setting. In general, students' experiences were positive with faculty and in many cases, faculty became their "go-to" individuals on campus when they faced difficult challenges or sought professional advice. Thus, the influence of faculty-student interactions may play a critical role in not only the engagement, but also the persistence and retention of

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White students attending public HBCUs. This finding is important because whether students appeared to be limited or extended in their engagement, a key influence for their engagement and collegiate experience involved some level of faculty interaction.

This finding also has implications for the influence of interracial interactions between faculty and students and raises equally important questions regarding the impact of race on faculty-student interactions at HBCUs. For example, the investigation's findings do not reveal if either the race or ethnic background of the faculty member or if the frequency of interaction influenced the engagement of White undergraduate students. Information related to the race and ethnicity of faculty members was only ascertained if the participants voluntarily shared it through the interviews. In a few cases, students discussed their discomfort discussing race or controversial topics in classes taught by White professors. These particular incidents provided some insight into the role same-race as well as different-race dynamics play in the experiences of White students in an HBCU environment. The role of race and interactions between faculty and students is critical in that some studies have suggested that interracial interactions are a factor in establishing faculty-student interactions (Cole, 2007; Milem & Hakuta, 2000). Although most studies examining the interracial interactions between faculty and students have been situated within the context of predominately White institutions (Anaya & Cole, 2003; Cole, 2007; Smith & Borgstedt, 1985), this particular finding established the importance of investigating the impact of interracial interactions in HBCU and other minority-

serving institutional environments as well. The impact of interracial interactions between faculty and students may influence a student's ability to engage as well as learn. Therefore, attention to this area is warranted as diversity continues to increase on HBCU campuses.

Staff-Student Interactions

Staff-student interactions were of similar importance in the engagement of White undergraduate students attending public HBCUs. In this study, the role of staff members, or lack thereof, significantly influenced the levels to which students engaged and if the students primarily functioned in an isolated or optimal engagement mode. This was clearly evident in the number of multiple student engagement experiences GCU students shared compared to the HU student participants. I believe that in the current climate of fewer resources for higher education institutions, coupled with the increasing diversity on HBCU campuses, staff members will be required to assume responsibility extending beyond providing services (e.g., residence life, orientation) and make even more meaningful contributions to student life through co-curricular programming that brings together diverse peers to discuss complex issues and accentuate learning in the classroom. Schuh (1999) argued that student learning should occur in all corners of the campus and opportunities for students exist "in the classroom, on the intramural field, in the residence hall, the library, sites of student work, and other places on the campus" (p.87). Due to the leadership and support student affairs professionals provide in these various areas, their ability to influence how students engage increases. HBCU staff and administrators can play an integral role in encouraging students who may be operating as "limited engagers" to consider other opportunities the university has to offer as well as

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coaching "extended engagers" to ensure a balance between academic and social activities and that they are prepared for careers or study after graduation.

Race Matters

Race matters on HBCU campuses. Although this study concentrated solely on the experiences and perceptions of White, undergraduate students, these students clearly recognized that their experiences did not occur in a vacuum and that their race, whether perceived positively or negatively, influenced the manner in which they engaged and experienced the HBCU environment. In this study, the impact of race was more poignantly demonstrated in participants' diverse experiences prior to coming to college, through the manner in which participants interacted with diverse peers, how participants contextualized their White identity, and through participants' hypervisibility (Peterson & Hamrick, 2009) in the classroom.

Those participants that indicated their transitions into an HBCU environment was seamless, more often than not credited their prior diverse experiences. For example, Brett believed his diverse childhood community and his previous military experience contributed to his adapting in an HBCU setting. In essence, his prior diverse experiences helped to shape his lens and influenced his understanding of the GCU community. Because of his diverse pre-college experiences, Brett was more likely and better able to interact and become immersed in the GCU setting; he was not afraid and intentionally claimed the campus as his own.

Interacting with diverse peers was yet another illustration of the impact of race within the context of this investigation. Jeremy, for instance, originally did not even know HU was a predominantly Black institution. However, he communicated that he

was raised in a racially mixed community, attended a predominantly Black church, and participated in activities with other Black students. Jeremy perceived some incoming first-year HU students saw him as a threat and wondered why he was there. Others who knew him, Jeremy exclaimed, loved him; he had developed solid relationships and had great friends on campus. Jeremy understood and embraced his interactions with diverse peers. Although he had been challenged by other students' perceptions of him, Jeremy continued to build relationships and engaged with diverse students at HU. He believed that his interaction with others was natural for him and he felt much more comfortable on campus as a White student in an HBCU setting. His ability to be comfortable and navigate as a temporary minority (Hall & Closson, 2005) student at HU was driven by his ability to develop strong relationships and interact with his diverse peers.

White identity development offered a third example of the complexity of race in the context of this inquiry. For example, Larry shared that his experiences at GCU helped him understand racial inequity in a different manner. He indicated he never had to deal with racism until he was with his friends at GCU. He witnessed first-hand Black students being treated differently when attempting to gain entry into social clubs in the community or even in instances when Black students were racially profiled and stopped by police. However, Larry contended that even with the overt acts of racism he witnessed, he should not have to bear the responsibility to be apologetic or make accommodations to the Black race. He believed that all people experience racism and that people should all work toward seeing no color. Essentially, Larry was able to see and even appreciate the impact of discrimination and racial inequity. However, Larry had not internalized his White privilege and the advantages his Whiteness afforded him

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(McIntosh, 1998). Larry's interview responses suggested that for some time, he had operated without thinking about race. However, the explicit acts of racism he observed at GCU forced him to think differently about how race affected him as a college student. While he disclosed that he had certainly become more open-minded and acknowledged that racial dominance of one group over another was wrong, he was resistant to messages of racism being constantly presented to him.

There were different ways students viewed the implications of hypervisibility and being a White student within a majority-minority environment. Some student participants perceived their Whiteness as a benefit. For instance, by being the only White in the classroom, one may stand out and become more noticed by the faculty member when making comments or visiting during office hours. Other students commented on the backlash of being a White student in the HBCU environment. Some students avoided high-traffic areas such as the student union because they felt other non-White students would stare at them as if to wonder, "Why is this White person here?" Other students chose to not raise their hands or actively participate in class discussions about race in fear of being ostracized for their varying opinions and comments. Other studies have revealed similar experiences for Black students attending PWIs. For instance, Watson, Terrell, Wright, and Associates (2002) found that African American students at PWIs perceived faculty were not supportive of multicultural environments or programs. In addition, Davis et al. (2004) suggested that Black students also had negative experiences around hypervisibility in the classroom.

The relevance and significance of race within the HBCU setting creates opportunities for innovation and presents challenges with regards to sustaining

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institutional traditions and norms. The pronouncement of race has a direct impact on the

manner which White students perceive themselves and others, including non-White

faculty, staff and students, on campus. If there is a degree of comfort felt by White

students, both socially and academically, they may find themselves more eager and apt to

participate in difficult class discussions and explore further ways to become optimally

engaged. Conversely, if the HBCU environment is not perceived as inviting through its

institutional actors such as faculty and staff or even its facilities, such as the residence

halls, White students may elect to be more limited in their engagement by focusing solely

on their academics and engaging with faculty who are pertinent to their academic

success.

Student Engagement, A Reciprocal Relationship

Student engagement occurred on these public HBCU campuses. This

investigation also provided evidence that student engagement occurs differently on

different campuses for different students. Specifically, the variance of the experiences

offered by the student participants align with Ryan's (2008) argument regarding the

presence of "ecologically fallacy" as it pertains to the understanding of engagement

within the student affairs field. Ryan (2008) asserted that "by assuming or suggesting

that similar patterns and levels of engagement have the same effect across different

students at different kinds of institutions" (p.14), is not justifiable and that overall

findings on student engagement may not be applicable to particular institutions or

different types of institutions.

In this study, there were opportunities and resources available on both campuses

for students to experience engagement in some capacity. It was from the degree of

varying student engagement experiences across both campuses that engagement could be characterized as two distinct strands—limited and extended. Limited engagement is characterized by those students who are engaged in some form of the campus experience. However, it is often relegated to one group or co-curricular experience. The HU campus is an example of where this was the level of student engagement for most participants. For instance, if a student made a strong connection with a faculty member through a history class, he or she tended to talk or interact with this particular faculty member more frequently. The interaction with faculty may have even resulted in the student's joining a departmental history club or attending a departmental lecture. Essentially, the student's engagement was relegated to interaction with one specific faculty member, in one specific department, and participating in activities in one particular area. This is definitely a form of engagement because the student is interacting with a faculty member on a consistent basis and pursuing membership in an academic organization. The engagement, however, is focused and constrained within a singular academic area.

Extended engagement, however, looks a quite different. Students operating in the extended engagement mode exerted more interest and energy in multiple student engagement experiences through various channels offered by the institution. Such behavior was apparent on both campuses but among more students on the GCU campuses. As external engagers, there were more examples and instances of students interacting with faculty members, actively participating in group projects with diverse peers, joining student organizations (academic and social), attending campus-wide events, and pursuing internships and research opportunities. More importantly, there were several accounts where students demonstrated a form of evolution from lower

modes to higher modes of engagement. For example, a student may have enrolled in a class with a faculty member that she or he enjoyed and decided to enroll in another course by the same professor or within the same department. This student then establishes a relationship with the professor beyond one primarily based upon receiving feedback on assignments or seeking career guidance. Their interactions led to opportunities outside the classroom and increased the student's understanding of the campus while still maintaining the relationship with the faculty member and becoming more involved on campus.

Although students who may be limited or extended in their engagement can have similar or varying experiences, the key difference between the two is the student's scope and depth of participation in educationally purposeful activities. The difference between these two conditions also illustrates how student interest and motivation to engage along with institutional resources available for engagement can assist, but may falter, due to the lack of strategy and intentionality on part of both entities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research may advance this topic by utilizing different research designs and methodological approaches such as an ethnographic study. An ethnographic approach would provide an opportunity to examine White student engagement on HBCU campuses over time. The longitudinal structure of such approaches provides opportunities for extensive fieldwork, immersion in a specific environment, long-term engagement and relationship building, and the generation of "thick description" to explain the people, processes, interrelationships, and space in that environment (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Furthermore, this approach may be helpful in exploring how the meaning of race

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is shaped within social settings such as public HBCUs and how experiences on these campuses influence students' identity development. Ethnography studies "places the researcher in the midst of whatever it is they study…and examine various phenomena as perceived by participants and represent these observations as accounts" (Berg, 2007, p. 172). Thus, future researchers may consider living or working directly with a small cohort of diverse students over a semester or academic year to examine how race influences the identity development.

The research can also be broadened by examining the frequency and quality of student interactions with faculty and staff, how the study of students' Whiteness and White identity development (Helms, 1994) can be used to shape their meaning of race and those of other students. This study was conducted using a single lens of White, undergraduate students' experiences. An investigation that offers an examination of student engagement of both Black and White students within an HBCU setting may yield data to determine any significant differences and similarities in student experiences. Such an analysis may also provide results to inform perceptions students have of each other and how these perceptions shape interactions between diverse peers and their overall college experiences. Other possibilities for future research could include comparative studies of White and non-White students, such as Latino/a students.

Scholarly inquiry examining the frequency and quality of interactions may also provide insight into how these interactions influence and guide student experiences (Gurin, 1999; Hall, 2009 & Hurtado et al., 1998). This study gathered information regarding the experiences of White students over a short period of time. Therefore, a study investigating the frequency and quality of faculty-student interactions may assist

HBCUs in considering the most effective ways to engage faculty in student development activities as well as develop strategies to create conditions that encourage and enable faculty to be effectively engaged in the student experience while balancing the rigor and expectations akin to scholarship and teaching.

Researchers could also explore the significance of interracial interactions as they relate specifically to White students attending HBCUs. In this particular investigation, the impact of interracial interactions between faculty and staff is unclear and thus raises important questions regarding the dynamic of such exchanges. Previous studies, such as Cole (2007), examined these relationships within the context of a predominately White institution. A similar study exploring how same-race or different race faculty interactions with White students may increase HBCU faculty and administrators' understanding of this relational dynamic and inform future educational and training practices and programs.

In general, additional research is needed examining student engagement on HBCU campuses. Harper et al. (2004) argued that scholarship in this area is limited and more inquiry regarding how students on HBCU campus engage and the approaches these institutions utilize to facilitate such experiences is necessary to better understand the impact of engagement on these campuses. A key observation of the 2009 NSSE HBCU comparison data was that perceptions and reported experiences of student engagement from all students were seemingly average, typically ranging between mean averages of 2.5 and 3.0 for most questions. Most importantly, when students were asked if they could start over and attend the same college, the White students' positive response of "yes" was significantly higher than those of non-White students attending HBCUs. This

difference not only raises questions about how White students engage on HBCU campuses, but about how HBCU students engage in general.

HBCUs should be encouraged to use institutional data from surveys such as the NSSE and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) assessment to make meaningful changes to enhance student engagement. HBCUs should consider ways to triangulate institutional data sources to inform best practices to increase engagement and assess ways to maximize engagement across a variety of activities. Bridges et al., (2005) suggested that "triangulating different resources of information is a key step in determining the state of student engagement and institutional performance" (p. 35). A study examining the pre- and post-test results of using institutional assessments to improve undergraduate education on HBCU campuses has the potential to better inform campus administrators about what they do well and where significant improvements are needed for programs.

Finally, when reflecting on the conceptual framework for this investigation, the utilization of the NSSE benchmarks proved to be a viable and appropriate means to assess White student engagement in HBCU settings. The benchmarks allowed me to better probe the genuine thoughts and perspectives of participants as they did not confine me to focused and close-ended questions. The interview questions were a great medium as I was truly able to realize the flexibility and autonomy of myself as the researcher for several reasons. First, I was able to reorder my questions during the interview, based on the tenor of the interview environment, e.g., student participant being less open or defensive. Furthermore, I was able to reword and adjust the levels of language based on the commonalities and differences between the participants and myself. Moreover, I was

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able to answer questions my participants had of me and provide clarifications when necessary. Nevertheless, it is important to note there are some other models that may have allowed me to delve deeper into understanding the engagement of White undergraduates. For example, the Diverse College Student Engagement Model (Hall, 2009) implied the quantity of diversity experiences occurring prior to entering college yields increased interactions between racially diverse peers before entering college. The model further posited that these experiences positively affect the likelihood of students' continued interaction with racially diverse peers upon entering and throughout college. This model may be a more substantiated data point to make connections as to how and why White students with prior diversity practices experience engagement differently. In the future, researchers might consider using this model to gain a deeper understanding of how White students engage with their diverse peers within an HBCU setting.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Future practices and implementation strategies to enhance White student engagement can be guided by research further examining the influence of student interactions with faculty and staff, race, and the reciprocity of student engagement. Specifically, strategies to strengthen engagement in the classroom and increase opportunities for optimal engagement could be particularly effective. Practice and programs can also be shaped by extending the examination of faculty-student interactions as well as faculty's direct involvement in activities internal and external to the classroom setting. In this study, participants benefited from interacting and engaging with faculty early in their college experiences (e.g., new student orientation). HBCUs should identify meaningful ways to involve faculty in recruitment as well as first-year initiatives, such as

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first-year seminar and mentoring programs. Some participants in this inquiry also shared

how meeting the faculty through more informal channels influenced their ability to

transition into the campus environment and seek assistance with both academic and social

issues with more ease. Secondly, several student participants indicated that their

involvement outside the classroom was often influenced by a faculty member. Therefore,

HBCUs could consider creative and intentional ways to encourage faculty participation,

and even leadership, in college activities such as departmental organizations, orientation,

and receptions to establish an even stronger presence in the university community.

For future practice, HBCUs should also consider how the classroom setting and

co-curricular programming can capitalize on increasing HBCU diversity as a learning

tool to discuss important issues such as race. Dwyer (2006) and Sim (1994) argued that

curriculum transformation will be critical for HBCUs as campus diversity increases. Sim

(1994) emphasized the importance of assessing the learning differences and individual

needs of each student. This idea is embedded in the process of incorporating strategies to

include "demographic and individual differences as well as the positive transfer of what

is learned in nonschool settings" (p. 53). In the case of White students attending HBCUs,

institutions may desire outcomes or learning experiences similar to those described by

some White faculty at HBCUs. White faculty members who teach or who have taught at

HBCUs have reported the transformation that occurs participating in a reverse role as the

minority in a majority environment. Specifically, these faculty have acknowledged

learning "about race and racism through many informal channels, from comments made

by students, by trying to solve teaching and learning problems in their classrooms, by

challenges from administrators to Afrocentrize curriculum, and by reflecting on their own

feelings of isolation and uncertainty" (Closson & Henry, 2008a, p.17). Although the experiences of White undergraduate students are sure to differ significantly from those of White faculty, the important point here is the power of what can happen in the classroom setting as it relates to diversity and diverse issues. Foster and Guyden (2004) argued that the power of diversity on HBCU campuses is realized "through mutual interactions involving authentic exchange and becomes efficacious for the living out of authentic truth in the wider society" (p. 132).

As a teaching practice, faculty can increase students' capacity to learn from diverse perspectives through interactive teaching methods and intentional efforts to meet with students individually or in dyads to discuss complex issues outside of class. Emphasizing and utilizing active and collaborative-learning strategies could be highly effective in classes concentrating on diversity topics or in mandatory courses such as African American studies. Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, and Johnson (2005) proposed formal cooperative learning groups as one possible classroom pedagogy of engagement. Formal cooperative learning groups encourage students to be responsible for their own learning and focus on collaborative performance. A key element of this pedagogy is face-to-face interaction. Through this process, "students are expected to explain orally to each other how to solve problems, discuss with each other the nature of the concepts and strategies to being learned…and support each other's efforts to learn" (p. 9). This strategy may prove to be highly effective in heated debates on race and politics.

Future practice by HBCU staff and administrators can also be guided by their awareness of the demographics and characteristics of students entering and matriculating at their institutions. The process of raising the awareness of staff and administrators can

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result in positive experiences for both the students and personnel. Closson and Henry (2008a) argued that "it could be worthwhile for HBCU personnel to explore and enhance their own multicultural consciousness so that they can model effective racial discourse, authentic multicultural relationships and social justice values" (p. 532). With this in mind, White students should be encouraged to participate in existing organizations or invited to create their own around social and academic interests. White students should also be recruited and encouraged to participate in key university-wide programs, such as new student orientation and hold key leadership positions in clubs and organizations. It is imperative for HBCUs to demonstrate their campus diversity in all aspects of campus life. This ensures that prospective and current students are able to interact with students who look like them so White students then would be able to visualize themselves in similar roles. Staff and administrators can ensure that information regarding academic, professional, and social organizations is readily available to students through electronic dissemination and campus-wide events. It is important for White and other non-Black students to see that all campus supported organizations are available to students and that their ethnicity is not a requirement for or barrier to membership.

For future practice, HBCUs should be intentional in offering programming and opportunities throughout the campus that invite dialogue and the enhancement of critical thinking skills. The approach toward co-curricular activities can include the participation and perspectives from various stakeholders in the HBCU community including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the surrounding community. Sallee, Logan, Sims, and Harrington (2009) recommended a robust set of strategies, such as the establishment of multicultural student services offices, cultural immersion experiences, and dialogue

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days, to engage all students in meaningful conversations and encourage White student participation on multicultural campuses. Although these recommendations were focused toward White students on predominately White campuses, I think these strategies are necessary and could also be effective within the HBCU context.

Finally, HBCUs should rely on institutional data from reports such as the NSSE to assess how they can increase the capacity for student involvement in high impact activities. Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) found that certain colleges, like HBCUs, may add value, such as enhanced student engagement, more than others. In their study, institutions such as HBCUs exhibited a larger number of substantial positive associations between engagement and learning. Strategies should also be developed to encourage student participation in one or more high impact activities to increase engagement. Also noticeable from the data was that few students participated in study abroad, learning communities, and undergraduate research. The limited participation by students in these activities could have been due to a lack of availability of such programs at HU and GCU or the students' ability and savvy to inquire about the availability of these types of programs. The utilization of student learning and engagement assessments such as the NSSE provide an opportunity for institutions to initiate self-studies and develop strategies to embark upon efforts to make improvements.

Researcher Reflections

The results of this study reflect the unique opportunities and complex challenges increasing campus diversity offers public HBCUs. The complexity of the situation is grounded in the institution's ability to maintain a balance that affords the opportunity for HBCUs to be outstanding higher education institutions for all students while maintaining

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a service-focused mission to advance the educational progress of African Americans. As an HBCU alumnus, former HBCU employee, and researcher, I believe that there are more opportunities than challenges related to increasing HBCU diversity.

As an HBCU student, I can clearly recall all of the people and experiences that were integral in shaping my character and building my confidence. However, I also remember the awkwardness I felt when more White students were in my advanced courses and discussions around race and politics emerged. I actually do not remember appreciating what these students had to offer from their personal perspectives. I also do not recall any intentionality on part of the faculty members to encourage further discussion of different views. For White students, HBCUs are in a unique position to offer a forum that enables these students to reflect on their Whiteness and enhance their understanding of race within a diverse environment. Based upon the results of this study and my own experiences, I believe that HBCUs have the ability and more leverage in creating "racially cognizant environments" (Reason & Evans, 2007, p. 68) and enabling students to better understand that race still matters in the larger society and how their understanding of their Whiteness can lead to positive change.

Conclusion

Students are drawn to and succeed in environments where they see themselves reflected in powerful ways and perceive themselves as key members of the educational community (Tatum, 2005). The participants in this study elected to attend HU and GCU for various reasons and their engagement experiences varied as well. Collectively, these students felt they learned more about themselves and their Whiteness, and the diverse perspectives of other students. From the study results, I inferred that as the landscape of

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public HBCUs transforms as a result of increasing diversity, so do the lives of the students enrolled in them. This transformation includes various experiences and, for White students, it can be facilitated through interactions with faculty and staff, prior college diversity experiences, involvement in co-curricular programs, and first-year experience programs.

The 22 student participants in this study join a growing population of White undergraduate students attending HBCUs that report not only quality educational opportunities but, in some instances, life changing experiences. Specifically, experiences provide more insight into how students such as Joshua Packwood, the first White valedictorian from Morehouse College, and Elisabeth Martin, the first White university queen at Kentucky State University, decided to attend an HBCU and, more importantly, identify ways to become engaged and integral members of the university community. The increasing diversity on HBCU campuses and academic success of all students within these environments place HBCUs in a unique and favorable position to respond to inquiries regarding their relevance and importance in higher education.

Appendix A

Approval Form and Correspondence

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 03, 2009

MEMORANDUM

Application Approval Notification

To: Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt
Joelle Carter
EDHI

From: Joseph M. Smith, MA, CIM

IRB Manager

University of Maryland, College Park

Re: **IRB Application Number:** 09-0208

Project Title: "Factors Influencing the Engagement of White, Undergraduate Students Attending Public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)"

Approval Date: April 03, 2009

Expiration Date: April 03, 2010

Type of Application: Initial

Type of Research: Non-Exempt

Type of Review for Application: Expedited

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved your IRB application. The research was approved in accordance with the University IRB policies and procedures and 45 CFR 46, the Federal

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Individual Interview Letter of Invitation

Dear Student:

You have been recommended to participate in a brief research study about the engagement of White, undergraduate students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). My name is Joelle Davis Carter and I am currently collecting data for a research study and doctoral dissertation sponsored by the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education and International Studies (EDHI) at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Little is known about the experiences of White, undergraduate students on historically Black campus. It is expected the results of my study will offer a foundation for meaningful dialogue regarding the challenges HBCUs may confront while addressing the needs of diverse student populations. My research goal is to add to the knowledge base and possibly inform policy and practice to eliminate barriers to and improve student engagement among White, undergraduate students.

I am seeking your assistance in helping me obtain this goal by completing a brief survey and participating in an individual interview. I am sure that you will find the topic and questions during the interview both interesting and informative. The information you provide will be held in strict confidence and all data will be collected confidentially and reported pseudonymously (e.g. Catherine will be reported as Kendra). There are no associated risks to you if you choose to participate in my study.

Participation is voluntary. However, as a token of my appreciation of your time, you will receive a $25 gift card as well as a summary of the results. Please contact as soon as possible at 301-379-6642 or jdcarter@umd.edu to arrange a suitable meeting time.

Thank you again for assisting me with this very important research. Your participation is invaluable and you will contribute to enhanced college experiences for all students.

Sincerely,

Joelle Davis Carter
Doctoral Candidate
University of Maryland College Park

Focus Group Interview Letter of Invitation

Dear Student:

My name is Joelle Davis Carter and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Studies at the University of Maryland College Park. I am writing regarding a doctoral research study I am conducting under the supervisor of Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt on factors of engagement of White, undergraduate students attending historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Increasing diversity at public historically black colleges and universities presents numerous opportunities to investigate recruitment strategies, academic course offerings and professional development opportunities available for students attending HBCUs. This study seeks to identify factors influencing the levels of engagement of White, undergraduate students on campus as it relates to their social and academic experiences. You have been identified as a student that meets the participant selection criteria for this study. I would like to invite you to participate in a ninety- minute (90) focus group interview along with 10-15 other students on your campus during the week of March 23-March 27, 2009 between the hours of 9a.m.-5 p.m. I will follow-up within the next week to confirm your interest and availability for participating in this study. Your involvement in this doctoral study is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to your participation.

If you agree to participate, the interview should not take more than an hour and a half of your time. The questions are general and based on aspects of your involvement in organizations, special programs, undergraduate research, community service and other co-curricular activities. At any time, you may decline answering any questions you feel that you do not wish to answer. All the information collected from the interviews will be considered confidential and coded in my dissertation to Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt. Further, you will not be identified by name in any thesis, report or publication resulting from this project. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and serve as a special code for my data analysis. The data collected will be retained for a period of April 1, 2009-April 30, 2010 in my graduate advisor's office at the University of Maryland College Park. Lastly, all participants will receive a $25 gift card for full participation in the study. Full participation is defined by maintaining the set appointment and completing the interview.

If after receiving this letter, you have any questions about this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact me (Joelle Davis Carter, 301-203-3013, rjcrndll@aol.com) or Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt (sfries@umd.edu or 301-405-0186). **Interested students must confirm their participation to me via email no later than Friday, March 6, 2009.**

Sincerely,

Joelle Davis Carter, Doctoral Candidate
University of Maryland College Park

Appendix B

Forms, Surveys, and Protocols

Factors Influencing the Engagement of White, Undergraduates Attending HBCUs
Joelle Davis Carter, Doctoral Candidate
2009-2010

Date or Date Range: September, 9, 2009 (Wednesday)

Research Site: Gulf Coast University-Student Union

Location(s): Student Center Lobby and Food Court

Purpose of Observation(s): To observe general body student interactions in the student center while waiting for individual interview participant, Davina. Also to observe Davina's interactions as she comes into and maneuvers through the building.

Activity or Behavior	Location	Observer's Notes	Time
5 African American students are gathered near the front door listening to ipods with separate headphones. Overheard some student say, "these are the beats I made up last night"	Left side of student near bay window	Appears to be break between 50 minute classes on Monday. These students apparently know each other.	11:16 a.m.
2 students who appear to be White walked through the center to go to food court. Went through the line to get food, talked briefly and then went to eat food in separate areas	Center of food court; mid-right, hand side of food court	Students appear to be domestic White students but could be international students. Also appeared to know each other but did not eat together (interesting! But maybe studying and needed individual space). Davina has not arrived for interview.	11:37 a.m.

Consent to Participate in Research Study Interview
University of Maryland College Park
College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education
and International Studies (EDHI)
Joelle Davis Carter
Phone: 301.203.3013
Email: jdcarter@umd.edu

Title of Study:
Factors Influencing the Engagement of White, Undergraduate Students Attending
Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Introduction:
This is a doctoral research study being conducted by Joelle Davis Carter, a doctoral
candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park under the supervision of Dr.
Sharon Fries-Britt, Associate Professor and Advisor, in the Department of Educational
Leadership, Higher Education and International Studies (EDHI). We are inviting you to
participate in this study because you meet the necessary criteria for participant selection
and have been identified by a campus administrator as someone that could add value to
this study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research is to identify factors that influence the engagement of White,
undergraduate students matriculating on HBCU campuses. Student engagement is
defined as the time and energy that students devote to both in-class and co-curricular
activities on campus (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 1993).

Duration:
Your total investment of time should not exceed 2.5 hours—a maximum of 30 minutes to
complete the questionnaire, 60-90 minutes to complete the individual, recorded
interview, and, possibly, a maximum of 30 minutes for feedback and follow-up.

Procedures:
You will be asked to complete a brief, multiple choice format, survey. It will inquire
about demographic information such as gender, age, academic classification, etc. You
will also be asked to participate in an individual, recorded interview. You will be asked
questions relating to your experiences as a White, undergraduate student attending an
HBCU, student and faculty engagement, and relationships with faculty and students.
Following data collection, the researcher may report back preliminary findings to you and
ask for critical commentary on the findings.

Risks/Discomforts:
There are no known risks to you from participating in this research study. Benefits:
Gaining a better understanding of student experiences and engagement on college
campuses provides university administrators and faculty with rich, qualitative

information that may aid in the development of enhanced student services and instructional delivery conducive to emerging diverse student populations on Historically Black College and University campuses.   We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through a better understanding of how White, undergraduate students interact and engage in diverse settings.

Confidentiality:
Participants' personal information will be kept confidential. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms to be used as identifiers in the recording of interviews and on all documents collected. These pseudonyms will be used throughout the entire coding and data analysis process. Pseudonyms will also be used for all interview excerpts used in the final report.

Records of all interviews, data from the survey and all other documents collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which the researcher has the only access. Additionally, all electronic documents will be maintained on the researcher's password protected hard drive. At the conclusion of the study, all materials will be locked in a filing cabinet for a minimum of three years from the study's completion date. At the end of this period, all materials used in the study, including interview tapes and all documents, will be destroyed. In addition to serving as the source of data for the dissertation, the results of this study may be presented in classrooms or at professional conferences. Publication of this study may also be an option. Participants' identity will be protected and remain confidential.

Audio taping/Videotaping/Photographs/Digital Recordings:
This research project involves making audio-recordings of your individual interview. Audio tapes are necessary to ensure appropriate and accurate collection and transcription of the data. Recordings of all interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which the researcher has the only access. At the conclusion of the study, all materials will be locked in a filing cabinet for a minimum of three years from the study's completion date. At the end of this period, all materials used in the study, including interview tapes and all documents, will be destroyed.

___   I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.
___   I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw:
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

Questions, Concerns and Clarification about Study:
This research is being conducted by Joelle Davis Carter at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Joelle Davis Carter at 301.203.3013 or jdcarter@umd.edu.   If you have questions about

your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.
This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Age of Subject and Consent:
Your signature indicates that:
- you are at least 18 years of age;,
- the research has been explained to you;
- your questions have been fully answered; and
- you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

_____

Name of Subject (Please Print)

_____

Subject's Signature

_____

Date

Consent to Participate in Research Study Focus Group
University of Maryland College Park
College of Education, Department of Education Leadership, Higher Education and
International Studies (EDHI)
Joelle Davis Carter
Phone: 301.203.3013
Email: jdcarter@umd.edu

Title of Study:
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and have been identified by a campus administrator as someone that could add value to
this study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research is to identify factors that influence the engagement of White,
undergraduate students matriculating on HBCU campuses. Student engagement is
defined as the time and energy that students devote to both in-class and co-curricular
activities on campus (Kuh, 1993; Astin, 1984).

Duration:
Your total investment of time should not exceed 1.5 hours to complete the focus group,
recorded interview.

Procedures:
You will be asked participate in a focus group, recorded interview. The group will be
asked questions relating to their experiences as White, undergraduate students attending
an HBCU, student and faculty engagement, and relationships with faculty and students.

Risks/Discomforts
There are no known risks to you from participating in this research study.
Benefits:
Gaining a better understanding of student experiences and engagement on college
campuses provides university administrators and faculty with rich, qualitative
information that may aid in the development of enhanced student services and
instructional delivery conducive to emerging diverse student populations on Historically
Black College and University campuses.   We hope that, in the future, other people might

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benefit from this study through a better understanding of how White, undergraduate students interact and engage in diverse settings.

Confidentiality:
Participants' personal information will be kept confidential. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms to be used as identifiers in the recording of interviews and on all documents collected. These pseudonyms will be used throughout the entire coding and data analysis process. Pseudonyms will also be used for all interview excerpts used in the final report.

Records of all interviews, data from the survey and all other documents collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which the researcher has the only access. Additionally, all electronic documents will be maintained on the researcher's password protected hard drive. At the conclusion of the study, all materials will be locked in a filing cabinet for a minimum of three years from the study's completion date. At the end of this period, all materials used in the study, including interview tapes and all documents, will be destroyed. In addition to serving as the source of data for the dissertation, the results of this study may be presented in classrooms or at professional conferences. Publication of this study may also be an option. Participants' identity will be protected and remain confidential.

Audio taping/Videotaping/Photographs/Digital Recordings
This research project involves making audio-recordings of your individual interview. Audio tapes are necessary to ensure appropriate and accurate collection and transcription of the data. Recordings of all interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which the researcher has the only access. At the conclusion of the study, all materials will be locked in a filing cabinet for a minimum of three years from the study's completion date. At the end of this period, all materials used in the study, including interview tapes and all documents, will be destroyed.

___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.
___ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw:
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

Questions, Concerns and Clarification about Study:
This research is being conducted by **Joelle Davis Carter** at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact **Joelle Davis Carter** at 301.203.3013 or jdcarter@umd.edu**.** If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.**

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Age of Subject and Consent:
Your signature indicates that:
- you are at least 18 years of age;,
- the research has been explained to you;
- your questions have been fully answered; and
- you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Name of Subject (Please Print)

Subject's Signature

Date

Demographic Survey Instrument

Please complete this survey by writing or checking the appropriate answers below. It is not required you provide your name on this form. All information included on this form will be kept confidential and secured in a password-protected computer file. Thank you.

1. Enrollment Status: □ Full-time □ Part-time

2. Age in years: □ 18-20 □ 21-23 □ 24-26 □ 26 and over

3. Campus Residency: □ On-Campus □ Off-Campus, Commuter Student

4. Are you currently employed? □ Yes □ No If yes, □ Full-time □ Part-time

5. Did you attend any colleges of universities prior to attending this university?
    □ Yes □ No
    If yes, the college or university you previously attended was classified as a(n)?
    □ HBCU(s) □ I attended both an HBCU(s) and a PWI(s)
    □ PWI(s) □ Other _____

6. Was this University your first choice institution to pursue higher education?
    □ Yes □ No

7. Besides this University, what kinds of other institutions of higher education did you apply to? Check all that apply.
    □ HBCU(s) □ Other _____
    □ PWI(s) □ I did not apply to any other institutions

8. Name and Location of High School:
    _____

9. Please rate the ethnic/racial diversity of the student body at the high school you graduated from:
    □ Very Diverse
    □ Somewhat Diverse
    □ Not Diverse

10. Did your parent(s) attend college? □ Yes □ No
    If yes, what kind of institution they attend?
    □ HBCU □ Both an HBCU and PWI
    □ PWI □ Other

11. What is your major? _____

12. What was the key factor(s) that influenced your decision to attend this institution?
    _____
    _____

Individual Interview Protocol

Benchmark #1: Level of Academic Challenge
1. How would you describe the academic rigor of the courses offered here at University X?
2. Describe your course load and the manner in which you manage your time and organize attention to required class papers, projects, reading assignments and other homework/tasks.
3. How would you rank the difficulty or complexity of your major homework assignments (e.g., research papers/projects, tests, final and mid-term exams)? Use a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the most difficult and 1 being the least difficult. Why did you assign the ranking?
4. How much time do you take to prepare for each class in which you are currently enrolled?

Benchmark #2: Student Interaction with Faculty Members
1. Describe your interaction with faculty members in class.
2. Describe your interaction with faculty members outside of class.
3. What type of discussions do you have with faculty members?
4. Would you describe faculty members as supportive or helpful?
   a. If yes, how and why?
   b. If not, why not? How could they be?
5. Describe your participation during class discussions.

Benchmark#3: Active and Collaborative Learning
1. Talk about your experience working in small teams or groups with students (non-White) on academic projects.
2. Were there people or certain events that motivated you to become active or involved on campus? If so who were the individuals and what were the events?
3. Have you participated in any internships, research presentations or community service learning projects?
   a. If yes, how did you approach becoming involved in these projects?
   b. If no, why have you not participated in such activities

Benchmark#4 and Benchmark#5: Supportive campus environments/enriching educational experiences:
1. What words best describe what it is like to be a student here in this university? In particular, what words describe what it's like to be a White student here?
2. Describe your interaction with students from different ethnic or religious backgrounds than your own.
3. How you describe faculty members that teach your courses or within your department?
4. To what degree, and in what ways, are the faculty here supportive or helpful-or less than supportive and less helpful to individual students.

5. To what degree, and in what ways, are administrators here supportive or helpful or less than supportive or less helpful to individual students

Racial Experience Questions:
1. Have you ever had a racially-driven experience on campus?
2. Describe any experiences of isolation that you have experienced.
3. Describe your interactions with students, faculty and staff that are not of your race?
4. Are you involved in organizations or programs where you are the only "White" student? What is that like?
5. How do you think Black students perceive you on campus?

General Interview Questions:
1. What are the major factors that influence White students to engage on campus?
2. What steps do faculty, staff, and administrators take to engage you campus, if any?
3. Describe your relationship with faculty, staff and administrators outside your race. If so, how do these individuals attempt to encourage you to engage or involve yourself on campus?

Heritage University (HU)
Focus Group Interview Questions

Important Note: The questions for the focus interviews will be further developed and modified after the individual interviews, review of field notes and document analysis. The purpose of the focus group interview will be solely designed to follow-up on data collection during the individual interviews and from the field notes and document analysis results

Researcher Opening: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this sixty-minute interview to learn more about your engagement and experiences as a student on campus. As with the individual interview, you may decline participating in the interview or refuse to answer questions anytime during the interview. Before we begin, I will need you to sign this consent showing that you understand the purpose of the study and your rights and responsibilities before we begin.

Sample questions included:

1. Discuss the ways in which you are most involved on campus?

2. Who do you interact the most with on a daily basis?

3. What is your knowledge of campus resources and which do you use the most?

4. Describe your experiences in the mandatory African American studies course.

5. Describe your experiences during new or student orientation program. What would you say you gained from the program?

6. What do you feel you gain from engagement on campus?

7. Describe your relationships with faculty and administrators on campus?

8. Is there a person on campus that you consider a mentor? If yes, who is the person or persons and how would you describe the development of the mentoring relationship?

9. Do you feel that people treat you differently as a result of your engagement? How and why?

Gulf Coast University (GCU)
Focus Group Interview Questions

Important Note: The questions for the focus interviews will be further developed and modified after the individual interviews, review of field notes and document analysis. The purpose of the focus group interview will be solely designed to follow-up on data collection during the individual interviews and from the field notes and document analysis results

Researcher Opening: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this sixty-minute interview to learn more about your engagement and experiences as a student on campus. As with the individual interview, you may decline participating in the interview or refuse to answer questions anytime during the interview. Before we begin, I will need you to sign this consent showing that you understand the purpose of the study and your rights and responsibilities before we begin.

Sample questions included:

1. Discuss the ways in which you are most involved on campus?

2. Who do you interact the most with on a daily basis?

3. What is your knowledge of campus resources and which do you use the most?

4. Describe your experiences in the mandatory African American studies course.

5. Describe your perceptions of the course before and after your enrollment in the African American studies course.

6. What do you feel you gain from engagement on campus?

7. Describe your relationships with faculty and administrators on campus?

8. Is there a person on campus that you consider a mentor? If yes, who is the person or persons and how would you describe the development of the mentoring relationship?

9. Do you feel that people treat you differently as a result of your engagement? How and why?

10. During the individual interviews, several participants mentioned the racial tensions that emerged between Black and White students during the recent Obama and McCain presidential campaign. Did you directly or indirectly experience or observe such tensions? Do you agree that the election sparked controversy on campus between Black and White students on campus? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Appendix C

Additional Tables and Materials

Benchmarks of Educational Effective Practice

The table below was developed using content extracted and adapted from the National Survey of Student Engagement's (NSSE) *Benchmarks of Effective Educational Benefits* summary located at www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/nsse_benchmarks.pdf

Benchmarks	Description	Sample Activities
Level of Academic Challenge (LAC)	Intellectual and creative work designed to promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing academic effort and high expectations for student performance	• Time spend preparing for class (studying, reading and rehearsing) • Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings • Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more • Coursework emphasizes: Making judgments about the value of information, arguments or methods
Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL)	Students' efforts to collaborate with others in solving problems, mastering difficult material that can be applied in different settings daily and after college	• Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions • Made a class presentation • Worked with others on a class project • Worked with classmates outside of class • Tutored or taught other students
Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI)	Students closely interact and witness how faculty think and solve practical problems first hand. Through interactions inside and outside the classroom, faculty members become role models, mentors and guides for continuous, life learning processes	• Discussed grades or an assignment with an instructor • Shared and discussed career plans with a faculty member • Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance • Worked with a faculty member on a research project
Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE)	Complementary learning opportunities experienced both inside and outside the classroom to allow students to make learning meaningful and useful. Examples include experiencing diversity, using technology and participating in internships and community service projects.	• Talking with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values. • Talking with students of a different race or ethnicity. • Using electronic mediums to discuss or complete assignments • Participating in study abroad or community service
Supportive Campus Environment (SCE)	Environments that encourage students to perform better through positive working and social relations among different groups on campus	• Campus environment provides support students need to succeed academically • Campus environment provides support to cope with non-academic responsibilities such as work and family. • Quality of relationships with students, faculty and administrators, respectively.

Table 3

Sample of NAFEO Institutions with White, Undergraduate Enrollments of 100 or More,

2006

College/University	Total Student Enrollment	White Student Enrollment	Institutional Type
Bishop State Community College	2035	450	Community College
Delaware State University	2934	282	Public
Elizabeth City State University	2324	353	Public
Fayetteville State University	4260	543	Public
Florida A&M University	9070	210	Public
Hampton University	4736	118	Private
J.F. Drake State Technical College	420	151	Technical College
Kentucky State University	1769	370	Public
Lincoln University (MO)	1969	789	Public
Norfolk State University	4496	167	Public
Shelton State Community College	3176	2128	Community College
Tennessee State University	5752	704	Public
University of Maryland Eastern Shore	3399	220	Public
Winston-Salem State University	4699	459	Public

Source: NAFEO Research and Advocacy Publications and Reports

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