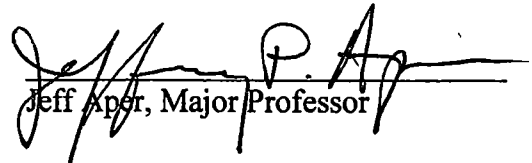
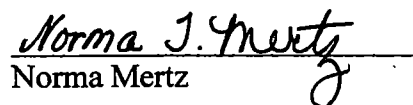


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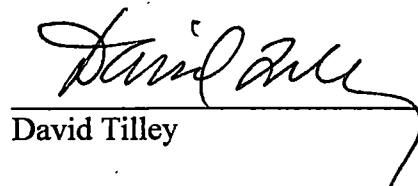
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Robert A. Littleton entitled "African American Student Persistence at Small Colleges in Appalachia." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Administration and Policy Studies.


Jeff Ager, Major Professor

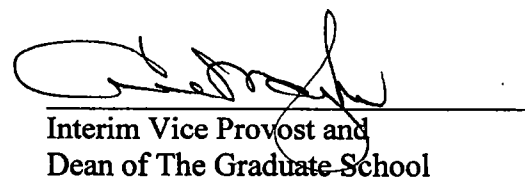
We have read this dissertation
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Interim Vice Provost and
Dean of The Graduate School

African American Student Persistence
At Small Colleges In Appalachia

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert A. Littleton
May 2001

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife

Mrs. Cheryl M. Littleton

and

my parents

Mrs. Elizabeth M. Littleton and (the late) Mr. Bob L. Littleton

and

my father and mother-in-law

Dr. and Mrs. Fred D. McGehee

who have all been a source of encouragement and support through the years.

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To my wife, I can truly say 'WE DID IT.' Her patience, love and support were paramount in completing this degree. She has been with me during the entire process and I am incredibly grateful for her faithfulness and encouragement. She is amazing. To my parents I say thank you for your love and the hard work ethic you have modeled through the years. To my father and mother-in-law, I say thank you for your support and understanding.

A number of colleagues have also been influential. Dr. William McDonald and Mrs. Cathy Brown have been by my side through the majority of the doctoral experience. I am grateful for their support as former supervisors and lifelong colleagues. I would also like to express appreciation to Dr. Don Good who has been supportive and understanding as my current supervisor. Mr. Jimmy Hodges and Mr. Andrew Johnston have been a source of encouragement as well. Mrs. Elisa Dunman also deserves a special 'thank you'

for her assistance. To all of my Carson-Newman family, thank you for your prayers and kind words along the way.

I am extremely thankful to my contacts at each of the participating institutions. Without their valuable assistance, the project would have been difficult to implement. I also appreciate each student and administrator for allowing me the opportunity to interview him or her. It was a pleasure to meet the students and I wish each of them the best as they begin their careers. Their insight and openness were key elements of the information obtained during the interviews. The administrators I interviewed work diligently to make their institution the best it can be for all students. I appreciate each of them and wish the well. I also want to say a special word of thanks to the Appalachian College Association (ACA) for their support at the beginning stages of this project.

Most importantly, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the grace to live each and every day. God's strength has truly been a guiding force in this project. I am truly grateful.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of twenty-four African American students who persisted towards graduation at small, predominantly white colleges in the Appalachian region of the United States. Past studies have focused on persistence of African American students at large, public universities. This study attempted to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on small liberal arts colleges.

The purpose was threefold: (1) to describe the experiences of African American students who persisted at small colleges, (2) to describe what administrators, at these institutions, said their college did to contribute to student persistence, and (3) to compare administrator and student perceptions of student experience. The focus of this study was on students who persisted towards graduation as opposed to a retention-based study that may have examined factors leading to student departure.

A qualitative approach guided the study, as semi-structured, open-ended interviews were the primary data source. This approach enabled readers to clearly understand, through detailed descriptive data, what the experience was like for a minority at a small, predominantly white institution. Phenomenological inquiry guided data analysis, which allowed the researcher to know what people experience and how they interpret the world.

From the completed analysis, many themes emerged. Faculty influence was the number one persistence factor for students in this study. Involvement in campus activities, family support, positive attitude, and peer influence were also significant.

Second, African American students at small, predominantly white colleges are, by definition, in the minority. However, among females and non-athletes, the issue of being

a minority was magnified for some students in this study, as they were a 'minority within a minority.' Third, the idea of 'resilience' as a persistence factor was suggested because of the data collected. Resilience was simply defined as sheer determination and ability to press forward amid difficult circumstances. Fourth, the need for an African American role model for students was also suggested.

Many other themes of student experience and persistence were described along with significant findings. Data from administrator interviews was compared to student interviews. The culmination of analysis resulted in suggestions for institutional policy and practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PROBLEM	1
Introduction	1
Personal Interest	5
Background	7
Problem Statement	9
Purpose	10
Research Questions	12
Assumptions	13
Rationale	13
Significance	14
Delimitations	16
Limitations	17
Definitions	18
Overview	19
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	21
Introduction	21
Theoretical Framework	24
Persistence of African American College Students	33
African American Students on White Campuses	36
Faculty Involvement in Student Life	42
Climate and Culture	47
Additional Literature Pertaining to African American Students	51
Example Models for Increasing Student Persistence	55
Examples of Successful Programs	61
Summary	64
III. RESEARCH METHODS	66
Introduction	66
Research Strategies	67
Data Collection Procedures	82
Data Analysis	85
Methods for Verification (Validity)	94
Closing	101
IV. RESULTS	102
Overview of Chapter	102
Section One: Participant Profiles	103
Section Two: Major Themes from Student Interviews	116
Section Three: Major Themes from Administrator Interviews	212

CHAPTER	PAGE
Section Four: Comparing Student and Administrator Interviews	247
Section Five: Document Analysis	261
Final Synthesis	264
Conclusion	266
V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS	268
Introduction	268
Discussion of Findings with Comparisons to the Literature	269
Conclusions	299
Suggestions for Student Affairs Professionals	307
Recommendations for Future Study	310
Concluding Statement	311
Bibliography	312
Appendices	323
Vita	353

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Steps for Developing an Organizing System for Unstructured Qualitative Data	90
2. Major Themes from Student Interviews	118
3. Student Interviewee's Attraction to College	122
4. Student Interview Persistence Factors (Alphabetically with definitions)	199-201
5. Student Interview Persistence Factors (Rank Order According to Frequency – All Students)	202
6. Major Themes from Administrator Interviews	213
7. African American Student Enrollment at Participating Colleges	234

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Interactive Model of Qualitative Research	6
2. Cyclical Process of Black Student Attrition	37
3. Model for Enhancing Black Student Retention	56
4. Data Analysis Steps	95

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Chris, an African American male graduated from Vanguard College, a small liberal arts college in the Southeastern United States. Vanguard, predominantly white with approximately 4.5% African American enrollment, has an excellent undergraduate program and is known for competitive NCAA Division III athletics. Among other factors, Chris participated in intercollegiate athletics and lived in campus housing a portion of his time in college.

Chris' persistence in college may be attributed to several things: positive peer relationships, good interaction with faculty and staff, good study habits; and the list goes on (Tinto, 1987; Astin, 1984). While Chris persisted and earned his degree, there may have been six or eight African Americans, who entered with him at the same institution, who failed to graduate. One might ask what experiences Chris had at Vanguard that the other students (who did not graduate) did not have?

In the late 1980s, Boyer (1987) projected by the year 2000 approximately 30% or more of all students in the public schools would be from minority groups. He stated:

If our sense of nationhood is to be strengthened, if a generation of new citizens is to be brought into the mainstream of American life, colleges and universities must recommit themselves to the task of equality of opportunity for all. They must assure that their recruitment and admissions procedures bring them significant numbers of students from under-represented populations. Perhaps more than any other institution in our society, it is the college that is crucially important to advancing prospects for black and Hispanic students (p. 39).

Gose (1998) stated that overall college and university enrollment for African Americans was up 1.7% to 1,499,400 in 1996. Of the total number of college students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education in 1996, a total of 10.4% were African American (Gose, 1998). In 1995, the proportion of African Americans (ages 18-24) attending college was 35% compared to 43% of Caucasians (Gose, 1997). However, the degree completion rate for African Americans was relatively low. In 1994, African American students comprised 10.7% of the undergraduate population at four-year institutions, but only earned 7.2% of all Bachelor's degrees (Gose, 1997).

According to Astin, Tsui, and Avalos (1996), "the undergraduate years represent a major leak in the educational pipeline for students from underrepresented ethnic/minority groups" (p. 6). The under representation of minority groups among entering college freshmen is intensified by their relatively low degree attainment rates during the undergraduate years. The percentage of African Americans completing their Bachelor's degree within four years was 19.4%, within six years was 31.2% and within nine years was 33.9%. Comparatively, 42.7% of white students completed their Bachelor's degree within four years, 46.8% within six years, and 47.3% within nine years (Astin et. al., 1996).

Retention is a major focus at most colleges and universities. Likewise, retention efforts are usually a strategic initiative supported by most senior administrators. However, according to Kemp (1990), when an institution focuses solely on retention it defeats the true mission of higher education, which is to provide society with socially responsible citizens. Furthermore, he suggested, "universities should develop and implement programs and services aimed at the education and *progression* of minority students toward graduation and

social productivity rather than retention” (Kemp, 1990, p.146). *Therefore, instead of examining why African American students drop out of colleges, the researcher in this study chose to explore the experiences they have that lead them to persist and eventually graduate.*

Kemp (1990) argued that the emphasis must be taken off retention and placed on persistence. Other researchers took a similar stance. Smith (1990) noted that using the term “drop-out rate” infers failure on the student’s part. Consequently, Smith (1990) argued that administrators, in order to be more proactive, must also look at institutional problems that inhibit student success. Cabrera, Nora, and Castanda (1993) suggested that college administrators shift their focus to variables that support the student’s intentions to re-enroll as opposed to converging on past behavior such as withdrawal decisions.

According to Kemp (1990), emphasizing African American student persistence instead of retention can avoid three negative connotations sometimes perceived with retention studies or programs. First, the focal point of African American student retention is often equated with attrition. Focusing on attrition may lead to interventions for observed problems such as study skills, while other factors such as the student’s perception of campus climate are not adequately addressed. Secondly, the term “retention” can carry negative overtones implying underachievement or under preparedness. According to Kemp (1990), the continued use of the term retention “preceded by the word minority in place of a more suitable alternative (e.g. minority progression) is a misnomer and does a disservice to students because of the associated negative connotation” (p. 147). Finally, emphasizing minority retention ignores the desire of African American students to learn and to graduate, and not simply be “retained.”

A great deal of effort has gone into the development of 'retention' programs (e.g. freshmen seminars, mentoring programs) at many institutions. However, some researchers have posed the challenge of doing more through a collaboration of efforts. Tinto (1998) recently said:

While we have witnessed changes in programming for students, in particular in the domain of Student Affairs, we have not seen comparable changes in the Academic side of the house or in the organization of higher education. In this regard, the educational experiences of students have remained largely unchanged, their education relatively unaffected by the research on student persistence (p. 168).

The goal of this study was to provide faculty and administrators, particularly at small institutions, with practical knowledge and recommendations for enhancing the experiences of African American students as well as their persistence during their undergraduate years. Therefore, the focus of this study was *persistence* as an expression of the quality of student experience rather than simply the emphasis of the number of students retained.

The qualitative method of research was used in this study. Palys (1992) compared the qualitative approach to Max Weber's concept of 'verstehen', which involves a more intimate and empathetic understanding of behavior in terms of its interpretive meaning of the subjects. While justification for this method is discussed in Chapter Three, two reasons for the qualitative approach are mentioned in this section. First, the focus of qualitative research is on the participants' perceptions, experiences and the way they make sense of their lives. Second, qualitative research focuses on the process that is occurring as well as the product or outcome (Creswell, 1994). Persistence to graduation is indeed a process and something that depends on perception. Therefore, the researcher believed the qualitative approach would produce both an insightful and meaningful study in the area of student persistence.

The purpose of Chapters One, Two and Three is to explain and justify the study on African American student persistence. The interactive model described by Maxwell (1996, p.4) provided a foundation on which to base the study (See Figure 1). The model describes how the purpose, conceptual context (or background), methods and validity sections of the dissertation affect each other. The research questions are the center segment to which all other sections connect.

Personal Interest

In qualitative studies, some researchers suggest the use of a personal biography to further define the research. According to Lock, Spirduso and Silverman (1993), "it may be possible to pretend that the investigator's person can effectively be isolated from the process of quantitative research. This pretense, however, is never possible in qualitative research" (p. 114). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to this process as a cover story or a written presentation of self.

The researcher is a 36-year-old male who lives with his wife in Jefferson City, Tennessee. The researcher received the Bachelor's degree from East Tennessee State University, the Master's degree from University of Tennessee, Knoxville and is currently pursuing the Doctorate of Education degree from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The researcher is currently employed at Carson-Newman College as the Director of Adult Education. Prior to the present position, the researcher served as the Director of Residence Life and Summer Programs at the same institution.

The topic of this study centered on the experiences of African American students at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the United States.

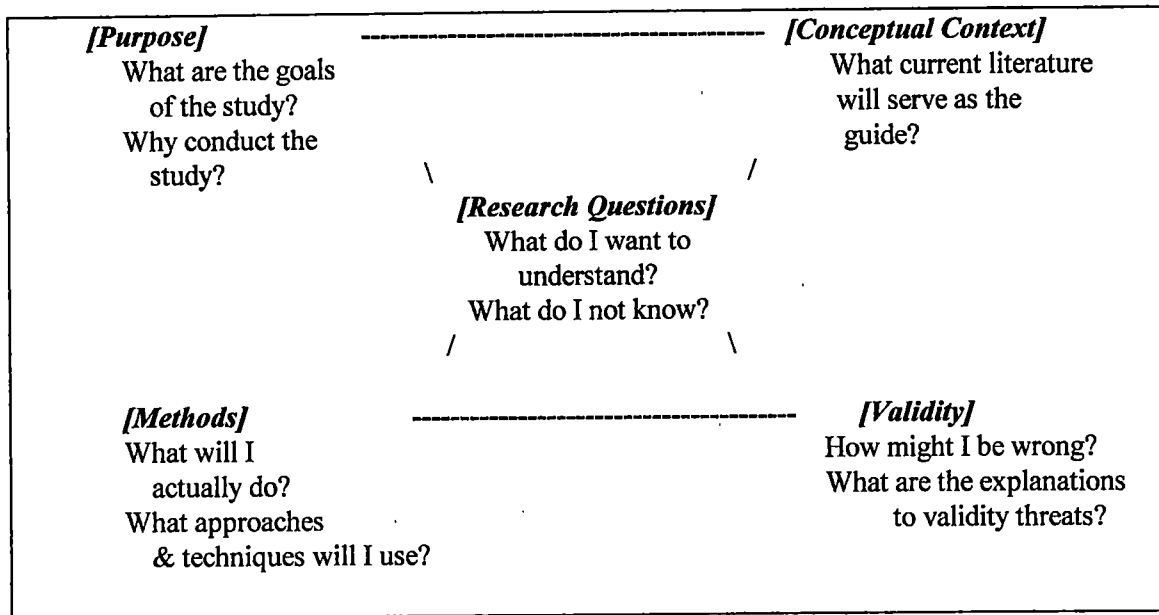


Figure 1
Interactive Model of Qualitative Research

The intention was to interview students and administrators at four institutions who are members of the Appalachian College Association (ACA). Interest in this topic originated from two areas. First, the topic was considered an important pursuit and worthy of further study. Secondly, the researcher is generally interested in assisting African Americans in having a positive campus experience. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), African American college students at predominantly white institutions tend to experience greater social isolation, alienation, dissatisfaction and overt racism than their counterparts at historically black campuses. Having worked ten years at an institution that is part of the ACA, the researcher has witnessed many students persist through their undergraduate years and several students who failed to persist towards graduation. While it is understandable to focus on those students who leave college, the interest was in those students who remained and graduated. By learning what experiences these students had, perhaps more effective efforts can be made to help future African American college students persist.

The researcher approached this study literally as a student. The role as a student researcher was not to judge or evaluate, but to understand. Interviews were used to help understand the experiences of African Americans as they persisted in college. In using the interview method, clarification was made of the student's role as the expert and teacher.

Background

Marshall and Rossman (1989) identified four functions a background section should address. First, the background section should demonstrate underlying assumptions behind the general research questions. Second, general knowledge of the topic should be expounded. Third, gaps in the literature should be identified and plans to fill these gaps mentioned. Finally, the background section should refine and redefine the research questions by embedding them in the larger scheme of things.

According to Fleming (1984), African American students at predominantly white institutions face an additional challenge by pursuing their education in an environment primarily structured for the needs and attitudes of white students. A recent study of a mid-size university in the Appalachian Mountains was a good example of Fleming's point. This study revealed three barriers to African American student persistence. First, the institution was located in a small county (approximately 27,000) with only 1.6% of the population African American. Second, the institutional enrollment was approximately 6,400 with a small percentage (3.6%) being African American. Finally, of the 320 faculty members, only four were African American (Williams and Wilson, 1993). African American students attending small liberal arts colleges located in Appalachia face similar circumstances. The institutions are usually located in small towns with few African Americans. The institutions are

predominantly white with an average African American student population of four percent. Finally, the representation of African American faculty and administrators is presumably small.

Based on current literature, there are several important things known about student persistence in general. The overall completion rates for African Americans are relatively low (Gose, 1997). Several theories provide a framework in understanding the student persistence process (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1980; Pace, 1980; and Tinto, 1987). Academic integration and faculty interaction play significant roles in student persistence (Astin, 1984; and Eimers and Pike, 1997). The perception of campus climate is a significant factor in a student's decision to persist (Smith, 1990). A student's overall satisfaction with programs and services is important to her/his persistence (Noel and Levitz, 1997). Finally, peer group interaction plays a significant role in the persistence process (Tinto, 1987). An in-depth review of these areas will be covered in Chapter Two.

The existing literature on student persistence is broad and covers both small and large institutions. Within the literature relating to student persistence, there exists a fair amount of research pertaining to African American students. However, the amount of literature pertaining to persistence of African American students at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges is very small. In fact, most of the studies mentioned in this chapter and Chapter Two were conducted at mid-size and large public universities (Brown, 1996; Cabrera et. al., 1993; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora and Hengstler, 1992; Cabrera, Nora, Pascarella and Hagedorn, 1996; Dale and Zych, 1994; Davis, 1996; Eimers and Pike, 1997; Haralson, 1996; Harris and Nettles, 1991; Loo and Robison, 1986; Nettles, Thoeny and Gosman, 1986; Norby-Loud, 1996; Rissmeyer, 1996; Ryland, Riordan, and Brack, 1994; Springer, Terenzini,

Pascarella, and Nora, 1996; Tomlinson-Clarke, 1994; and Williams and Wilson, 1993).

Only a few studies have concentrated on small, predominantly white liberal arts institutions. O'Neal (1993) used a case study approach and surveyed administrators, faculty, support staff and students to assess retention efforts at a small college. Penn (1987) completed a dissertation, which focused on the relationship between financial aid, aptitude and persistence for students at small colleges. Fleming's (1984) study on minority college students consisted of mostly large institutions but included some small colleges in the Southeastern United States. Finally, Astin (1975, 1993, 1996) has done extensive work on student outcomes and student retention at both large and small institutions. However, the majority of his work was based on the quantitative method rather than a qualitative approach, which is the intent of this study. Therefore, the goal of this study was to fill the gap in the literature where few studies exist that deal with the experiences of African American students who persist at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges.

Problem Statement

The problem was to describe the experiences of African American students who persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the U.S. This problem was worthy of study because little is known about the experiences of African American students at these institutions. As indicated in the Background section, most studies focusing on persistence of African American students were conducted at mid-size or large public universities. Only a few studies have focused on small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges. This study attempted to fill a gap in the literature on the experiences of African American students who persist at these small colleges.

A significant number of African Americans attend small liberal arts colleges. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1998), 4.35% of students enrolled at colleges belonging to the Appalachian College Association (ACA) were African Americans (see Appendix C). In order for small, liberal arts colleges located in Appalachia to better meet the needs of African American students, it is important to hear about their experiences of being a minority at a predominantly white institution.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to describe the experiences of African American students who have persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia, (2) to describe what administrators, at these same institutions, said they did to contribute to the policies and procedures that impacted the persistence of African American students, and (3) to compare what administrators said they did to support African American students and what African American students said about their experience of being a minority at a small, predominantly white liberal arts college.

This study focused on the experiences of African American students who persisted to their junior or senior year. By focusing on the experiences of students who persisted, this study examined factors that enabled African Americans to succeed in a predominantly white, small college environment. This approach was chosen in place of a retention-based study that might have only examined factors leading to student departure.

This study also described what administrators said they did to support African American students. The speculation was that there could be incongruence between administrators and students. If administrators thought they were making the necessary efforts

through policy and practice but yet students felt there was a need for improvement, changes in policies and practices might need serious consideration. Overall, the culmination of analysis resulted in recommendations for institutional policy and practice.

Maxwell (1996) noted three research purposes for which qualitative studies are especially suited: (1) understanding the meaning for participants in the study (i.e. how they make sense of things), (2) understanding the particular context within which the participants act and the influence that this context has on their actions, and (3) generating new ideas that will contribute to the literature. These three purposes were applicable to this study.

Understanding the experiences African American students have on their campuses were important to this study. Allowing students to tell the researcher stories about their undergraduate experience accomplished this goal. Understanding the context and how this plays a role in their actions was also important. In this particular study, the context was small, predominantly white colleges in Appalachia. The experiences of African American students in this context were not found in the current literature. A relatively small number of people were studied, which allowed for a more individualistic approach. In short, the researcher attempted to understand the experiences of students who persisted in a predominantly white environment. Furthermore, the researcher asked administrators what they thought they contributed to these same students' experience.

It was presumed this study would generate new theories concerning the experiences of African American students who persisted on small college campuses. By comparing what administrators reported and what African American students said they experienced as minorities, possible recommendations could be made for institutional policy and practice.

Five overarching goals guided this study: (1) to describe how African Americans at small, liberal arts colleges perceived their college experience; (2) to better understand how African American students persist in predominantly white institutions; (3) to compare the experiences described by African American students with what administrators say they do to foster these students' persistence in order to determine if they are congruent; (4) to make practical recommendations for campus policy and practice that would enhance the quality of experience for African American students and in turn strengthen African American student persistence at small liberal arts colleges in Appalachia; and (5) to compare the results from this study to the results found in the literature to determine if there exists a difference in factors leading to persistence between large and small institutions.

Research Questions

This study was exploratory in nature, which was reflected in the research questions. According to Marshal (et. al.,1989), exploratory questions seek to investigate, identify and discover. According to Maxwell (1996) and Creswell (1994), qualitative research questions should remain adaptable and open to change during the course of the study. While the questions below guided the study, it was the intention of the researcher that they not constrain or limit the research.

1. How do African American students describe their experiences of being African American at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?
2. What do administrators at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia report that their institutions do to support African American students?

3. What is the relationship between what administrators report and what African American students say they experience as minorities at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?

Assumptions

The primary assumption under girding this study was that each participant would candidly describe her/his experiences and perceptions to the researcher. As the researcher talked with students about their undergraduate experiences, the desire was to learn something important about what happens at their institution from their perspective. Furthermore, it was assumed that participants were making progress towards graduation due to: 1) their junior or senior status, and 2) their being considered 'in good standing' with their college.

Rationale

The rationale for this study was to produce meaningful data that would contribute to the present structure of knowledge in college student persistence. The research questions were based on what is not known about persistence of African American students at small, liberal arts colleges in Appalachia.

Based on current literature, some general information is known about student persistence. However, most of this data was the result of research at large, state institutions and was collected from a mix of racial backgrounds. First, the overall completion rates for African Americans have been relatively low (Gose, 1997). Second, several theories have provided a framework in understanding the student persistence process (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1980; and Tinto, 1987). Third, academic integration and faculty interaction have played a significant role in student persistence (Astin, 1984; and Eimers and Pike, 1997). Fourth, the perception of campus climate has been a significant factor in student's decision to persist

(Smith, 1990). Fifth, a student's overall satisfaction with programs and services has been important to student persistence (Noel and Levitz, 1997). Sixth, peer group interaction has played a significant role in the persistence process (Tinto, 1987). Seventh, African American students have experienced different types of problems with college adjustment than their white counterparts (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991).

The gap in the literature on student persistence was in the area of how certain factors influence persistence of African American students at small, liberal arts colleges, particularly in the Appalachian region of the United States. Specifically this study examined: how African American students describe their experiences at small liberal arts colleges; what administrators report they do to support these students; and the relationship between these two findings. In short, this study was a response to what was not known about student persistence from an African American student point of view.

Significance

Five specific factors made this study unique and significant. First, the study focused on persistence as opposed to retention. A focus on persistence provided meaningful information on the experiences of African American students who progressed to their junior or senior year at a small, predominantly white liberal arts college.

Second, interviews provided a rich, detailed perspective from each student about her/his experience of being a minority at a small, predominantly white liberal arts college. The interview method helped the researcher understand the complexity and richness of the students' experiences. It is unlikely that the researcher would have obtained as rich of data through a survey approach.

Third, the study focused on small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges (of which there is little known in terms of African American student experiences) as opposed to large public institutions (which are well represented in the literature). The study of students' perception of their environment was worthy of research. There was reason to believe an African American student on a predominantly white campus would have a different experience than a white student. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) supported this:

It is clear that many of the most important effects of college occur through students' interpersonal experiences with faculty members and other students. It is equally clear that the academic, social, and psychological worlds inhabited by most non-white students on predominantly white campuses are substantially different in almost every respect from those of their white peers. (p. 644)

This study provided a valuable contribution in this area by filling a gap in the literature, which was primarily based on large public institutions.

Fourth, the relationship between students' perspectives and administrators' perspectives were compared. The students' perspective on experiences that have fostered or hindered their success in college could be a useful tool for administrators. This information could provide direction for possible changes in campus policy and practice for those colleges who are interested.

Fifth, the study focused on a particular region of the United States: the Appalachian region. The Appalachian College Association (ACA) consists of 33 small liberal arts colleges in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The 33 ACA institutions have a small, but significant percentage of African American students (4.35%). This study focused on the factors that led to persistence for a sample of students attending institutions affiliated with the ACA. The results could, in turn, be generalized to other

institutions of similar size, mission, and African American population.

Those who may potentially benefit from the study include: participating institutions; other ACA institutions; other small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges; and African American students who attend small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges. The results of the study could provide faculty and administration at ACA institutions with helpful information to address issues of policy and practice. Furthermore, the results could be generalized to similar institutions throughout the country that are interested in the experiences of African American students and their persistence in college. Most importantly, the African American student population at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges could benefit. Knowledge of the factors that contribute to African American student persistence could enhance programmatic efforts that, in turn, could have a positive impact on students.

Delimitations

The focus of this study was narrowed in scope to colleges and universities who are part of the Appalachian College Association (ACA). The ACA is a consortium of 33 small colleges and universities in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia (see Appendix C and D). The enrollment size of ACA institutions ranges from 315 to 2,652 with an average African American population of 47 (4.35%). Four institutions participated in the study. These four institutions are located in four of the five states mentioned above. Focusing on African American students who were classified as juniors or seniors further narrowed the study.

Limitations

Limitations are defined as: limiting conditions or restrictive weaknesses that occur when all factors cannot be controlled as a part of the study's design (Locke, Spriduso, and Silverman, 1993). The primary limitations of this study were threefold. The first limitation was that of generalizability. The study took place at four small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the U.S. These institutions are similar in size, mission, geographic region, and representation of African American students. Therefore, the results may only be generalizable to those four colleges. Perhaps the results could be generalized to the other 29 ACA institutions, which have similar demographics.

The second limitation was in the area of researcher effect. In this study, the race of the researcher was white and the participants were African American. Previous research showed that race can be a factor in studies where the interview method is used. According to Palys (1992), the researcher should be aware of reactive bias due to the interactive nature of interviews. Similarly, Maxwell (1996) described the influences of the researcher on those interviewed as *reactivity*. Maxwell (1996) also suggested that reactivity could not be eliminated but could be understood and even used productively.

Ideally it would have been desirable for the race of the researcher to be the same as the participants. Two reasons for this compatibility are: (1) acceptance of the interviewer by the respondent and (2) a greater likelihood that the interviewer would be able to understand (Weiss, 1994). However, according to Weiss (1994) qualitative interviews can still be productive even when the race of the researcher is different than that of the respondent:

It seems like common sense that it would be better for the interviewer to be of the same race and, if possible, the same ethnic background as the respondent. My own experience has been that here common sense is mostly wrong. Racial and ethnic differences, insofar as the respondent can infer these, may play a role in a potential respondent's initial reaction to the interviewer, but my experience has been that once an interview takes hold, these differences have little effect on the quality of the interviewing partnership. They become like a difference in height: there, but unimportant (p. 139).

The third limitation was in the area of research method. Interviews, like many other methods, also have their limitations. First, the researcher's presence may have caused bias responses. Second, according to Creswell (1994) not all people are equally articulate and perceptive. Furthermore, the interviewer may not ask appropriate questions because of lack of expertise or familiarity with language or cultural norms (Marshall et. al., 1989).

As with any study, there are sure to be limitations. However, the researcher assumed that written correspondence from the ACA in support of the study would assist in efforts to obtain the necessary cooperation from each institution. Furthermore, it was assumed that the representative at the participating institutions would lend support in identifying an adequate number of participants who were willing to tell their stories. Finally, it was projected that the pilot study would assist in adequate preparation for the actual interview.

Definitions

African American: People having origins in any of the black racial groups in Africa. This includes persons who may have come to the United States from one of the Caribbean countries. (Minority Student Enrollment in Higher Education, 1988)

Climate: The concept of climate can be defined as a perception that is developed on a day-to-day basis. Organizationally, climate is inferred by its members and such inferences are organized around 1) how the institution does business, and 2) what goals the institution pursues. For the purposes of this study, climate will be defined as the atmosphere students perceive is created on their campus through practices, procedures and interactions between faculty and staff.

Faculty Interaction: Students interacting with faculty both in formal settings (classroom) and informal settings (casual conversations).

Obstacles or Interfering Problems: Problems that, in most cases, have the potential to be a hindrance to academic progression. Examples of interfering problems include: emotional problems, academic difficulty, financial struggles and problems at home (Nettles et. al., 1986).

Student Persistence: Any student who continues to be enrolled full-time in undergraduate, graduate, or professional school or has completed an undergraduate degree (Astin, 1975). The individual institution defines full-time enrollment. For the purposes of this study, the participants were African American juniors or seniors (full-time status) as identified by their institution to be in 'good standing'.

Overview

In summary, by using qualitative research methods to study African American college students in Appalachia, the researcher intended to find out what factors or experiences contributed to their persistence at their respective institutions. The findings generated were used in three ways. First, students' perception were compared with what administrators said they do to contribute to the policies and procedures that impact the persistence of these same students. Secondly, the findings were used to make recommendations for campus policy and practice pertaining to African American students. Thirdly, the findings were compared to the literature to determine if the factors that led to persistence at a large institution were the same as those at smaller institutions. Most importantly, it was the hope of the researcher that the information gained through this study would assist future African American students in obtaining their college education.

In the remaining chapters, the researcher will discuss the procedures that brought this research into one comprehensive study. Chapter Two will provide the review of related literature on student persistence. Chapter Three will discuss the research methods used in the

study, which included: research strategies, data collection, data analysis, coding procedures and methods for verification (validity). Chapter Four presents the analysis of the data gathered and the results. Student profiles are shared to give the reader an opportunity to become familiar with the participants. Data are presented according to each of the three research questions outlined in this chapter. A brief document analysis is also presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five summarizes the study, compares the results with the existing literature and draws several conclusions. Suggestions for student affairs professionals and recommendations for future research are also presented.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature review has many functions; one of which is to provide a meaningful foundation for contributing to the knowledge base (Merriam, 1998). According to Creswell (1994), there are three main purposes of a literature review: (1) the results of other similar studies are reported, (2) the study itself is related to the larger body of literature by filling in gaps, and (3) a framework for establishing the importance of the study is provided. It is the general intent of this chapter to provide an overview of some of the relevant literature pertaining to college student persistence and to provide a framework for this study. This chapter has nine sections which are entitled: Theoretical Framework, Persistence of African American College Students, African American Students on White Campuses, Faculty Involvement, Climate and Culture, Additional Literature Pertaining to African American Students, Example Models for Increasing Student Persistence, and Examples of Successful Programs.

In order to begin this review of literature, it is important to discuss three synonymous terms: retention, persistence and attrition. Levin and Levin (1991) defined *retention* as students who continue to re-enroll and eventually earn a degree on the same campus. Lang and Ford (1992) provided another definition of retention: "the degree to which students meet self-determined educational goals" (p.126). However, as Lang and Ford (1992) pointed out, it is often difficult to ascertain these goals and measure them. What usually occurs is reliance

on graduation rates, which are more easily measured. The standard retention rate is based on the percentage of entering first-time students who complete a degree in four to six years.

The term *attrition* is often used in conjunction with retention issues. Levin, et. al. (1991) provided a two part definition of attrition: (a) students who either permanently drop out of school or transfer voluntarily and (b) students who are dropped from school as a result of inadequate grades. What Green (1983) said several years ago is still true today:

Stable enrollments ultimately depend on the retention of currently enrolled students as well as the steady inflow of new students. According to a recent Carnegie Council report, increased attrition - not recruitment difficulties - is the cause of enrollment problems among institutions that actually experienced enrollment declines during the past decade (p.3).

According to Noel (1985, p. 9), there are four myths of attrition that administrators and faculty should note as they seek to resolve retention issues. Two of those myths are: *Myth* - Retention means lowering the standard. The truth is that inflated grades may have an adverse effect because substance will not be present. *Myth* - Retention is the responsibility of the Student Affairs Division. The truth is that retention is everyone's business.

To pinpoint a single factor that contributes to student attrition is difficult. Instead, Noel (1985) suggested 'themes' of attrition that are briefly mentioned below. Academic boredom and uncertainty with career goals is one theme of attrition. Learning is often difficult for those students without goals. Consequently, the student becomes bored with general education. The second theme is transition and adjustment difficulties. For four years or more, students have had support from high school peers. Entering college puts the student in a new environment that sometimes lacks support. A limited or unrealistic expectation of college is the third theme. Beginning students often do not understand the demands of

college and can be overwhelmed trying to meet the expectations. The fourth theme is academic under-preparedness. Many students enter college without necessary skills to succeed academically which leads to frustration with grades. Incompatibility is the fifth theme. This theme is particularly important for those in admissions. Retention essentially begins with recruitment. Therefore, a good match between student and institution is a key factor in retention efforts. The sixth theme is irrelevancy. When course requirements are not clearly understood, students become frustrated with the college experience.

Persistence is another term used in retention literature. Levin, et. al. (1991) defined persistence simply as a student's decision to not drop out of college. They suggested two predictors of persistence often cited by researchers: pre-college predictors and at-college predictors. Pre-college predictors consist of: academic preparedness, adaptability, commitment to educational goals and student perception of progress toward those goals, willingness to seek academic assistance, self-confidence, and reasons for pursuing a college degree. At-college predictors usually include: living environment, classroom experience, academic advising, extra-curricular activities, financial support, and faculty involvement. At-college predictors are considered by Levin et. al. (1991) to be stronger indicators of persistence than pre-college predictors.

Recruiting minority students is only half of the equation in higher education; retaining them once they have enrolled in our institutions is the other half. Dr. Allen Green, of the University of Pennsylvania, stated concerning the importance of a minority-friendly campus: "Twenty-five years ago the problem was access. Now, it's retention, the mechanism by which we measure our ability to consistently interact with our students" (Phillips, 1993, p.26).

According to the American Council on Education, the total number of minority students rose 2.9% to about 3,496,000 in 1995 (Gose, 1997). Hispanic students showed the greatest gain with an enrollment increase of 4.6% to 1,094,000. Enrollment for African American students was up 1.7% to 1,474,000. The proportion of African Americans (ages 18 to 24) attending college was 35%. However, the degree completion rates for African Americans were relatively low as they made up 10.7% of the undergraduate population at four-year institutions, but earned only 7.2% of all Bachelor's degrees (Gose, 1997).

Stan Ikenberry, President of the Education Council, stated he was pleased to see the number of minority students continued to rise, but was worried that minority enrollment was growing at a slower pace than it had in the early 1990s (Gose, 1997). Justiz, Wilson, and Bjork (1994) also expressed concern that today's African American college participation rates do not match those of the mid 1970s. In the 1960s, only about 100,000 African Americans were enrolled in institutions of higher education. That number grew during the 1970s to the extent of exceeding one million in the 1980s. However, today, according to Justiz, et.al. (1994, preface), "people of color are not taking their places in colleges and universities as rapidly as expected."

Theoretical Framework

A review of the literature on student persistence reveals five influential theories that provide a comprehensive framework for this study. The five theories are: Tinto's Student Integration Model, Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, Bean's Student Attrition Model, Pace's Quality of Effort Scales and Cross' Four Stage Developmental Theory.

Student Integration Model

Tinto's (1975, 1987) *Student Integration Model* has stimulated research for over two decades (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler, 1992; Mallette and Cabrera, 1991; Nora, 1987; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1979, 1983, 1986; and Stage, 1988). Tinto (1987) proposed that the more a student is integrated into the institution, both academically and socially, the more likely that student will persist towards graduation. While motivation and other pre-college attributes (e.g. high school GPA, parental support) are important, Tinto's theory is based on interactions with various campus members after enrollment.

Integration into the college environment is not likely to occur if incongruence exists. Tinto (1987) suggested incongruence occurs when the student perceives a mismatch between her/his goals and the values espoused by the university. While congruence with institutional goals and values does not necessarily ensure persistence, its absence will surely undermine the process. Integration may also be thwarted through isolation. When students do not have contact with faculty and other students outside the classroom, isolation may occur.

Tinto's (1987) theory is based upon the study of rites of passage in tribal societies and Durkheim's (1951) study of suicide. Briefly explained, the rites of passage in tribal communities involve three distinct phases: 1) separation from past associations, 2) transition into the new group and learning knowledge and skills relevant to that group, and 3) incorporation which consists of taking on the patterns of the new group. Upon graduation from high school, the college student finds herself/himself separating from prior associations (e.g. family, high school friends). As the transition phase begins, the student finds herself or himself in a situation where neither strong connection to the past nor firm ties to the future

exists. Incorporation occurs when the student moves toward adopting new norms and becoming integrated.

The second framework on which Tinto's theory is built, deals with Emile Durkheim's four types of suicide: altruistic, anomic, fatalistic, and egotistical. It is the fourth type of suicide, egotistical, that Tinto placed his focus. According to Durkheim (1951), egotistical suicide occurs when people are unable to become integrated and establish membership in a community. Tinto (1987) suggested that insufficient integration and the absence of community membership might result in differing values from the norm. The studies of suicide and rites of passage provided a construct to study student departure from college.

Tinto (1987) proposed that integration occurs in two areas: academic and social. Both areas have formal (e.g. academic performance and extra-curricular activities) and informal (e.g. faculty/staff interaction and peer-group interaction) realms. The 'formal' component of integration consists of the student's intellectual fit into the academic program and the level of involvement in extra-curricular activities. Thus, if the student feels he/she can meet the academic standards and become a part of the social life on campus, the likelihood of positive integration is high. The 'informal' component of integration consists of the student's interactions with faculty outside the classroom and her/his sense of belonging to a peer group.

Students enter college with a wide range of family and community backgrounds and bring with them a variety of personal attributes (e.g. sex, race, physical disabilities, skills, abilities, and pre-college educational experiences). External forces and choices (e.g. family, peers, and role conflicts) also play a part in Tinto's theory, and can have a major impact on a student's ability to integrate into college life.

Finally, the individual's disposition must also be taken into consideration. The student's disposition towards departure or persistence is enhanced by expectations and motivations. Expectations foster intention, which in turn leads to goal setting. Motivation fosters commitment, which in turn leads to a willingness to complete, in this case, a college education (Tinto, 1987).

Theory of Student Involvement

The second theory relevant to student persistence discussed in this section is Alexander Astin's *Theory of Student Involvement*. Astin's (1984) involvement theory and other works have also proven useful in explaining student persistence in several studies (Brown, 1996; Dale and Zych, 1994; Davis, 1996; Norby-Loud, 1996; Sedlacek, 1987; and Williams and Wilson, 1993). The theory of student involvement has its roots in a study conducted by Astin (1975) and further studies by Astin. The study focused on college dropouts with the intent to discover factors that affected student persistence. Essentially the factors that contributed to student persistence suggested involvement. Likewise, a lack of involvement was an obvious factor in those students who dropped out of college.

Astin (1975) also found specific areas that were significant to students' involvement in campus life. First, living on campus was positively related to retention. Second, students who participated in extra curricular activities (e.g. fraternities, sororities, intramurals, ROTC, SGA) were less likely to leave college. Third, holding a part-time, on-campus job was also found to facilitate student retention.

Astin's theory of student involvement proposed that if students are involved, the likelihood of retaining them is greater. Astin (1984) defined involvement as the "amount of

physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 297). Thus, the highly involved student placed her/his energy into studying, spending time on campus, participating in student activities, and communicating with faculty members. Involvement was different than motivation, which Astin referred to as a state of mind. Astin (1984) preferred the term *involvement* because it implied a behavioral component more susceptible to direct observation and measurement.

Astin’s theory of involvement has five postulates: 1) involvement refers to an investment of physical and psychological energy, 2) involvement occurs along a continuum, 3) both quantitative and qualitative aspects are present, such as how many hours a student is engaged in an activity and whether there is comprehension of the activity, 4) student learning and development are directly proportional to the quantity and quality of student involvement in a particular program, and 5) the effectiveness of any educational policy is directly related to the capacity of that policy to increase student involvement (Astin, 1984).

Involvement theory suggests that active involvement and participation must be present for successful retention programs. Astin (1984) encouraged both administrators and faculty to look closely at policies and practices within the institution (e.g. how class schedules are established, how orientation meets new students’ needs, etc.). Administrators should then consider how they affect the student’s time. According to Astin (1984), time may be one of the most precious institutional resources: “the extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains” (p.301).

Student Attrition Model

The next theory is Bean's *Student Attrition Model*. Bean's model has proven to be significant in explaining student persistence at traditional institutions (Bean, 1980, 1982, 1983; Cabrera, Nora and Castanda, 1993; and Cabrera, et. al, 1992) while modifications to the model have been incorporated to explain persistence among non-traditional students (Bean and Metzner, 1985; Metzner and Bean, 1987).

Bean's model expanded on the notion of organizational turnover and models of attitude-behavior interactions. According to Bean (1980), student attrition was related to employee turnover in work organizations. The behavioral intentions to stay or leave were then predictors of persistence behavior. In other words, students leave college for reasons similar to those that cause employees to leave their place of employment. Bean's (1980) model of student attrition was an adaptation of a model developed by Price (1977) involving turnover in work organizations.

The student attrition model contained the dependent variable, 'dropout' defined by Bean (1982) as the cessation of enrollment of a student in an institution. Transfer students and suspended students were also considered dropouts according to Bean (1982). Satisfaction and institutional commitment were the intervening variables. Satisfaction was considered the degree to which being a student is viewed positively. Institutional commitment was the degree of loyalty toward membership in an organization.

Bean's model (1980) suggested 21 organizational determinants that potentially affect satisfaction, which influence dropout. As an example, four of the twenty-one organizational determinants are mentioned: development, practical value, integration, and faculty/staff

relationship. The term 'development' refers to the degree to which a student believes that he/she is developing because of attending college. 'Practical value' is the degree to which the student perceives that her/his education will lead to employment. 'Integration' refers to the degree to which a student participates in primary or quasi-primary relationships (i.e. has close friends). 'Faculty/Staff relationships' consists of the amount of informal contacts the student has with faculty members.

Five background variables are also part of Bean's (1980) model. These variables reflect the influences of a student's pre-matriculation characteristics on the student's interaction with the organization. Two examples of background variables are: performance and socioeconomic status. The 'performance' variable refers to the degree to which a student has demonstrated past academic achievement. 'Socioeconomic status' is the degree to which a student's parents have achieved status through occupational level.

Essentially, Bean's (1980) Student Attrition Model works in the following manner. The students' background characteristics are considered in order to understand how the student interacts with the various organizational determinants of the institution such as the practical value of the educational experience and her/his interaction with faculty and staff. These variables are then expected to influence the degree to which the student is satisfied with the college or university. If the level of satisfaction increases then the student's level of institutional commitment is also expected to increase. Finally, the level of institutional commitment will then influence the likelihood that the student will or will not drop out of college.

Quality of Student Effort Scales

Another important work in the field of student persistence is that of Pace (1980, 1984). Pace's work involved the basic assumption that what a student gets out of college is dependent on two things: (1) what the college does or does not do and (2) the extent and quality of effort that the student puts into the college experience. The premise is that the extent of learning, as well as other college outcomes, is a function of what the institution offers and what the student does with those offerings. In an effort to assess student involvement, Pace developed 14 'quality of effort' scales that estimate a student's use of facilities and opportunities. The 'quality of effort' scales cluster into three factors: (1) academic and intellectual experiences (e.g. faculty, classrooms), (2) personal and interpersonal experiences (e.g. student acquaintances), and (3) group facilities and opportunities (e.g. student unions).

Pace (1980) administered the quality of effort scales to a sample of approximately 4,000 students at all class levels at 13 institutions. He found that the quality of effort students put into the academic or intellectual aspects of the college experience had statistically significant correlations with both the general education and the academic outcomes scales. It was also the case that the student's quality of effort in personal and interpersonal experiences and group facilities and opportunities had statistically significant positive correlations with the same two outcomes. In general, Pace's findings suggested a basic wholeness about the college experience. In other words, other factors contributed to the learning process in conjunction with academic and intellectual effort. Specifically, those factors were personal and social experiences while enrolled in college (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991).

Four Stage Developmental Theory

One final theory that has relevance to this study is Cross' (1978) *Four Stage Developmental Theory* which explained minority group development in a majority culture. According to Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates (1990), student development theorists have been criticized for not fully explaining the development of minorities. Upcraft, et. al., (1990) reported that critics believe current student development theories make assumptions that were not valid about the commonality of environment, culture and backgrounds of students. Specifically, Wright (1984) suggested that most student development theories were based on Western ideas and failed to include the minority perspective. For example, most theories failed to acknowledge the oppressive living conditions of minorities.

Cross (1978), provided a minority perspective to consider with other student development theories. Cross' (1978) theory has four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion and internalization. In the 'Pre-encounter' stage, the majority group determined the minority group member's attitude toward the world and self. Making the connection to the majority was desirable even if it meant developing a dislike for her/his own group.

The 'Encounter' stage is characterized by awareness that there are differences between the majority and minority groups. The minority group members search out their own group history and begin to interpret things from their own group perspective. This experience can, in turn, lead to feelings of discrimination. In the 'Immersion' stage, the minority group members discard the values and stereotypes of the majority group. A stronger attachment to the minority group is established. Sometimes political action may be taken on behalf of the group. The final stage is 'Internalization'. This stage is a renegotiation period with the

majority group. The minority group member develops a new identity with an inner security and can live within the majority, while still being committed and active in social change.

Persistence of African American College Students

While the preceding theories provide a good foundation to the understanding of the student persistence process, other studies are also noteworthy. In a recent study comparing minority and non-minority student adjustment to college, Eimers and Pike (1997) noted four findings. First, academic integration played a key role for minority students in contributing to their academic success. Second, perceived quality of their educational experience had a significant effect on minority students' intent to persist. Perceived quality was defined as the student's perception of academic quality, satisfaction with academic and social experiences, and affinity of values with faculty and other students. Third, perceived racial discrimination had only a small direct effect on academic integration and intentions to persist for minorities and non-minorities. Fourth, encouragement from family and friends had an important influence on minority and non-minority students' intention to persist in college.

Norby-Loud's (1996) study on influences of involvement indicated five areas, which were significant in positively influencing African American student persistence. These areas were: intra-racial friendships, use of academic tutoring facilities, use of computer laboratories, attendance at athletic and other events, and use of the student center to meet with friends.

As other researchers have concluded, there is not one best solution to predicting success. Tinto (1987) indicated over a decade ago, "student departure is more a function of what goes on within the institution following entry than what may have occurred beforehand" (p. 202-203). According to Sherman, Giles, and Williams-Green (1994), "the research has

largely produced ineffective methodologies and particularly questionable applications for predicting the performance of Black students” (p. 164). In their study, Sherman, et. al. (1994) examined the literature on various research that predicted academic performance: attempts to measure study ability, attempts to correlate student characteristics with college success, and attempts to specifically predict Black student retention. Therefore, if an institution elects to assess its retention efforts, the methodology should reflect the institution’s definition of retention. The institution should consider retention programs that are campus-wide as opposed to targeting a specific group. Sherman, et. al. (1994) also suggested that retention efforts be consistent and extensive so that students always get the same message from all areas of the campus. Finally, retention efforts should be longitudinal in order to meet the students’ needs as they grow.

Rowser (1997) examined what new African American students perceived their needs to be upon entering a university. The premise of Rowser’s (1997) research was that students enter college with their own self-perception of their academic preparation, personal and social needs, and career aspirations. These perceptions were believed to be the basis for student expectation for future experience. Data was collected at a Midwestern University through a survey method. Approximately 1,100 participants (117 African Americans) were surveyed in a freshman orientation class.

The results of Rowser’s (1997) study were positive for the most part. Approximately 90% of the students believed they were at least adequately prepared for college. Most of the students expected to graduate in four or five years (96% males; 94% females). Two areas stood out where students indicated a need for academic assistance: study skill (46% females;

45% males) and writing skills (31% females; 28% males). The students indicated four areas where personal help might be needed: self-discipline (20% males; 11% females), self-confidence (20% males; 13% females), money management (34% females; 16% males), and time management (38% females; 28% males).

The researcher considered the results of the study disturbing based on the interpretation that these findings represented unrealistic expectations on the part of the students (Rowser, 1997). The notion was presented that even African Americans who strongly value education and have ample resources:

.....still continue to earn fewer credits than white students during their freshman year, have poorer grades than whites throughout their college experience, will flunk out at a significantly higher rate than whites, or will more likely drop out during their first two years than whites (p. 722).

Essentially, Rowser (1997) concluded that misperception of actual needs leads to frustration when students are unable to meet their expectations. As a result, the student sees him or herself as a failure and eventually chooses not to continue.

Rowser (1997) offered three suggestions for institutions to consider. First, remedial programs that may stigmatize students should be examined. There is likelihood that students will avoid these classes. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on program effectiveness and the affects of program participation. Second, more emphasis should be placed on helping students with their time management and money management. Third, faculty and administrators should help students develop more realistic expectations that may help eliminate some frustration students experience with transition into college. One bridge to this issue is improved communication between the university, high schools, students and parents.

Nettles' (1988) work in the area of student retention consisted of a cyclical process that is relevant to this section. The process described what the educational experience might be like for some African American students. This process is described in Figure 2. Essentially, Nettles (1988) described a process where African American students who persist and graduate may actually 'not' have a good experience. This negative experience may result in low grades and no motivation for the student to further her/his education. If this occurs, there is less a chance that the student will choose a career where they can positively influence other African Americans to attend college. Thus the cyclical process continues through a lack of role models, which Nettles noted as a factor leading to black student attrition.

African American Students on White Campuses

For many African American students attending a predominantly white campus, the transition process can be a challenge. One of those challenges is adjusting to the campus climate. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) considered the sociopsychological climate of many predominantly white institutions as nonwhite students experience it:

It is clear that many of the most important effects of college occur through students' interpersonal experiences with faculty members and other students. It is equally clear that the academic, social, and psychological worlds inhabited by most non-white students on predominantly white campuses are substantially different in almost every respect from those of their white peers (p. 644).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) further suggested that minority students often band together for support due to the perceived negative vibes they receive from non-minority students and faculty. Richardson and Skinner (1991) also provided a good foundation in the examination of African American students on white campuses:

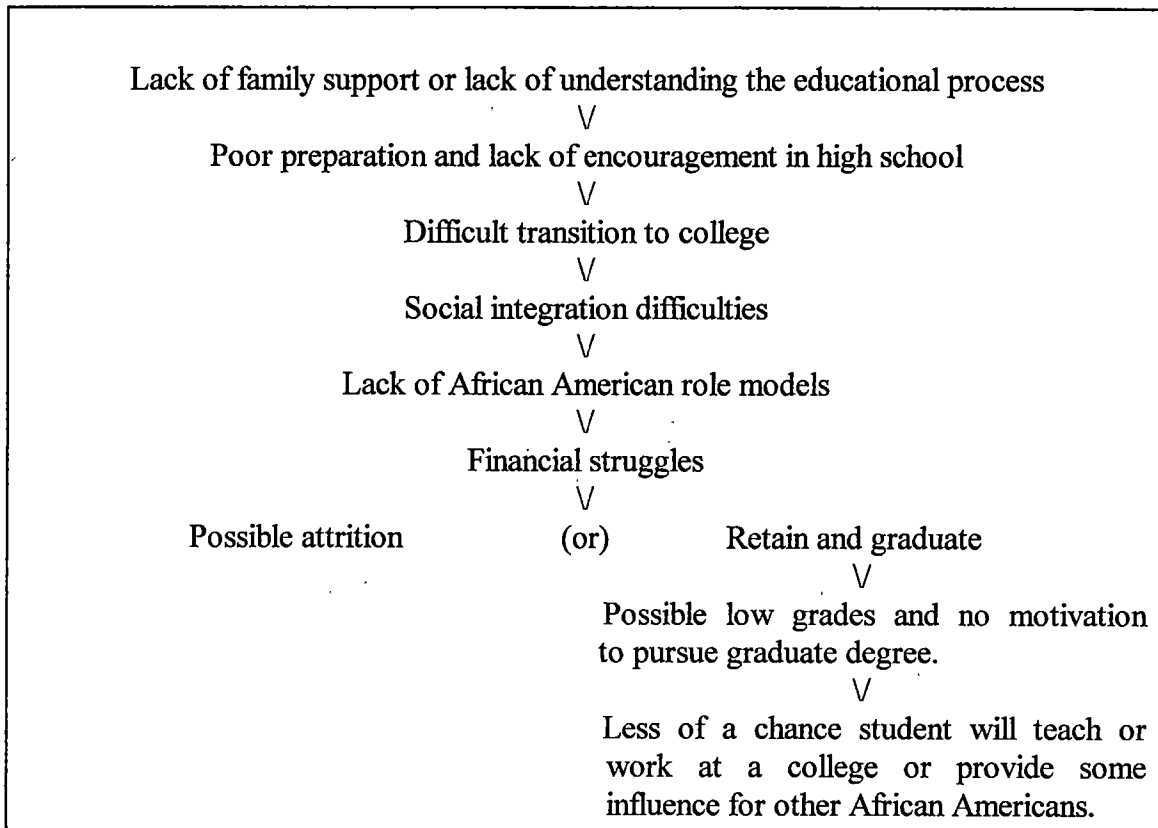


Figure 2
Cyclical Process of Black Student Attrition

Minority students experience frustrations when they are recruited by institutions on the strength of previous achievements and cultural affiliations and then expected to behave like Anglo students with whom they have little in common. Their frustrations deepens as differences in preparation and learning preferences translates into often insurmountable barriers to graduation (p.11).

Richardson et. al. (1991) suggested that an institution can improve their environment for diversely prepared students without relinquishing their standards. The goal of their book was to promote the idea that diversity does not have to be a threat to quality. Quality was simply defined as 'student achievement'. A case study approach was used at ten public universities to develop a model for understanding the many variables related to minority persistence at predominantly white institutions.

Richardson et. al. (1991) suggested three stages which an institution might move through in an effort to improve their environment. The *reactive* stage represents the pressure an institution feels to bring about equity in the institution. During this stage, recruitment of minority students is strongly encouraged along with increased financial aid opportunities and special admissions procedures. The second stage is *strategic*. At this stage, institutions develop outreach, transition and support programs designed to help a more diverse student population. Other areas are also addressed such as: preparation deficiencies, academic and cultural transitions, and early intervention. Finally, there is a move to hire more minority faculty and professional staff.

The final stage is *adaptive*. During this stage, the institution realizes that participation and graduation rates cannot be achieved with the expectation that students do all the changing. Therefore, the focus changes to assessment and learning assistance. Faculty get involved in an effort to examine the curriculum for possible changes in teaching practices and course content. Overall, an effort is made to redesign the learning process to encourage comparable achievement by a more diverse group of learners.

The goal is to move through the stages while achieving equilibrium, which was defined as an equal representation of student diversity and student achievement as opposed to having one at the expense of the other. In fact, Richard et. al. (1991) suggested that graduation rates may be effected when an institution is forced to admit students for whom their environment is not a good fit. For example, admissions requirements and recruiting strategies are sometimes increased without compensatory changes in the environments provided for student achievement. Richardson et. al. suggested a quality education must be

one that has minority students meeting the same performance standards as other students.

The issue of what factors might assist African American students' persistence on white campuses must also be considered. Sedlacek (1987) provided seven critical factors for black student success on predominantly white campuses. The Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) was used in a 1987 study at the University of Maryland at College Park to predict grades, retention, and graduation for black students for up to six years after initial matriculation. Each factor is briefly mentioned below. The first critical factor is self-concept. It is important for the African American student to view herself/himself as a part of the institution in order to identify with the community. A realistic self-appraisal is the second factor. The student must be able to reasonably assess how he/she is doing in class. The third factor is the ability to cope with racism. Sedlacek (1987) suggested that the most optimal way for students to cope with racism is to balance being informed about it and having a preoccupation with it. The student takes action when it is in her/his best interest but also realizes when to refrain.

Community service is the fourth factor. Community service has both on and off campus domains: getting involved in the local community (e.g. churches, etc.) and in the other various organizations on campus (e.g. residence halls, student government, etc.). A long-term goal is the fifth factor. This finding was consistent with Astin's (1975) research that concluded low aspirations and vague goals likely lead to student departure. Contact with a strong support person is the sixth critical factor. This person is often a peer, but as will be pointed out later, faculty and staff can also be included. The seventh critical factor for black students' success in college is leadership. According to Sedlacek (1987), African American students often hold leadership positions off campus or in areas that are not considered valid

by faculty and staff. He suggested that faculty and administrators encourage African American students to become more involved in campus leadership opportunities.

A recent dissertation centering on student persistence also yielded meaningful information for the review of literature. Rissmeyer (1996) identified eleven categories African American students experience in the transition process on predominantly white campuses. Transition to college is an important component of the persistence process. According to Rissmeyer (1996), successful African American students on predominantly white campuses move through the following categories: connecting, initiating, openness, persevering, discerning, focusing, goals, support, managing time, dealing with racism, and familiarity.

Rissmeyer (1996) noted the *connecting* element as "the core activity during the transition process" (p. 80). This category is characterized by integration of the individual into the campus community. Students become connected in the residence halls, student organizations, the classroom, and off campus locations. *Initiating* occurs as students reach out in interpersonal situations and build relationships. *Openness* is described as a condition necessary for any student trying to connect within her/his environment. *Perseverance* simply refers to remaining connected to goals through periods of frustration.

The *Discerning* category is characterized by a period of introspection in which the individual reflects upon the experience of college. *Focusing* occurs when the student connects personal energy and time to desirable pursuits. The *Goals* category includes personal, professional and academic domains. When the daily activities are connected to the realization of the student's goals, the college experience is more meaningful. *Support*, the next element, may come from a variety of areas (e.g. residence hall staff, advisors, faculty, or

administrators) and essentially refers to assisting students through the difficult times. *Effective Time Management* refers to the ability to discern and judge how much time is required to accomplish goals. *Dealing with Racism* was recognized as an aspect of the white college environment. This element involves discernment of the situation and the appropriate response. *Familiarity* is the final factor identified by Rissmeyer (1996) for successful transition to college for African Americans on predominantly white campuses. Familiarity was defined as achievement (knowing) and belonging (becoming known). In other words, as successful African American students become familiar with aspects of themselves and with the college, the campus becomes familiar with them. This familiarity results in a sense of belonging.

Recently Cuyjet (1997) suggested the need to look at the disparity between the accomplishments of African American males and African American females within higher education, especially on white campuses. Based on figures from the U.S. Government and the American Council on Education, Cuyjet (1997) reported that African American males have the lowest male-to-female proportion when compared to all other ethnic groups. Only 38% of African American students were male compared to 49% for Asian males and 44% for Hispanic males. In terms of degree completion, African American males, compared to females, also represented a lower proportion of their ethnic population receiving degrees in contrast with other ethnic groups.

With these low numbers, Cuyjet (1997) urged administrators to consider the extra care African American males need on a predominantly white campus. He suggested a twofold agenda. First, care should be taken to provide a non-threatening environment for African

American males where expectations of success can be nurtured and reinforced. Second, attempts should be made to “reeducate the majority of the community about the inaccuracy of generally held perceptions about black men” (p. 7).

One final area mentioned in this section dealt with African American students’ attitudes towards leadership positions on predominantly white campuses. In a recent study, interviews were conducted with 106 minority students at two mid-size institutions. Participants were asked to talk about their leadership experiences (Arminio, et. al., 2000). One example of students’ attitude towards leadership was particularly relevant to this study. Arminio and associates (2000) found that most participants did not consider themselves as leaders and some even resented the use of the term. Participants indicated they felt being a leader would “separate them from other students in their racial group” (p. 500). For some of the participants, “being a leader meant being part of the enemy, no longer separated from the oppressor or an oppressive system” (p. 500).

Arminio’s (2000) study also examined the importance of role models to student success. The study revealed the “difficulty many student leaders of color had in finding any [role models] on campus” (p. 501). Consequently, most students identified a family or church member when asked about a role model. One of the conclusions in the study was that, “campuses should assess their efforts in facilitating students meeting potential role models” (p. 505).

Faculty Involvement in Student Life

Interaction between faculty and students is an often-cited factor in successful retention programs (Altbach and Lomotey, 1991; Astin, 1975, 1984; Gordon, 1994; Kobrak, 1992;

Lang and Ford, 1992; Noel, 1985; Sedlacek, 1987; Tinto, 1975; and Toy, 1985). Although faculty/student interaction is not the cure all, Toy (1985) suggested that the quality of relationships between faculty and students is of critical importance to retention efforts. Based on Astin's (1985) research conducted over 20 years with five million students from more than 1,200 institutions, quality interaction with faculty was more important than any other single college factor in determining minority student persistence (Levin and Levin, 1991). Bean and Noel (1980) found faculty/student interaction to be the most positive influence on retention in a study of 944 institutions of higher education.

Kobrak (1992) stressed the importance of faculty involvement, specifically with African American students. However, faculty involvement cannot be totally focused on prepared, minority students; those who are lacking in academic skills deserve equal attention. As Kobrak (1992) pointed out, one issue that concerns most faculty members is time constraints. Faculty who continually focus on developing student relationships will be pulled away from other pursuits, namely publishing and teaching. This concerns non-tenured faculty who must meet certain expectations of university tenure policies and professional acceptance from their individual discipline. Kobrak (1992) suggested that faculty who volunteer for the much-needed area of student mentors should not be penalized.

Kobrak (1992) specifically listed four things African American students need from faculty: 1) well trained faculty who believe they (the students) can learn, 2) faculty who will take the time to learn the African American culture, 3) minority perspectives included in class discussions and course content, and 4) high expectations established and the assistance provided for students to reach them. Kobrak (1992) also cited an example at Miami-Dade

Community College. COPE (Comprehensive Opportunity to Pursue Excellence) is a program that matches students with trained faculty and minority support staff. Together, the faculty and staff work with students for six weeks prior to the freshman year. During this six-week term, students are allowed to attend college classes and receive support services. The purpose is for students to 'sample' the college experience in a more personalized setting.

The issue of academic integration also has some relevance in this chapter. Nettles (1991) conducted a faculty/student interaction study with 4,094 students (2,218 were African American) at 30 colleges and universities in 10 southern and Mid-Atlantic States. Two instruments were used in data collection: the Student Opinion Survey (SOS) and the Faculty Opinion Survey (FOS). In general, Nettles (1991) found that black students were less academically integrated than their white counterparts. Nettles (1991) discovered four items that led to academic integration for all students: satisfaction with faculty relationships, feeling the faculty and university was sensitive to their needs, satisfaction with instruction, and the ease students felt in developing relationships with faculty. Nettles (1991) also found that faculty members with non-traditional teaching styles contributed to the progression of African American students to graduation.

The issue of minority faculty members also merits consideration. Altbach and Lomotey (1991) raised several relevant issues in their book Racial Crisis in American Higher Education. One of those issues was affirmative action. According to Altbach, et. al. (1991), higher education needs an increased number of African American faculty, especially at predominantly white universities. However, the pool of perspective black faculty is limited. In 1974, there were 26,827 Ph.D.'s awarded with only 846 granted to African Americans. In

1987, 22,863 Ph.D.'s were awarded with only 765 African Americans honored. According to Justiz et.al. (1994), of the 3,200 predominantly white colleges and universities, only 2% of the faculty were African American. Although white faculty members can serve as mentors, having black faculty on staff would be a plus for retention efforts.

Faculty at predominantly white institutions can learn from their colleagues at historically black institutions. Springer, Teranzini, Pascarella, and Nora (1996) suggested that African Americans who attend historically black institutions benefit from a supportive social, cultural, and racial environment. Furthermore, this supportive environment has an impact on educational outcomes such as social identity and academic achievement. Thus, African American and/or white faculty at historically black institutions could provide insight in creating a more hospitable environment on predominantly white campuses.

Lang and Ford (1992) provided several recommendations for institutions to consider in the area of African American faculty. First, institutions should actively seek and promote the hiring and retention of black faculty and staff. Significant proportion (8-10%) of black faculty and staff creates a more equal distribution to address the needs of students. Second, the institution should hire a full-time director of retention. The director of retention would provide a nexus between the student and the administration. Since retention involves all areas of the campus, one specific person in charge of coordinating efforts is important. Third, a support system within academic affairs and student affairs should be developed. This collaboration would provide curricular and non-curricular programs such as study skills and time management. Finally, African American faculty should encourage black students to consider and prepare for graduate studies, especially in academia.

In many cases, the classroom is the only place where students and faculty meet. According to Tinto (1997), if involvement and integration are to take place, it will be in the classroom. Furthermore, he suggested that faculty shape the nature of classrooms and influence the degree to which students become involved. However, he also argued that little has been done to explore how the classroom affects persistence and that further research is needed to "explore the critical linkages between involvement in classrooms, student learning and persistence" (Tinto, 1997, p.600).

Tinto's (1997), study resulted in three findings in which learning communities influenced persistence. First, the learning communities built supportive peer groups that fostered integration into the college community. Second, shared learning took place, which helped bridge the academic and social divide. As Tinto (1997) noted, often social and academic concerns compete. Learning communities helped draw the two together and provided a means for each to enhance the other. Third, learning communities allowed students to gain a voice in the construction of knowledge by working together with faculty in course planning. The bottom line was that a student's shared learning experience with peers often led to enhance individual learning, which led to a greater likelihood of persistence.

In discussing the persistence of college students, it is also useful to consider their experience beyond the undergraduate years. The undergraduate experience of African American students and the overall retention of these students have an indirect effect on doctoral students. According to Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie and Sanders (1997), African Americans represented 5% of all graduate degree recipients (e.g. Master's, Doctorate and Professional). In 1995, African Americans represented 5% (1,287) of the doctoral recipients,

whereas their white counterparts represented 77% (23,805). Overall, Patterson-Stewart, et. al. (1997) found the retention rate of African American doctoral students 50% to 75% lower than white students. During interviews with African American doctoral students, researchers found three important definitions of what they perceived a “supportive” faculty member to be: an interest in the student as a person; ability to communicate student limitations objectively without suggesting that the student was incapable; and cross-cultural competence in her/his interactions with students.

Climate and Culture

The impact of campus climate and culture is an important part of the college experience for most students. Green (1989) provided an appropriate definition of climate for this section.

Campus climate embraces the culture, habits, decisions, practices, and policies that make up campus life. It is the sum total of the daily environment, and central to the ‘comfort factor’ that minority students, faculty, staff, and administrators experience on campus. Students and other members of the campus community who feel unwelcome or alienated from the mainstream of campus life are unlikely to remain. If they do remain, they are unlikely to be successful (p. 113).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that African American college students at predominantly white institutions tend to experience greater social isolation, alienation, dissatisfaction, and overt racism than their counterparts at historically black institutions. According to Nettles (1988), African Americans had higher attrition rates, progressed at a slower pace and had less satisfying experiences than non-minority students. Cabrena, Nora, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1996) concluded from a review of literature that an exposure to a climate of prejudice and discrimination has gained increased attention as one main factor for

differences in persistence behavior between minorities and non-minorities. Furthermore, this perceived climate of prejudice and discrimination created a deterrent for interacting with other students, faculty, and administrators. Finally, this disassociation negatively impacted a minority student's cognitive and affective development and her/his persistence in college.

Developing a healthy campus climate is one of the challenges higher education faces today. According to Davis (1998),

One of the greatest challenges for American Higher Education is to develop a healthy campus climate where opportunities for learning include cultural appreciation and reciprocity among people of diverse backgrounds. Many American colleges and universities have responded to acts of discrimination and tolerance by revisiting missions, implementing policy and broadening their academic curricula. However, as evidenced by this study, disrespect for others and discriminatory behavior continue to plague the academy (p. 72).

Davis' (1998) study included data collection of campus tension incidents as published in the Chronicle of Higher Education from February 1994 through May 1997. Overall, there were 213 cases of race, gender and sexual orientation related issues published. Of the 213 cases, 76 % (162) were situations where the student was the target. Of those 162 cases, 43.2 % (70) were race related. Davis (1998) also cited that 68% of all college presidents cite racial tension as a major problem on their campus (Gilman, Maloney and O'Connor, 1997).

Cabrena, et.al. (1996) conducted a study of freshmen students at 18 four-year institutions (N=2,416). The College Adjustment Model was used for this study. The College Adjustment Model proposed that student collegiate experiences were reflected in two domains: 1) a social domain consisting of formal and informal experiences with other students, and 2) an academic domain including classroom and out-of-class academic experiences with faculty and staff. The perceptions of prejudice and discrimination were

found to affect the social experiences of African Americans. Furthermore, African Americans were twice as likely to have their commitments to their institutions decreased by exposure to a campus climate of intolerance.

According to Sedlacek (1987), institutional racism in policies and procedures may be quite subtle and more of a problem than individual racism. He mentioned four specific areas: admission standards, relationships with faculty, campus life, and attitudes of white students. Admission standards at some institutions may be too high (discounting many African Americans) or too low (resulting in creating a low self-esteem). In some cases, faculty may have lower expectations for black students than other students. Furthermore, various areas of campus life may contribute to institutional racism such as: residence hall arrangement, attitudes of campus police, and attitudes towards interracial dating. Finally, white students may become jealous if they believe special circumstances are given to black students.

Haralson (1996) reported that as the number of African Americans achieving admission to predominantly white institutions increases, administrators will need to be aware of the social isolation and alienation that comes with this enrollment. Haralson's (1996) study examined the influence of gender and socio-economic status on assertiveness for African American freshmen and juniors at four predominantly white institutions. Qualitative data were collected from 560 African American freshmen and juniors. The College Self Expression Scale measured assertiveness. Peer group influence was a major factor affecting 'campus survival.' In general, African American students reported a need to adapt their assertiveness style to campus environment.

Person and Christensen (1996) reported that little has been done in the area of black student culture affecting retention. Person et.al. (1996) suggested three factors for researching the African American student's experience at a predominantly white institution: campus climate, personal characteristics of the student, and the influence of peer group on individual behavior and student persistence. These factors were the result of a study conducted at a four-year, predominantly white institution in a suburban community in the Northeast (Person et. al., 1996). The study consisted of investigating whether an African American student culture existed at the institution. If such a culture did exist, the study was carried out to investigate the culture's values, group members' normative behavior, and the rate of interaction and group influence on individual behavior. Of the 39 African Americans who chose to participate in the study, 90% felt the need for a black culture. Furthermore, 83% spent all their free time with other African Americans. Over half (56%) indicated that they felt comfortable in class but uncomfortable in social settings.

Similarly, Davis (1996) examined students' personal experiences of the campus social climate and the academic environment. Two major conclusions resulted from her work. First, many African American students were dismayed when they first arrived at their institution and discovered they did not have the necessary skills to do well academically. Second, many of the African American students revealed they were not prepared for the perceived 'institutional racism', which confronted them in their college experience.

Finally, Brown (1996) noted three major findings in her study on racial climate at a racially integrated campus. She discovered that African American students believed their in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences with faculty to be unsatisfactory. Essentially, the

students felt opportunities for mentoring relationships were almost non-existent. Furthermore, it was discovered that African American students were comfortable with the overall curriculum at their institution. However, they did express a belief that faculty did not know how to discuss African American issues in the curriculum. Also, the students reported a belief that campus recruitment efforts to local high schools and the community that harbor potential African American students were insignificant and insincere.

Additional Literature Pertaining to African American Students

Various ideas have been presented in recent years that are relevant to African American student persistence and this study. While these ideas do not provide a primary framework for this research, they are intended to expand the understanding of the various views pertaining to African American students and their experiences on college campuses. The three ideas mentioned in this section deal with: marginalization, institutional racism, and hidden agendas.

The term *marginalization* is an idea suggested by Cuyjet (1998) to examine the student - environment relationship. Some researchers take the approach of examining the student's attitude toward the environment (Astin, 1993 and Kuh, 1993). However, Cuyjet (1998) suggested a reciprocal approach whereby the focus was on the extent to which students believe others in the environment cared about them. The concept of 'mattering' was used to refer to "a feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension" (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981, p. 165). The term 'marginality' referred to a perception that one does not fit in, was not significant, and was not needed (Rosenberg, et. al., 1981). Schlossberg (1989) further suggested that

'marginality' can exist because we bond with society not by virtue of our dependence on others but their dependence on us.

Cuyjet (1998) conducted a study at six predominantly white universities using a survey approach. Students were asked their perceptions on a number of elements in the campus environment such as: academic and personal advising; interaction with administrators, faculty and peers; classroom climate; and delivery of services. The questions were designed to assess how the various components of the institution cared about the students. The premise of the study was that marginalization was thought not to have been perceived as intentional but insidious and very real for those who experienced it.

The responses of African American students differed significantly from those of their non-African American peers on a majority of survey items. Overall, African Americans were more likely to feel marginalized. In other words, the African American students were more likely to feel insignificant and not needed by the institution. With the exception of academic advising, the difference in perception between non-African American and African American students pertained to a wide range of relationships across campus. For example, African American students felt their advisors added a personal touch to the relationship by the simple act of remembering their name. Cuyjet (1998) suggested that advisors could be the key to addressing marginality. Other suggestions from the research results consisted of: training front-line personnel in cultural sensitivity; offering course materials that reflect various cultures; and assessing campus norms from all perspectives not from only the majority.

The term *institutional racism* is mentioned in some literature on African American student persistence and retention. Anderson (1988) offered this definition of institutional

racism: "one group having relative advantages or disadvantages of another on a racial basis; an inclusive concept encompassing elitism, ethnocentrism, and egoism when manifested solely on a racial basis" (p. 259-260). Anderson (1988) suggested that despite the progress since *Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas (1954)*, many feel racism still exist.

According to Anderson (1988), African American students on a predominantly white campus [enrollment of 85% to 95% white students] encountered several things that contributed to the feeling of institutional racism. First, the physical environment and social culture was alien to their own background and traditions. Second, racially tense or strained relationships existed with white students due to conflicting lifestyles, interests and activities. Third, black students perceived there was an apprehension and uneasiness on the part of white faculty and a common attitude that black learning capabilities were marginal. Fourth, the textbooks were perceived to only reflect the ideologies of the white culture. Finally, black students often felt ostracized by white students and faculty. The results of these perceptions often contributed to black students forming and congregating in their own social domains.

The notion of *hidden agendas* is the final idea presented in this section. Webb (1992) presented an interesting paradigm in which to consider the issue of African American student retention. The premise was that African American students leave higher education because of a hidden agenda, which attempts to eliminate undesirable students. The hidden agenda survives because its victims believe in its ideology. According to the agenda, three structural factors contribute to retention problems for black students: the ivory tower factor, the differential expectation factor, and the gate-keeping factor.

The ivory tower concept suggests that the environment where faculty and students co-exist is purposely set up to create distance between the two groups. Many institutions place more emphasis on research, publication, and grant writing than on teaching and advising. This type of agenda gives the appearance of the faculty as separated from students.

The differential expectation factor simply states that some faculty may view minority students as being academically different. Courses are then established with lesser expectations for 'special' students. The result is that students in these courses become the yardstick by which other African American students are measured.

The gate-keeping factor is, for lack of a better term, a screening process. Examples include large introductory classes where many new ideas are taught in an impersonal manner or general survey courses taught by graduate students who are often preoccupied with their own studies. Students with fair to poor study habits are often screened out.

Webb (1992) also listed three myths that perpetuate the hidden agenda. Myths were defined as "beliefs that are not necessarily intrinsically true but are not reinforced in such a way as to become realities" (p.153). By accepting or 'buying in' to certain myths, the student becomes her/his own worst enemy in the battle of persistence. One of those myths is the socio-economic status myth, which has an impact on the hidden agenda according to Webb (1992). The idea is that students who come from a lower economic and social status are not capable of performing at the college level and therefore, need special assistance. This belief results in special programs centered on recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and support services. The results, while based upon good intentions, sometimes make black students feel inferior and create an image that they are not equal to other students. Myths such as this set

up a self-fulfilling prophecy, which can lead to underachievement and possible departure from college. Webb (1992) suggested institutions consider eliminating programs that lead to stigmatized environments and create programs to improve students' self-esteem and skills. He added this should be done without making students feel they are tracked for a special program.

Example Models for Increasing Student Retention

While there is not one agreed upon retention program, various approaches deserve consideration. According to Levin, et. al. (1991), "retention program components are 'critical' if they are central to the program's design, and more importantly, to its success" (p. 325). Levin, et. al. (1991) suggested five critical program components that should be included in a retention program. Proactive intervention is the first component, which consists of early intervention programs aimed at identifying at-risk students. The second component is small group tutorials that support the idea of social integration as a means of retention. Emphasis on study and test-taking skills that apply to the student's current course load is the third component. The fourth component is language skills (i.e. effective reading, writing, listening and speaking). Quality instruction by involved faculty members is the final component.

Credle and Dean (1991) provided a framework in their article entitled "A Comprehensive Model for Enhancing Black Student Retention in Higher Education." This model was based on recruiting and retaining African American students at predominantly white institutions. The expectations of the model are for total commitment and comprehensive effort among administration, faculty, and staff. Figure 3 outlines the model.

1. Examine the Institution's Philosophy and Mission
2. Assess the Institution's Ability to Work with Black Students
3. Assess Black Students' Academic and Social Readiness
4. Schedule Early Visits to Institutions
5. Establish Rapport with Black Students
6. Help Black Students Learn to Work Within Organizational Structure
7. Develop an Ongoing Mentoring Program
8. Assist Black Students in Career Exploration
9. Help Black Students Prepare for the World of Work
>>Academic Progress

Figure 3
Model for Enhancing Black Student Retention

The first step in ensuring the successful recruiting and retention of African American students is to examine the institution's philosophy and mission. Questions that may be asked at this stage include: Is everyone truly committed to the mission or do they simply comply with it? Does the mission include a commitment to serve a diverse population? According to Credle and Dean (1991), administrators at predominantly white institutions usually count on a certain number of black applicants. However, predominantly black institutions are increasing their enrollments and black students are becoming more selective. Therefore, Credle (et. al., 1991) suggested it would be wise for predominantly white institutions to reconsider their philosophy and their mission in recruiting and retaining black students.

Assessing the institution's ability to work with black students is the second step. In this step, the institution should assess the social and emotional atmosphere on campus. For example, the support systems for black students should be examined for the quality of services. Obviously, if no support services exist for African Americans, the institution should strongly consider providing the mechanisms whereby these services can be established.

Programs should also be offered to increase sensitivity to racial prejudices and stereotyping. These types of programs would be particularly helpful for those faculty and staff who had little experience working with the African American population.

The third step is to assess black students' academic and social readiness. The institution must determine if it is prepared to admit black students who may need remedial work. Support services should be assessed to ensure needs can be met. Socially, the institution should assess its campus activities to guarantee activity themes which center around diversity. If the institution is in a rural environment, steps should be taken to consider those students coming from a larger city. Inversely, if the institution is in a large city, consideration should be given for those from a rural background.

Scheduling early visits to the institution is the fourth step. This early experience with the campus allows students to get to know faculty and staff. Furthermore, students begin to develop relationships with them. An outcome of the fourth step should be a natural flow into step number five. The fifth step is establishing rapport with black students. Although founded upon good intentions, faculty and staff may treat black students more as members of a racial group rather than as individuals. It is significant that black students are treated as adults and with the same expectations as other students.

Helping black students learn to work within the organizational structure is the sixth step. The structure of an institution of higher education can be quite complex. In order to assist black students with this process, a peer mentor program could be utilized for teaching students the many services offered by the university and where they are located. Furthermore, a peer mentor program fosters relationships and provides encouragement. The seventh step is

a continuation of the sixth step whereby an ongoing mentor program is established. Credle and Dean (1991) suggested matching black students with faculty and staff who have similar interests. Again, the emphasis here is to increase contact with faculty members in an informal setting as noted by Tinto (1987).

The eighth step is assisting black students in career exploration. This process should begin with admittance to career workshops and special opportunities to learn about various majors. As Tinto (1987) noted in his integration theory, the students' goals have an impact on their decision to persist or depart from college. It is in the eighth step that students' goals are examined. The final step is to help black students prepare for the world of work. One way to approach this step is to promote contacts with black upperclassmen and professionals who can serve as role models. Black students who may be undecided about their careers can learn from African American professionals about their experiences in the world of work.

Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1985) offered another model for increasing retention. Their model suggested a shift in thinking from an "institutional" perspective to a "student" perspective. Responding to the individual student and his or her needs is the result of a change in perspective. Changing perspective also includes focusing on how institutions can make the necessary accommodations in order to serve the needs of a diverse student body. Furthermore, Noel (et.al., 1985) suggested ten basic steps for implementing a campus-wide retention effort (see Appendix A).

A model developed by Eimers and Pike (1997) provided a useful reference for what areas might need to be covered in a retention study. The model draws heavily on the work of Tinto (1975) and other researchers. The major constructs of the model are summarized in

Appendix B. This model is based on the following premise:

A student's background characteristics and college experiences influence their academic and social integration into university life. Background characteristics, college experience, and integration in turn influence institutional commitment and goal commitment, which all ultimately influence intent to persist and persistence (Eimers, et.al., 1997, p.82).

Further research by Levitz and Noel (1985) yielded the identification of "three imperatives which can give direction to retention research efforts on campuses: emphasize performance, design appropriate indicators of measurement, and provide data that validate performance" (p. 345). Performance is emphasized over growth because the future success of the institution will likely depend on how well the overall mission is communicated. Mission here refers to distinctively defining what the institution does best and effectively communicating that to students and parents. The second imperative is to design measures that indicate how well the institution is doing. The measures are best designed when they are congruent with the mission of the institution. This effort not only shows institutional support, but also helps maintain focus. The third imperative is to provide data that demonstrates whether the performance-achievement indicators have been satisfactorily reached.

It is common for many institutions to focus on attrition by considering who has left the institution and why. While this type of information (i.e. patterns of withdrawal) is important, focusing on why students stay could also prove to be a worthwhile endeavor. Levitz and Noel (1985) suggested six objectives for a comprehensive retention research program: (1) find out what your institution is doing well and do more of it, (2) pinpoint campus services that need attention, (3) determine what your institution does that has an impact on student persistence, (4) follow students who are in special programs and determine whether the

service is having the desired impact, (5) target students who will likely benefit from interventions that are currently having a positive impact, and (6) provide validation of the desired student outcomes.

Levitz and Noel (1985) also examined "three phases" in a comprehensive retention research program. The three phases are: 1) Enrollment Behavior, 2) Assessment of Student-Institutional Interaction, and 3) Outcomes Assessment. The Enrollment Behavior phase essentially determines whether a gap exists between admission to the institution and subsequent enrollment each semester/quarter. Critical times are identified during this phase that highlight peak times for those who withdraw (i.e. after the first week, after a break or vacation, etc.). The purpose is to identify these periods of concern and construct a plan to identify interventions. For example, a returning student who does not pre-register for the following semester could be an early warning signal. This could be followed up by a phone call or note from faculty and/or staff. Along with patterns of withdrawal, profiles of students who persist and students who do not persist could be composed and compared. Characteristics that could be included in the profile are: ACT/SAT scores, G.P.A., major, residence status, courses attempted versus courses completed ratio, number and type of activities involved in, amount and type of financial aid, and whether the student has a job on or off campus. This type of information could be gathered retrospectively (i.e. looking at the past five years or so) or longitudinal (i.e. gather the data for the next entering class).

Assessment of Student-Institutional Interaction is the second phase. There are basically two parts to this phase. First, the institution determines the extent to which student expectations are congruent with campus experiences. When students are evaluating their

institution, they probably do not see a difference between real and perceived needs. What they see are needs and their expectations of administrators, faculty, etc. to meet those needs. One way to obtain data in this area is to survey currently enrolled students during the end of the first term of the freshman year. It is hypothesized that the greater the student feels her/his expectations are met, the more likely that student is to persist. The second part of phase two focuses on how graduates view their college experience. If graduates are satisfied, the institution can be relatively sure that they are being effective. Graduate satisfaction can be assessed in these areas: the library, residence halls, career planning and placement, faculty, and financial aid (Levitz et. al., 1985).

The third phase in Levitz et. al. (1985) is Outcomes Assessment. In this phase, the institution determines whether the programs or practices espoused are having the desired impact on students. The outcomes consist of such areas as: student learning, student persistence, and student development (i.e. self concept, self confidence). These studies may be cross-sectional or controlled. An example might be to determine the outcomes of assigning all freshmen science majors to rooms on the same floor of a residence hall. The expected outcome might be that those living in close proximity are more likely to persist in their major than those housed at random.

Examples of Successful Retention Programs

Noel (et.al., 1985) provided five case studies of successful retention programs. Each program is briefly mentioned below. Boston University implemented a subcommittee on retention and included various departments within the university. The subcommittee instituted a standardized, university-wide exit interview through the Dean of Student's Office.

The subcommittee also used freshman/sophomore surveys to evaluate the quality of university programs. This questionnaire served as the basis for a more comprehensive survey to the entire undergraduate population at the end of the academic year (Gilbane, 1985). Eastern Michigan University (EMU) operated their retention program around the philosophy that retention is a by-product of improved quality of campus life. This philosophy of retention was integrated into the accountability process of the institution. One example used at EMU was the process of identifying all students who indicated they were not returning to EMU. A follow-up person then contacted the students in order to determine what the university could do, if anything, to help them continue their education (Porter, 1985).

The University of Denver developed the position of a full-time retention project director (Toy, 1985). In some cases, a tenured faculty member was given one year of release time to coordinate the project. Specific situations were investigated that were thought to influence retention: 1) longitudinal tracking and statistical analysis; 2) a review of available financial aid packages; 3) an examination of campus morale from both student and faculty perspectives; 4) an analysis of the chronology of the decision to withdraw from the university; and 5) the comparison of student expectations and subsequent perceptions about various aspects of the university.

The focus of the retention program at the University of South Carolina at Spartanburg (USCS) is faculty involvement (Eaglin, 1985). The strength of the retention program at USCS is located at the unit level. Faculty members who serve on the university-wide committee form retention committees within their own divisions. Therefore, retention is viewed as a goal of all academic units, not just the goal of the division of student affairs or a

single unit. Bradley University (Illinois) takes a similar approach at the administrative level (Huddleston, 1985). At Bradley, six student service units work together in retention efforts with emphasis on service to the student. The units include career development, co-curricular and organizational development, educational development, financial assistance, residence life, the student judicial system, and undergraduate admissions.

Kobrak (1992) also provided an example of a successful retention program at Western Michigan University (WMU). WMU's program is entitled 'Students Taking Advantage of Resources (STAR).' The STAR program operates on a selection/volunteer philosophy. Those students participating receive a \$1,000.00 incentive. The various programs that students participate in continue throughout the undergraduate years. This philosophy is based on the notion that students are most likely to drop out of college immediately after specialized programming. The following are four of the thirteen requirements for STAR participants that have been shown to have a positive impact on adjustment and retention of African American students: (1) participate in mandatory academic advising sessions, (2) attend the five lectures per year in the Minority Convocation/Lecture Series, (3) participate in the Minority/Mentor program, and (4) enroll in the University 101 course.

Hossler and Bean (1990) provided an example of a retention program at Marian College, Indiana. Although retention efforts were met with some resistance, a single task force consisting of five staff and three faculty members was established. One area of focus at Marian was the residential student. During a study, first generation students and those with under-developed social skills reported little social contact. As a result, student Resident Assistants made unscheduled weekly visits to each first generation student to discuss

problems, clarify perceptions, and monitor the adjustment to the college environment.

Other researchers, in the area of student retention, have also cited the aspect of residential living. Astin (1973, 1984) found that students living in the residence halls were less likely to drop out and more likely to graduate. Chickering (1974) concluded that those students who reside on campus were more involved and earned higher G.P.A.'s. Upcraft (1985) suggested that freshmen living assignments impacted retention. For example, assigning students roommates according to majors can build common bonds. Furthermore, allowing students to choose their own roommate gives them control in the matter thus providing, at times, greater satisfaction for students.

Summary

Retention at any institution is a complex matter. Furthermore, retention cannot be the sole responsibility of student affairs; the support of faculty and other administrative offices is imperative. Tinto (1987) urged educators to consider their ability as an institution to reach out and establish a healthy environment. The institution's success in retaining its students will ultimately depend on this ability.

Tinto (1987) also noted that each institution must come to the realization that all students' needs cannot be fully served. This creates a paradox in that the institution is committed to retention, but realizes its limitations in meeting all students' needs. However, this paradox is possible to maintain if the institution keeps its focus of educating the student rather than keeping students at all cost.

Within the literature and research on student retention, attrition and persistence, there existed a fair amount of research as it pertained to African American students. However, the

majority of this research occurred at mid to large size universities. There has been very little research on African American student persistence particularly at small, private liberal arts colleges. This study attempted to fill in some gaps within the literature in this area.

The goal of Chapter Two was to examine the results of various studies concerning student retention and persistence. This chapter was also to provide a framework for establishing the importance of the study. These two goals were to be accomplished through the following sections: Theoretical Framework, Persistence of African American College Students, African American Students on White Campuses, Faculty Involvement in student life, Climate and Culture, Additional Literature Pertaining to African American Students, Example Models for Increasing Student Retention, and Examples of Successful Retention Programs.

It was the intention of the researcher to enhance, enlarge and add to the current literature on African American student persistence. The research methods in Chapter Three, the results in Chapter Four, and the conclusion in Chapter Five will hopefully achieve this goal.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The intent of this study was to address the problem of describing the experiences of African American students, who had persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the U.S. The purpose of the study was threefold: (1) to describe the experiences of African American students who have persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia, (2) to describe what administrators, at these same institutions, say they did to contribute to the policies and procedures that impacted the persistence of African American students, and (3) to compare what administrators say they did to support African American students and what African American students said about their experience of being a minority at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges. This section will cover the following major areas of methodology for this study: Research Strategies; Data Collection Procedures; Data Analysis; and Methods for Verification.

The undertaking of every portion of the research project was preceded by the approval of an *Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects (Form B)* by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Institutional Review Board. Furthermore, written approval from each of the four participating colleges was obtained prior to data collection.

Methodology refers to how one conducts research. Two perspectives used most often in research are termed: positivist and phenomenologist. A positivist seeks after the facts or

causes of particular phenomena apart from the subjective states of individuals. The positivist researcher uses such quantitative methods as questionnaires and inventories. The phenomenologist attempts to understand a phenomena from a subject's own perspective in examining how the world is experienced. The phenomenologist uses such qualitative methods as participant observation and in-depth interviewing which yield descriptive data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). According to Merriam (1998), "Qualitative researchers are interested in undertaking the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6).

Research Strategies

The proposed design for this study was a qualitative approach. Specifically, semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted with student and administrator participants served as the primary data source. Document analysis was used as a secondary data source. Locke (et. al, 1993) provided some helpful definitions of qualitative research to serve as a foundation for this section:

a systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded social context.....a means for describing and attempting to understand the observed regularities in what people say, do and report as their experience (p. 99).

Rationale for Qualitative Design

For the purposes of this study, the researcher and the dissertation committee decided that a qualitative approach would be better suited than a quantitative method. This study could have been attempted through a quantitative approach. Assuming there was effective instrumentation, a good sample size and significant response rate, a quantitative approach could result in a meaningful study. A quantitative approach could also provide relevant data

from a large number of students, be quantifiable and amenable to statistical analysis, and be easy to establish generalizability. Also, results on the variation of those who succeed and those who fail at persisting in college could be demonstrated through a quantitative approach. According to Marshal et. al. (1989),

Survey research is the appropriate mode of inquiry for making inferences about a large group of people from data drawn on a relatively small number of individuals from that group. The basic aim of survey research is to describe and explain statistically the variability of certain features of a population (p. 84).

However, a qualitative method of research was better suited for the purpose of this study. A qualitative study provided an opportunity to obtain *rich, detailed* information on a small group of people (Patton, 1990) that could not be obtained through a survey. According to Merriam (1998), "Qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understanding gained in the field" (p. 7). In this study, a qualitative approach enabled readers to understand, through detailed descriptive data, what it meant to be a minority at a small, predominantly white institution.

Another advantage for using a qualitative method of research was not being constrained by a predetermined set of categories as with the survey approach (Creswell, 1994). By using an open-ended interview method, the researcher heard the students' stories about their college experience as opposed to being restricted by survey questions. The exploratory nature of this approach allowed the researcher to hear what students *do talk about* as well as what they *do not talk about*. This approach allowed for a personal story instead of simply answers to a set of predetermined survey questions.

A final reason for choosing the qualitative approach was the concept of *meaning*. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning - how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Creswell, 1994). The researcher was interested in how African American students made sense of their lives as a minority at a small, predominantly white liberal arts college. It was important to learn more about the experiences of these students who persisted to their junior or senior year. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to learn what administrators believed they contributed to the persistence process at these same institutions.

The results of this study will hopefully be useful for administrators who are interested in the persistence process of minority students on their campus. A qualitative approach provided rich description on this subject. Not only are qualitative data rich, they are also attractive. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated:

Qualitative data are sexy. They are a source of well grounded, rich, descriptions and explanations of process in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations (p. 1).

Overall, not much is known about the experiences of African American students at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia. There is also not much known about factors that foster or hinder African American student persistence in these colleges. Administrators and faculty at these types of institutions will presumably benefit from knowing about the nature, complexity and richness of these students' experiences.

It is unlikely that the researcher could have obtained rich, detailed description of these experiences through any approach other than the interview method. The interview method allowed the student to express their perspective in their own words. As the interviewer, the

researcher was able to have immediate follow-up in order to accurately reflect their perspective. In short, twenty-four rich descriptions of student persistence and five rich descriptions of administrator perception were provided.

Research Design

According to Patton (1990), the main purpose of qualitative interviewing “is to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data” (p.295). Patton continued by stating the importance of asking interview questions in an open-ended manner that allows respondents to answer in their own words. The intention for each interview was to ask semi-structured questions that focused on open dialogue. For the purposes of this study, a semi-structured, open-ended interview can best be defined as follows (Patton, 1990):

A number of basic questions may be worded precisely in a predetermined fashion, while permitting the interviewer more flexibility in probing and more decision-making flexibility in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth or even to undertake whole new areas of inquiry that were not originally included in the interview instrument (p.287).

The above definition was the result of one of Patton’s (1990) approaches to interviews: combining an interview guide approach with a standardized, open-ended approach.

Six broad questions were asked in the interview to invite students to articulate their story about being a minority at a small, predominantly white liberal arts college in the Appalachian region of the United States. The same type of format was used in the interviews involving administrators. The interview questions used in this study are located in Appendix E and F. These questions were developed based on topics related to student persistence as derived from a review of related literature and a pilot study which will be discussed later in this section.

The use of an interview strategy proved to have much strength. Interviewing provided a face-to-face encounter, which added a more personal emphasis. Also, the researcher was able to obtain a large amount of expansive and contextual data from the students interviewed. Interviewing facilitated access for immediate follow-up data collection for purposes of clarification. Furthermore, interviewing was useful for discovering complex interconnections in social relationships. Finally, interviewing provided insight to the subjective side (Marshall et. al., 1989) or the student's perception of their experiences as they persisted in college.

According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research questions should be posed in a non-directional manner without words that infer quantitative direction (e.g. affect, influence, impact and determine). The type of question used in this study was intended to facilitate open-ended responses, which enabled the researcher to understand various points of view without a predetermined set of categories (Patton, 1990).

From the very beginning, a major challenge in this study was race. It was assumed that there may be some concern on the part of the student participants, who were African American, about being interviewed by a white male with whom they were not acquainted. However, the relationship established with a gatekeeper (i.e. contact person) at each college provided a good reference and a liaison between the researcher and the students. Based on the 24 student interviews, the researcher did not detect any concerns on the student's part about being interviewed by a white researcher. Furthermore, a pilot study (described later in this chapter) was conducted prior to data collection to ensure interview questions were appropriately worded and effectively administered. Necessary adjustments to the interview

questions assisted in awareness of unfamiliarity with language or cultural norms.

The issue of race did not appear to be a drawback to the study. All 24 African American student participants appeared to be comfortable interviewing with a researcher of a different race. Only one student mentioned surprise that the researcher was white. This student expected that a researcher asking questions to African American students would also be black. However, this remark came at the end of the interview and did not appear to have any impact on the student's desire to fully participate in the research process. In fact, the student said it was not a problem that the researcher was not African American. All student interviewees appeared to be at ease and were very enjoyable to interview. One student shared "a lot of the questions you asked I had not thought of before."

Document analysis provided a second form of data. The various documents substantiated the other data source of interviews. Also, documents were interpreted to provide explanation of the past and clarify meanings underlying current policy and practice as McMillan (et. al. 1993) notes. A document analysis in this study provided a better understanding of each institution. Documents included such items as current catalogs, student handbooks and campus demographics. The documentary evidence from the document analysis was nominal.

Pilot Study

Prior to the data collection process, a pilot study was conducted. According to Locke et. al. (1993), the pilot study is the best possible basis for designing research; it can reveal a fatal flaw and provide assurance to continue with research. Pilot studies help refine data collection plans with respect to content and procedure (Yin, 1994). Pilot studies also help

generate theory about the people being studied (Maxwell, 1996). Glesne et. al. (1992) considered pilot studies “a crucial prelude to the successful conduct of interviews” (p.68).

Glesne et. al. (1992) provided three objectives pilot studies are meant to achieve. First, the idea was not to collect data but to learn more about the research process. The pilot study enabled the researcher to view the interview process in an informal way. This provided a good foundation for the actual study. Second, the pilot study enabled the researcher to test interview questions for clarity and the appropriateness of the language used. Language was thought to be a factor due to the difference in race. The pilot study helped to clarify and adjust the questions where needed. This was of particular importance in making sure the questions led to the desired results. Most importantly, the pilot study allowed the researcher to determine if the students felt comfortable in answering the questions. Third, the pilot study enabled the researcher to test how the research comes across to others. It was the researcher’s intention to learn from the pilot study how best to establish rapport with the students who participated in the actual study.

A pilot study was conducted in the spring and summer of 1999. The pilot study was conducted at a small, liberal arts college in the Appalachian region of the U.S. A total of six African American students (five male and one female) participated in a one-on-one discussion with the researcher. The primary purpose of the pilot study was to obtain feedback on the following: the letter to the student asking for their participation (Appendix I), the interview process to be used, the interview questions (Appendix E), and the Basic Elements of Informed Consent form (Appendix J). Overall, the pilot study was a positive experience with meaningful feedback for the researcher to consider.

The pilot study participants had several remarks regarding the letter to the student. In reference to the \$25 offered to each participant, the word 'remuneration' was thought to be unclear and was changed to 'compensation'. The issue of recording the interview was suggested as an important item to mention in the letter. This change was made accordingly. The word 'persistence' was mentioned as needing clarification in the letter. The researcher added a sentence defining this term.

Comments regarding the actual \$25 compensation included: (1) not being necessary, (2) this amount would definitely attract more people to participate and (3) no reaction to the compensation. The researcher decided to continue with the \$25 compensation with very specific guidelines to clarify the money was not meant to be coercive. Also, it was explained that receipt of the money was unconditional, even if the student did not complete the interview. The terms 'African American' and 'minority' were also discussed. One student preferred use of 'minority'; the remainder preferred 'African American' and thought it was much more appropriate. The researcher decided to continue using the term 'African American'.

The basic elements of the interview process were discussed next. The opportunity to comment 'off the record' was mentioned in the informed consent form but not at the beginning of the interview process. This adjustment was noted. Overall, this section was very understandable according to participants.

The next item discussed was the Basic Elements of Informed Consent Form (Appendix J). The issue of declining to be recorded but yet remain part of the study was recommended as an addition to the introduction portion of the actual interview. The

suggestion was made to delete the possibility of using the tape in a future presentation. The suggestion was also made to clarify the \$25 compensation was only for those who completed the interview. However, this change was not made due to the issue of perceived coercion. *The researcher decided that all participants would receive the \$25 compensation for their good faith effort to interview, even if they did not complete the interview process.*

Pilot study participants also examined the interview questions (Appendix E). Several suggestions were given regarding the addition of questions. Potential topics consisted of questions dealing with: the student's own impact on diversity; relationship with peers; opinions about the content of curriculum at their institution and whether it provided a cultural perspective; the student's experience with the various groups/races on their campus; the issue of whether discrimination existed on their campus and to what degree; and why the student chose to come to a liberal arts college as opposed to a historically black college. These topics were considered for possible sub questions in the interview process.

The question "If I were an entering African American freshman at _____ College, what would I see the first month on campus?" had a slight change in format. The researcher changed "what would I see" to "what would I experience" as suggested by the pilot study group. The only concern about the questions was whether they were too broad. However, in order to allow participants to speak as openly as possible, the questions remained worded in a broad fashion. Sub questions were considered as part of the interview if the participant needed further clarification.

The above feedback was noted and used to make adjustments in the interview questions. Constructive feedback from the pilot group of students, who were reflective of the

population in the actual study, provided very useful information for revisions. Any changes concerning the interview process or interview guide were addressed as well.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study was one of gaining entrance to the various institutions and the basic management of the research process (Marshall et. al., 1989). The first step was gaining entry into the four institutions selected for this study and obtaining permission to interview its students and administrators. The process began with obtaining support from the Appalachian College Association (ACA). Since each of the four institutions in the study was a member of the ACA, it was assumed that ACA endorsement would be helpful in gaining entry. An ACA representative mailed to each of the four institutions a letter that explained the purpose of the study and encouraged participation. A copy of this letter was attached to the *Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects (Form B)* at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. A second letter, from the researcher, served as a request for assistance in locating interested African American juniors and seniors (Appendix G). In addition to the letter, a research synopsis of the study was included (Appendix H).

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested that a *gatekeeper* be identified for each institution in a research project. In this study, an administrator or faculty member was identified on each campus that served two functions. First, the gatekeeper assisted the researcher in locating the person in charge of the institutional review board. Support of the institutional review board was essential for obtaining the necessary permission to conduct research at each institution. An official letter of approval from each of the four participating institutions was mailed to the researcher. These letters were attached to the *Application for*

Review of Research Involving Human Subjects (Form B) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Second, the gatekeeper served as a contact for campus visits and introductions with the students who volunteered to participate in the study. This support was incredibly important to the research process.

Management of the research process was the next step in the researcher's role. Marshall and Rossman (1989) noted several suggestions for managing the research process. First, the researcher should have knowledge of the setting and the environment. This was accomplished through reading about the institutions prior to conducting the on-campus interviews. Furthermore, the gatekeeper served as a resource person to learn about the institution and its students. Second, roles should be established that facilitate trust and openness. This was accomplished through establishing a rapport with the gatekeeper and eventually the students who volunteered to participate. According to Spradley (1979), "rapport encourages informants to talk about their culture" (p. 78). Glesne et. al. (1992) suggested that people will be more willing to talk about personal issues once they know you. Being an advocate for the student, the gatekeeper served to facilitate this process.

The third step was to explain to participants what the study was about and its possible uses in the field of higher education. This was accomplished through a letter sent to student participants prior to the interview (Appendix I). This letter explained the purpose of the study and its importance, as well as confidentiality issues. Furthermore, the introduction section of the interview guide (Appendix E) was read to each participant prior to the interview. This document provided information about the research and allowed time before the interview for questions or clarification about the purpose and intent of the study.

Informed consent was evident in each portion of the study. According to Glesne et. al. (1992), participants should be made aware of the following: (1) that the study is voluntary, (2) any aspects of the research that might affect their well being, and (3) that they may freely choose to stop participation during any point in the study. Fictitious names were used on the audiotape and in written documentation to maintain anonymity. The letter of invitation (Appendix I), the introduction section of the interview guide (Appendix E) and the Basic Elements of Informed Consent Form (Appendix J) provided the necessary information for each participant to make an informed decision to participate or decline participation. More detail on the informed consent process follows in the Data Collection section.

Site and Sample

The site of this study took place at four colleges that are members of the Appalachian College Association (ACA). The ACA is a consortium of 33 small colleges and universities in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia (see Appendix C and D). The enrollment size of ACA institutions ranges from 315 to 2,652 with an average African American population of 47 (4.35%). To date, no study known to the researcher has previously been conducted which focuses exclusively on the experiences of African American students who persist at small colleges in Appalachia.

Appendix D provides a brief set of institutional characteristics for the 33 ACA institutions. In general, 59% of the colleges and universities are Bachelor's degree granting institutions and 41% grant Master's degrees. In terms of Carnegie Classification, 63% are classified as BA II, which are "primarily undergraduate colleges with major emphasis on baccalaureate degree programs. These institutions are less selective in admissions or they

award less than 40% of their baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts fields” (Evangelauf, 1994 p. A18). Furthermore, 22% of the ACA institutions are classified as MA II, which “offer a full range of baccalaureate programs and are committed to graduate education through the Master’s degree; awarding 20 or more Master’s degrees annually in one or more disciplines” (Evangelauf, 1994, p. A18).

A majority of the ACA colleges and universities (63%) are located in small towns and 28% are located in rural areas. Most of the ACA institutions are at least 100 years old with 63% being established prior to 1894. Nearly all of the ACA colleges and universities have some church affiliation (94%). Finally, in terms of intercollegiate athletics, 56% are in the NAIA division, 25% are classified NCAA II, and 16% are in the NCAA III division.

Serving as an administrator at an institution affiliated with the ACA would likely yield a temptation to include the researcher’s own institution in the study. However, based on discussion with the doctoral committee and other researchers, the institution at which the researcher is employed was not included in this study. Some researchers advise against conducting a study within your own institution. According to Glesne et. al. (1992), “Previous experience with settings or people can set up expectations for certain types of interaction that will constrain effective data collection” (p.22).

Purposeful sampling was incorporated to select participants for the study. According to Patton (1990), the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful sampling*. Maxwell (1996) suggested two goals for purposeful sampling: (1)

purposeful sampling should achieve representativeness of the setting; (2) purposeful sampling should adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population.

The institutions that comprise the ACA are located in five southeastern states. Furthermore, 94% of the 33 institutions have some church affiliation. The four institutions selected for this study were in four of the five states where ACA institutions are located. Due to reasons of proximity, an ACA institution located in one of the five states was not included in this study. Two of the participating institutions are located in small towns and two in rural areas. In terms of Carnegie Classification, two institutions are classified as BA II and two are classified as MA II. A variety of church affiliations were also represented. The average student enrollment for these institutions was 1,280. The average African American student enrollment was 6.1% of the total campus population. Identification of participating students, administrators and institutions is confidential and not listed in the dissertation. Pseudonyms for the students, administrators and institutions are used and only the researcher knows the identity.

Criterion sampling is one strategy for purposefully selecting information-rich cases. Criterion sampling allows the researcher to study cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 1990). The criteria chosen for this study were threefold: (1) African American, (2) junior or senior status, (3) in 'good standing' with her/his academic institution. The rationale for selecting African Americans who had a junior or senior status and 'in good standing' was that their experiences would likely present a more accurate view of successful persistence than first year students or students 'not in good standing'. Also, juniors and seniors were presumed to have an adequate understanding of their college

environment and be able to provide meaningful contributions to the study. Six students were interviewed at each institution.

Patton (1990) suggested *purposeful random sampling* as a strategy for purposely selecting information-rich cases. Patton (1990) suggested:

The fact that a small sample size will be chosen for in-depth qualitative study does not automatically mean that the sampling strategy should not be random. For many audiences, random sampling, even of small samples, will substantially increase the credibility of the results (p. 179).

However, implementing purposeful random sampling does not guarantee a representative random sample as Patton (1990) warns. In order to obtain a more representative sample (e.g. 50% males and 50% females), the researcher had to select respondents *purposely* as Weiss (1994) noted to avoid unwanted duplication. Having "dissimilar forms represented about the same number of times will allow us the same knowledge base for each"(Weiss p.23). Therefore, the researcher purposely selected six students at each institution who made up the preferred sample (three males and three females). Although the intent was to have equal male/female representation, there were slightly more female student participants. The researcher assumes this was due to a lack of desire on some male students to participate. A total of 13 females and 11 males participated in the student interviews.

Administrators were also interviewed as part of this study. Marshall (et. al. 1989) referred to this type of data collection (administrator interviews) as *elite interviewing*. Elite interviewing focuses on well informed, influential people who can provide overall information for an organization (Marshall et. al., 1989). According to Marshall et. al. (1989), participants in an elite interviewing process prefer open-ended questions as opposed to a more specific

question format. The interview guide used with administrators can be found in Appendix F. The researcher's intention was to interview at least one administrator at each of the four institutions. Five administrators were interviewed with one institution having two administrator participants.

The intention for the administrator participants was to select those who could give an idea of what their institution does to foster student persistence. Ideally, the administrator participant was to be a person who interacted with African American students and could comment on his/her perception of students' experiences in college. This interaction may have taken place through services provided by the administrator's representative department or through a campus organization the administrator directs.

Data Collection Procedures

On-campus student interviews were the primary source of data collection. Interviews were also conducted with administrators at the four institutions selected for the study. In order to understand the experiences of African Americans who persisted at small liberal arts colleges in Appalachia, interview questions were focused on the students' perception of their campus climate. Fleming (1984) used a standardized, open-ended questioning method to assess the perceived college climate for each student. For the purposes of this study, the interview questions (Appendix E) were asked of students participating in the interview process. According to Weiss (1994), asking for census data (e.g. age, place of birth) at the beginning of the interview sets the wrong tone by focusing on facts as opposed to detailed narrative data. Therefore, census data questions were asked at the end of the interview.

The gatekeeper at each institution distributed letters that invited students to participate in the study (Appendix I). Afterwards, a list of interested students was obtained. This process was then followed by an e-mail message to the gatekeeper to learn when interview times were established for those interested in participating in the study. Each interview was scheduled at the participant's convenience on her/his campus. Locations for the student interviews included: a student center conference room, an office, and a guesthouse meeting room.

The gatekeeper gave a letter explaining the research project (Appendix I) and the Basic Elements of Informed Consent Form (Appendix J) to each student prior to the interview. The primary reason for following this procedure was so the student could make a more informed decision of whether or not to participate in the study. The letter to the student (Appendix I) ensured the student of confidentiality and that the information collected in the study would not be used to identify them in any way. The letter also mentioned that their participation was completely voluntary and there was no penalty to withdraw at any time or to choose not to participate.

The Basic Elements of Informed Consent Form (Appendix J) was used to clarify: (1) that participation was voluntary, (2) the procedures used in the study, (3) the assurance of confidentiality, and (4) the understanding that the participant may choose to stop the interview process at any time. Prior to the interview, the researcher discussed the Basic Elements of Informed Consent Form and asked the student to sign two copies (one which the student kept). Original copies of this form were then placed in a locked cabinet in the Leadership Studies Office, Claxton Education Addition at the University of Tennessee,

Knoxville. Also prior to the interview, an introduction was read to the student (Appendix E) to ensure that they understood the project and the confidentiality issue.

With the consent of the participant, the researcher audiotape recorded the interview. A micro cassette recorder was used along with a lapel microphone for better reception. All students consented to the use of the recording device. Each participant was given the opportunity to receive a copy of the tape if they desired. All interview participants were mailed a copy of the interview transcript to review for accuracy. Opportunity was given to provide feedback and return the transcript in a postage paid envelope. Of the 29 interviewees (24 students and 5 administrators), 20 (69%) returned the transcripts.

The students were compensated \$25 cash to participate in the study, which was distributed after the interview session. The \$25 was given to all participants who made a good faith effort to participate, even if they left before the interview was completed. The researcher intended the compensation to be a fair remuneration and was not meant to be a bribe or a patronizing gift. The majority of the students seemed to appreciate the compensation. All 24 students chose to complete the interview process.

Field notes were taken during the interviews. According to Patton (1990), field notes are an important part of the interview process and contain the researcher's feelings, reactions to the experience, and reflections about the meeting. Contact summary sheets (see Appendix N) noting the setting, student attitude and demeanor, and general observations were written for each interview and maintained as part of the database.

The final source of data collection was document analysis. According to Glesne et. al. (1992) and Yin (1994), documents help corroborate interviews and make findings more

trustworthy. This type of information was to provide a historical perspective for each institution. Documents that were received by the researcher and analyzed for content included: college catalogs, student handbooks and campus demographics.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological inquiry guided data analysis in this study. According to Patton (1990), phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (p. 69). The phenomenon experienced may be an emotion, a relationship, a program, a culture or an organization. In this study, African American students were experiencing life on a predominantly white college campus and persisting towards graduation. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) defined phenomenology as "exploring the different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and various phenomena in, the world around them" (p. 82).

Patton (1990) further defined the approach by describing how phenomenologists "focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a worldview" (p. 69). One implication of this perspective was to know what people experience and how they interpret the world, which is the focus of phenomenological inquiry. The use of interviews was one method of inquiry that allowed the researcher to obtain this knowledge without actually experiencing the phenomenon. In short, a phenomenological study "is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience" (Patton, 1990, p. 71). The interview method allowed for a greater understanding of what the experience was

like for an African American who attended a small, predominantly white college and how this experience contributed towards persistence to graduation. The remainder of this section focuses on the analysis that took place after the interviews.

After each interview was completed, the researcher conducted two primary steps: 'write-ups' and contact summary sheets. The 'write-ups' step was essentially processing the written field notes taken during the interview. A two to three page summary was written up for each student. After the 'write-up' process was completed, a contact summary sheet was filled out. Elements of the contact summary sheet included such items as: frequently used words, non-verbal cues, attitude, themes, reflective feelings, and speculations (see Appendix N). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested both these steps in the order described for a more thorough analysis.

The next step involved transcribing interview tapes, which was completed by the researcher. Although this step was extremely time consuming, the researcher chose to transcribe all 29 tapes for two reasons. First, it was more cost effective. Second, it was assumed the process of transcribing would increase understanding and familiarity of the data. The researcher was able to get to know the participants better through repetition of their stories. After tapes were transcribed for each institution, a full transcript of the interview was then mailed to each participant asking for comments on the accuracy of the document. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included to return the transcript. Those transcripts with corrections were adjusted prior to analysis. The next step was to analyze the data.

The data gathered in this study were the result of the following research questions: 1) How do African American students describe their experiences of being African American at

small, predominantly white liberal arts college in Appalachia? 2) What do administrators at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia report that their institutions do to support African American students? 3) What is the relationship between what administrators report and what African American students say they experience as minorities at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?

Data analysis was the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the data collected through searching for relationships among categories within the data (Marshall et. al. 1989). Similarly, Bogdan and Taylor (1975) defined data analysis as a process that includes an effort to identify themes and to construct ideas as they are suggested by data, and then attempt to demonstrate support for those themes. According to Patton (1990), the challenge that comes with qualitative data analysis "is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed" (p.371). In this section, the researcher will describe the analytic process implemented in this study.

An inductive approach was followed in the data analysis for this study. Patterns, themes and categories emerged from the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection and analysis (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, data analysis partially ran concurrent with data collection as several researchers suggest (Maxwell, 1996; Creswell, 1994; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1990; and Tesch, 1990). The process of reviewing contact summary sheets and write-ups continued throughout the interview process.

The process of data analysis was based on data reduction and interpretation whereby data were reduced into certain patterns, categories, or themes and then interpreted by some system (Creswell, 1994). Data reduction, according to Marshall et. al. (1990), begins as soon as important themes are identified and continues throughout data collection. Tesch (1990) further explained this process in terms of *de-contextualization* and *re-contextualization*.

De-contextualization, or segmenting, refers to separating relevant portions of data from their context. This was accomplished through an organizing system developed from the data themselves as opposed to an established framework (Tesch, 1990). After data were de-contextualized, coding took place. Coding is a second step whereby abbreviations are assigned to data segments containing information about the category to which it belongs (Tesch, 1990). Re-contextualization is the third step. This process involves assembling everything that belongs in one category together so the researcher can read in continuous fashion (Tesch, 1990).

In order for the data to be de-contextualized and re-contextualized, content analysis needed to occur. Content analysis enabled the researcher to design categories that are pertinent to the research purpose and to sort all occurrences of relevant words into these categories (Tesch, 1990). According to Marshall et. al. (1989), content analysis is a procedure for making deductions by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. Three steps were identified by Marshall et. al. (1989) in planning a content analysis that is relevant to this section.

The first step was to establish specific objectives to be achieved. There were two objectives to be achieved in this study. The researcher wanted to provide descriptive

information on the experiences of African American students who persisted at small liberal arts colleges. Also, the researcher wanted to compare findings with those findings obtained from interviews with administrators.

The second step in content analysis was to develop a coding system for analyzing the content. Creswell (1994) contended that a qualitative research proposal should identify the coding procedure to be used in the study. He referred to eight steps, identified by Tesch (1990), that engage a researcher in a systematic process of analyzing textual data (see Table 1). An open coding approach was used in which the data was examined line by line for empirical indicators consisting of actions and events described verbally (Tesch, 1990).

The final step to occur in content analysis was the specific analytic procedure to be used. Absolute frequencies were the primary procedure used in order to provide a summary of themes that existed throughout the data. According to Marshall et. al. (1989), it is essential for the researcher to be open to subtle themes, recurring language and patterns of belief that will be generated during the data analysis.

The researcher also maintained a codebook. The codebook was a document that described the locations of variables and listed the code assignments of the attributes composing those variables (Babbie, 1990). The coded information that signified the institution and the student was available only to the researcher. The assurance of confidentiality was addressed in a letter from the researcher and in the Basic Elements of Informed Consent Form (see Appendix I and J).

Various researchers suggest the use of matrices to display relationships among data (Maxwell, 1996; Tesch, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1984). Matrices are graphical displays

Table 1
Steps for Developing an Organizing System
for Unstructured Qualitative Data

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read through all of the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
2. Pick one document (one interview) - the most interesting, the shortest, the one on top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, What is this about? Do not think about the 'substance' of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.
4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary organizing scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show relationships.
6. Make final decisions on abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your existing data.

Creswell (1994, p. 155)

that identify patterns, comparisons, trends and paradoxes among the data. Some matrices will be used in Chapter Four to provide visual description for the data analysis. For example, a matrix will display the various themes concerning student persistence.

Another important component in data analysis will be the use of field notes. Field notes, or theoretical memos, are running records of insights gathered during the data collection stage (Tesch, 1990). According to Glesne et. al. (1992), field notes should be both descriptive and analytic. Descriptive notes are intended to portray the context in which the interview took place. Analytic notes are reflections, feelings, problems or impressions of the interview process. Contact summary sheets also aided in this process (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Contact summary sheets allowed the researcher to answer questions pertaining to: 1) the main themes, issues, problems and questions observed during the interview, and 2) any hypothesis, speculation or guesses about the interview process as perceived by the researcher. Contact summary sheets also contain reflective remarks and questions raised during the interview (see Appendix N).

A final step in the data analysis was conducted with a sample of interview participants. This was the process known as *member checks* (Maxwell, 1996). This process took place after the initial interview during a convenient time for the participant. *Member checks* are discussed in the 'Methods for Verification (Validity)' section of this chapter.

Along with the interviews, a document analysis provided a second form of data collection. A document content analysis consisted of coding and analyzing documents for making descriptive or explanatory assertions about the literature, the author, and/or the environment of which the documents are a part (Babbie, 1990).

Overall, from the completed analysis, themes emerged that described the experiences of African American juniors and seniors at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia. Conclusions drawn from one data source were checked against conclusions from another source through *triangulation* (defined in the Methods for Verification Section at the end of this chapter), bringing more validity to the conclusions drawn from this study.

Coding Procedures

This sub-section details the coding procedures that were used during data analysis. The first step included the following procedures. The researcher typed interview transcripts verbatim using a personal computer and Dictaphone. Four hundred pages were typed single-spaced with double space between interviewer and interviewee comments. Transcripts were separated by interview question, which amounted to six sections for student interviewees and three sections for administrator interviewees. Transcripts were read line by line by the researcher. Key statements, words and phrases were highlighted. The highlighted portions were read a second time and coded with a word or short phrase in the right margin. These codes became categories.

The second step began with creating 8"x5" note cards for each category. On each card was written the category and the information pertaining to that category taken from the transcript. Essentially the student or administrator pseudonym was listed with the respective thought or direct quote pertaining to that particular category. In cases of long quotations, the page number of the transcript was given for easy access for the researcher to retrieve from the computer. Note cards were stored in 8"x5" notebooks according to the interview question, separated by category.

One hundred fifty-seven categories were established for the six interview questions for students. The interview questions had the following number of categories represented: Question 1 – 26 categories, Question 2 – 22 categories, Question 3 – 13 categories, Question 4 – 26 categories, Question 5 – 34 categories, and Question 6 - 36 categories. Seventy-eight categories were established for the three interview questions for administrators. The interview questions had the following number of categories represented: Question 1 – 37 categories, Question 2 – 18 categories, Question 3 – 23 categories. Duplication existed for some of the categories with certain categories represented in more than one interview question. Refer to Appendices L and M for detailed information on how initial categories were separated.

The third step consisted of additional note cards created with the name of each category title printed in large letters. This procedure was used for both student and administrator data. The process enabled the researcher to determine how patterns and themes developed and fit together with other categories. Note cards were arranged so the researcher could observe how categories might fit together. The researcher began to look for duplications that were occurring. For example, the category 'administration' occurred in four of the six student interview questions (Questions 1, 2, 3, and 6). The category 'faculty' occurred in five of the six student interview questions (Questions 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6).

The researcher considered the categories that were developing and concluded with 17 broad categories represented in the student interviewee data. Those categories were as follows: Administration, Faculty, Support Services, Academics, Perception, College Environment, Sense of Community, College Experience, Transfer Student Experience, Peer

Influence, Being a Minority at a Small College, Involvement, Obstacles, Persistence Factors, General Descriptors, Student Background, and Closing Remarks. These categories were narrowed and placed into Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model and various themes were developed, which can be viewed in Chapter Four (see Table 2).

Following the same procedure, the researcher also considered the categories that were developing among the administrator interview data and concluded with 10 broad categories. Those categories were listed as follows: Administration, Faculty, Curriculum, Peer Mentor Program, College Environment, Community, Administrator Comments on Student Perception, Student Involvement, Perceived Obstacles to Persistence, and African American Student Enrollment. These categories led to various themes, which can be viewed in Chapter Four (see Table 6).

After the data was analyzed, it was written into a readable text, or re-contextualized. The detailed results are discussed in Chapter Four. All major steps of the data analysis process can be viewed in Figure 4 on the following page.

Methods For Verifications (Validity)

Creswell (1994) suggested that qualitative researchers "have no single stance or consensus on addressing traditional topics such as validity and reliability in qualitative studies" (p.157). However, to bring closure to the chapter, this section will discuss validity and reliability issues as they pertain to qualitative research. According to Maxwell (1996), "validity is a goal rather than a product" (p.86). Validity is also relative in that it requires assessment in relation to the purpose and circumstances of the research (Maxwell, 1996). Creswell (1994) noted the importance of addressing concepts of validity and reliability in

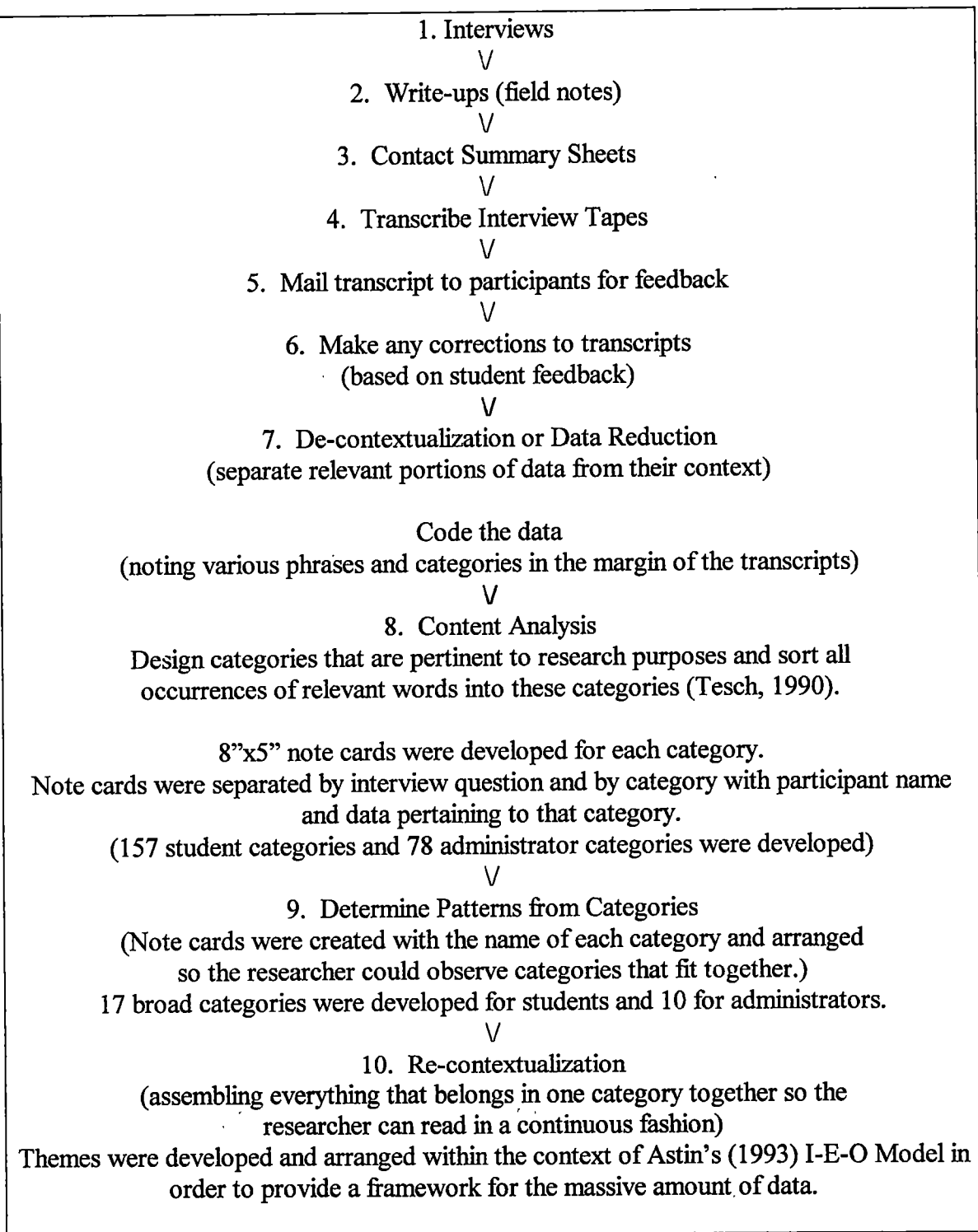


Figure 4
Data Analysis Steps

qualitative research. He suggested three areas in which to address this issue. First, the study should describe how it will address issues of internal validity and whether it coincides with reality. Second, the limited generalizability of the study's findings (external validity) should be discussed. Finally, limitations of replicating the study (reliability) should be addressed.

One way this study addressed the issue of *internal validity* was through *triangulation*. Triangulation is a collection of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings using a variety of methods (Denzin, 1970). According to Yin (1994), triangulation is a major strength. Using a variety of sources allows the researcher to address a broader range of issues. The process of triangulation can also enhance a study's generalizability and usefulness for other settings (Marshall et. al., 1989).

This study incorporated triangulation in two ways. A variety of research methods were used: student interviews, administrative interviews, and document analysis. The researcher incorporated *triangulation* by using a variety of locations (i.e. four colleges) and interviewing several participants (i.e. twenty-four students and five administrators). Four different higher education institutions in four different states served as the research sites. The intention here was to provide a variety of participants by using a range of sites instead of using only one institution. Finally, at least six students and one administrator were interviewed from each institution. Two administrators were interviewed at one institution.

Another means of addressing the issue of internal validity is the involvement of participants (Creswell, 1994). This is the process known as *member checks* (Maxwell, 1996). Glesne et. al. (1992) suggested that researchers obtain reactions of respondents to the data they provided. This process will strengthen data analysis by: (1) verifying accurate reflection,

(2) alerting the researcher of potential problems, and (3) helping to develop new ideas for interpretation.

This process took place after the initial interview during a convenient time for the participant. The initial plan of the researcher was to obtain feedback from the participants concerning the conclusions of the study. This process would increase the accuracy of interpretations of the data. According to Yin (1994), having the research reviewed by participants was a way of corroborating the essential facts and evidence introduced in the study. Furthermore, the corrections made through this process should enhance the accuracy of the research, hence increasing the construct validity. Construct validity referred to using the correct procedures for measuring the concepts under study (Yin, 1994). For clarification, each student had already been given the opportunity to review his or her interview transcript earlier in the year (see Appendix K), which is also relevant to internal validity.

The process of *member checks* began with a letter to all 24 student interviewees asking their assistance with reviewing the results of the study (Appendix O). Eight students indicated an interest in reviewing the results. Further communication was mailed to students updating the process of *member checks* (Appendix P). Due to student graduation, the researcher was able to locate addresses for only seven of the eight students. A synopsis of the interview results was mailed to all seven students with a letter explaining the process (Appendix Q). Of the seven students who received correspondence, two students returned feedback concerning the project.

Although the responses to the *member check* process were relatively brief, they were positive and encouraging. The first student agreed with the results and noted that the sections

pertaining to faculty and staff stood out the most to her. She shared, "I liked the way you showed how faculty and staff didn't see the problems African American students deal with."

The second student shared a little more detail about his reaction to the results. Overall, he thought the study "accurately expressed the comments of students – especially mine." He felt the results of the study depicted his personal college experience. The thing that stood out the most to this student was the "constant discrepancy between what the students said and what the administrators said." Only one clarification was asked for which pertained to the theme (from Chapter Four) of "sharing commonalities". His question was whether the commonalities were between African Americans or among students from other ethnic backgrounds. Although it would be helpful to have more feedback on the results, the researcher was grateful for the two thoughtful students who took time to comment.

The second area to be addressed is the limited generalizability of the study's findings, *external validity*. According to Merriam (1988), the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize the findings but to create a unique interpretation of events. External validity is the extent that the results are generalizable to other settings. Yin (1994) pointed out that case studies do not work the same way as surveys where results are generalized to a larger universe. The intent of this study was to provide *rich data* on a select number of sites (i.e. four) with a select pool of participants (i.e. 29). The term *rich data* refers to "data that are detailed and complete enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (Maxwell 1996, p. 95).

It was assumed that the results of the study would offer helpful suggestions to participating institutions in the area of African American student persistence. The assumption

was also made that the results could be used to facilitate discussion at the other 29 ACA institutions. According to Maxwell (1996), qualitative researchers “rarely make explicit claims about the generalizability of the accounts” (p. 96). However, *internal generalizability* can be a clear factor in a qualitative study. Internal generalizability refers to the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied and can lead to the development of a theory that can be extended to other similar cases (Maxwell, 1996).

The final area addressed is the limitations in replicating the study, or *reliability*. According to Creswell (1994), in qualitative research the same rule applies to replication as to generalizability. While true replication is not possible, it was the intent of this study to provide detail so a similar study could be conducted. According to Maxwell (1996),

Generalizability of qualitative studies usually is based, not on explicit sampling of some defined population to which the results can be extended, but on the development of a theory that can be extended to other cases. (p.97)

It was presumed that the results had what Maxwell (1996) defined as ‘face generalizability’, meaning there was no obvious reason not to believe the results apply more generally. One strategy that was incorporated in order to enhance generalizability, was multi-case analysis. According to Merriam (1998), the use of multi-case analysis with predetermined questions and specific procedures for coding enhance the generalizability of findings. Four institutions in four different states were used as sites for the administrator and student interviews.

Maxwell (1996) suggested other issues to consider in reference to validity in qualitative research. In the areas of description and interpretation there were distinct threats to validity. The main threat to *description* was the inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data. One way to resolve this conflict was to record and transcribe the interviews. With the

permission of each student and administrator participant, all interviews were audio taped. The researcher then transcribed each interview using a Dictaphone and computer.

The main threat to *interpretation* was imposing one's own framework or meaning to the data rather than trying to gain understanding of the people being studied and the meanings they attach to their words. One way to combat this was to attempt to learn how the participants make sense of what is going on, rather than forcing their views into the researcher's own framework (Maxwell, 1996). It was the researcher's intention to ask broad interview questions that were framed in such a way as to allow open and honest feedback. The researcher wanted to hear the students tell their stories as they desired. Furthermore, each student and administrator participant was provided with a copy of the interview transcript. A letter from the researcher accompanied the transcript asking the participant to review the transcript for accuracy and clarity (Appendix K). The participant was given a stamped, self-addressed envelope to return the transcript. Approximately 69% (20 of 29) of the transcripts were returned to the researcher. Finally, the researcher intended to use what Maxwell (1996) describes as *member checks*, which is simply the process of soliciting feedback about data conclusions from the participants being studied.

Patton (1990) suggested that in qualitative research, "validity hinges on the skill, competence and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork" (p. 14). The intention of the researcher was to implement a thoughtful research process that generated a meaningful dissertation as well as useful information for participating institutions. In order to do this, it was necessary to approach the study with an openness to learn from each student what was important to him or her in terms of successfully pursuing his or her college education.

Closing

This chapter discussed the research methods used in this study. The following areas were discussed: Research Strategies, Data Collection Procedures, Data Analysis, and Methods for Verification. Chapter Four describes the results of the study in detail. Chapter Five provides a discussion and conclusion to the research.

Chapter IV

Results

Overview of Chapter

This chapter is devoted to the examination and results of data gathered from student and administrator interviews. In the Fall of 1999 and the Winter of 2000, twenty-four African American students and five administrators were interviewed at four small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the United States. The data was gathered through audio taped interviews and totaled 400 single spaced pages. The data was analyzed and then reduced into a readable manner. This chapter discusses the results by describing to the reader what students and administrators reported.

Section One is titled "*Participant Profiles*". In this section, profiles of the 24 student interviewees are presented. A brief description of each student is presented so that the reader may have some familiarity with these young men and women. Administrator interviewees are also mentioned.

Section Two is titled "*Major Themes from Student Interviews*". Various themes from student interviews are discussed. This particular section addresses the first research question: "How do African Americans students describe their experiences of being African American at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?"

Section Three is titled "*Major Themes from Administrator Interviews*". Various themes from administrator interviews are discussed. This particular section addresses the second research question: "What do administrators at small, predominantly white liberal

arts colleges in Appalachia report that their institutions do to support African American students?"

"Comparing Student Interviews with Administrator Interviews" is the title for Section Four. This particular section is a comparison of Section Two and Section Three. The third research question: "What is the relationship between what administrators report and what African American students say they experience as minorities at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?" is the focus of this segment.

Following Section Four is Section Five entitled *Document Analysis*. The document analysis segment highlights some of the important elements derived from the various written materials obtained from each institution. The *Final Analysis* section provides a brief summary of Sections Two, Three and Four with a Conclusion section that follows.

Section One: Participant Profiles

This section presents a brief description of the student and administrator interview participants for this study.

Student Participants

Each student participant is introduced using the pseudonyms they chose in order to maintain confidentiality. The student chose the pseudonyms prior to the interview. Various characteristics are mentioned in a profile for each student such as: age, hometown (i.e. geographic region where student spent most of her/his life), high school enrollment size and racial composition, other family members who have attended college, classification, extracurricular activities, residential status, major, employment while in

college, grade point average (i.e. given at the time of the interview), and anticipated plans after graduation. The profile of each student is designed to present a 'snapshot' in order to familiarize the reader with the participants. All information was current at the time of the interview.

Participant 1: Lauren

Lauren, a 29-year-old female who grew up in rural North Carolina, attended a predominantly white high school that enrolled approximately 1,500 students. One of her siblings attended college. Lauren transferred from a larger institution and was classified as a senior at the time of the interview. Her major was biology and her involvement included: a social organization, choir, and an academic club. She lived on campus and was employed off campus part-time. Lauren's cumulative grade point average was 3.13. After graduation, she planned to pursue graduate school in Forensic Science.

Participant 2: Chris

Chris, a 21-year-old male from an urban area of Georgia, attended a predominantly black high school. His mother is a college graduate. He was classified as a senior business major at the time of the interview. Chris was a Resident Assistant, involved with a social organization and assumed a leadership position with the student activities board. He lived on campus and was employed on campus. His cumulative grade point average was a 2.02 and planned to attend graduate school for an MBA.

Participant 3: William

William, a 24-year-old male transfer student, lived in various places within the southeastern United States because his father was in the military. Half of his pre-college experience was spent in a rural area and the other half in an urban area. The high school

he attended enrolled approximately 1,400 students and was predominantly white. William's mother, brother and sister have all attended college. He was a senior, biology major with a cumulative grade point average of 3.16 at the time of the interview. William's involvement included: intercollegiate athletics for two years, Resident Assistant, teaching basic math to freshmen, and being involved in a peer mentor program that worked with incoming freshmen. William lived on campus and was employed part-time both on campus and off campus. After college, he planned to pursue graduate school then teach high school.

Participant 4: Patrick

Patrick, a 22-year-old male from an urban area of North Carolina, attended a high school of about 1,400 students. Approximately half the students in the high school were African American and half were white. Patrick's father was the only other family member to attend college. He was a senior, music major with a cumulative grade point average of 2.50 at the time of the interview. Campus involvement included such areas as: marching band, honorary societies, various music groups, and choir. Patrick lived on campus and had a work-study position on campus. His interest after college consisted of several options: teaching elementary school, teaching high school band and choir, pursuing church music and pursuing a degree in music therapy.

Participant 5: Cindy

Cindy, a 24-year-old female transfer student who grew up in Canada, spent most of her life in New York City. She attended a predominantly white high school. Her mother is a doctor and her father did not finish college. Cindy was a junior and had a double major in Allied Health and Fashion Merchandising at the time of the interview.

Her cumulative grade point average was 2.50. Campus activities included choir and a social organization. She had a work-study position on campus and a part-time job off campus. Her plans after college were to work for a while, then hopefully become accepted to physical therapy school.

Participant 6: Liz

Liz, a 22-year-old female from an urban area in the U.S. Virgin Islands, attended a high school enrolling approximately 700 students. The majority of students were African American and Hispanic. Her brother and sister each have a couple of years college experience. Liz was a junior, Psychology major with a 3.00 cumulative grade point average at the time of the interview. She lived on campus for her first two years then moved off campus with her child. Prior to being a single mother, Liz was involved in several activities such as: choir, an honorary society, and an athletic supporter club. Liz had an on-campus work-study position and worked off campus approximately 30 hours per week. After college, she planned to work for a while, then pursue graduate studies in counseling.

Participant 7: Charles

Charles, a 20-year-old male, spent eleven years of his life in Germany due to his father being in the military. He spent the remainder of his childhood in an urban area of Georgia. He attended a high school made up of approximately half African American and half white students. Charles is the first in his family to attend college. He was a junior, accounting major with a cumulative grade point average of 2.70 at the time of the interview. His extracurricular activities included: intercollegiate athletics, a social organization, chorus and intramurals. Charles lived on campus and had two work-study

positions. He also worked off campus as a part-time employee after his athletic season was over. His plan after graduation was to be an accountant.

Participant 8: John

John, a 22-year-old male transfer student from a rural town in Florida, attended a small high school (approximately 500) with a "mixed" number of white and African American students. John is the first in his family to attend college. He was a senior, business management major with a cumulative grade point average of 2.67 at the time of the interview. His extracurricular activities included: intercollegiate athletics, a social organization, choir and an honorary society. John lived on campus and did not have a job on or off campus. After graduation, he hoped to get into the insurance business.

Participant 9: Shequita

Shequita, a 21-year-old female, was born in Florida but spent most of her life in an urban area of the Caribbean. Shequita went to a small religious high school that was predominantly African American. She and her sister are the only members of her family to attend college. Shequita was a senior, mass media major with a cumulative 3.50 grade point average at the time of the interview. Her extracurricular activities included: choir, campus ministries, campus activities board, and social and honorary organizations. Approximately half her time was spent living on campus and the other half off campus. She had a work-study position on campus. Her plans after graduation were to pursue her master's and doctoral degrees in mass communication at a university in Florida.

Participant 10: Simone

Simone, a 21-year old female, was born in Florida but spent most of her life in an urban area of the Caribbean. Simone went to a small religious high school that was

predominantly African American. She and her sister are the only members of her family to attend college. Simone was a senior, accounting and management major with a cumulative 3.81 grade point average at the time of the interview. Her extracurricular activities included: campus activities board, social and honorary organizations, choir, and working with the campus newspaper. She lived on campus for two years but moved off campus for her last two years of college. She had a work-study position and tutored other students as well. After graduation, she planned to pursue a MBA degree.

Participant 11: Grace

Grace, a 21-year-old female from an urban area in Tennessee, attended a large, predominantly black high school. Both parents and a sister attended college. Grace was a senior, Education major with an emphasis in English and History at the time of the interview. She had a cumulative 2.70 grade point average. Grace was a Resident Assistant, involved in a social organization, and captain of the dance team. She lived on campus and along with being a Resident Assistant, had a work-study position and another on-campus job. Her plan after graduation was to get involved with Teacher Core and teach overseas. She also had an interest in teaching in the inner city.

Participant 12: Vanessa

Vanessa, a 21-year-old female, was born in New York and lived in Georgia and Texas due her dad's military profession. She spent approximately half her childhood in an urban area of Tennessee. Vanessa attended a small high school (approximately 700 students) with a composite of half African American and half white. Her father has a bachelor's degree and her mother has an associate's degree. She is the first of her siblings to attend college. Vanessa was a senior, pre-medicine major with a cumulative

3.51 grade point average at the time of the interview. Her extracurricular activities included: social organizations, campus activities board, and working at the campus radio station. Vanessa resided on campus and had a work-study position in addition to serving as a tutor. After college, her plans were to attend medical school.

Participant 13: Kris

Kris, a 22-year-old male from an urban area of Kentucky, attended a high school enrolling 1,200 students (approximately 60% white and 40% African American). He is the first in his family to attend college. Kris was a senior, computer major with a cumulative 2.70 grade point average at the time of the interview. Extracurricular activities include intercollegiate athletics and intramurals. Kris lived on campus and had a work-study position. His plan after graduation was to work for a computer company.

Participant 14: Jean

Jean, a 24-year-old female from a rural area of Kentucky, attended a predominantly white high school, which enrolled approximately 1,000 students. Jean's parents both attended college along with her brother and sister. She was a senior, psychology major with a cumulative 2.50 grade point average at the time of the interview. Extracurricular activities included athletics and sports information for one of the athletic teams. Jean lived on campus and worked approximately 30 hours a week off campus. Her plans after college were to pursue counseling or work with the state highway patrol.

Participant 15: Robert

Robert, a 20-year-old male from an urban area of Ohio, attended preparatory high school that enrolled 2,000 students (approximately 60% white and 40% African

American). Both parents attended college but did not graduate. Robert was a senior, secondary education major at the time of the interview. Extracurricular activities included: Resident Assistant, campus ministries, choir, music group, and freshman mentor program. He lived on campus and was employed as a Resident Assistant. Robert had several things that he considered pursuing after college: working as a college recruiter, pursuing his master's degree in education or ministry, and teaching high school.

Participant 16: Nichelle

Nichelle, a 22-year-old female transfer student from an urban area of Tennessee, attended a high school enrolling 1,300 (approximately 50% African American and 50% white). Nichelle transferred from a two-year college where she earned an associate's degree. Her sister is the only other family member to attend college. Nichelle was a senior, business administration major at the time of the interview. Her extracurricular activities included intercollegiate athletics and an academic honorary society. She lived on campus and was not employed. Along with caring for her grandmother, Nichelle planned to pursue a career in human resources and potentially pursue a master's degree in industrial psychology.

Participant 17: Voline

Voline, a 22-year-old female from a rural town in Kentucky, attended a small predominantly white high school. She recalled four black students in her high school. Both of Voline's parents have college degrees. She was classified as a senior, Biology major with a 2.70 cumulative grade point average at the time of the interview. Extracurricular activities included: campus ministries and academic honorary societies. Voline lived on campus and had a work-study job. Her plan after college was to pursue a

master's degree in Cyto-Technology, work for two or three years, then possibly apply to Medical School.

Participant 18: James

James, a 23-year-old senior, grew up in Korea due to his father's military career. He attended a large high school in an urban area in Arizona, which enrolled 3,000 students. The racial composition of this school was approximately 40% white, 25% African American, and 35% other. James attended a community college in Arizona then transferred to his present institution after three years. He is the first to attend college in his family along with his sister who was attending another university. James was a senior, Biology and Chemistry major with a 3.50 cumulative grade point average at the time of the interview. His extracurricular activities included intercollegiate athletics and an academic club. He lived on campus and did not have a job on or off campus. James planned to attend medical school and pursue a career as an orthopedic surgeon.

Participant 19: Debra

Debra, a 21-year-old female, grew up in an urban area of Wisconsin but spent most of her life in an urban area of North Carolina. The high school she attended was small and was approximately 50% white and 50% African American. Debra's mother has a bachelor's degree. One of her sisters was in graduate school and the other sister enrolled in college. Debra was a senior, History and Sociology major with a 3.28 cumulative grade point average at the time of the interview. Extracurricular activities included: a community service organization, a social organization, and various committees for student activities. Debra lived on campus and had a work-study position.

Her plans after college included pursuing a master's degree then either teach or work as a guidance counselor.

Participant 20: Marlene

Marlene, a 21-year-old female, was born in Germany but spent most of her life in a urban area of Tennessee. Her high school was predominantly black. Both her parents have two years of college and her sister was attending college. Marlene was a senior, Medical Technology major with a cumulative 2.00 grade point average at the time of the interview. She is also a wife and a mother. Her extracurricular activities included: a community service organization, intercollegiate athletics, a social organization, and local community involvement. Although she and her family lived off campus, she did live on campus for one year. Marlene was employed off campus. Her plans after graduation were to pursue a degree at a medical technical school then possibly go into the Army.

Participant 21: Olivia

Olivia, a 22-year-old female from an urban area of Tennessee, attended a predominantly black high school. Other family members have also attended college. Her father has an associate's degree and her sister a bachelor's degree. Olivia was a senior, Political Science major with a cumulative 2.80 grade point average at the time of the interview. Extracurricular activities included: an academic honorary society, the campus judicial board, a social organization and a peer advisor program. She lived on campus and did not have a job on or off campus. Olivia's plans after college were to attend Law School.

Participant 22: Jamar

Jamar, a 21-year-old male, spent a portion of his life in New Jersey and the other half in an urban area of Georgia. The high school he attended was predominantly black and enrolled approximately 2,500 students. Jamar's parents are both in the military and his sister is the only other family member who attended college. He was classified as a senior, accounting major with a cumulative 2.60 grade point average at the time of the interview. Intercollegiate athletics, a social organization and an academic honorary society were among his extracurricular activities. Jamar lived on campus and was employed as a Resident Assistant. His plans after college were to pursue some level of professional football. He also considered graduate school.

Participant 23: David

David, a 21-year-old male from a rural area in Virginia, attended a predominantly white high school. David's father has a bachelor's degree and his mother attended college but did not finish. He was a senior, mass communication major with a cumulative 2.50 grade point average at the time of the interview. Extracurricular activities included: intercollegiate athletics, campus activities board, Greek council, a social organization, and choir. David lived on campus and had a work-study position in the athletic department. After graduation, David wanted to pursue professional athletics at some level. He was also interested in music and film producing.

Participant 24: Warren

Warren, a 23-year-old male from an urban area of Tennessee, attended a large, predominantly white high school. His parents attended junior college. Warren was a Senior, business management major with a cumulative 2.50 grade point average at the

time of the interview. Extracurricular activities included: intercollegiate athletics, a social organization, a community service organization, choir, and an academic honorary society. Warren also had his English as a Second Language certification, which enabled him to spend a semester overseas teaching English. He lived on campus and had a job as an academic tutor. His plan after graduation was to pursue a career in investments and finance.

Administrator Participants

Administrators served in various capacities at each participating institution. Administrators were not asked to select a pseudonym and are therefore referred as follows: ADM.1 (Administrator Number One), ADM.2 (Administrator Number Two), ADM.3 (Administrator Number Three), ADM.4 (Administrator Number Four), and ADM.5 (Administrator Number Five). Due to reasons of confidentiality, demographic details are not shared for administrators. More information will be shared concerning administrator interviews later in this chapter.

Summary of Participant Profiles

Twenty-four students participated in the interviews conducted on their respective campuses. Eleven students were male and thirteen were female. Student interviewees ranged in age from 20 to 29 with the average age being 22. These students were from various areas of the United States and abroad. The following regions of the U.S. were represented with the percentage of students from that area in parentheses: Southeast (59%), Mid-Atlantic (17%), Northeast (7%), and Southwest (4%). Thirteen percent of students were from the Caribbean. The racial composition of the high schools attended

by the students was evenly divided among the following: predominantly white (38%), predominantly black (33%), and approximately one half white and one half black (29%).

Student interviewees were also of diverse family backgrounds pertaining to parental education. The term 'first generation' student was defined, for this study, as the only person in their immediate family (i.e. parents and siblings) to obtain a college degree. Although the student interviewees had not graduated, they were persisting towards degree completion. Forty-two percent of students were first generation college students meaning upon graduation they were the first person in their immediate family to obtain a college degree. Fifty-eight percent of students were not first generation college students. In other words, at least a parent or sibling had obtained a college degree.

Eighty-eight percent of the students were classified as seniors and twelve percent were juniors. Various academic majors were represented among the twenty-four students: Business Management (21%), Biology (13%), Accounting (8%), Communication Arts (8%), Education (8%), and Psychology (8%). The remaining 34% of the students majored in the following areas (one student in each major): Computer Science, English, Fashion Merchandising, History, Medical Technology, Music, Pre-Medicine, and Political Science. The cumulative grade point averages at the time of the interview ranged from 2.00 to 3.81 with an average of 2.83.

All four participating institutions were predominantly residential campuses. A large majority (96%) of students either lived on campus at the time of the interview, or had lived on campus at some point during their college experience. All campuses have active intercollegiate athletic programs in several NCAA or NAIA sports. Forty-six

percent of the student interviewees participated in intercollegiate athletics at some point during their college experience.

Section Two: Major Themes from Student Interviews

The researcher discovered various themes throughout the 24 student interviews. The purpose of this section is to describe and analyze each theme in detail. Furthermore, this section addresses the first research question: "How do African Americans students describe their experiences of being African American at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?"

The themes are presented within the framework of Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model (Input – Environment – Output). According to Astin (1993), the I-E-O Model is a conceptual guide for studying college student development. There are three basic elements to the model. *Inputs* refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to college. The various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed comprise the *environment* element. The student characteristics after exposure to the environment are referred to as *output*.

Given the focus of this study was on student persistence, the I-E-O model was an appropriate framework for displaying the data. Students had various characteristics prior to entry into college (input). All students were either juniors or seniors, at the time of the interview, with multiple experiences with the college (environment). The experiences with the college environment led to various (output) elements. For the purposes of this study, persistence in college deals primarily with the present as opposed to the past (input) or the future (output). Therefore, the majority of Section Two will focus on

environmental factors which students were experiencing at the time of the interview. The I-E-O model is listed in Table 2 with various sections and corresponding themes.

Input

Input is the first element in the I-E-O Model and refers to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to college (Astin, 1993).

Various Themes

In addition to items discussed in the participant profile section, high school experience, comments regarding family, and attraction to college are discussed in this section.

Theme: High School Background

Overall, nine student interviewees (38%) reported attending predominantly white high schools, eight student interviewees (33%) attended predominantly black high schools and seven student interviewees (29%) reported their high school enrollment as one half white and one half minority. The type of environment experienced during high school was of some importance to student's experience in college. Approximately ten students (42%) mentioned high school experience, during the interview, as having some impact on their adjustment to college. Most of these comments centered on social experiences and academic preparation or lack thereof. For example, William reported an experience he had in high school dealing with segregation. He attended a county high school of approximately 1,400 students. William discussed how the experience made him a stronger person and prepared him for a predominantly white college.

Table 2
Major Themes from Student Interviews

INPUT
High School Background, Family Impact, Attraction to College, Fresh Start
ENVIRONMENT
<u>Personnel</u> – Helpful Administrative Offices, Frustrations with Administrators, Presidential Influence, Administrator Misconceptions, Students Treated as a Showpiece, Approachable Faculty, Tough Love, Color Blind, Interactive Classroom Discussions, Black Spokesperson, Faculty Misconceptions, Fostering Closed-mindedness, African American Role Models and Racial Identity <u>Academics</u> – Academic Reputation, Academic Awakening, Academic Major, Student Opportunity for Cultural Competence, Peer Mentor Programs <u>College Environment</u> – Stereotypes, Annoying Questions, Environmental Appeal, Racial Identity, Students as Sojourners, Residential Living, Minority within a Minority, Culture Shock, Community Among Minorities, Misconceptions about Community <u>College Experience</u> – Confident in Choice, Adjustment and Transition, Social Integration, Superficial Integration, Adaptable Nature, Male/Female Relationship Conflict, Interracial Dating, Negative Social Integration, Perceived Obstacles to Persistence, Disappointments <u>Involvement</u> – Activities with Little Appeal, Athletics, African American Social Organization <u>Personal Examples of Persistence Factors</u> – Earning a College Degree, Internal Motivation, Faith, Positive Attitude
OUTPUT
<u>Various Themes</u> Mattering, Good Preparation for Work World, Academic Preparation (Ah Ha Moments), Social Ah Ha Moments, Resilience <u>Student Suggestions</u>

There were a lot of segregation problems in my school. My class of '94 decided to protest both of the proms that year. Where I'm from we had a black parent advisor committee and a white parent advisor committee. The black parent advisor committee sponsored a prom just for black students and the white parent advisor committee sponsored a prom just for white students. We boycotted both proms to let them know that this had been going on long enough. I had been in high school four years and hadn't been to one prom. The proposal really shocked our school as well as the other schools in the county. The following year was the first year the school had a prom for all students.

Voline described opportunities she had in high school that prepared her for the college experience. She came to the college she attended as a high school student and stayed with a friend for a week, which allowed her to develop a connection. She also was part of a program similar to Upward Bound that allowed her to live on a college campus and take college classes during the summer break. Both these experiences made her transition to college easier to manage. Attending a racially mixed high school enabled Kris to have a smoother transition. He described his first visit (i.e. a recruiting trip) to the college he is attending: "I pretty much noticed that I was the only black student at orientation." However, he said it was not a big adjustment because he had the opportunity to have several white friends in high school.

Theme: Family Impact

Comments made by students regarding their family were also important to this particular section. Most comments dealt with the student's parents and siblings. Overall, 13 students (54%) reported family, in some manner, having a positive influence on them prior coming to college or since arriving at college. James described his family's influence on him in terms of having good role models (e.g. father and uncles). He felt that it "was expected" of him to have a degree because of the examples set for him. Although his father did not receive a college degree, James said he "worked his tail off so

I could have the opportunity to get a degree.” James believed that if he did not persist, he would be letting others down: “If I didn’t graduate, I wouldn’t just be letting myself down; I would be letting my father and younger siblings down.”

Grace described her family’s influence on her in terms of preparing her for the type of college she now attends:

In reference to going to an all black high school then coming to a predominantly white college, I came here knowing that. I wanted a change. I went to an all black school from kindergarten through my senior year in high school. My parents did that on purpose. Their belief was that if I got a good foundation I could branch off anywhere; so I had my foundation. My parents have been a big help to me.

Both Nichelle and Jamar talked about how proud their mothers were of them and the progress they had made since their freshman year. Their mothers believed there were positive outcomes resulting from attending a small college and attributed this influence to their success.

Along with sheer determination, Debra attributed her persistence to her family and friends at her home church. She described how many of these people were depending on her to succeed.

I have a very close family. But it’s not even them so much as it is the kids at my home church. I go to a predominantly black church. They are really looking at me to see if I’m going to slip up or something. They’re looking to see if I’m going to burn out or get pregnant. They’re thinking ‘if she can do it so can I.’ A lot of people are encouraging me; especially the mothers. They ask me to talk to their daughters when I come home from school during breaks. They want me to tell them about the college classes and what they need to do now to prepare them. I have a lot of people counting on me to get through school and to encourage their daughters to go to college.

Charles’ parents were also an encouragement by showing how proud they were of him. As his grades improved from Cs to Bs, his parents became excited and encouraged him more in this area.

Some students referred to their own spouse and/or children as having an influence on their college persistence. A few of the students had family responsibilities while in college. Liz said her daughter had been a big help to her. She said "I want to have a good education so I can supply her needs." Liz also mentioned how supportive her parents had been especially when she had her baby. Charles said that once his son was born it made him "start acting right" because he had to make sure he graduated.

Marlene's college experience was very different than most of the other students interviewed. By being married and having a child, she was very pushed for time. On many days, her husband worked 5 a.m.-1 p.m. and she worked 2 p.m.-10 p.m. Although her experience was not without frustration, she said that she did not have any bad experiences. She attributed part of her positive experience in college to her family, "My child helps me, calms me down and keeps me on my feet." Her husband was also a factor in her persistence: "We pretty much help each other; to keep each other straight. When assignments are due, we help each other." Marlene said that knowing she will one day need to help provide for her family was a motivation for her to persist in college.

Although Shequita and Simone were not married and did not have children, they were in a unique situation - they are sisters. Shequita said: "By having my sister at the same college has helped a lot. I couldn't have handled it by myself."

Theme: Attraction to College

"Attraction to college" was a general descriptor the researcher chose as a means of introduction. During the first interview question, a brief phrase about what attracted the student to her/his college of choice was mentioned in 18 of the 24 (11 females and 7 males) student interviews. Table 3 lists the attraction for their respective college along

Table 3
Student Interviewees' Attraction to College

Attraction to College (listed alphabetically)	Number of Male Respondents	Number of Female Respondents	Total Number of Respondents
Advisor at former college recommended me to come this college	0	1	1
Athletics	5	1	6
Attractive program of study	0	4	4
Being a minority was not an issue	0	3	3
Educational reputation	2	0	2
High school coach referred me here	1	0	1
Initially I was not attracted	1	1	2
It was something new and different	0	1	1
Parental influence	0	2	2
Personal attention I receive	0	1	1
Proximity to my home	1	2	3
Religious affiliation	1	1	2
Financial Aid	3	2	5
Small classes	0	2	2
Small college atmosphere	2	2	4
TOTAL	16	23	39

with the number of males and females who noted that information. Some students listed more than one attraction to their college.

A brief analysis of Table 3 revealed that *athletics* was the greatest attraction to college with 6 of the 18 students who commented on this issue. The next greatest attraction was *Financial Aid* with 5 of the 18 students, who commented on their attraction to college, responding. The third greatest attractions to college were *Attractive program of study* and *Small college atmosphere*, each receiving four responses. By far, the greatest attraction for males was *athletics* with five students responding. However, the greatest attraction for females was *Attractive program of study*.

It was interesting to note that the females reported a broader array of attractions to college than the males described. Males only noted eight different items that attracted them to college. However, the females listed 13 different phrases that described their attraction to college.

Theme: Fresh Start

Grace described her college experience as a “fresh start” and having the opportunity to start over with a “clean slate”. She reported on her first month on campus:

I liked the fact that nobody knew me here. I told them what I wanted them to know about me. I built from the ground up. I loved that. Whatever happened to me in high school that I didn’t want to be known was not known. So I could pretty much start over with a clean slate. I had fun just rebuilding who I was going to be.

Similar to Grace, Lauren was looking for a new start. She entered her present institution looking for a more positive experience than her previous college. Lauren described her first experience with college as ‘traumatic’ due to the size of the institution she attended. Recently she was going through some of her belongings and discovered her course schedule from her freshman year. She noticed that some of the classes she took during her first year were 300 level courses. She felt her advisor, at her former institution, did not care. There were so many students at this institution that the freshman classes were full and she had to sign up for whatever was available. At the time she said, “she didn’t know any better.” At the smaller institution, she liked the size of student enrollment, small class size, and the individual attention.

Environment

Environment is the second element in Astin’s I-E-O model and serves as the primary area of reported data. The element of *environment* refers to the various

programs, policies, faculty, peers and educational experiences to which the student is exposed during her/his college experience (Astin, 1993). Various college environmental factors are mentioned as themes in this section. Because this section has many themes, the following sub-sections will be used: Personnel, Academics, Environment, Experience, and Involvement.

Personnel

This section examines the themes that focus on experiences African American students reported concerning their interaction and relationships with administrators and faculty. Administrative services provided by the college are presented as well.

Theme: Helpful Administrative Offices

Several of the students had very positive things to say about the administration. Twenty-nine percent of participants (seven students; four females and three males) noted the Financial Aid Office at their college as helpful in locating scholarships for their college education. Based on their remarks, it was obvious that this office had made an impact in their lives. One student mentioned how the staff in Financial Aid had been like a second family to him by inviting him for Sunday lunch and remembering his birthday. Marlene was pleased with how her college provided opportunities to learn outside the classroom by setting up trips to different places both domestic and abroad. Olivia commended the administration for having started a retention program that assisted African American students, which she served as a mentor.

Kris described how administrators (e.g. his boss) cared enough to constantly ask him how he was doing in his classes: "My boss stays on my case about how I'm doing in class. That's how they all are around here. It surprised me that some faculty and staff

could care that much.” Liz was surprised her freshman year by a lady who helped her in an administrative office, “the lady knew my name before I ever had a chance to introduce myself.” Liz also noted how one administrator’s wife was a source of support for her. Jean, Marlene and Kris all mentioned a coach who had been a help to them. Kris also had a positive comment about a recruiter who works with all the freshmen: “Most of my friends who come in as a freshman say good things about him. He is very helpful in getting people on the right track.” Robert’s overall perspective of administration was that they “accept you for who you are with no division; all students are on the same level.”

Forty-two percent of the students interviewed said they had used some type of academic support services on their campus. Lauren reported that the “staff in the support service office on her campus was wonderful.” Not only did she receive help with writing assignments but also found the staff in academic support like a second family: “when I was down I knew I could talk to them.” Chris mentioned that he enjoyed the seminars the academic support office provided on writing skills and the tutoring services that were available. Patrick noted how the writing center on his campus was a big help to him in writing papers. Vanessa said the support office was willing to help with just about anything within reason. She added, “They help students who otherwise wouldn’t get help and may otherwise be kicked out of school.” Kris and James also mentioned the academic resource centers on their respective campuses as helpful to their persistence.

Both Cindy and Liz spoke of the use of tutors and how that particular service was helpful to their academic needs. Voline, who tutored in the sciences and religion, explained how she witnessed the use of tutors in a productive manner both from a tutor’s perspective and as the student receiving the tutoring.

Some teachers can't explain stuff. If a student can help another student with something that the teacher has gone over their head to explain - then that's OK too. Some students can explain to other students better. The teachers are OK with it because they know the learning goes both ways; both students learn in the process. I needed help in Organic Chemistry. Another student was able to explain the exact same concept in different terms so that I could understand.

Theme: Frustrations with Administrators

Although most students were pleased with the administrators on their campus, some students were disgruntled. Chris' perception was that administrators' only contact with students was during disciplinary situations: "Based on what I see, they really don't interact very much with the students unless they are in trouble." David was frustrated with the policies of his college and how they are relayed to the students. Most of his frustrations dealt with what he perceived was a very restrictive alcohol policy and opposite sex residence hall visitation policy.

Simone perceived the administrators on her campus thought there were no problems with race relations and were not interested in discussions pertaining to the matter. David's perception was similar in that he felt the administration "tends to overlook things." Jean responded in a similar manner referring to a decision by administrators to change a campus 'hang out' in the student union to a room with another purpose: "I think sometimes the administration forgets about the students it seems." Warren believed there were times when he was pacified by administration in order to keep him happy and content (i.e. by placing him on a committee, etc.). Based on his interview, it appeared to have a positive impact on his persistence.

Theme: Presidential Influence

The President's office was particularly noteworthy to some of the students.

Twenty-nine percent (seven students; six females and one male) mentioned the president as being a positive influence in their college experience. Of these seven students, three of the four colleges were represented with four students from one institution. None of the twenty-four students spoke negatively about their president. Kris reported, "Our former President was someone I really liked. He enjoyed football and he was always coming to our games. I saw his face more than what I think I would see a college president on campus." Grace also was impressed with her respective college president:

One thing that has impressed me is our former President (who left last year) he knew my name. His wife knew my name. He would come and shake my hand along with his wife. In our Dance Team's first performance, he personally came over and said what a good job we did. I used to brag about that to my sister. She went to a university and she didn't even know what her President looked like. He would also play basketball with us during faculty/student basketball.

Marlene mentioned how students felt welcomed to go to the President's Office at her institution. Olivia has had several positive interactions with the President of her college. As a freshman, the President served as her academic advisor. She has also had the President as a professor one semester. Olivia also mentioned that the President's wife had invited her to their home on occasion for various campus events. Shequita was pleased to say that the President of her college knew her by name and she felt he did a lot for the students by being not afraid to show he cared.

Theme: Administrator Misconceptions

There are times when students believed misconception took over and administrators assumed that just because a student is black, she/he would want to work on ideas for Black History month. Lauren implied that administrators should not make these assumptions with all black students:

During Black History month they [administrators] swamp us during this time, which we don't mind. They want us to do all this stuff. But I want to say why can't other groups take part, why does it always have to be us. Don't assume that because it's black history month we have to be on call. They put the spotlight on us for that brief time in February and then it's back to normal.

Olivia felt there was a misconception given by administrators about the college environment at her institution. She was led to believe there would be a more diverse community, which she did not find.

In our recruiting brochures, it talks about people from different countries that are here. I always thought since it was a private school they would try to get people from different areas of the county and world instead of just right here. I wondered where all these internationals were. I met some people from different places; but they were like 200 miles away from here. I was thinking that people would invite me home with them to all these places and that I would learn so much. But it was a different story when I got here. I think that is my main misconception; which makes me wonder if I made the right choice.

Theme: Students Treated as a Showpiece

Sometimes the African American student at a predominantly white institution may feel like a showpiece: an object to prove a certain level of representation exists. Jamar described an interesting perspective of how he felt African American students were sometimes treated.

When they [administrators] were trying to start a gospel choir, the African American students felt like the Dean was trying to use us as a 'show piece'. It was like 'hey we have some black people on campus'. We thought it was just to get more money from Alumni. We said we we're not doing it. We felt like we were being used; just showing us off. That is one thing that cut us deep. That was one of the things that we took as being discriminatory.

Theme: Approachable Faculty

The influence that faculty have with college students was described by each participant in some fashion. Faculty influence was a key factor in student persistence for most students. Several students had positive things to say about faculty members and the

influence they had on them both in and outside the classroom. All 24 students had at least one positive comment about faculty at their institution. Seventeen students (71%) had at least two or more positive comments regarding faculty members. Male students were slightly more positive with 73% (8 of 11 interviewees) having two or more positive comments about faculty members. Comparatively, 69% of the females (9 of 13 interviewees) had two or more positive comments.

James described the individual attention he received from faculty by stating: "It helps when someone else cares other than yourself." When Grace described the availability of faculty at her college she remarked: "I can go in their office and just talk. There are a lot of things you would see here [like talking to faculty outside the classroom] that you wouldn't see at a larger school."

Grace continued with what was a memorable quote concerning faculty members and the motivation they have about their profession: "The teachers in my department are so excited about what they're doing and their excitement just bounces onto us." Similarly, the quality of the faculty was one reason why Cindy chose to remain at her present institution: "If it wasn't for the professors and if the school was not a good school, I wouldn't stay. I didn't stay because of the students." In comparison to her former college where she explained the teachers did not know her at all, the small college atmosphere was very personable.

Patrick's professors have been a key factor in his persistence in college. He noted:

The teachers here have motivated me to move on. There have been times like my sophomore year when I almost dropped out of college. I was going through personal problems and other things. Some of my closest teachers pulled me aside

and told me that I needed to be here. They wanted me here. They helped me outside of class and checked up on me to make sure everything was OK. I was having trouble in one of my English classes. One of my teachers suggested that I go to the Writing Center, which was only opened certain times during the day. With my schedule, it was hard to make it during those hours. My teacher told me to do a rough draft early and bring it by their office for feedback. They made suggestions and returned it in time for me to turn the paper in.

Going the extra mile was something that was also particularly important to Lauren when it came to a writing assignment:

I was so afraid of writing papers. My English professor just calmed me and let me know I could do it. She said you know what you are a good writer. She knew I was freaking out and all I needed to hear was I could do it. I just needed for someone to tell me I could do it. I had beat myself up so bad that I couldn't do it.

While Jamar indicated that he did not talk to faculty often, just knowing they were available made an impression on him:

I think the major thing the faculty and staff do is challenge. Everybody challenges you to do your best. It seems like it's more personal since we're at a smaller school. They will call you in their office and ask you what's going on. I think that is one thing you would miss at a larger school - the individual attention.

Faculty understanding and ability to communicate also made an impression on Voline, especially within her major area of study. She said, "They don't try to be above your level; they understand and they're like 'hey we were there too'." Marlene perceived the faculty/student relationship that of a peer relationship where both parties worked together in the learning process.

Faculty involvement outside the classroom is another area that was a factor to some of the students interviewed. Patrick had this to say about getting to know faculty on a personal basis:

A lot of the faculty I know on a personal basis even though they're not my teachers. Some of them I even play basketball with on the weekend. If we have a performance in band they want to know so they can try to come. They care about

you and your classes. Once you are not in their class they still care; they even ask you when you're going to take their class again. If you miss too many classes they will call you and ask if you're sick. I think it's because they really enjoy what they do. From what I've seen they're not getting paid as much as their colleagues at other schools. They like the idea that they can make an impact. That's why I want to be a teacher myself - hopefully in elementary or high school.

One of the primary factors that enabled Charles to persist in college has been the influence of faculty. During Charles' first year, he was not doing very well in his English course. His English professor assisted him with improving his writing skills. He said, "I actually started enjoying English." In terms of persistence, Charles said, "She was very influential. She is a good reason why I made it to my junior year."

Chris felt he got along with all the faculty members at his respective college. Debra said, "I think the faculty like me. They know I like a challenge. I'll stick my neck out there." Robert said his academic performance and hard work helped him build a good relationship with faculty members. James gave a similar account: "I think I have the respect of my professors. They know I'm a hard worker and that I'll do my best. I think a lot of times I get the benefit of the doubt."

Grace believed that faculty members were willing to help students if students were willing and showed interest in being helped. She said that she made it her point to be accepted by being active on campus and "professionally" presenting her opinion: "I refuse to go through college just being a student. I want to leave my mark so to speak." Lauren, who is a non-traditional undergraduate student, said that it is all a matter of how you present yourself when it comes to building that relationship with faculty: "You can't just go in and be a dud in class. I always was very attentive, took great notes, and ask questions."

Theme: "Tough Love"

Some of the students mentioned the importance of faculty with the ability to be stern when needed and to have defined expectations. Lauren used the term "tough love" to talk about the faculty at her institution. She said, "Our professors lay down the law; they have tough love." Her definition of "tough love" was described in a brief example she witnessed:

A student in one of my classes wasn't coming to class and the professor got on to him. He told the student if wanted to pass the class he had to show up. So the professors lay down the law...tough love...and tell them like it is. They don't just keep documenting absences they want to why the student is absent.

Nichelle described a similar observation: "I have some professors who are tough and basically say that your either do what is required or they will be seeing me again next semester." Grace also described "tough love" among faculty in a similar manner:

They don't accept anything but your best. They hound you and you won't like it when they're doing it but once you turn your paper in and you finally get an A; it's worth it. You feel good about yourself. I have found myself going back and thanking them for not allowing me to turn in a sloppy paper.

It is interesting to note that all three of these students come from different institutions. Therefore, three of the four institutions were mentioned in terms of some faculty members having what students referred to as "tough love". Other students also had comments regarding "tough love". Patrick said, "Most faculty will get on your case if you're slacking off (sort of like my parents)." Similarly, Voline reported, "Some faculty show 'tough love'; they don't allow me to quit."

Theme: Color Blind

The issue of prejudice among faculty came up during some of the interviews. However, the comments were based on observations that faculty were not prejudice, at

least as described by the students who mentioned the issue. Kris said:

They don't look at gender or color; they look at you as a person. They respect you and hope that you will respect them also. That's why I can respect them in return. I feel they want to see everyone succeed.

Nichelle also had a comment concerning this issue:

The faculty are really good here. If there is a topic that will be sensitive to anyone, they approach it with care so as not to discriminate. They bring it up in a way where you don't feel discriminated. They accept your opinions and what you have to say. I haven't felt left out in the classroom, which is good. In high school, I felt left out a couple of times.

Theme: Interactive Classroom Discussions

The impact of the small college atmosphere was a positive factor for many participants. One area of significance was in the classrooms. Kris described his favorite type of class: one that involved discussion as a method of teaching.

The classes that focus on group participation are good. I think those are my favorite classes; where you get to work with other students. You get to talk with other students and they share what they want to say – it's easier to learn. I learn better in small groups. The good thing about group projects is you get to meet other students that you don't know and people who are different than those you hang out with all the time.

Similarly, Voline was very positive about her classroom experience. She thought classroom discussions helped professors get to know students' backgrounds and students the opportunity to learn about their peers. Charles was also pleased with his classroom situation and the environment that existed at his institution. One reason for his approval was that some of his classes allow time for debate and discussion about various African American issues and issues of other ethnic groups.

Theme: Black Spokesperson

A smaller number of students had negative comments about faculty members. Eleven (46%) of the 24 student participants had at least one negative comment regarding faculty. Only two students (8%) had two or more negative comments directed towards faculty members. Of the 11 students who had negative comments towards faculty members, four (36%) were males and seven (64%) were females.

One issue for at least two of the students was that of feeling like the "black spokesperson" when they were in the classroom and the issue of race was discussed. Simone mentioned that if an issue such as affirmative action were brought up in the classroom, the professor would automatically look to an African American student for comment. What made the situation more frustrating for Simone was that in the majority of her classes, she was the only African American. Grace also described how it felt to be the "black spokesperson":

My freshman year was difficult. The classrooms want to make you the spokesperson for the black people. I'm far from that. It's not like I've fought them.....because most of the time I'm the only black person and usually the only black female and I know my feedback coming from a different background is important to the class. I know it's important but it gets tiresome. Because not always do I know the black way if there is a black way....the black perspective....it's my perspective and it just so happens that I'm black. A lot of teachers want me to give the black perspective and I don't always have that perspective. But it's all right.

Theme: Faculty Misconceptions

Some students expressed frustration about faculty who assumed all students had the same background and academic preparation. John believed that sometimes professors took it for granted that all students had similar childhood experiences or background and should therefore be prepared for all types of college work.

The minority students come from a different background and culture; therefore, they [the faculty] can't be biased against us for things we do or don't know. Say for instance with computers. All minorities don't come up with computers in the home. Sometimes faculty members think everybody has the general knowledge about computers that some minorities just don't have. I think a lot of them assume this. Once they learn about you personally, they realize what to expect from you and not be biased. But at the beginning it's easy for them to be biased.

Shequita gave some valuable insight to course assignments. She cited an example of how sometimes writing assignment topics were geared towards areas, which African Americans could not relate. For example, she observed some of her African American friends who were given the assignment to write about a fishing trip experience they had as a child. According to Shequita, those students from a large city who never had been fishing could not relate to the assignment.

Theme: Fostering Closed-mindedness

Warren provided an interesting perspective on the "closed-mindedness" he had observed among students. He speculated that some of the closed-mindedness actually came from the professors.

I think a lot of close-mindedness comes from the professors. We're in class and the professor may be making certain types of jokes with people...a lot of the class does not even relate to it...white and black students. A lot of these professors are from small areas as well the coal mining areas. They bring that personality into the classroom and can only relate to students from farming type of backgrounds. Nothing against farmers or coal miners but you have other types of people in class. As a professor, you have to be able to relate to everybody in class. A lot of times the professors don't relate to everybody...just those certain people.

Theme: African American Role Models and Racial Identity

All students were asked during the interview what they would like to see happen in the future for African American students at their respective colleges. Liz, Kris and Patrick reported that the faculty members were "doing all they could" and that they were

getting the help they needed. The one issue that came up for several of the students was the issue of few or no African American faculty members on their respective campuses. Fourteen students (58%) mentioned the addition of African American faculty would be a benefit to the African American students. Of the 14 students, five were males (36%) and nine were females (64%). This theme examines the student opinion concerning African American faculty members.

Some of the students were specific about the need for African American faculty on their campus. For example, while there were coaches who are African American at her institution, Shequita felt that there should also be African American faculty and administrators on staff.

We need black faculty. The only examples we have are the black coaches. They are not role models for me. They may be role models for an African American football player – but for me that's not a role model. I want to get my Ph.D. There are no examples here for me.

Simmone had a similar response and added her concern that the college could not attract African American faculty and administrators. Patrick thought the addition of African American faculty and administrators would assist African American students, but especially those who are non-athletes:

We need someone who is African American who is not a coach, just a regular teacher. We have two women but from a black male perspective we don't have anyone to turn to other than a coach. This would help the guys who are not athletes to have a positive role model to look up to.

Charles described an effort by his coach to bring in African American graduate assistants to better relate to the African American athletes. However, the effort was not as productive as was intended because the graduate assistant coaches were so close in age to the undergraduates that they often "hung out" with the players. As a result the respect

was not there from player to coach, as there could be with a faculty mentor relationship.

When asked about the curriculum at her college, Grace said she felt the curriculum did not meet her needs because as an African American student, she was not exposed to African American faculty members. Grace described the impact one African American staff member had while that person was at her institution. Grace described this staff member as a mother/father figure for all students:

She was the only connection that most black students had on campus, the only mother figure that was there constantly. We felt we could go to her and blow up about anything and she would have empathy if not sympathy. Her being gone is just like an empty hole. She just had that ability and that connection with us. The mother/father figure in most families is a stable figure. Seeing that the guys have football coaches....there are some black football coaches.....but there is no balance. For the girls there is nobody to talk to about problems.

Similar to Grace, Voline believed the addition of African American faculty members would help give the African American students someone to whom they could relate.

I think they need to have more African American teachers on this campus. I know that some of the teachers have been around African Americans but an African American can reach more African American students and get to them; they understand. I had a chance to come from a house...but some students didn't have a chance to come from a house. They may come from the ghetto, or the housing projects or the bad side of town. But they (faculty) don't understand unless they have been there. The college needs to focus on African American teachers for our African American students to feel comfortable here. Just to say 'hey there is someone like me on campus and they have been through what I have been through.' Just to feel welcome.

John noted the importance of having someone African American students could relate to academically and someone to talk to who understood the African American culture. He said, "Academically, we just don't come in contact with African Americans. It's just non-existent around here as far as academics." John also said that, as a freshman, he felt he did not belong at the college and that it would have been a worse experience for

him had an African American staff member not been on campus for a brief time. He continued by saying that his college loses a lot of minorities each year "due to the simple fact they don't have a sense of belonging and there is nobody to confide in. There are no black faculty members to confide in." Marlene also described how important it is for African American students to have a role model other than a peer.

Not only would African American faculty members give African American students someone to relate to and provide a good role model, they would also serve as a good role model for white students. Lauren thought this issue was particularly important:

I think there needs to be more African American faculty of course. It would be great to see more positive role models; not only for us but for white students. A lot of the white students have had no contact with black students at all. I don't know what they have been taught but it would be nice for them to see something positive instead of negative stuff they get bombarded with all the time. Something other than sports.

While the majority of students would like to see more African American faculty members at their respective institution, there were a few who said it was not a significant need in their opinion. Charles noted: "I don't think we would have to bring in African American faculty or administrators. I don't see a problem with the ones we have; as far as racial discrimination goes." Kris added: "I've thought about the numbers of black students on campus. But I haven't thought that a black faculty member would help out a lot." Finally, Nichelle noted that having only one or two black faculty members was what she was used to and did not think it would make a difference to add more African American faculty. It is interesting to note that these students did not feel the addition of African American faculty was a need. Perhaps their resilience is such that they do not allow themselves to consider the notion because they have adjusted to the present status.

Academics

This section examines the themes that focus on experiences African American students reported concerning academics and the peer mentor program on their campuses.

Theme: Academic Reputation

The overall academic experience was an area noted by several students during the interviews. Both positive and negative comments were shared about the academic experience at a small, private liberal arts college. Academic reputation was a reason many of the students decided to attend their current institution. James said the reason he chose the college he attended was "because it is a small community and a respectable school. Some of the black schools are not respected in terms of the curriculum they offer." Shequita said her educational experience had been "excellent" which was why she chose to attend.

Theme: Academic Awakening

While academic reputation was an important factor in college selection, it was also quite challenging to some of the students. Charles, who was a junior at the time of the interview, described how only four students were left from the 15-20 freshmen football players in his recruiting class. He attributed their departure to difficult academic standards.

A few of the students described what their own academic experience was like and what it would be like for an incoming African American freshman at their particular college. Liz and James stressed the importance of helping incoming freshmen realize the experience would be difficult and much more of a work load than what they were used to in high school. Charles said that, as a freshman, "you will want to leave your first

semester.” John said, “The freshmen will need to know that they will struggle academically.” Voline would make sure freshmen knew the teachers at her college “mean business” when it came to academics. Grace described the academic experience for freshmen as an ‘academic awakening’:

It will be an academic awakening. In high school I made A’s on my papers. When I came here I couldn’t see my paper for all the red ink. That will wake you up. The classes are so small you can’t slack. The teacher knows your potential by the end of the second week so you can’t slide by in class. The classes are so small. If you’re black you stick out even more. So, when you miss class it is obvious. You can’t just fade into the woodwork. The academic awakening would definitely hit you in the face.

Personal responsibility was one factor that Robert had to learn in his experience with his own academic awakening.

Just buckling down and taking responsibility is a lot of being able to persist. I really didn’t have to work hard in high school. I was fine until I got here. I remember writing a paper for my English Composition class and got a C+ on it. I remember saying ‘what’s wrong....I actually put some thought into this paper.’ From there on I realized that I was in a whole different world. The work ethic is different, the mentality is different and everything is different. A lot of my persistence came from just buckling down and being responsible. Mom and Dad are not here to make sure I get my work turned in on time. If I didn’t buckle down, my grades would show it.

Theme: Academic Major

William and Olivia discussed the benefits of consistently being in class with the same group of people, within their major, as being particularly helpful in their persistence. William related his experience to that of a family:

In the educational field you have a family; we have been together since I first came here. We’ve had the majority of our classes together. A few people have been in all of my major classes. Being African American, they lean to me for advice sometimes....for ideas. I lean to them for help sometimes with academics. It’s like we’re all in this together.... for the same goal...all 27 of us. That’s been a big momentum builder for me. I’ve met new friends. We get a chance to talk

about different ideas. We also help each other with tutoring. For instance, I help them with math and they help me with English.

Similar to William, Lauren also found the students within her academic major a positive influence in her college experience. She said of her friends within her field of study, “we’re all suffering through the same classes; just studying together and being together is a big help.” Overall, she reported her college experience as very positive.

Similarly, Lauren, Vanessa, and Nichelle all felt their respective majors met their educational needs as college students. Voline was particularly impressed with the curriculum and the professors within the Biology department, which was her major: “My high school teacher graduated from here and said if I came here I would be ready and be better prepared for graduate school.”

Theme: Student Opportunity for Cultural Competence

During the interview, the students responded to the question of how the curriculum met their needs as an African American college student. While some of the students had positive things to say about the curriculum as it related to being an African American at a small, predominantly white college most students had negative comments or suggestions they felt should be implemented.

Lauren did not see a problem with the curriculum mainly because she majored in Biology. She said she did not share the same interests in cultural issues or civil matters as she thought a political science major would. Lauren was not concerned about courses dealing with African American History or Literature. Patrick, Cindy and Nichelle all concurred that the curriculum met their needs as an African American college student. Nichelle’s only suggestion was that examples of African American professionals needed

to be used in class as examples to present a different perspective. Jamar was very positive about his experience with the curriculum at his college:

As an African American male it [the curriculum] meets my needs. Being at a predominantly white college, it helps me see what corporate America is like and what they're looking for when I get out there. That is one reason I've stayed and not transferred. Everybody sees that being an African American male and graduating from a predominantly white liberal arts college; I think they will look on that positively.

Several students had negative comments concerning the curriculum as it related to African American students. Most of these comments focused on the lack of courses pertaining to African American issues. "I don't think any of the classes here prepare you as an African American to adjust to [name of college]" declared James. Simone thought that if she wanted to learn anything about her culture, she was in the wrong place:

If you're looking to enrich your African American culture or learn more about black history; any type of African American folk stories, anything about you and about being a black person in America; you're not going to find here at [name of college]. I don't know of any courses about African American history. Sure it's incorporated in American History and you'll hear probably about Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and maybe Malcom X. But there are African American students here who don't know who Medgar Evers is. I don't think it takes a predominantly black school. I don't think you have to go to Florida A&M or Tennessee State where there are a lot of black people to find it out.

At least four other students indicated that while the curriculum did meet their educational needs, it did not meet their needs as an African American student. The main reason the curriculum did not meet their needs as an African American student was because there were few or no courses (or course content) that focused on African American issues. Warren felt that the curriculum needed to be from "a more diverse perspective – not just from an American or European perspective." Based on her experiences, Olivia mentioned that when issues involving African Americans came up in

class not much time was devoted to the subject matter. Charles said he just finished a history course "where we talked about the Civil War and that's probably the closest we'll come to an African American class." Shequita was a little more specific about the curriculum not meeting her needs as an African American student:

There are not a lot of classes to teach white people or black people about African American history....or to teach people like me who up until about a week ago didn't know who C.J. Walker was....she was the woman who pioneered African American hair products. I didn't know who she was. She was one of the first female millionaires in the U.S. That should be a part of the curriculum and not just something we hear about in February or not just something I have to go and research about to learn. It's not just my history but your history as well but it's not taught here. I have a problem with that.

Because there are no courses pertaining to African American issues at James' college, three of his courses did not transfer from the community college he attended. He said:

It really bothered me that there was not one African American History course here. To me those classes are very important. Those three classes [dealing with African American issues] have been more help than any classes I've taken in college. I think it's a shame they don't offer African American studies courses here.

John noted that adding a course that focused on African American issues would create a sense of belonging among the African American students. Overall, 15 of the 24 students interviewed (63%) indicated that some type of course (i.e. African American heritage and/or cross cultural issues) pertaining to African Americans should be added to the curriculum.

Theme: Peer Mentor Programs

The issue of peer mentors and freshman seminar programs was also mentioned during the student interviews. Kris reported that his freshman seminar class helped him understand the college environment better and prepared him for the remainder of college.

Vanessa was a peer mentor on her campus. Her main responsibilities were to work closely with two or three freshmen during their first year and show prospective students around campus. Robert described how the freshman seminar program at his college was a help to him as a freshman and later as a peer mentor. The program at Robert's institution is set up with a faculty member and an upperclassman teaching the course.

[Name of program] helped me a lot as a freshman. It's more like 'Face the Facts'. That program really helped a lot in making me feel comfortable and relaxed my freshman year. I didn't have any fears or apprehensions about what would happen. I felt really comfortable. It helped me get to know folks who are in the same boat I was in. Being in there with 16 other people, who have been experiencing the same feelings, helped a lot because we talked about it and discussed what we were facing. You have solutions rolling out of the woodwork because someone else has dealt with the same thing you are dealing with. It is almost like a support group.

William had a similar experience with a program at his college but it was not as well established. However, he suggested an idea much like what Robert described. The difference was William suggested a program specifically for African American students.

I tend to think African Americans talk to other African Americans on another level of understanding. Sometimes they use terminology that some people wouldn't understand. I think that would be a big help to have a small group organized who could do this; just to be a help to incoming freshmen who are African American and really do not belong in athletics and are just here to get an education. The peer mentor program we already have sort of meets the needs but it is on sign-up basis only. You have to sign up if you want a peer mentor. I think a lot of [African American] students don't sign up because they don't know whom they're going to get [as a peer mentor]. They may be approached by a white student asking if they want to get involved and they may say 'No I don't need to'. It would be good to have African American upperclassmen serving as peer advisors to African American Freshmen.

College Environment

This section examines the themes that focus on experiences African American students reported concerning their college environment. Various issues are discussed

concerning environmental factors, minority issues, the college community, and the local community.

Theme: Stereotypes

The issue of stereotypes is an issue that many African Americans face at small predominantly white colleges. Some of those stereotypes center on the misconception that all African Americans play a sport in college. As a non-athlete and Biology major, Voline described her experience of being the subject of stereotype:

Many people used to ask me if I played a sport. Some asked me what my major was and when I tell them Biology, they look at me like I lost my mind. I guess some react this way because they know Biology requires a lot of time.

Patrick, who attended another college, had a similar experience with people assuming he played a sport.

Unfortunately, the athletic stereotype can also include the false notion that if a student is African American and an athlete, they may need additional assistance with their classes. Patrick described a situation that occurred in one of his classes.

My roommate my sophomore year was in my American Literature class and we both did our homework together and studied together. We would have similar answers on the test but he was coming up with a "B" and I got a "C". One day the football team had an away game and they left early and were not in class. The teacher asked him why he wasn't going to the game and he told her he didn't play football. She said she thought he did play. After that, he got the same grades as me.

Lauren described how the African American social organization she belonged to was often viewed in a stereotypical manner. She thought the organization was only seen in terms of race. The organization on her campus was primarily established for black females but was open to all races.

Even though it would be wonderful to have a black sorority, it's always going to be 'black'. Anytime we come together it's always going to be 'black.' When the white kids do things 'color' is not the first thing you see. But when we come together to do things, it's like 'Oh those black girls' - you know what I'm saying. That's one thing I wish we could get rid of. I think that isolates us even more. They aren't going to see AKA they're going to see a black sorority. Anything we do is seen as 'black girls together'. That's why we opened up [our present African American social organization] so we would not have that perception.

Jamar reported that African Americans, on his respective campus, were treated differently than white students when the issue was off campus parties. Jamar perceived the stereotype was 'if the black students are going to have a party, there will be trouble'.

Debra felt that she always had to prove herself and redefine the stereotype most people have about African Americans.

I have to prove to the students that I deserve to be sitting in the desk next to them. I hate having to prove myself to people. Or, that I have to 'un-define' the stereotypes that they have. I don't play basketball. In the grocery store if I wear my college paraphernalia they say 'Oh, you go to [name of college]...you must play basketball'. I say 'no I'm here on academic scholarship.' They act really surprised. They ask if my major is Physical Education or Sports Information. I tell them that it's History and Sociology. They then ask what I aspire to be. I tell them I want to be a professor. They look surprised. So now I feel like I have to be a professor just to tell people I can do it.

There exist also stereotypes within the African American community. For instance, a stereotype might be if a person is African American they should dress or appear in a certain manner. Grace described her experience of how she has been viewed by some of the African American males at her respective campus:

Last year, I was informed by the black guys that I was not a true sister. My whole thing is I'm in college and in transition. So, I go through hairstyles and fashion styles until I'm comfortable with who I am. Through that transition apparently I wasn't black enough for some of the black people which I don't understand that whole concept. I don't know how I cannot be considered black when I have the nappiest hair on campus, it's as black as black can be. The black males are not as accepting to individuality as the white people. If I come in with something that I'm comfortable and it doesn't fit their [African American males] fashion

standards, they're critical. Whereas the white people say that what I did was nice and that they liked it. The white people say they wish they could be more like that and express themselves.

Olivia's perception of a stereotype from other African Americans was that they (i.e. African Americans) thought she should not regularly associate with white students.

I opened up to the white people and talked to them because they talked and opened up to me. The other African Americans were close-minded and would not socialize with white people. I don't know if it was just because of the people I hung around and maybe the black students thought I didn't know what my identity was. It hurt my feelings that the other black students didn't take the time to get to know me and who I was. They took the way I do things as negative instead of trying to get to know me. I think the white people opened up and wanted to know me - you know ME -quicker than the black people on campus.

Theme: Annoying Questions

Sometimes African American students were asked annoying questions concerning their culture. Debra described how she had to deal with these questions from white students.

We all sit around and talk about it and some of the stupid questions people ask. Some of the stupid questions I'm talking about are: 'Is your Santa black?', 'What kind of hair grease do you use?', 'Is the hair grease cooking oil or is it from a car...what does it smell like?' It's things like that we sit around and laugh at; that we're able to laugh at. My freshman year, I had washed my hair and I was oiling my scalp and the girls on my hall asked what I was using. I told them grease. They ask if it was the same kind of grease you cook your food in or if you could melt it down and put it in your car. They weren't laughing so I assumed they were serious. They ask if my Santa was black and I said that my Santa was my mom and she is black, so yes my Santa is black. Its stuff like that we sit around and laugh at but I can't laugh about those things with everybody, just the same people who have heard similar questions.

Olivia described a similar experience where she perceived white students trying to find out more about her, as an African American, because they had not associated with African Americans in high school. Olivia considered this annoying because of the questions she was asked.

Theme: Environmental Appeal

The perception of a quiet campus with few distractions was the most frequently used descriptor of the physical environment. Approximately 10 students (42%) noted that having the opportunity to attend college, without the distractions that can be present in a larger city, was an important factor to their college persistence. Jean said the following concerning environmental appeal as it related to the small college atmosphere:

Being here has helped me keep my feet on the ground and keep my head out of the clouds. I don't go out and do the party thing. It keeps me more focused.

Students were also asked to speculate about what their experience would have been like had they attended a larger college or university. The major factor with most of the students, in this study, for not attending a larger university was because they wanted a smaller environment. Patrick said he would have been scared in a larger environment and would have gotten "lost or left behind". Kris thought that a larger school would have been worse for him. Some of his friends went to a large university and failed out because "there was too much stuff to do." He said, "a large school would have been a distraction for me." Nichelle thought that she "would have gotten caught up in the whole party scene" had she attended a larger university. Charles said:

I'm going to graduate from here with nothing lower than a C. It's probably the best place for me. I like to party. I would be very tempted at [name of local university] and would have failed out. I hear a lot of people talk about leaving but I'm glad I stayed. There are fewer distractions here and that's why I make some of the grades I make.

William felt like he would have been "a number" at a larger university. He said he did not want the "hype" of a big college and wanted to be "respected for more than just athletics." Jean speculated that: "a larger school would have freaked me out. It

would have been completely different. Everybody knows me here.” Voline reported she “would not have liked being in class at a large school where I didn’t know everyone.” David said: “Our students get two to three times more the attention than students at a larger university because it’s a small liberal arts college.”

Charles talked about how he was offered a potential athletic scholarship to a large historically black school in his home state. He went to the college on a recruiting trip and “had such a good time he did not want to go anywhere else.” The scholarship was not awarded, which worked out for the best in his opinion. He said, “I am doing better here than I would at [name of Historically Black School] with all those distractions.”

On the other hand, John would have preferred a larger university because he thought there would have been more minorities. However, John’s thoughts about the reality of attending a larger university were: “I would have had more fun but I don’t know how I would have done academically.” John continued:

The small environment has helped me persist. There is nothing to do around here so I do my homework and study. At a larger school, I probably would have partied a lot and skipped the homework.

Similarly, Jamar wondered what would have happened had he attended a larger school. He stated, “Having the opportunity to be involved with a black fraternity would have been one benefit of attending a larger university.” However, when he got together with his high school friends who attended larger universities and compared progress, he felt he was in a better situation because of graduating in four years. Whereas, some of his friends were not progressing towards graduation at the same pace as he was progressing. Consequently, he felt happy and content with his college selection and was pleased with future career options.

Theme: Racial Identity

Racial identity here has two distinct references. Some students remarked about the identity they had established in a positive manner. Other students felt they had to change their identity when they entered into a predominantly white college environment. Vanessa said of why a small college was attractive to her: "I liked being a name and a person." "Something new and different" was what attracted Olivia to college because she wanted to be in the minority: "I was tired of seeing black people. I had been around black people since I was in kindergarten." Nichelle reported the friendliness on campus was one thing that led her to remain at her institution. One of her earlier memories was being surprised that a student started talking to her first before she talked to them.

On the other hand, Simone felt that an African American student would need to change his/her identity if they attended her institution:

When you come here you have to change your identity. You're forced to compromise yourself and put your true identity aside; not necessarily who you are but if you're used to acting a certain way. Sometimes I think there is more compromise a black person has to make than a white person has to make. There are more white people here and you feel you have to fit into that niche. There are white people who don't make an attempt to talk to black students. I don't know if that's how they were raised. I don't think it has anything to do with racism; they just don't feel the need to reach out or to learn anything about our culture.

Debra's remark regarding her identity was that she felt she had to act one way at home and another way in college.

When I was a freshman, I came home for Christmas break and got together with all my high school friends and they thought I was white. They thought I was like the Oreo - you know what that is: black on the outside but white on the inside. They thought I had changed so much by the way I was acting. They thought I was so different. When I came back to school I was trying to be who I was in [hometown] and that didn't fly here at [name of college]. I'm talking about my slang and my attitude. I had to change my attitude and that was weird. I had to change a lot of things about myself.

Theme: Students as Sojourners

For the purposes of this study, the term 'sojourner' is defined as "a temporary resident" (Webster, 1988). As was the case with some of the interviewees, African Americans can sometimes feel as though they are a sojourner 'passing through' during their college experience. The term 'exile' also applies here: "a voluntary absence from one's home" (Webster, 1988). Both these terms capture how some African American students felt at a predominantly white college. James described it as "going to someone else's territory." He said that the adjustment experience at his college was not necessarily negative for an African American student, but different.

There is nobody here for you to relate to except for the other African American students. You have to be ready for that and willing to accept it - that you are going to someone else's territory and not you're own. You have to be willing to adjust to their way of life.

The classroom can be a unique place for an African American student in terms of feeling like a sojourner. William said, "In some classes I'm the only African American in my classes." He further reported, "If the subject is culturally oriented, the professor will ask for your opinion." Marlene said, "It can be tough being the only African American in most of my classes." Similarly, Nichelle said that in most of her classes, she was the only African American student:

In most of the classes I've had here I was the only black person. There have been times when there have been two of us but there has never been a situation where there has been more than three black students in a class that I was in. It's just so weird being in a class where I'm the only black student. In some classes it makes it difficult. Like in Psychology class when a race issue is brought up, you have to fight everyone else's opinions instead of someone else being there to help.

Cindy had this to say about her classroom experience:

Sometimes in class if group projects are assigned, I'm the only one left without a

group and I have to go to a professor to be put in a group. I shouldn't have to feel like that. We should all get along....but it's like that in all my classes. If there is not another black person in class you will feel that way. If there is another black person they will come to you to be in their group.

Jamar, on the other hand, liked being the only black student in his classes. In fact, he was the only black person in his major.

Participation has been encouraged in my classes. I try to encourage myself to participate because I know if I don't then I won't learn. I always look for opportunities to participate and learn. Sometimes I think I like being the only black accounting major on campus. I like the challenge because people will judge themselves against me. I like the competitive spirit.

Debra provided another view of being a sojourner on a predominantly white campus. Although she had persisted and was involved in campus activities, she was very adamant in what she felt was a negative college experience:

Well, I really hate this school to be completely honest. I think it was good for me to go to a small school. But as far as the area goes, we're out here in the middle of nowhere with the cow pastures and sheep and pigs. There is no public transportation so you can't get to town to the grocery store. If you don't have a car then you are stuck. The people are so close-minded; they're not friendly at all. They grab their children when you walk by. I'm really ready to graduate in May. I'll probably come back for Homecoming next year but other than that I probably won't come back. I didn't enjoy my years here.

Another area where African American students can feel like a sojourner is the campus cafeteria. Both William and Cindy's impression of the cafeteria was that "blacks and whites don't mix." Simone perceived that most of the athletes sit by teams at her college, which in her opinion denoted segregation. Warren said of the cafeteria "everyone has their own place." David gave a description of his college's cafeteria:

The African American students sit on one side of the cafeteria. The teachers set on the other side of the cafeteria and then you have the white students in the middle. I've heard people ask why the black students didn't come over and talk with the white students. Well personally, being a minority and being out numbered - I feel the whites should come and sit with us. There are more of them

than us; so 'why should we be the ones to have to go and sit with them?' Me personally, I can sit with anybody to eat. It's not that I feel I have to sit with my own kind; that's not the case. It's just that sometimes you feel more comfortable sitting with your own kind when you know that other people don't want you sitting with them.

The sojourner experience also applied to transfer students. James said, upon transferring, that during his first month on campus there was a lot of homesickness. He said he did not know anybody except for teammates and was not involved except for sports and studies. Aside from the initial experience, James also noted that: "the change from a liberal community college to a conservative small college was different."

A few of the students mentioned relationships between African Americans and international students and the similarities that existed. This comparison relates to the sojourner idea in that internationals are also sojourners. Voline reported prior to coming to her present college she had no experience with international students and that it had been a great experience getting to know them. Lauren mentioned that several internationals were involved with the African American social organization on campus:

I've noticed that the Asian students stick together. I don't know if they felt we [African American social organization] would be more welcoming. Last year we had a lot of internationals come to the [African American social organization]. I don't know if they thought it was easier to break through our barriers as oppose to sororities or other things. We're the minorities here and I guess they figure we can stick together. They hung tight with us. It was easier to approach us.

Cindy, who attended the same institution as Lauren, had a similar description of international students and their relationship with African American students.

All the Asian students have black students as friends; they are closer to the black students than the white students. I don't know if the white students don't take time to know them. We (African American) try to be friends to them. It's like the white people don't care.

Nichelle, who attended a different institution than Lauren and Cindy, also had an

observation regarding this issue. According to Nichelle, African Americans on her campus had a lot in common with international students:

I haven't talked to many of the international students here. I want to talk to them but they don't always have a lot to say back. I think I have a lot in common with internationals sometimes because it's easy for both of us to feel left out. Just like me - when they're in a class, they're probably the only international or one of few internationals in class. I talked to one international who didn't like it here at first. All the people who talked to her were internationals and she thought the white people didn't like her. I told her that wasn't true; it's just that some people don't know how to talk to other people of a different race. I guess the internationals feel left out sometimes just like I do. However, I guess it's easier for me to not feel left out because I can talk to people without the language barriers.

Theme: Residential Living

The residence halls were another part of the college environment mentioned by students involved in this study. Nineteen students (79%) lived on campus [at the time of the interview] and five (21%) students lived on campus at least some portion of their time on campus. Kris said, "The residence halls help a lot but it depends on who you live by. You're living with them so eventually you're going to get to know them." Robert's experience in the residence halls was very positive especially with the adjustment process his freshman year: "My freshman year I was surrounded by upperclassmen and it was like they took us under their wings." Charles said his closest friends were in the residence hall. Olivia said instead of going to the writing lab on campus she went to her friends in the residence hall for help with writing assignments.

A few students also mentioned the significance of having a roommate. Liz said, "My freshman year there was only one person I hung out with and that was my roommate." Similarly, David shared "Being a freshman and not knowing anyone, you tend to stay to yourself and talk to your roommate; which may be the only person you can

talk with.” Lauren indicated that her roommate moved out after her first semester. She said, “If I would have had a roommate perhaps I wouldn’t have gone home every weekend.”

Theme: Minority within a Minority

The focus of this theme is how sometimes African American students at small, predominantly white institutions feel like a minority within a minority. By being African American in a predominantly white environment, the student is automatically in the minority. However, for some students in the study that experience was magnified. For instance, African American non-athletes and African American females often felt like a minority within a minority.

Some students considered being a “minority” not only applying to being African American at a predominantly white institution. They considered non-athletes to be a minority at their institution, especially African American non-athletes. Charles, Shequita, and Grace all stated African American non-athletes were a minority on their campus. Lauren said, “The college needs to recruit more African American non-athletes.” Simone said, “It all starts with Admissions. The Admissions Office needs to think seriously about how they can recruit more African American non-athletic students.” As a result of there being few non-athletes who are African American, Patrick described how there is a lot of stereotyping at his institution – that if you are African American, you play sports.

I would like to see the campus be more culturally aware than what it is right now. Cause a lot of times we're (African Americans) are viewed as a football player or basketball player; like that's all we can do is play sports. There are some of us here who don't play sports and we're just as smart as other students. In the last couple of years there has been a lot of stereotyping. But it is better this year. We have had some more students that come in that don't play sports. When I came in - in my freshman class, my roommate and I were the only black guys (freshmen)

who didn't play a sport and I was in band. I would say that there needs to be more black non-athletes here at [name of college]; females especially.

Some students were not pleased with the athletic emphasis that existed within their college environment. Simone reported that her college is "an athletic school and if you're not an athlete, you're just here or you find your own clique." Simone further explained how she felt non-athletes were left out at her college especially when it came to being recognized for academic achievement and campus involvement. Shequita felt that her college recruited the same type of black males, who were all athletes.

The biggest problem I have with [name of college] is that they recruit the same type of African American male. It's always the football player or the athlete who is not a bright student; who really may only be a mediocre player. They recruit these same people. It's like a cookie cutter; they all look the same. It's hard for me to understand. I know this is not an example of all African American males; it can't be. But that's the only example we have. It would be great if I could see a black guy on this campus with a 4.0 GPA that doesn't play a sport.

Grace's perception is that community exists for athletes but not for non-athletes. She said, "There is not enough non-athletic activities or organizations to make us (non-athletes) feel important." Grace continued by saying:

I think it might have something to do with there is no common ground between the black females and the black males on campus. The seven black females are not athletes. I would say 99% of the black guys are athletes.

As an athlete, Kris agreed that a non-athlete who is African American would find the college environment challenging: "if you don't play sports, it may take you longer to make friends. There are other black students who don't play sports and they normally don't hang out with the black athletes." On the other hand, Robert, a non-athlete reported, "having so many students involved in athletics is not a problem nor an issue." He continued, "I don't even think about the athletic/non-athletic issue."

The issue of being a 'minority among minorities' on campus was also related specifically to African American females. Due to athletic involvement, the institutions involved in this study had significantly more African American male students than African American female students. At least ten students (42%) felt that their institution needed to recruit more African American females. At Shequita's institution, the females felt that they had nowhere to turn for role models.

I think the African American females have been slighted. We have been dealt the most unjust hand because there is nothing here for us. There are so few of us (black females) and we don't have anywhere to go. There are a few boys we can turn to as friends but when it comes crunch time they're closer to their teammates than us. It's tough. Sometimes the African American males say they have it tough but they don't because we (females) have no resources. We have no black role models to look up to on campus. We have no female role models and no male role models except for the coaches. Even the black football players have their two black coaches to turn to but I have nobody except for my sister and she is all that I have. In terms of a female African American role model there is none.

Simone had a similar opinion but also thought because there were so few African American females there were excessive conflicts between them. The fact that there was a great deal of diversity among the females, with no common ground (i.e. sports) made it all the more difficult to build community. Jean, who attended a different institution than Shequita and Simone, briefly mentioned the conflicts that have happened between the few African American females on her campus.

Male to male the relationships among African Americans are good. All the men get along and they can talk about anything. With the girls, for the most part, I personally don't have any black female friends right now. It's almost like a competition between the black girls because there are so few of them. It's like 15 black females trying to get the best looking guys on campus – whatever that is supposed to mean. I personally don't date on campus.

Similarly, Grace shared that being one of few African American females on campus can be very frustrating:

When you're one of four black females on campus it's hard. There are times when you are tired of explaining yourself and you want to go somewhere where you don't have to explain yourself. I'm from an all black neighborhood and I went to an all black high school. I never lived in the vicinity of white people. I'm in the minority here and I'm used to being in the majority. It's kind of hard sometimes but I've been here for four years so I've learned to deal with it.

Lauren also reported there was no community among African American females because they could not get along with each other.

Even the degree of dark skin can attribute to being a minority among minorities.

One thing unique to Jean's account of her college experience was her perception of how she was received by other African American students. Jean said she has never had a problem of being a minority at a predominantly white institution. However, she added, "but it's like my friends say - I'm not black so to speak. I've been raised in a predominantly white area." Jean clarified her comments below.

I have light colored eyes. I don't have my hair cut off short. I don't have 'bad' hair whatever that is. I talk like a country girl. I try to hide the accent. They don't treat me any different other than the occasional joke; but that's what friends are for. Other African American students don't consider me black. When we walk into a restaurant and we get treated badly, they say that I wouldn't have been treated that way had I been there by myself and they're right. I have never been treated badly. I guess it's because I have light skin and light colored eyes. I guess that is not what black people are supposed to have, so to speak.

Similarly, Debra described a situation for a student at her institution who is bi-racial.

I have found that the mixed students (e.g. mother white and father black) don't relate to the black students at all. There is a mixed girl in the [community service] program...and all the students are close, but this girl is not close to the black students in the program. She is not close to the black students at all. She doesn't talk to the black students, she doesn't relate to the black students, she doesn't participate in [name of African American organization] because she is not black; she is mixed. So, her adjustment was to try to get the white people to see that she was white.

At least nine of the students (38%) felt there should be more African Americans at their institution. Marlene said that her institution needed to "recruit more African American students, more than the 10-15 new ones we get each year." She further mentioned the need to recruit at diverse high schools. David said recruiting "more black students would help the entire group of African Americans feel more accepted."

The African American males also concurred that there should be more African American females on their campus. Patrick stated: "We need more black females who don't play sports." John thought his college needed something in order to attract African American females to his campus.

We need to enroll more African American women. There is an easy way to do that. If we were to get a track team and a marching band that would help. Having more women would attract the guys. There are always going to be guys here because of football. There is no sport here that recruits black females. I don't know why. That's the biggest change I would suggest. It would make a lot of people happy.

John also said: "We need more minority women. It's good to interact with people outside your culture. But you need people inside your culture to make it equal out." Similarly, Warren, who attended another college, said: "We need more African American females on this campus. Right now, there is nothing to attract black females to [name of college]. Some of the African American males on Cindy's campus asked the African American females to tell their female friends to enroll. With so few African American females, Charles said that for males it was difficult "especially if you don't date white females."

Theme: Culture Shock

At least four students described their situation on a predominantly white campus located in a rural area or small town as a "culture shock" at first. Vanessa said the

“transition is hard and you have to learn to adjust and find your niche.” Jean also described the experience as “culture shock”:

A new student would be definitely and totally surprised. Especially if you're from a big city you would have a hard time adjusting. If you're from a big city and you're here and you decide you need to go shopping - the only place to go is Wal-Mart. Saturday nights would completely throw you for a loop. There are no clubs to go to - no place for social gatherings. You would find yourself with a lot of the older African American students coming up to you and giving you advice. Some would probably say to leave [name of college]. Any freshman coming in their first week, their first month, is going to be in absolute shock.

Patrick described his experience in college as “extreme; coming from an area where I have two fairly large cities on either side of me. I was in sort of a culture shock when I came here. I felt like I went to another civilization but once I got here I loved it.”

Overall, Vanessa's experience had been positive. She felt she had been able to accomplish the things that she had intended. She noted “there have been some bumps in the road but they're small and minor.” One transition that was particularly challenging was the environment:

When I was a freshman, I had a little culture shock because I was used to being around more black people. Being from [name of hometown] there are just more black people there. I just had to get adjusted to it and be more open-minded to new people. It was just a transition for me. I had a lot of growing up to do.

Nichelle said that those African American students “coming from predominantly black areas will experience culture shock.” David said at first an African American student on his campus will “be scared and not know who to trust; they will experience culture shock if they are not from the local area.”

Another area within the theme of ‘culture shock’ is the local community in which the college is located. As noted in Chapter Three, two of the institutions in this study are located in, what the Carnegie Classification system refers to as a “small town” and two

are located in a "rural area". Because of the college's location, William felt as though the people in the local community were not used to being around black people and therefore did not know how to react.

Chris and his friends "don't really go out in the local community that much so we're not around people in the community [outside the college]." He further stated "to hang out, we go an hour away to [nearby town] or stay here on campus." Charles came from a military background so for him the adjustment was not difficult. He said, "life in a military family prepared me for the local community."

James grew up in the western part of the U.S. and had several white friends. However, his experience at a small, predominantly white college in the southeast was different especially in the local community.

I felt if I came to a small town it would help me to accomplish some things I wanted to accomplish. In [home state], I believe there is racism there but it's hard to tell; everyone is very friendly and outgoing. My best friends growing up were white. It was very different moving here; you just have to live it to experience it. When I came here I could see and feel the difference. Mainly, I could feel the difference because I had never experienced anything like it before. The way people looked at you. Not so much the students on campus but the people off campus. They give you a look like they don't want you here in this town.

Although the small college community atmosphere helped some students be more focused, according to Warren, there are some negative kickbacks. These drawbacks sometimes consist of limited opportunities, such as few opportunities for internships within his major. At least one of the colleges in the study is near an area where there are small numbers of African Americans. However, according to Simone, the college does not try to take advantage of this situation by trying to connect African American students with the African American citizens in the local community. She said:

I don't think the college is reaching out to the community that is in [name of town where college is located]. There are African American people in the community who have told me they didn't know I went to [name of college]. They're in their little niche and we're in our little niche. There is no way of bringing the campus to the community. There are black people who live in [name of town] but there is no connection. You come here and you're just here.

Theme: Community Among Minorities

This theme describes the sense of community as perceived by the students on their respective campuses. Robert described his perception of the sense of community on his campus as close knit but also divided at times by athletics or campus organizations. He said, "People tend to individualize and compartmentalize. But still there is a sense of togetherness and having a bond with each other." Marlene provided a unique perception of community as a student who is also a parent. She said, "It's pretty much like a family. The males on campus are my son's Uncle and the females are his Aunt. It's just that close." Warren had similar comments about community on his campus:

Here at [name of college], there is such a small number of African Americans that all the black students just cling together whether a person is like you or not. It's like there is a sense of we have to stand together with each other. It's real strange because I've not been anywhere like this. Even if there is someone that I really don't care for, I know we have to stick together to be a force on campus. We can't push each other aside, we have to stick together and be as one. There is a sense of unity there. Just like with any group of people, sometimes there are differences within the black community. But usually it does not get out to the rest of campus and just stays within the black community.

Vanessa's view on the African American community was that it was somewhat dysfunctional on her campus. As a result, she felt the African American community was not as strong as it could have been.

Anytime something bad happens we seem to pull together as a community. At other times, we may not be as strong a community as we could be. It is a family, sometimes dysfunctional, other times good, but I think overall it's a typical family situation. You would think that being in a small school and in this part of [the

state], we would know how to communicate and speak to one another when we pass each other on campus. You would think it would be close knit and that everyone would come to the campus activities but sometimes that is not the case. You have people who tend to not want to be a part but only be a part of their own little world and not share in the community as a whole. It's like a chain - a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. So, if you have people who don't want to participate you will not be as strong a community or family as you could be. But if you have everybody working together then it will be a good thing.

A few of the students mentioned that they thought more efforts needed to be made to enhance the aspect of community on campus. Robert commented: "African American students need to become more unified and get to know each other. I think we're divided too much by sports. I think it would be good if we actually got to know each other." Olivia, who attended a different institution, had a similar perspective. She felt there needed to be a greater sense of community among African Americans and that both white and black students needed to be more open.

Three of the students talked about the cliques on their respective campuses. Nichelle perceived that it would be easy for a freshman to see the African American students in cliques early in the semester. The cliques were formed based on different factors. Patrick believed the cliques were based on sports and extracurricular activities and were easily noticeable to freshmen. He said, "The unity is not really here. Although we're all here together as African Americans there is a lot of separation among us."

These cliques are further defined by where students choose to sit in the cafeteria. Debra reported that all the black students sit together in one area of the cafeteria at her institution. Cindy reported a similar experience at her institution: "You see all white people together and all black people together and we see that as normal. That's the thing about it. We see that as normal for us. We're use to it." Charles reported a similar

situation at his institution but does not necessarily view it as a negative situation.

If you went in our cafeteria during lunchtime you would see all the African American students sitting in one section. Everybody else would be spread out. If you walk in and see this, your first response will probably be separation. But when you walk out of the cafeteria you will see people mixing together. So, there are real friendly relationships on campus.

Simone described a situation that occurred in the cafeteria on her campus. She perceived this event as racial discrimination from within the African American community.

The racism I've experienced has come from black males not white students. During my first semester here I went to the cafeteria one day. I had made friends in my class - these people were white and I sat with them in the cafeteria. Two black males who asked me if I thought I was white and if I thought I was better than them accosted me. I told them that I didn't know them but I did know the white friends I was sitting with. I asked the males if I was suppose to sit with them just because they were black. That's not me. I sat with those friends because I knew them. It was just drama from the beginning. From that day on, I ate in the cafeteria very few times.

Theme: Misconceptions about Community

Some students were under the impression (i.e. through literature and campus visits) that there would be a great sense of community on their campus. However, upon arrival their experience was different. Olivia described her perceived misconception regarding the sense of community at her institution.

When I was first read about [name of college] in their brochure, I read about a 'sense of community'. There was a lot of misconceptions for me as far as what I would see when I got here. You know the brochure.....you have your little picture of African American students. [Laugh] They put them on the front of the book so you'll know there are some here on campus [Laugh] Although I knew that the school was 90% white when I applied. They tell you there is a sense of community, and everyone has an open mind and they really don't.

Other students felt there was a misconception about the sense of community. The misconception centered on the time they were considering coming to the institution and

what they had experienced through the years after enrollment. Debra said that the college community was not "all one big happy family as the college portrays it to be."

I think there is a sense of community. [Name of college] tries to feed to people that we are one big family and that we look out for each other. That is not true. Certain groups look out for each other and certain groups have a community. I have a community here - the black students. We are family and we look out for each other. Some African American students don't really share the sense of community with us that they share with the other students. But this is not a big family and everybody doesn't love each other. We don't hold hands and sing Kumbaya when we go to class. That's what [name of college] tries to feed people to get them to come and it's not like that. To a vast majority I guess the college is what they say it is. But for us (African Americans) there is nothing here. If you don't play football or basketball or if you're not extremely smart and have received academic scholarships; then there is nothing here for you except for us. If we were not together, if we weren't unified, if we didn't look out for each other, if we didn't listen to each other, if we didn't take interest in each other, then there wouldn't be a community here for us. There wouldn't be a family.

Grace thought that the African American population on her campus would be "more tight" than it appeared. Due to the community she experienced, she felt a closer bond with white students than black students.

One thing that shocked me in coming here is that my perception of coming to a small, all white, private school was that the black population on campus would be tight and be the best of friends. That it would be a bond that would last throughout a lifetime. I think this type of atmosphere was here my freshman year. I felt I could call on those guys if I needed something. Over the years it has dwindled. I don't even speak to the black guys on campus and it shocks me. Actually it kind of disappoints me in a way that this has come about. I have tried to figure what the problem is and I don't know; I can't answer it. But it disappoints me that the black girls despise the black guys. Where I am from, I wouldn't even think about depending on a white person for anything. Not that I'm racist but I don't have any white friends at home. For me to come here and to find those that I trust, those that I know will have my back, or if I'm stuck somewhere will come and get me are white people and not the black people...that hits home more than anything. It's just unheard of.

College Experience

This section examines the themes that focus on opinions African American

students reported concerning their college experience.

Theme: Confident in Choice

This theme focuses on whether the student felt he/she made the right choice in selecting her/his respective college. Seventeen students (71%) indicated that they did make the right choice in attending their particular institution. Eight of the 17 students were males and nine were females. Three students, two males and one female, (13%) indicated they “probably” made the right choice but were not totally sure with their selection. Two students (8%), one male and one female, indicated that in some ways they made the right choice but in other ways they felt they did not make the right choice.

One student was not sure about the term “right choice”. She felt that many things were good about her experience such as the quality of education and the size of the school. However, she had several misconceptions about the college that were frustrating to her such as the college community not being what she expected. Only one student said that if she had the decision to make over she would have attended elsewhere. The only positive factor for this student was the quality education he/she received.

For those students who felt they made the right choice in selecting their respective college, there were several reasons they gave to support their decision. John said, “I would not have been able to play sports had I attended a large university.” Voline said, “I’ve never regretted it or thought about going elsewhere.” According to Jamar, the experience “helped me see how the world works especially if I ever get a job in the southern states.” Debra said she “needed a small school and needed to know that everywhere is not like my hometown. I need to see the people who haven’t been around black people a lot.” Marlene enjoyed her college experience to the extent of encouraging

her friends at home to enroll: "I feel it's a good environment. I think it's better than the city around a lot of distractions. If you really want to learn, you will come here."

David said the decision he made to attend a predominantly white college was the right decision for him. He talked about how the experience "opened his eyes and provided a different experience" than what he would have had "by attending a Historically Black College." He continued his comments:

The experience of going to college here opened up my eyes. I could have gone to an all black school and not have gotten the kind of education that I will receive here. Or, I could have gone to a university and just have been another number. But here I have had to learn how to adapt to how life is going to be. I mean nothing is going to change. You're still going to have problems with people. It's just learning how to adapt to those people and settle those problems.

Robert described his college experience as "holistic" or very well rounded and meaningful. He was pleased with his college choice.

I feel I made the right choice. I've never had regrets about coming here. I look back on my freshman year and see how naïve, and ignorant I was and what a kid I was. I look now and see how much I have grown up. I don't think I would have developed as holistically as I have anywhere else. I have developed emotionally and mentally through education but socially and spiritually as well. I think I have accomplished all the areas of the individual as the health and wellness people would put it. It's been a serious holistic development for me and I doubt I could get that anywhere else. I would make the same decision again if I had to. I love it here. Granted I feel like I'm in the middle of nowhere a lot of the time and all we have is a Super Wal-Mart. But I've grown up a lot.

For some students, the decision to attend a small, predominantly white college was more suited for them than a larger institution. Therefore, this solidified their confidence in college choice. Jamar said,

The experience has been one that I wouldn't say I enjoyed but it has been a learning experience. I looked back on it and wonder what would have happened had I gone to another college. I realized that [name of college] was the best place for me to be. I feel I made the right decision. I am satisfied with my

decision...actually I'm not just satisfied, I am happy with my decision. I look down the road and my options are wide open.

Charles had the opportunity to go to a historically black institution much larger than the one he attended. On a campus visit to the larger institution, Charles said, "I had such a good time, I didn't want to go anywhere else. I got spoiled." After things did not work out, he decided to come to his present institution.

When I first got here I was doing things that was keeping me from my school work and that is hard to do in this town. Imagine what I would be doing [at the first institution I considered]. So, I look at it that this was the best place for me to come to college. I'm doing my work here and have a pretty good GPA. I am doing better here than I would at [the other institution] with all those distractions.

Theme: Adjustment and Transition

This theme discusses the students' adjustment and transition to the respective colleges they attended. Jamar described his adjustment to a predominantly white college as unique in that he was coming from a large city where he attended a predominantly black high school and was used to being in the majority.

I was the only one coming into [name of college] that wasn't used to being in the minority, I was used to being in the majority. All the other African American freshmen were coming from small towns and used to being the minority. I was coming from a large city. All the other black guys came from small schools that were predominantly white or schools that were mixed. I was coming from an all black high school. I was the only one. There was nobody to relate to from the freshman class all the way up to the senior class. When I first got here I was the most different person here. I had a cut-off shirt, a blue scarf around my head, and I was '*doing it*'. I was an arrogant person when I first got here.

Liz commented that it was a challenge at first to make the transition to an all white environment because she had not experienced this before.

It was after I got here that I realized 'Oh my God...there are more whites than blacks'. I have never really had white friends. My mother and father had some white friends but I have never because there were never many white students at my school. So when I came here, I spoke to the white students and started

hangin' with them. They have never been racist towards me. I guess that is something good too. There is no kind of racism here, as long as I've been here.

Vanessa said: "finding your niche is how you learn to settle yourself and get into the groove of things." She also believed "you have to be patient through the transition." Jean felt that after you have been on campus for a while you get used to the atmosphere then "making fun of the college becomes your daily prayer. It's no big deal; everybody does it. Anything that happens on campus is up for a joke."

Shequita did not feel her college offered enough transitional help from high school to college during her freshman year. She reported that there were no specific services at [name of college] available to her as a minority student. She felt that what she was told as a prospective student concerning minority services and what was actually provided were two different things.

Jean described a unique experience regarding the transition process. Jean grew up in a rural town with very few African Americans. Therefore, she was used to being in the minority. Furthermore, most of the guys she dated were white.

My first month here I was in shock. I had never been approached by a black guy. I'm from a predominantly white school and there are a few black guys but I was related to them. It's not just black guys but guys from the city period. Everybody I've gone out with talked worse than I did. [Laugh] These guys from Detroit and other big cities - I had no idea what they were saying. I didn't know what to think. I didn't want to talk with anybody. Eventually, my sister helped me to cope.

Attending a small, predominantly white liberal arts college was an interesting adjustment for David. Although he said his experience was good, he stated that "being an African American and coming to a predominantly white college - you really don't know what you're getting yourself into." David elaborated on his transition:

My high school is predominantly white; but when you come to a college that is located in [location of college], there is a lot of racism that goes un-noticed or goes under the table so to speak. You just have to learn how to adapt and overcome because there is always going to be racism. So, really my first two years you really stay close to the people who are around you; and they're mostly African Americans. Then there comes a point where you realize that you have to deal with these people in the real world so you might as well make the first step. It's not everybody on campus, it's just that certain few who still don't like you because of who you are.

Jamar described how important it is for an African American student, at a small predominantly white college, to have a smooth adjustment especially during her/his freshman year.

The support and acceptance is what you need, especially if you're African American. You need support; some sort of safe haven or group to push you on through. I thought I could do it myself and felt I didn't need anybody. Being here you can't do that; at least I don't think you can do it effectively.

Theme: Social Integration

Overall, 54% (13) of students mentioned friends or peers as helping them persist. The issue of peer relationships and the influence of peers on the students is the focus of this theme. Students in most interviews mentioned the relationship with peers in some manner. The comments ranged from peers being a significant factor in the African American student's persistence to not being a factor.

Liz, an African American from the U.S. Virgin Islands, described how she felt accepted at her respective college:

Many people knew that I had no family here so they took me under their wing. They would tell me if I wanted to come home with them sometime to let them know. I thought that was sweet. Although they don't know you they try to help you. I went home with a friend one time for the weekend because the campus is dead. I thought that was good. Even though I was of a different race....they didn't even take that into consideration. They just thought of me as one of them. Like there is a girl in my class that always asks me how my little girl is and tells me if I need a babysitter to let her know. I guess it's the way they were brought up.

One friend in particular had a significant influence on Kris and motivated him to remain in college. He described this student as his role model because they shared something: having to give up sports due to not meeting academic standards. However, both continued their college education. Kris described his friend as an inspiration to finish college.

Although the issue of tough love came up among students concerning faculty members, it also surfaced in discussions concerning peers. Jamar noted:

I have gotten it [tough love] but it's not been from faculty. It's been from a group of friends on campus. If we see someone fail, we're like 'what are you doing, you can't fail; there are just a few of us on campus and we can't just be falling out of school. We've got to go ahead and do this'. If someone is not doing their work, the others in the group will tell them to get busy. It's like we're not going to let each other fail. There are several majors represented within our group of friends so we're able to help each other out.

Another issue that came up within the theme of peer relationships was what the researcher referred to as 'sharing commonalities.' Lauren said that sharing the same disappointments and going through similar experiences helped her establish friendships. Patrick said that having similar interests and sharing similar spiritual concerns with other students helped him. Warren described how the support of friends and the pursuit of similar goals with his peers was a help to his college persistence. Marlene described the African American students on her campus as a family that had a lot of connection. James said that all the African Americans were pretty close to each other and that "sometimes we feel that all we have is each other. It's like a family here."

The issue of relationships with white students was also part of the Social Integration theme. Chris said that he saw no tension between white and black students at all. According to Voline, "The white students have been nice to me. A lot of their

parents have treated me like a second child; they even refer to me as their other child.” Grace rated her relationship with white students higher than her relationships with African American students and said white students were more accepting of her. Shequita said she had more in common with white students than African American students. Due to common interests, she felt closer to the people in her academic major. She said, “You hang with people you have the most in common and it just so happens that I have more in common with white students than African Americans.”

David, on the other hand, felt that the white students on his campus needed to be more open minded. His perception was that they did not know how to respond because they had not associated with African Americans in the past.

More of our white students need to be open-minded. A lot of them are from this area and tend to listen to what their parents say. Their parents listen to what their parents said. So, being in [regional area] where there are not a lot of African Americans, the values and morals tend to be molded. When they come to [name of college] and see the way African Americans and other minorities act they just need to learn to accept it. Sometimes I feel African Americans get judged because white students don't understand. You can't blame them because they haven't been around it. That's just something they have to work on.

James felt there was nothing that could be done to improve the relations between African American and white students on his campus. He said, “I think a lot of it comes from students being from small towns and not accepting change. They just can't adjust. They don't want to and they won't adjust.”

Theme: Superficial Integration

There were several comments from students that were negative in nature towards their peers on their respective campuses. It was interesting to note that only four of the students mentioned they felt the students on their respective campuses were

approachable. Cindy declared that other students (or peers) were not a factor in her remaining in college but rather her professors and the overall reputation of the college. For Patrick, the issue of peer relationship was not that important because he does not hang around a lot of people, only a select few.

Debra commented that she does not feel accepted by some of the white students on her campus. Part of this non-acceptance she related to a time when the African American students asked for a national black fraternity and sorority on campus; which was declined due to local chapters already present on campus. Her response to the question "Do you feel like a lot of the things white students say are because of ignorance or is it because they just don't care?" was as follows:

I think it's a mix of things. I think a lot of white people really do want to be educated [about race and cultural issues]. Some white people just don't care. They don't care that I'm here. They have the attitude 'I will go to class and do my work and you go to class and do your work and we'll be just fine. I don't care that you're here. We don't have to talk and we don't have to make eye contact.' Some of them have that attitude. Some of them think that I don't belong here. They think 'You don't belong here but you want a national fraternity and sorority when there is only a spoonful of you here anyway, why do you want this? We have local chapters here for years; it's tradition'. So, we (African Americans) are a bother for them...we're a problem for a lot of them. It's just a mixture of things.

A couple of students shared their experience of what they perceived as subtle non-acceptance. Olivia's remarks were particularly interesting, "Overall, I do feel accepted. But feeling and being accepted are two different things; but yes I feel accepted." Perhaps she felt that being accepted was a front and that some white students really did not want to develop a relationship with her. Jamar, who attended the same institution as Olivia, described his impression of some of the influential white students on campus:

The school is so small you pretty much know everybody. I'm at peace with everybody. The friendships are good. You have some people - it's weird - it's

sort of like people in power don't really want you here at all and don't want to be your friend. We have a group here, or that used to be here called the [name of group]. They were cool with you, they would play football beside you and work-out with you but they didn't want you here. It was like they wanted to preserve the southern society, with the confederate flag and everything. They would be cordial with you, even invite you to their cookouts, but they didn't want you here.

Cindy said that she does not know white people by name, only by their face.

Whereas she said she knew all the black people by name. Cindy said, "I don't have any white friends. I say hello to them but that's it." John reported that he does not interact with very many white students. The white friends he had came from relationships on the football team. James said that he tried to develop relationships with white students on his campus but it did not work in his opinion.

I have more tight unity with my teammates more than anything. Aside from a handful of people, the African American students are the main people I talk to. I mean a lot of the students here are from small communities. I think they are not use to having different people around.

David said, "Just because you become friends with one white student doesn't mean that the others will be there with open arms." Warren also described what he perceived as a competition between blacks and whites at his campus:

It's like a competition between black and white - between foreign students and so on. It's like a competition of who has authority over what people call 'the yard'. It's a small area. I know that is a prison term but people call it 'the yard'. But it's like people are concerned about who is going to be control over 'the yard'. I don't know; it's real strange like that. It's where people get caught up. I think that is where the friendships are lost. People get into cliques like the fraternities who have been here for a long time. Honestly...it's mainly the black population and the fraternities like [name of organization].

Theme: Adaptable Nature

Some students discussed their adaptable nature as it related to their college experience. There were varying degrees of comments describing what it was like for an

African American student to attend a small, predominantly white college. For example, Simone said, "When I came here for a visit, I didn't think about not seeing any black faces. It wasn't an issue until we got here to stay." Olivia was ready for a change: "I was tired of seeing black people. I had been around black people since I was in Kindergarten."

Several of the students described their experience of being a minority at a small, predominantly white college as not being an issue. Patrick attended a K-12 school with very few African Americans so it was not an issue for him. Being a minority at a small, predominantly white college was not an issue for Charles who came from a military family. He said living overseas helped him prepare for different cultures and made his adjustment smoother. Jean's experience was positive as well. Her sister, who was already enrolled at the same college, introduced her to a lot of other students.

Robert had no problems attending a small, predominantly white college because he was used to having to adapt to different situations.

When I found out that it was about 10% minority here I was OK with it - not a problem. My parents asked me if I thought it would be a problem. I explained to them how I felt about my elementary and high school experience and they could see where I was coming from. It wasn't that much difference for me. I've always plugged in well and been able to work with people from other ethnic backgrounds. I've always been able to cross the line and I think that is what makes me different. So, it hasn't been much of a struggle for me. It hasn't been an issue for me. As far as I was concerned I was just another person on campus.

Nichelle's experience of attending a predominantly white junior college prepared her for a small four-year college. Marlene felt she was "pretty much accepted by everybody." David also thought that being a minority was not a factor because he was a people person and could adapt easily to most individuals.

Theme: Male/Female Relationship Conflict

When the issue of relationships between African American males and females was mentioned, several of the students mentioned a lack of closeness. Grace attributed the lack of closeness between African American males and females on her campus to the fact that there was no common ground for them to share. The majority of African American males were athletes and the majority of African American females were non-athletes. Debra felt the African American males and females on her campus were not as close as they could have been, but they all looked out for each other.

Vanessa mentioned how frustrating the whole area of African American male/female relationships was on a small campus.

Since I am in the minority, I would think that the people who are in the same situation as me would be closer than we actually are. After all, there are not a lot of us on campus. That really irks me that we can't get along. Sometimes we're OK but sometimes it's not. It's more of a gender thing. The girls get along fine; the minority girls get along fine. There may be some catfights along the way but we get along well. The African American guys get along great among themselves. But the African American guys and the African American girls can't get along; we have static and friction. I don't know why it's like that. We don't even speak when we pass each other. That is really sad.

Shequita said on her campus "we have one African American couple dating on campus and that's it. The other black girls aren't dating anyone on campus." Cindy also said that African American males and females did not get along well on her campus:

The problem is when the African Americans get together to do something there's always arguing or fighting. That's the problem. We can all get together but nobody is going to agree. When we (our African American organization) get together we argue....it's like we can't do anything together. Why do we do this? I don't understand. We can't get along. The girls are OK; we compromise. But with the guys and the girls it's a problem; you get all those football players and the African American girls together and it's a problem. They don't get along. That's why we have nothing to do here. We just said forget it.

Jamar also said there was conflict between males and females on his campus but he could not attribute the conflict to anything in particular.

The relationships...well you know how relationships are; like with the females. I don't know what it is but we have always had some sort of conflict with the females. I don't know why. I think some of the black females feel that the black males should treat them special because there are so few black students on campus. We were like 'forget that, you're just like anybody else'. But we all get along. We don't disrespect each other and we don't fight or stuff like that.

Olivia said that she had "only been asked out by one black guy in three years." She further explained: "The black guys will talk to you but they have not directly asked me out or anything. But I have had a couple of white guys asked me out before."

Theme: Interracial Dating

Another aspect of relationships between African Americans students and white students was interracial dating. When Jamar first arrived at his college, he said: "I'm not going to be dating any white girls here. Now I have a white girlfriend." Charles said there was conflict between African American males and females "when too many white females talk to too many black guys; it's like competition." Similarly, Jamar explained how African American females gave him a "hard time" for dating white females.

Cindy perceived, on her campus, that when the African American males dated white female students it often caused conflicts with the African American females.

A lot of the white girls like the black guys. You see that a lot here - black guys and white girls. Sometimes the black girls get offended; it's like 'what's wrong with us, what's wrong with the sisters?' The black guys say that the 'white girls are nice, they understand us, and we can talk to them.' It's like with us (African American males and females), we're always arguing. The white girls who go out with black guys don't talk to the black females. I don't know why. They don't talk to us at all. I know they're not prejudiced; maybe they just don't want to talk to a black female. I never understood that if they're going out with a black guy why they don't want to talk to a black female.

Shequita described how new African American freshman males on her campus would be introduced to campus life. She said upperclassmen male students would tell the freshman male student, "there are no African American females here" and "to get used to it because you're going to be with some white girls." Jean thought that white female students treated her differently if she dated a white male student. Conversely, she said, "The white girls are intimidated if they are dating a black guy for a black girl to be around. For what reason I don't know."

Debra described a "gap or a barrier" on her campus between African American males and African American females. Debra said about African American males "They don't choose us [African American females]. So, I guess that is why the females don't put too much effort in building really healthy relationships with our guys." Debra attributed the barrier between African American males and African American females, on her campus, to how the African American males treated white females.

The black guys don't treat the white females very well. I don't have a problem with interracial relationships. But if you're going to be with a white girl then treat her good. You should treat her like you would treat a black woman. We (African American Males and Females) have very heated discussions that sometimes end up in arguments over this issue. Some of the white girls seem to be so into black guys. For them, it's like a phenomenon. I don't understand it. I think the white girls are in this phase of being interested in settling down and getting married. The guys don't take them seriously. That's why I'm like 'girls can't you see this'? The white girls worship the black guys - especially the football and basketball players.

Conversely, Debra said that on her campus she had never seen "a white guy talk to a black girl."

Grace has a good, descriptive analogy of how she perceived African American males acted towards females, both white and black. She thought there was incongruence with how the African American males acted on campus and how they acted at home.

Picture [name of college] as a bubble and everything around that bubble revolves, changes and grows. But within that bubble whatever norm you think is outside that bubble does not come into the bubble. For instance, the black guys talk to white girls and mess around with them or whatever. I don't have a problem with it because I don't want them anyway. But outside that bubble they will not associate themselves with white females. If they go back home and their guys or brothers find out they are messing around with white girls at home they would be shunned. But inside this bubble, that norm does not exist. Even disrespecting me, they would not do that back home; to their family and brothers that is not an acceptable norm outside the bubble. But within the bubble it has it's own culture here at [name of college]. I can only speak of African Americans because I know the norm outside the bubble. Not saying it doesn't go on with the white students but I don't know their norm outside the bubble.

David gave a male perspective on interracial dating that he had observed at his institution:

Community among African American males and females is like 'hi and bye'. The numbers are limited. I mean some of them (African American females) get mad at an African American male talking to a white female - which you can kind of see why because you're limited. At the same time, I don't think they (black females) should hold a grudge against an African American male because he can talk to them (white females) the same way he talks to another person. I think sometimes it's harder on African American females on this campus than African American males because a lot of the females don't play sports.

Theme: Negative Social Integration

This particular theme discusses the issue of perceived racial harassment or discrimination at each institution. Approximately 12 of the students (50%) said they had experienced some form of racial harassment or discrimination either on or off campus while enrolled at their institution. Seven of the students (29%) said they had not experienced any form of racial harassment or discrimination either on or off campus

while they were enrolled. Five students (21%) did not comment on racial harassment or discrimination during the interview process.

Two examples are shared of students' experiences of perceived racial harassment, which occurred on campus:

My friend who is black and a white guy were arguing. The white guy was from [a nearby rural area]. As we were walking away from the situation, the white student made the comment that with one phone call he would have my friend hanging from a rope. Then it escalated from there. He tried to say that he never made the comment. But there were a couple of us standing around when he said it. I guess the thing that made it worse is that we have always heard a lot about [the nearby rural area] and about the KKK rallies that are held there. It's made up to be like a clan capital. It made it worse that the student was from this area. I'm pretty sure he really felt that way. – Kris

My boyfriend and I were sitting outside in my girlfriend's car. The visitation hours were already past. There were so many police officers passed by - about six different ones (campus police and city police). We were only sitting in my friend's car. After a few minutes there were several policemen around. We saw a lot of lights and the policeman told us to stay where we were and not move. There were other white people around doing the same thing but they didn't talk to them. I told them I had the key to my girlfriend's car and that she was OK with it. They searched my boyfriend and me. I asked them why they were doing this and they said they had to search the car. They said someone reported the car was being stolen. I told them that was not true. I was so mad. We were only sitting and talking. I didn't understand why there had to be so many police. – Cindy

Robert described a situation that happened to him off campus he considered racial harassment.

I came across a situation in [a nearby rural area] which is about 15 minutes north of here. The town is known for or described as the KKK capital of [region of the state]. It's not a very cool climate for minorities. I went to eat at a steak house there one time. A guy confronted me in the rest room. I'll just call him ignorant and he asked me what I was doing there. He was just being really stupid. I brushed him off, ate my meal, and left. That's the only experience I have had in four years. Granted, this was my freshman year and yes it did concern me a little.

Warren described an inappropriate situation that occurred in one of his classes involving a course study guide comment. The African American student group, which he

was a member, dealt with the issue by filing a complaint:

Last year with the [African American campus organization], dealt with an issue. There is a History class here at [name of college]. There was a discussion guide about Africa with a quote from a former [name of college] student that stated 'African Americans and Africa have not contributed anything to the prosperity of the U.S.' This was a quote at the very beginning of the study guide. The student organization exploited that quote for what it was...it was real misleading. When a student reads that, it is very misleading. We proposed another study guide. We kind of got shafted a little on the side. But, the quote is not in the study guide anymore. So, we were successful in that fact. We try to target the subconscious things like the situation I just described. When you read the quote you get misled. Automatically if that is the first thing you read about Africa and African Americans, then you will think that neither of them contributed to the prosperity of this nation. You know we just tried to rearrange things to make them positive....like the other study guides.

Simone felt that the students on her campus thought racism did not exist and was not something they wanted to discuss.

We had a forum to talk about racism. The thing is that people think racism doesn't exist. I try to get people to talk about it. I think white people feel if they get into a forum with black students that all they'll do is bitch and complain. That's not what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to have some dialogue. There is so much close mindedness. I think people want everything to be happy and jolly. They think that race issues are what happen in Jasper, Texas. That's what happens in Colorado....that won't happen here and it won't happen to me. But I think you need to be prepared for it or be aware of it I should say.

Other students had different opinions concerning race issues. Voline had a different approach when dealing with comments or situations that could be considered racial. Her parents told her, "do not blame white people for everything that happens to you, you make it or break it. If it is direct racism you will know." John did not really perceive any of his experiences as racial harassment or discrimination, but as the reality of a small environment:

I'm a pretty big guy and I think most of the students are pretty intimidated by me. I don't feel I have experienced any racial discrimination. People here are actually very nice. It's just the small environment; it's not that diverse. A person that is

looking for diversity would not be happy here. I would prefer diversity. But it was more important for me to graduate than to look for diversity or sit around sad because it's not diverse. So, I just adjusted to the situation I have.

Similarly, Lauren believed students had to take responsibility for their behavior and consider the environment in which they lived.

From what I know of my friends now, the ones who have been here - they act so persecuted. And I don't know if it's really true; a lot of them claim that they are harassed by the police. Which could be true but I don't know. I have to say to myself...you know where you live....you don't do stupid stuff...you do things to protect yourself. You're out driving around at 12 midnight....what do you think is going to happen? [Laugh] I'm mature enough that you can't draw attention to yourself. Be home and do what you're supposed to be doing. You can't put yourself in those situations and not expect to be harassed.

Grace attributed comments that could be considered racial to ignorance of the person not being familiar with other cultures. She described a situation as an illustration:

I would have to say most of the people here are not racist. It's more on their part....ignorance....just not being exposed to or not being corrected. My freshman year I was basketball manager for the women's team. We were at a game sitting on the bench trying to point out a black player's parents in the crowd. One of the black girls said 'you can see them, they're the only black people sitting over there' and a white player said 'oh, you mean the colored people'. It through me for a loop and for a split second I was mad. It took me walking away from her and thinking about it. I went back to her and said 'that's not who we are, we're black, we're not colored'. She said 'well, I didn't know'. She apologized and said she was from this area and that's just what people normally say. I understood and I told her that she might want to educate her friends and herself because that is not acceptable. I think comments like the one she made come from ignorance. I wouldn't say they are racist comments. I would just say that they are ignorant due to not being around black people. Just like I have not been around white people a great deal. I try not to look at everything that comes to me (especially on this campus from this group of people) as racist.

Although Robert had experienced a racial incident off campus, he had not experienced any type of racial incident on campus. He described a positive environment at his institution:

I haven't run into anything else on or off campus. I think you will hear from our minority students that you don't see discrimination on our campus: academically or socially. It just doesn't happen. A lot of the folks here are big on accepting people for who they are and how they are. Meeting folks where they are and helping them out is what most people try to do. Decisions made by faculty and staffs are not motivated by race, or popularity, or by being an athlete or non-athlete. It just doesn't come up. I've never experienced it. I've never heard of it from anyone else in the four years I've been here. I think that says a lot by not hearing about it or experiencing it at all. It's a safe environment.

Theme: Perceived Obstacles to Persistence

All the students were asked if they experienced anything they considered an "obstacle" to their persistence in college. The area of academics was the most often cited obstacle with nine students responding. Vanessa described how a perceived obstacle turned into a motivator for persistence during her freshman year.

When I was freshman, I wanted to give up on myself. I was just out of high school and used to getting A's. I come here and get a C or a B- and it really brought my self-esteem down. I wanted to get out of here and not return. My mother told me I could stick it out. I stayed with it and the next semester I started getting A's and I brought my GPA up. It was OK until I got to the last semester of my sophomore year. I got the worst grade ever, a 'D'. I was at an all time low and I thought that was it for me. I called my parents and they told me that it was my one time to experience failure and now that I've experienced it I can move beyond it and do better. So, even though I wanted to quit and give up they told me they were not mad or disappointed. That did something to me. It made me think that if my parents were not giving up on me why should I give up on me. So I knew I needed to nip things in the bud and do what I was supposed to do.

Three students cited finances as a potential obstacle to their persistence. Warren said about his struggle to pay for his education, "I spent a lot of time here trying to figure out a way to get through this expensive school. I've gone in debt." Although Debra had mentioned other factors that were an obstacle for her in college, personal discouragement was a major frustration for her.

College has not become any easier for me to deal with because attitudes haven't changed. I have been here for four years and it hasn't gotten any better. I would

feel so much better....I would smile everyday...if I could just see little things happen. I know things don't happen over night but I didn't think it would take four years. We have all these forums and stuff...talking about race relations and how we can make things better. It's like preaching to the choir. There are students who genuinely want to see things change...but there is nothing happening. Nothing is happening. That's what makes it hard.

According to Grace, Jean, and James, their college experience has not consisted of obstacles. James expressed that dealing with the experiences and demands of college was his responsibility; it was up to him to succeed.

It was pretty much on me. I've had the opportunities given to me to succeed. If I don't succeed, it's my fault. I wasn't born poor. I wasn't born without a Father. If I didn't have that background then I would probably have obstacles. No, I have no excuse not to get my degree.

Theme: Disappointments

As part of the first interview question, the students were asked to talk about the "most disappointing" aspect of their college experience. For Kris, the most disappointing factor was the college's regulations:

The most disappointing thing has been some of the rules they have here. We're in college but it feels like we're in high school almost. Because it's a small school there are rules here that larger schools don't have. It doesn't give you the same feeling; it doesn't feel like college, it feels like high school. One example is that we're not free to come and go as we please. We have to sign in at the front desk before they close the building. The front doors are closed at midnight. If you come afterwards you have to have someone let you in. You go to a big school and you can come and go as you please.

Jean also reported her most disappointing college experience was with the administration. Although thankful for various opportunities the college provided, she too was frustrated with the rules and regulations at her college, which she felt were too restrictive.

Other students shared comments on the most disappointing aspect of their college experience. For Lauren and Patrick, the financial needs and cost of tuition was the most

disappointing. Lauren said, "It's like the freshmen and sophomores get all the money and it's pulled away from juniors and seniors." Liz mentioned the deteriorating condition of campus buildings as the most disappointing, especially the residence halls. Shequita was disappointed with the overall atmosphere on her college campus. She outlined her frustrations below:

There wasn't a large community of minorities on campus...there wasn't that big welcome wagon that was described...at least not from the African American perspective. In terms of white students, they were willing to accept us - both the professors and the students. I'm closer to them than I am many of the African Americans. Some people are not going to be your friend.....they tolerate you because they don't want to look mean but you know that when you leave here you're not going to talk to them again. These people are not going to be in your wedding or be god-parents to your child. That's the saddest thing - I'm going to leave here without fostering, at least with my peers, a friendship that will last an eternity. I'm jealous because I hear friends at home talk about their friends (both black and white) who have been home with them or have been on trips with them or that will come and visit them. I don't have that and that's the saddest thing for me. I think college is suppose be for education but you also build lifelong friendships and I haven't done that.

For Warren, the most disappointing college experience was "hard to explain" but was something he believed "manufactured tension between different ethnic groups."

There are a lot of people here at [name of college] that have never been around black people. I mean literally....they come from an area with no black people. They get here and it's a new thing for them. They don't know how to react....it's not that they don't know how to react but they act in a different way than society would have you to react and sometimes it's offensive. I'm not saying they do it on purpose but it does become offensive at times. It's like I always felt like [name of college] would be a place that would be a leader in relationships between black and white but it's really the opposite. It's kind of behind. It's like in [my hometown] there are problems between people but they get along OK. But here it's a little more tense.

Involvement

Involvement in campus activities was a significant issue in most of the student interviews. College students have the opportunity to be involved in various campus

organizations, student activities and athletics. This section will discuss the themes surrounding various activities and organizations student participants were involved in at their respective institution. This section will also discuss how these activities have been a positive influence in the lives of the students interviewed. Students who had less than desirable experiences with campus involvement will be mentioned as well. Some general comments concerning student involvement will be shared first.

Appendix R lists each student and the activities he/she was involved in while attending her/his present institution. The 24 students participated in 91 activities. Of these 91 activities, female students participated in 52 different activities (57%) and males participated in 39 different activities (43%). The average number of activities students were involved in was 2.7. The most popular activities were as follows: social organizations (15 or 63%), music or choral group (15 or 63%), academic club (12 or 50%), and athletics (11 or 46%).

It is interesting to note some of the comments students made about their various types of campus involvement. A number of the students were in some type of choir on their campus. Lauren said participating in the choir had helped her be well rounded. Patrick said his campus choir helped send a message of unity when they went out into the community:

In the choir we have black students, white students, Asian students; we have a diverse culture. It's just a group of believers from no matter what race you are. We try to prove that God can use you. We come together and when people see our choir and see our name they see we live up to our name.

Warren had been involved in several campus organizations but his involvement in the community service organization was especially meaningful. Through his

involvement, he had the opportunity to go abroad for a semester and teach. He said the experience gave him "a whole new perspective on the U.S." Debra also had a positive experience with her community service organization:

The [Community Service Organization] has helped me. They are the reason I'm here. I think they are one of the most genuine groups on campus. They actually want to sit down and talk to me - to ask me how my week is going. They ask if they can help me in any way. My grandfather passed away when I was a sophomore. One of the [Organization] coordinators drove my sister and me home. I didn't even have to ask. They're so sincere. They didn't have to do that. They paid for all the gas and the food. I really enjoy the program.

This comment was particularly relevant for Debra, because she had many other experiences at the college that were not as positive. This was a prime example of the impact of student involvement.

There were various perspectives when it came to the issue of involvement. Chris, who grew up in a large city, found it took some adapting once he came to a small college and a small town but once he was involved in campus activities his perspective changed: "I can have fun here but a different kind of fun than what I would have in a larger city." Liz had a little different perspective than the other students. Three of the students in this study were parents. However, Liz was the only single parent. Prior to being a mother, Liz was involved in various activities. After her child was born, Liz juggled parenting, classes, homework and work. Therefore, little time was left for extracurricular activities. Robert found that involvement had more of a reciprocal effect: "you can be involved and not get to know people. It calls for a willingness to tear down walls to let others in. It has to be reciprocal; which some students aren't willing to do."

Some students stood out in their leadership efforts and the responsibilities they were entrusted with while in college. Three of the students interviewed fit this

description. William said being involved as a leader in the peer mentor program at his institution was an encouragement and had helped him with maturity and social skills. William was also entrusted with other responsibilities. As an undergraduate, William served as a Resident Director in charge of an entire residence hall. He was also an assistant coach on the football team. The responsibility that stood out the most was William's opportunity to teach an undergraduate course.

I'm also a Math Preceptor here. Me and another guy teach Basic Math. The course is set up for those who take the placement test and aren't ready for college algebra. So it's basically all freshmen. The professors choose someone they feel confident in that can teach the class. This has helped me develop my teaching skills here. It gives me a chance to communicate and at the same time gain respect from my peers. It's different than teaching elementary. It's difficult for someone on the college level to look at another person on the college level as their teacher. This is also a good resume' builder. It looks good when the chair of the math department pulls you out to teach a class. That's an honor to me. It's also a good example to other students to see you doing this. They say if he can do it so can I.

Robert was another student who stood out with the responsibilities that were entrusted to him. He was the Resident Assistant in an all freshman building, where he was one of two seniors. Robert also worked, in conjunction with a faculty member, with the Peer Mentor program at his college. He said, "I work with freshman in the classroom. I went through the class as a freshman and then turned around and applied to be a leader." Warren also had a unique responsibility in serving on an inter-cultural task force created by the President of the college.

Theme: Activities with Little Appeal

When discussing the issue of student activities with African American students who attended a predominantly white campus, several issues came up. One issue that came up a few times was the perception that there was little to do for African Americans

on campus. Jean provided an example of how African American students felt when it came to campus activities:

Socially, there is not much to do. You have to make your own social life like going to ball games and such. I would say there is not a lot to do here, especially for black students because it is a predominantly white college and most of the activities are geared towards what white students prefer. There is not much representation among the black students here, which causes some problems among the black students, but because I'm from here I'm used to it in some ways.

Approximately 13 students, or 54% (five males and eight females), made some type of comment that they were displeased with the lack of activities on their campus for African American students. Vanessa said she "would like to see more cultural activities – not just centered around African Americans but all cultures represented on campus." John said about the lack of activities, "We need more activities for African Americans besides the one social organization. We don't have things we can get involved with and have fun." Liz said the only campus activities African Americans seem to be interested in were sports related. Charles said, "After my athletic season is over there is not much here I like to do." Lauren, Simone, and Cindy all felt that while there was a lack of activities for African Americans, it was especially true for African American females.

According to a few of the students, some African Americans on their campus were not as likely to get involved in campus activities and might need some encouragement to do so. Chris said, "African Americans should get involved on campus and not transfer because they feel there is nothing for them to get involved in; being involved on campus is what kept me here." James believed African Americans should become more involved with Student Government Association:

The type of things they [Campus Activities Board] do I'm not interested in. I don't think they mean to isolate me. I think it's more that they don't know that I

wouldn't be interested in the activities they do. They are not appealing to me. I think it's partly our fault. A lot of the African Americans at [name of college] don't get involved with the school. We have no members of SGA that are African American so they don't here our point of view. I think that could be fixed if the African Americans students would get involved honestly. But it's hard when I don't have that much time to get involved.

Several of the students who were interviewed were or had been a part of their campus activities board. Charles said he was asked to be on the board to encourage African American students to campus events. Vanessa said it gave her the opportunity to "associate with white students." David felt his role for being on the activities board was to give an African American perspective for campus events.

Most minorities don't get involved in things like the Campus Activities Board because they feel there is nothing offered for them. So, I try to give an African American's perspective on what type of activities they should have. I have just tried to get some new flavor in the group.

Theme: Athletics

For the students in this study, involvement in intercollegiate athletics was a significant part of their college experience. Of the 24 students interviewed, 11 students (46%) had participated in intercollegiate athletics sometime during their college experience. At the time of the interview, nine students (38%) were intercollegiate athletes; seven were males and two were females.

David reported that participating in intercollegiate athletics helped him across the board in his college experience:

Sports have helped me persist in college. I have had to learning to maintain self-discipline not only on the practice field but also in the classroom. You have to be really dedicated on the field. But in order to be dedicated on the field you have to do your class work as well. So, it's sort of like if you want to play you have to get your work done.

Kris reported that being involved in athletics helped him to make friends. He commented

on what he thought it would be like, for an African American at his college, who did not play a sport:

I guess another thing you were asking about with the black students who don't play sports - I look at it like if I didn't play sports it would be hard just to walk up and make friends. It's more like you have to be put in a position to make friends; you don't just walk up and introduce yourself. At least I'm not that way. I'm in a position [through sports] to meet people and become friends. So, if I didn't play sports it would be hard for me to just join in a group.

Similarly John shared, "It would be tough for me, without athletics, I don't think I would fit in as well. I don't think I would have as many friends; I'm around my teammates a lot." According to Marlene, athletics enabled her to get acclimated to campus, "My first month was fun. I was here as an athlete two weeks before school started so by the time everyone else got here, I already knew where to go."

The majority of students who were athletes agreed that athletics was a major factor in their persistence. Discipline and involvement were two major characteristics nurtured through athletics. Nichelle cited athletics as a major factor that enabled her to persist in college:

Even though it [athletics] is time consuming, it teaches you discipline and that is something I was lacking. When I left my junior college I was like 'I'll get it done when I get it done'. I have learned to manage my time better now. But you also have to keep your grades up because if you don't, you don't get to play.

Conversely, a few of the student athletes admitted that although athletics helped them persist, they had little time for anything else. Nichelle said athletics took up so much time "other activities are not possible." James said that participating in intercollegiate athletics made it tough to get his course work done during the season.

Theme: African American Social Organization

Three of the four institutions participating in the study have an African American

social organization on their campus. These organizations were not national or local fraternities or sororities but social organizations established by students. For reasons of confidentiality, the names of these organizations will not be noted because of their distinct titles. Therefore, they are simply referred to as "African American social organization". A number of students were members of these social organizations. Sixty-three percent (15 of the 24 total student interviewees) participated in the African American social organization on their campus. It is important to note that of the three institutions that did have an African American social organization, 83% (15 of the 18 student participants from these three institutions) were involved in these organizations. Of these 15 students, six were males and nine were females.

Chris reported that the African American organization on his campus was set up "not to separate us [African Americans] but just something for us to have; we plan activities for all students." Warren noted that the organization for which he was involved was also active off campus with the local high school students and the community.

We have always done things in the community. We try to go out and help teenagers in the local community. Our latest project that is coming out this year is a program called [name of program]. We will go into the high schools and talk to African American students about going to college. Around here everything is real enclosed. You can really get lost. There is not a lot of ethnicity. There are not a lot of opportunities for Blacks, Latinos and Orientals; for people of ethnicity. We will try to go into the high schools and talk to the students to open their eyes a little bit. We're just trying to tell them that the things they are going through now, we as college students have just gone through those same experiences.

As mentioned earlier, one of the four participating institutions did not have an African American organization at the time of the interviews. Six students from this particular institution participated in the interview process. Of those six students, three commented that some type of organization for African American students should be

added. Kris said, "I think if they started something like that they could get more black students here." Although Nichelle was active in campus ministries at her institution, she said it would have been nice to have an organization for African American students.

It would be good to have a group that wasn't religiously based; where you could be real - like a multi-culture group. That way the internationals could be involved and they wouldn't feel like they were being left out. I know some go to FCA and stuff. We had a black speaker come in one time. Just having events like this will attract black students to attend, if they're not already involved. I went to this event, saw a lot of African American students, and didn't think I would.

Jean, who attended the same campus as Kris and Nichelle, also thought some type of organization for African Americans to participate in should be established.

I would like to see BSF (Black Student Fellowship) started up again and taken seriously. It should be as important as [name of campus ministry] or any of the other programs. I think they have an organization for internationals and they should have one for the African Americans. The administration should get more involved with the fact that there is nothing like that here for any student really.

A few of the students mentioned the addition of black fraternities and sororities as a need on their campus. On Cindy's campus, there were national fraternities and sororities. However, her observations were that these existing organizations did not have an accepting environment for African Americans. Lauren, who attended the same campus as Cindy, felt that a black national sorority would help "keep females bonded, increase self-esteem and provide a good support system." Lauren said the African Americans at her institution believed they did not fit in with the present sororities because "they are not very accepting of blacks." William, who attended the same institution, thought there was some tension between the African American students and fraternities and sororities. He also concurred that a black fraternity and sorority was needed. Voline, who attended the college that did not have an African American social organization,

thought her college should consider fraternities and sororities because it would be an improvement to campus life.

Debra and Jamar attended the same institution and both remarked that their college should consider adding black fraternities and sororities. Debra had the following to say about the administration at her college not allowing these organizations:

The administration won't let us have a national fraternity or sorority. They say it has to be service first then social in terms of organization. Since the organizations we would like to have on campus are not service first then they won't let us have them. Plus they don't want to knock their traditional fraternities or sororities - which there may be one black person in them altogether. I think there are two black girls in the local sororities here. Nationals would take the attention and the focus from the local organizations and would take prospective students from the local chapters. So not only are the students against it but also the Trustees.

Personal Examples of Persistence Factors

This section examines the persistence factors African American students reported as being an influence during their college experience. While the entire study focuses on persistence of African American students at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges, this particular theme highlights those factors students reported as being key elements to their success as they persisted towards graduation. These factors were the result of student's direct response to the second interview question: "What factors have enabled you to succeed and/or persist the past two or three years at [name of college]?"

Theme: Earning a College Degree

According to the students, one factor that led them to persistence was earning a college degree. Specifically, the educational reputation of the college they attended and/or the satisfaction and experience of the degree they were to receive was a persistence factor for some students. Five students (21%) mentioned this area as a

persistence factor. Jean had this to say about her perception of why African American students remain at a small, predominantly white liberal arts college.

I have seen several African Americans leave this campus, especially the football players. They may stay the first semester but leave the second semester for the simple fact that the area or the college is not big enough. For the most part, the people I know stay for the simple fact that they know it's going to be a good education and they know that simply having [name of college] on your degree adds to your prestige and how good of an education you have.

In response to what enabled Chris to persist in college he said "the new things I've learned...like I'm a business major and there is a lot of stuff I've learned with my classes...it's been incredible." He added "I have a different mindset as opposed to my freshman year." One of the persistence factors for Simone was her service learning experience. She said she "has been touched by the people I work with. I work with the elderly and learned things I couldn't learn from a book. It has made me reconsider some of my goals in life." Warren stated, "obtaining knowledge through reading and searching for truth in life has helped" with his persistence. Liz admitted the thing that helped her persist was simply "to graduate – that's my biggest factor right now." She added, "I also believe in that in the next few years a high school diploma is not going to be worth anything. You're going to need a college degree to even get a job at McDonald's. That also pushes me."

Theme: Internal Motivation

Internal motivation was another persistence factor reported during the student interviews. Simply put, internal motivation is a gut level determination to finish college, no matter what happens. Nine students (38%) mentioned internal motivation in some manner. Along with wanting "a good life", Liz had an internal motivation of wanting to

provide for herself and not depend on someone else: "The reason I came in the first place is that society has changed. Women don't stay at home, they get out and work."

John's internal motivation consisted of "buckling down and studying." He said, "I spent more time on work and focused on what I had to do; I paid more attention. I saw my grades get worse. I knew I had to do something to recover that." Simone said "inner strength" has helped her succeed in college.

I think it's the motivation to be somebody. The motivation to know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel; that I can go out into the business world and be a success. Even though my experience was not what I thought it would be, the degree I've earned is a lifelong step. The degree will help me get a better job and get into graduate school. For me that light at the end of the tunnel keeps me going. I know that I will get that piece of paper and that it will take me so many places that I would have never gone if I would have quit my second or third year. That's what keeps me going.

For Shequita, the internal motivation was simply "the drive to get out of here." Jamar said, "My desire not to quit has helped a lot. No matter how hard my major has gotten, I can't quit no matter what happens; I refuse to quit."

For Robert, internal motivation was "buckling down and taking responsibility."

He explained the awakening he received his first of college:

A lot of my persistence came from just buckling down and being responsible. I really don't know where this came from. I think it was some epiphany I came to in the middle of my first semester. It was like 'hey I'm the one running the show here - this is weird. I've got to do some work.' And it didn't rest on anybody's shoulders but mine. I think a lot of it came to me when I realized that I was going to be paying back for some of this education.

For Vanessa, the internal motivation consisted of receiving what she thought was a bad grade. Vanessa described her first semester below:

There was a time when I got a 'C' and I didn't know what to do. What kept me from leaving was just the fact that I had to make it here. I just had to make it. I saw what I was up against and I just had to make it. I didn't want to be one of

those people who was indecisive and jumped from one school to another and didn't know what they wanted to do. I had to stop having a pity party.... and wake up and smell the coffee.....because play time is over. [Laugh]

Similarly, James found his internal motivation through setting goals for himself: "That is the most important thing that has helped me persist. Like the goal I have is to study everyday for two hours even if I don't have homework." Debra's internal motivation was that she had some idea of what she wanted to do when she graduated college. Although she had not narrowed it down to a certain level [at the time of the interview], she desired to teach and to help other African Americans go to college.

Theme: Faith

For at least seven of the student interviewees (29%), the element of faith or inner strength made a difference in their college persistence. According to Vanessa, her spirituality was the number one factor that enabled her to persist in college:

Number one would be my spirituality. It would have to be God to keep me going; especially here, not just at [name of college], but in [region of the country]. If it wasn't for God I would have left a long time ago. I just figured, and most of the people I know feel the same way, that if you can make it here you can make it anywhere - period.

Similarly, Voline responded about what enabled her to persist in college, "God and God alone; there is nothing else." She added, "I learned how to 'be still and know that He is God' in every situation." According to Patrick and Grace, a lot of praying helped them persist in college. Finally, Jamar said, "I think these last two years, faith has gotten me through a lot; a whole lot."

Theme: Positive Attitude

A positive student attitude was mentioned as a persistence factor by ten (42%) of the students. Jamar had the following to say about his attitude concerning college life.

When I get stressed about anything: football, class work, life, what I will do when I graduate; I will just stop everything and move on to something else. I just leave it up to God. I don't get stressed out about anything; life is too short. If I get stressed about it, I'll stop and leave it alone for 30 minutes or a day and come back to it. That is why 1999 has been such a great year. I think my faith has really started to pick up again.

Attitude was also a main persistence factor for Warren.

I acknowledge the things that exist around me but I've always been able to progress through that and see the light at the end of the tunnel. I think just being myself is really what helped me to get through; just being myself.

Simone's attitude towards being accepted was a factor in her persistence in college. She said, "I feel I'm appreciated because I push myself to be appreciated; to do things like participate in class discussions." Debra also remarked, "At graduation, I'm not going to cry because I'll miss [name of college], I will cry because I made it to graduation and I didn't leave." Similarly, Vanessa's attitude was to prove a point when she graduated:

If you can make it here with all the prejudices you have against you and especially being a minority female on this campus - that is two strikes against me right there. When I walk across the stage and get that diploma I will shut people's mouths. They will say 'hey she made it'. I will be able to go just about anywhere and shut people's mouths and say look 'I got my degree, what are you doing?'

As stated earlier, the theme of *Persistence Factors* consisted of items related to the second interview question "What factors have enabled you to succeed and/or persist the past two or three years at [name of college]?" and other persistence factors mentioned throughout the student interviews. Table 4 will highlight the factors mentioned by students that contributed to their persistence in college. This table will list each persistence factor with definitions taken from the student interviews. The frequency and percentage of each persistence factor will be highlighted according to gender with an overall result. The overall rankings of persistence factors will be highlighted in Table 5.

Table 4
Student Interviewee Persistence Factors
(Alphabetical list with descriptors)

Persistence Factor (Terms are defined by student comments)	Freq. Males (n=11)	%	Freq. Females (n=13)	%	Total Freq. (n=24)	%
Administration – administrators; Coaches; various departments on campus (Student Affairs, Financial Aid, Business Office, etc.)	0	0	4	31%	4	17%
Attitude – positive; not allowing self to get stressed out; seeing light at the end of tunnel; putting things in perspective; realizing things aren't that bad; knowing I didn't quit	3	27%	7	54%	10	42%
Campus Responsibility – Peer Mentor; Residence Life job; work study position; the people I work with are like family, they help me; my job helps with finances; knowing I'm helping pay for school	1	9%	3	23%	4	17%
College Degree – knowing I'll get a good education; prestige; learning; service learning experience; desire to graduate	2	18%	3	23%	5	21%
College Environment – helps me be more open-minded; attending a predominantly white college helps me be prepared for the workforce	1	9%	2	15%	3	13%
Faith/Inner Strength – faith in God; spirituality; praying	2	18%	4	31%	6	25%

Table 4 (Continued)
Student Interviewee Persistence Factors
(Alphabetical list with descriptors)

Persistence Factor (Terms are defined by student comments)	Freq. Males (n=11)	%	Freq. Females (n=13)	%	Total Freq. (n=24)	%
Family – want to provide for my child (3 students); want to help my parents out; seeing how proud my parents are and how pleased they are with my grades; parents have encouraged me; has never given up on me; would let them down if I didn't finish; church family at home	3	27%	8	62%	11	46%
Freshman Seminar – this class was a good introduction to college; it helped me understand the environment	2	18%	0	0	2	8%
Friends – we suffer through the same things; study together; same classes; support each other; same major; has been an example to keep going; pushes me to do better; stands by me; lean on each other; has confidence in me;	4	36%	5	38%	9	38%
Internal Motivation – gut level determination; wants a good life; buckle down and study; inner strength; desire not to quit; taking responsibility; goals; direction	4	36%	4	31%	8	33%
Involvement – getting involved in campus activities; athletics; music groups; African American social organizations; campus ministries; helps learn time management; opportunity to better myself	7	64%	5	38%	12	50%

Table 4 (Continued)
Student Interviewee Persistence Factors
(Alphabetical list with descriptors)

Persistence Factor (Terms are defined by student comments)	Freq. Males (n=11)	%	Freq. Females (n=13)	%	Total Freq. (n=24)	%
Mattering – what I do matters; sense of appreciation; knowing I have touched people's lives and made an impact	2	18%	1	8%	3	13%
Professors – care enough to get on my case; wants me to do better or do my best; won't let you lose focus; motivated me to persist; has taken time for me; willing to help; influential; caring; given me confidence; understanding; I have gotten to know them; they explain their decisions when asked; my advisor has been a big help	8	73%	9	69%	17	71%
Residence Halls – community; camaraderie; roommate was a positive influence	1	9%	1	8%	2	8%
Small College – few distractions; nothing to do so you study; small classes; more time to study here; people work together; I wouldn't have made it at a larger school	2	18%	1	8%	3	13%
Student Services – available; helps those who would normally not make it here; family atmosphere; writing center helps me; good referral service; seminars; study halls for athletes; students who work there are helpful	4	36%	5	38%	8	33%

Table 5
Student Interviewee Persistence Factors
(Rank Order According to Frequency – All Students)

Rank	Persistence Factor	Freq. Males (n=11)	%	Freq. Females (n=13)	%	Total Freq. (n=24)	%
1	Professors	8	73%	9	69%	17	71%
2	Involvement	7	64%	5	38%	12	50%
3	Family	3	27%	8	62%	11	46%
4	Attitude	3	27%	7	54%	10	42%
5	Friends	4	36%	5	38%	9	38%
6	Internal Motivation	4	36%	4	31%	8	33%
	Student Services	4	36%	5	38%	8	33%
8	Faith/Inner Strength	2	18%	4	31%	6	25%
9	College Degree	2	18%	3	23%	5	21%
10	Administration	0	0	4	31%	4	17%
	Campus Responsibility	1	9%	3	23%	4	17%
12	College Environment	1	9%	2	15%	3	13%
	Small College	2	18%	1	8%	3	13%
	Mattering	2	18%	1	8%	3	13%
15	Freshman Seminar	2	18%	0	0	2	8%
	Residence Halls	1	9%	1	8%	2	8%

Output

Output refers to the student's characteristics after exposure to the environment (Astin, 1993).

Various Themes

This section will examine the various characteristics displayed by the student at the time of the interview. While the students had not graduated at the time of the interview, the data in this section were considered as elements of output because they were persisting to graduation.

Theme: Mattering

The African American students' perception of themselves was a significant part

of the interview process. The term 'mattering' was chosen as a guiding principal here. The term 'mattering' was coined by Cujet (1998) and was discussed in the Review of Literature (Chapter Two). The basic premise is students feel they matter when they feel they are important to the institution or when they are appreciated in some way. William provided an applicable definition of 'mattering' as it related to students in general.

As a student you always want to feel appreciated. If you put a lot of work into it, praise is so important. The student is not looking any awards; they're just looking for a 'Good Job', 'Thank you doing what you're doing'. If the students sense this appreciation that inspires us to want to do something else and even get more students involved in the process. That's all they're looking for is a little appreciation...a little 'thank you'.

Simmone also described the issue of 'mattering' as it related to her college experience:

I think I have touched people's lives here at [name of college]. I think I will be remembered by something I said or just by being myself. I feel I have made an impact on the ladies in [an office on campus].

For William, knowing that he was appreciated made him want to do even more.

William had several responsibilities on campus such as: serving as a Resident Assistant, teaching developmental math, and participating in the college's peer mentor program.

It makes you feel good on Parent Day when a student pulls you aside and says this is my math teacher. It makes you feel good to be considered in this way. 'Mom and Dad this is my Resident Director and I would like for you to meet him.' 'Mom this is my peer mentor.' It makes you feel a sense of appreciation and that's been great. If you're appreciated that's a big help. Those three things have helped me feel appreciated. It gives you a warm feeling inside and makes you strive to want to do more as a person.

Kris also felt that he mattered to his college community:

Two weeks ago I won the Homecoming King. All the support from everyone was great; a lot of people around campus told me they voted for me. It meant a lot to have people appreciating me and me appreciating them.

Theme: Good Preparation For Work World

Several of the students felt their college experience at a small predominantly white college was actually a good preparation for them as they entered the workforce. Grace said that she has learned to put everything in perspective. She mentioned, "What I learn here will prepare me and equip me for life in the world, the workforce, and the community." In discussing her persistence, she commented:

I would definitely say having the attitude 'that everything I go through will have a purpose one day' has influenced my persistence. That everything I go through is equipping me to deal with these same type of people in the workforce. I'm a strong believer that the people I come in contact with here at [college] will be the same type of people I deal with as co-workers and neighbors.

Voline's college experience was positive in many ways. She described not only the academic and social aspect of college but also the opportunities she had to grow spiritually.

It has been unique experience - just really getting a broader focus on my faith in God and ministering to different people. Also, I've learned how to survive in the real world. I think that's what college prepares you for. The academic major just shows that you can put money and food on the table. But how you deal with everyday situations is going to determine how you will make it in the real world. I like the things that have come up in my life. It's made me stronger. It has help strengthen my faith in God to the strongest it's been up to this point in my life.

Overall, Warren's college experience was also positive. He felt as though his time in college prepared him for 'the real world'.

It's been a real positive experience. I've been able to find myself as far as who I am; the things I strive for everyday. I've been able to...you know just elevate my life I guess you could say...to make the transition from teenager to a man. I learned to deal with people. I've learned how to deal with all types of people. There are people here who have never experienced being around African Americans. All in all, my experience has been positive for the simple fact that it has made me the person I am today.

Grace said that coming to a predominantly white college was just what she needed in her college experience. She wanted to learn how to relate with white people.

My thing is that I know that this is not an all black world I live in by no means. And I know that I need to learn how to carry myself around people who are not of my culture (white people, Asian people, etc.). I wanted to come here because it is small and I wanted to come to a small school. I saw the population and I wanted to go somewhere where I could learn white people - if you want to put it like that. I don't have a fancy word to say it - but I didn't know white people. I never had a white friend. My mother worked with white people but as far as sitting down and having a conversation with a white person; it never happened until I came here. I like that. Now this has equipped me with something else when I go out and look for a job. I can carry myself around all different types of people not just one type of person. I think that is important.

David also commented on how his college experience was instrumental to prepare him for the future by helping him learn how to adapt to various situations.

Theme: Academic Preparation ('Ah Ha' Moments)

Academic 'Ah Ha' moments are those moments when the light comes on for students regarding the curriculum they have studied. Whether general education requirements or classes within the academic major these experiences are one of the goals of higher education. This goal can be accomplished by seeing the connection between various academic disciplines or the ability to apply lessons from the classroom to practical situations. Vanessa acknowledged that her core classes not only met her needs but also helped her be more open minded and also a better leader. Patrick also felt that the curriculum at his institution met his needs:

Here at [the college], we have to take some of everything. At first I didn't understand why I had to take Humanities as Music major. But when I started taking my entry level music classes (like Music History) I began to see how classes tie together; how all classes tie together. It's like everything ties together.

Jamar and Debra described how certain classes made a significant impact on their college experience. Jamar shared his experience as follows:

It was rough my freshman year. I didn't want to be here at all. It was really persistent my whole freshman year and part of the way into my sophomore year. I had a speech class last year and it made me look within myself. I also had a Christian and Social Ethics class. Those two classes made me look within to where if I talk about things it gets better as opposed to just keeping it inside. I got most of the stuff out through eidetic and motivational speeches we had to give.

Theme: Social 'Ah Ha' Moments

Similar to 'Academic Ah Ha Moments' are those co-curricular moments when the student sees a connection and importance in how her/his college experience applies to her/his life in general. Both Liz and Nichelle described their college experience as "new"; something that was incredibly different for them. Liz had never had white friends before coming to college. She said now "she has more white friends than black friends." Nichelle described her situation of being the only black female on her athletic team and how associating with her teammates changed her perspective.

Actually a lot of white students have changed my opinion of white people. When I got here and had to associate with white students and being the only black student on the basketball team and not knowing any of the black students on campus - a lot of them changed my whole attitude and perspective. They took care of me. I guess the biggest thing is when their parents accepted me as well. Most of the time you don't meet their parents. But here I've talked to some of the student's parents on the phone and they have even done stuff for me. It helped change my attitude; they're not that bad.

In discussing what he thought to be the most enjoyable about his college experience, Warren described a type of self growth: "I was a follower when I got here and now I look at myself as a leader." Jamar also described his college experience as teaching him to look at things through various perspectives.

Being here has taught me to look at things from more than just one dimension. I have seen a lot of different things happen. So, when I go home, I'm not just looking through one perspective but through different perspectives at one time. I've seen a lot more and notice a lot more by going to school here.

Unfortunately, not all students had an 'Ah Ha' moment. Simmone described an opposite experience. She did not feel she had the college experience and that she was closer to her high school friends than she was to her college friends.

In my high school graduating class of 150, there are probably 100 people I keep in contact with. When I leave here just override [name of college] totally. I refer back to high school for my lifelong friends. Yes, I was there in high school longer but I thought when I grew up I would make more friends. I feel closer to the friends in high school than here at [name of college]. Outside of some people I've met in my work-study job and a few professors, there is nobody my age. There is nobody that I could say when I leave here in December that I'm going to pick up the phone and call or write them.

Theme: Resilience

Resilience is defined as "an ability to recover or adjust easily to misfortune or challenge" (Webster, 1988). It was evident for the majority of the 24 students that resilience played a significant part of their college experience. In some cases, the researcher could observe the sheer self-determination in the student that no matter the situation, he/she would move forward. In other cases, it may have been the desire to prove somebody else wrong; someone who did not think the student would persist and graduate. Resilience was chosen as an appropriate descriptor of this characteristic.

Debra had several experiences during her college experience where she did not feel accepted. However, she determined in her mind that she would not quit or allow someone to hinder her college education.

There are a lot of things that have happened....a lot of comments that have been made.....there are a lot of enemies. But, I couldn't quit like I did with cheerleading. Cheerleading comes and goes; it does not pay the bills, so it's not

something I just have to do. But college is going to pay my bills one day. So, there is nothing anybody can say to me. Nobody can say anything to me that will hurt me to the point that I will want to leave or that will make me hate myself. Because I would just have to be disgusted with myself in order to leave here. But I know what I want to do and I have the determination to do it. So, I have just decided to not give anybody the power to take that from me.

Jamar also gave a good example of resilience:

Most of my disappointments were in the first two years because I didn't give the school a chance. Once I realized I was going to be here for four years, I opened up and saw what the school could do for me. Disappointments always seem to work themselves out; you just have to make the best of the situation you're in.

Robert discussed how many African Americans experience "an uncomfortable change" at a predominantly white campus the first month. However, he noted how resilience allows for successful adjustment: "In a sense, by not having a more stable network, it almost pushes you to stay."

As Shequita commented, her motivation and resilience kept her going through the college years:

The biggest drive is knowing that nothing can be worse; it can only go up from here. I don't want to be mean but that's the way it is. This is my almamater and I don't want to feel mean towards the college. It's not that it's been the pits here and that I haven't done anything. I've been places that I probably wouldn't have gone. My classes have allowed me to go to several places. It all goes back to academics. Socially, it's taught me tolerance, patience, and my limitations. A lot of times you go into a situation that is tough and you don't have any control over and you either ride it out or quit and I've chosen to ride it out. I know that this too shall pass...you know what I mean. That's the biggest drive...that I can walk across the stage and get my diploma and say 'I'm getting the hell out of Dodge'. The fact that I know I can get over this hump and have a B.A. from a well respected college. I feel I can get into the university I need for a graduate program. It's been a good preparation. I'm a better person for it.

Similarly, one factor that enabled Simone to persist in college was inner strength, which she described as motivation and knowing there is a light at the end of the tunnel. She believed the education she received prepared her for graduate school and the business

world; this too kept her going. According to Grace, self-determination enabled her to persist in college.

I take everything with a grain of salt and pray about it. Plus I've put too much money in. I've never quit and I've never changed schools in my entire life. I have to keep that record. That President is going to shake my hand and give me a diploma or a certificate of attendance. I've been here too long and I'm determined to get a piece of paper from that man.

Student Suggestions

As part of the 'Output' section, the researcher has listed suggestions as noted by several of the students for the administrators at their respective college. Although there were many suggestions, only a few are mentioned in this section. The first suggestion was in the area of recruiting. Grace suggested that the college bring in more African American students who are non-athletes and more black females. In doing so, she felt the college would attract more black males. Simone suggested that there was too much focus on athletic recruiting at her college:

When the admissions office is recruiting someone they recruit the athlete first then the student. When the student gets here, they play football and that is supposed to be first. It's not fair to the athlete. That's why we have what I call one type of black male. One or two of the black males are just here for academics. In both cases they chose not to play the sport. I think that [the college] will continue to have problems until they realize that African American students or international students are looking for something different in the college experience. At least there is something different that I'm looking for.

Simone also suggested that administrators consider hiring an African American to work within the Admissions Office. Warren said, "We need something that will attract people besides sports. Black people are not attracted to [the college]."

Vanessa suggested that the college be more "up front in their recruiting" practices for African American students. Vanessa commented:

I would suggest when they bring prospective African American students here they tell them it won't be an easy adjustment but that it is possible to make the transition. I suggest they let them talk to an African American student about [the college]. Since I've been a [campus tour guide], I haven't had the opportunity to talk to too many African American students. I think that they need to hear the truth that it won't be easy. Momma is not going to get you out of this one. You have to learn to take responsibility. You just have to learn to adjust because playtime is over.

David, Chris and Voline felt that administrators should listen more to the students.

David described how the administration failed to recognize Martin Luther King Day by not canceling classes. David said, "they [administration] preach a lot of diversity but they fail to show diversity." Voine said, "Once you have gotten your degree from here you are not a student anymore. They should ask the students what they want. The student will benefit not the alumni." William suggested that the administrators attend more campus activities other than sporting events.

Another suggestion mentioned by at least three female students was the consideration of a Minority Affairs Office and the opportunity to offer more minority scholarships. Simone explained how that was one of the first things parents of potential African American students ask when they tour her campus. Grace said, "There needs to be a Minority Affairs Office for all minorities not just for African Americans but Asian students and so on." Debra referred to a Minority Affairs Office as a 'hiding place':

I would like to see a Multi-cultural Center; it doesn't have to be just for black students. I would like to see different displays of art and literature. I would like to see a 'hiding place' for us. Right now our hiding place is in the cafeteria. Our comfort zone right now is the cafeteria....that one section of the cafeteria where I know I will see someone who looks like me. And I know I will talk to somebody who will want to talk to me. The cafeteria is not a hiding place. The school can't build a hiding place just for black students, I wouldn't even propose it.

Chris felt like the faculty could provide more leadership and/or encouragement in getting students involved in the college. Nichelle suggested the faculty include a section on African American issues in the course they are going to teach.

If they [the faculty] could include a segment on African Americans in the curriculum they're going to teach. Then again it's so hard because you don't have a lot of African Americans in class but it could be for the white students as well. I think that is necessary because it would get them out of the mind set that some of them are in. I know you can't change a person's background but you can help reform thoughts.

Summary of Student Interview Results

The purpose of Section Two was to explore the major themes resulting from the interviews with 24 African American juniors and seniors. These students attended small, predominantly white, liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the United States. Students each participated in an hour to one and a half hour interview consisting of six broad questions. Analysis of those interviews resulted in several themes, which can be found in Table 2 presented earlier in this chapter.

These themes were examined in detail by the researcher and discussed in this section. The primary goal of this section was to answer the first research question: "How do African Americans students describe their experiences of being African American at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?" The themes presented the students' experiences with college life and were discussed within the framework of Astin's I-E-O (Input – Environment – Output) Model. The themes also examined various factors students mentioned as helping them persist in college. Overall, the results led to several significant findings and conclusions, which are discussed in Chapter Five.

Section Three: Major Themes from Administrator Interviews

This section will explore the second research question: “What do administrators at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia report that their institutions do to support African American students?” This question was explored through interviews with five college administrators at all four participating institutions. Each administrator was asked three interview questions (see Appendix F).

Administrators were not asked to select a pseudonym and are therefore referred as follows: ADM.1 (Administrator Number One), ADM.2 (Administrator Number Two), ADM.3 (Administrator Number Three), ADM.4 (Administrator Number Four), and ADM.5 (Administrator Number Five). Also, it is important to note that in place of using the terms “he said” or “she said”, the use of he/she or her/his was implemented to maintain confidentiality of gender.

Administrator Themes

During data analysis, the researcher considered the themes that were developing among the administrator interview data. Several themes were developed, which are listed in Table 6. The themes are divided into the following sections: Administration, Faculty, Academics, College Environment, College Experience, Involvement, and Perceived Obstacles to Student Persistence. Themes are discussed in terms of comments shared during the interviews and researcher observation of the interview process.

Administration

This section examined the administrators’ perspective of their respective colleges’ administrators and their impact on African American student experience and persistence.

Table 6
Major Themes from Administrator Interviews

<u>Administration:</u> Going the Extra Mile, Administrators as a Role Model, Heightened Awareness and Sensitivity, Always Room for Improvement, "Growing Your Own"
<u>Faculty:</u> Supportive and Approachable Faculty, More African American Faculty and Administrators
<u>Academics:</u> Courses Relating to African American Issues, Inability to See the Forest for the Trees, Peer Mentor Program
<u>College Environment:</u> Individual Approach, Community Among Minorities, African American Student Enrollment, Local Community
<u>College Experience:</u> Male/Female Relationships, Administrator Perception on Student Acceptance, Culture Shock, Minority Among Minorities, Token Black Person, White System, Student Attitude, Negative Social Integration
<u>Involvement:</u> African American Social Organization, Athletics, Lack of Leadership Desire, Activities with Little Appeal
<u>Perceived Obstacles to Student Persistence</u>

Theme: Going the Extra Mile

All five administrators were generally positive about the African American students on their campuses. According to ADM.1, her/his institution had made good strides in their efforts to assist African American students. Specifically, ADM.1 said the housing department made a concerted effort to recruit African American students as Resident Assistants in order to be more diverse. Furthermore, according to ADM.1, "Many of the black students here are athletes and one thing the campus does well is to help them remain as a student if they don't make it as an athlete." ADM.1 continued with an example of how administrators, at her/his institution, 'go the extra mile' in working with students:

One of the football coaches is the type of person, along with the head coach, who if a player is having trouble they will go to the residence hall and talk to them. They'll spend hours on the phone talking to the parents. There was one football player who was here for about a month and didn't feel like he was successful. He just packed up and went home. The coach talked to him on the phone and then went to his home in [a nearby city]. The student came back as a student, not to play football. That's one thing I think everyone on campus does well is to work with the student to keep them here even if they don't make it as an athlete.

ADM.4 said, "African American students receive a great deal of support from faculty and staff. We try to make their experience just like everyone else's experience." Although more efforts could be made to assist African American students on the campus of ADM.5, he/she was positive about future efforts: "There are a lot of eager people here that want to help. They are willing to be allies to help our African American students."

During administrator interviews, one of the positive things that stood out was a willingness to make things better, not only for African American students, but for all students. In talking with the administrators, it was obvious they enjoyed their work and

believed in the mission and benefits of a small college. ADM. 3 said,

You're talking to someone who is a graduate of this college and left for five years. I returned and have been here several years. So, I'm a cheerleader for [name of college]. But I wouldn't be if I didn't feel the mission of the college was the success of the student. I'm a firm believer in a small school.

Theme: Administrator as a Role Model

This theme is particularly relevant because it is shared from an administrator who considers herself/himself a role model. ADM.5 talked about having a role model in college and now believed he/she was a role model for college students, especially African American students. The reason ADM.5 thought he/she was a role model was her/his own experience of what African American students face at predominantly white institutions.

I came from [name of city] which is a big city. I'm from the projects and from a single parent family. In high school we had 1,400 students and I was one of eight African Americans there. We were called every name in the book and looked on as low achievers. And coming through all that and going to college, then starting a career and beginning a master's degree - you realize that this was an accomplishment and you should be proud as oppose to being ashamed. I think most of our students are ashamed and think that people are going to downplay where they come from. I had that experience of not being willing to tell people where I come from.

ADM.5 continued her/his experience by describing the student's positive reaction to an African American role model on her/his campus.

Since I've come to [name of college], a lot of the African American seniors come up to me, as another African American person, and say 'Where have you been?' They're like 'we needed someone for support or just sit and talk to.' At my prior institution, the students gathered in my office when things weren't going so well. Or, if they just needed to bounce some ideas off of me. They could identify with me because I'm African American. They knew I was an instant ally. A lot of our students here at [name of college] were missing that aspect until I got here. I keep a very open door policy. All kinds of students come in and out, especially the African American students who feel like they can come in and have somebody to talk to that is not related to their academics. I could relate because I had attended a predominantly white institution for high school and college and the colleges I had worked at were predominantly white. So, by just having 5-10 minutes we can

click on some issues. I don't have to find out where they're coming from. We can get right to the matter. We can talk about moving beyond the problem and not allowing their surroundings and where they come from define who they are. But, see I can say that because of who I am and where I came from. But if a Caucasian person on our staff said that to an African American student, even though they might be very genuine, it might not be well received.

Theme: Heightened Awareness and Sensitivity

ADM.3 indicated that an increased awareness or sensitivity to African American student's college experience, on a predominantly white campus, would be helpful for faculty and staff.

I have not been in the minority very often but when I have been it's not a comfortable feel. It's not a feeling that I'm used to so I don't like it. I'm sure that students who are in the minority most of the time have a different way of looking at it. I think we as administrators and educators need to experience the other side occasionally so we can remember. When you're on this side of this desk it's easy to forget what it's like on the other side of the desk.

Although ADM.1 did not mention a specific need for administrators to develop a keener sense of awareness, he/she shared a personal example of stereotype.

Frankly one of the students you're going to interview is someone I thought played football. I found out last spring that he doesn't play football and never has played at [name of college]. That was my thinking that if he is black he must play football. I asked him about football and he said, 'I don't play football. I felt kind of dumb. On this campus that type of thing happens sometimes. I can think of only two or three male black students who are not associated with athletics. I think there is a tendency in conversations to assume that a black student plays a sport. Whether it's that big a deal or not I do think it happens.

While reaching out to minority students to help them feel welcome to campus was important, one of the administrators cautioned that this effort needed to be implemented carefully so as to respect those who may not want attention, which was particularly true for African Americans in her/his opinion. However, this issue was not mentioned in the student interviews.

Theme: Always Room for Improvement

In some cases, the administrators said their institution could put forth more effort in reaching out to African American students. ADM.2 felt that her/his institution was doing a good job in meeting students' general needs but could do better with specific needs:

I don't know that there is anything done targeted to a particular group. It's good that we take all our students individually. It's not so good that we don't always realize that our minority students bring in different struggles and have different situations and issues that they're faced with on a predominantly white campus that a white student does not face. It's nice that we focus on student needs. But realistically our minority population is 10% or 12% and we sometimes miss the boat. As for specifics, we're not doing it and I don't know that I could tell you what those needs are as a campus.

ADM.3 also felt that her/his institution could do a little more in terms of meeting the needs of minority students and students in general. As was confirmed by many of the student interviews, some white students were not accustomed to being around African American students. This sometimes resulted in feelings of non-acceptance for African Americans among white students. Therefore, the concern of some administrators was not only to focus on African American students but all students.

It is a concern of mine that sometimes our students are not as open as I wish they were. Sometimes I think students are very judgmental and part of that is lack of experience or lack of life lessons. I'm sure there are things we could do to give them a broader experience. I would like to see us do more in the area of accepting differences. I think that when you are a private, religiously affiliated school that limits you to some degree. A private school is like a family, a large family. Sometimes it's a little bit hard to say that 'this is an issue, we have these differences and we need to look at them'. – ADM.3

The administrators mentioned some general things they felt their colleges could do to assist African American students towards having a more positive experience. One of those suggestions was simply to be more proactive as a college. Being more proactive

could mean the simple task of an administrator asking African American students how their needs could be better met as ADM.2 explained below:

One of the things I will try to do soon is to talk with the members of our African American population and other minorities and find out what we're doing well and what we could do better. And just really lay that out in an open forum. They may say something like 'the programming is good but we would like to see more emphasis in minority affairs or black history month or some black entertainers; some things that we're interested in as opposed to folk singers and such'. But it would be good to find out from them what they want. I think they miss having someone come to them and asking what they want instead of waiting until turmoil breaks out then after the dust settles we go back to status quo. I need to get out there to them and not expect them to come to me. I need to go to them on their turf, for lack of a better word, and meet them where they are. They need to know about my background and they can come to me. I want to build a comfort zone for them where they feel they have a support mechanism. The African American students I work with closely give me feedback regularly and let us know things. There are others who sit behind the scenes and grumble. There are others who probably wonder if they should stay at [name of college] or leave. Those are the students I need to reach.

ADM.5 described a similar proactive stance at her/his respective college involving forums for all students, in an effort to know each other's background better. He/she thought that as minorities and non-minorities get to know each other the stereotypes and non-acceptance might decrease. ADM.2 pointed out if forums and other proactive measures were to be taken, the effort needed to be a priority and not something that was continually delayed. He/she said, "Our campus has gone through several changes and growth during the past several years and I don't think that issue has been on the forefront." ADM.2 also mentioned the importance of research to examine the needs of African American students. He/she offered pertinent questions for consideration.

I do believe as we start to explore our population growth and our study of historical data as far as minority representation trends, we need to ask what type of needs we have. Based on those numbers, needs and experiences, we will need to ask whether a minority affairs position is needed on campus. Is it in our best interest to develop curriculum that focuses on minority history or whatever the

case may be? What issues do we need to consider for minority needs in general? I think it will be important to take the data we have and interpret it to find out where we want to be. If our goal is to increase total enrollment in the next few years, instead of having 50 African American students, we'll have 65 or 70. What are we going to do for these students? What do we want to offer?

Although administrators believed there were things each institution could do to improve their work with African American students, one administrator felt strongly that no institution should lower their standards to assist any student regardless of race. He/she said, "To lower the standard means that you feel they don't have the ability to meet the requirements, which is wrong. It's an insult."

Theme: Growing Your Own

One of the four participating institutions was in the process of exploring the idea of implementing a minority leadership program for high school students. The program was designed to give African American high school students an opportunity to live on campus and take classes for a period during two consecutive summers. Although this program might not be suitable for all small, liberal arts colleges, it could serve as a good model for those institutions that are interested in building their minority student population. The program was briefly outlined below by ADM.4.

We are going to start a Minority Leadership Program. We're going to bring young kids during their sophomore year in high school and introduce them to [name of college]. They will visit the college for two summers in a row. The first summer would be an introduction to college. We will do some of the things in the community and some things on campus, some of the fun stuff. The second summer, we'll concentrate on getting ready to go to college: the application process, financial aid, etc. We're also in the process of developing a program for the parents. Some of those parents are going to be sending their kid off to college for the very first time. We want to provide some things for them to help them get ready. Hopefully what that will do is to help us increase our number of African Americans here at [name of college]. The students will be high school sophomores the first summer and juniors the next summer. After their second year, they will hopefully apply to [name of college]. However, they don't have to

make any commitments to come to [name of college] to be in the program. If we get them here, it will be our job to make this the place they want to be. The other part of this is that it will be free to the students. We have won a grant to do this. The only thing that the parents have to do is to get them here.

Faculty

This section examined the administrator's perspective of their college's faculty and their impact on African American student experience and persistence.

Theme: Supportive and Approachable Faculty

The issue of faculty approachability was the next theme mentioned in the administrator interviews. The consensus among the administrators was that faculty on their campuses were supportive of all students. ADM.3 described the dedication of the faculty on her/his respective campus.

I just think in general the faculty take an interest. If you were not interested in the success of students you would not be teaching at a small private school in the middle of nowhere. I think anyone who stays here is interested in the success of students or they wouldn't give what it takes to work at a small school. They love students and [name of college].

Other administrators commented on the open door policy and concern for the student they thought the faculty on their campuses practiced on a daily basis.

Our faculty keep an open door policy. Most students have their numbers at home and their office hours. I think it's known that if a student needs a faculty or staff member they can go to them. I also think that faculty feel they can approach students in this way as well. It's not uncommon that a faculty member calls me about a retention problem with a student and it is very likely that they have tried to make contact several times before getting me involved. I think our faculty know the red flags. – ADM.2

Theme: More African American Faculty and Administrators

All five administrators, as something they would like to see on their respective campuses, mentioned the need for more African American professors and/or

administrators. For the most part, this suggestion was based on the need for African American role models. This need was expressed in response to the question "What would you like to see in the future for African American students at [name of college]?" ADM.1 said, "We need more black faculty and administrators." However, ADM.1 felt that her/his institution had a visible representation of African American faculty and staff for a small college. ADM.1 further commented on how current African American faculty members served as good role models, especially for the African American students.

I know particularly that [name of an administrator] has an open door policy and has met, counseled, and advised many African American students just in his/her short tenure here at [name of college]. I think all our black faculty and staff demonstrate being a good role model and are genuinely interested in the individual more so than they are with the student as an athlete, band member, singer, etc. They just want to see them succeed in life. We have a white faculty member who is working very closely with the [name of African American social organization]. He/She meets with them regularly.

ADM.2 thought an African American role model was one of the major assets missing at her/his particular institution. In particular, ADM.2 referred to the need for a Minority Affairs staff member.

I think the biggest component missing for our campus is that professional role model, example, confidant or whatever term you want to use as far as a resource person for African American students to voice concerns and frustrations and to just bounce ideas off.

ADM.2 also mentioned the student perception of the college when they hear diversity mentioned as a goal but fail to see results.

It's hard to tell the students that we embrace diversity when we don't have a minority representation among our staff (with the exception of a couple of people). Visibly that perception is there. The students may ask 'if you want us here why is there not someone to serve as a role model or an example or just somebody that we can go to that understands our frustrations'. If you consider our coaching staff, we have more representation but they're all graduate students. The students are looking for the non-coach. The majority of African American

students are athletes and sometimes it's good to have a third party to go to; they don't always want to go to their coach.

The lack of African American faculty members was also a concern of ADM.3 who thought it was difficult to attract these professionals to the location of their college. He/she considered this a limitation, especially in terms of a lack of role models for African American students. He/she said, "I think any small, private college will say strong African American role models are hard to come by, but having them on campus as role models is a commodity." ADM.4 also felt there should be more of a presence of African American faculty on her/his campus, more than the two faculty members and three administrators reported by the administrator.

ADM.4 suggested the African American faculty on her/his campus "schedule some informal times to get together with African American students; similar to a mentor program." ADM.5 also suggested the idea of a faculty/student mentor program, as something the college should consider. He/she noted, "I am into helping others because I had people take time to make sure I was OK as an African American student at a predominantly white institution. They made sure their home was open to me."

If small, predominantly white colleges decided that they would like to attract more African American faculty and administrators, it would be important to consider how they would be received. Given the majority of administrators in this study were white, there was little description of how African American faculty and administrators are received at small, predominantly white colleges. However, ADM.5 gave her/his own personal account on this particular matter:

I think our faculty are very supportive of our African American students as far as I can see. But there is always that undercurrent there. I think that even with

myself coming in to replace the person that I replaced, there has been some gossip around that I'm only here because I'm African American. Because you know I'm not suppose to have any know how or skills. I'm just here because of who I am. It's sort of like a quota or something. That's very sad that faculty and staff would think that. But when they get to know me and know about my credentials and what I can do they come around. But it's sad that I have to prove myself worthy. I know if I get that response, students would get that same response and type of undercurrent as well. It's not a comment directed to them; it's gossip. And that is something that I find being African American, you deal with constantly.

Academics

This section examined the administrators' perspective of their college's academic related areas and their impact on African American student experience and persistence.

Theme: Courses Relating to African American Issues

In talking with administrators about the curriculum, responses varied as to how well their institutions provided academic opportunities for African American students. Specifically, academic courses relating to African American issues were discussed. In a review of the college catalogs for each institution, it was discovered that three of the four institutions had at least one course related to African American studies.

ADM.3 thought her/his institution does not offer enough in terms of courses related to African American issues. Part of her/his opinion stemmed from what he/she felt was a limitation of being at a religiously affiliated institution.

We've started some international programs and international studies. I'm not sure we emphasize some of the black history like we need to and other cultures as well. I think a course dealing with African American literature or history could be really good thing. It would have to be handled in the right way. The right people would have to teach it and coordinate it. We try to touch on prejudice and acceptance in [name of the freshman seminar program] but we don't do it enough. Prejudice, as we have already discussed, covers a lot of things. I would like to see us do more in the area of accepting differences. I think that when you are a private, religiously affiliated school that limits you to some degree.

Due to ADM.2 being an administrator in a non-academic area, he/she did not feel he/she could comment on the issue of what their college provided in terms of courses relating to African American issues. He/she said they had not heard students voice a concern in that area. Similarly, ADM.4 was not aware of particular courses offered at her/his institution related to African American issues. However, he/she did consider courses focusing on African American issues something to implement. Her/His college's multi-culture society was one avenue he/she felt African American issues could be explored.

Although some African Americans students attending a predominantly white institution might feel all the curriculum is presented from a Euro-centric perspective, the students at ADM.1's institution had not voiced that concern.

I don't think our students feel that everything is presented from a white perspective. I think there is a better diversity on our campus than that. We don't have a black studies program but based on what I've heard we're pretty diverse in what we're studying in literature and other courses. We've also had some well known black leaders from around the country on campus.

ADM.4 talked about what he/she had heard students say concerning their classes outside the classroom, specifically one course that focused on great books within literature. ADM.4 heard several positive comments from athletes about this particular course; comments concerning what they had learned from certain books they had read. ADM.4 noted how encouraged he/she was to have heard this discussion.

Theme: Inability to See the Forest for the Trees

Although courses relating to African American issues are important components of curriculum, care should be taken in establishing the course content according to administrators. For some African American students who think they are in tune with

their own culture, they might 'not be able to see the forest for the trees'. ADM.5 offered a word of caution if her/his institution were to develop a broader curriculum related to African American studies.

I think it would be great to have a broad course related to African American issues but at the same time the (African American) students in those classes will think they know it all. As a freshman, I went to a class like this and had the attitude that because I'm African American I already knew the subject matter. But when you get in there the class talks about a whole lot more than you can imagine. I found that there were white students in class who absorbed a lot more than I did about the course. They were willing to learn more than I was and did better in the course than other African American students. The African American students take the laid back attitude that they know it all but they don't. I've experienced that first hand. I think we could benefit from some courses in African American studies here, even some courses in African American drama or some courses on just the contributions that were made by African Americans. Because a lot of those things are not published and just glossed over. So, the contributions would be good to instill a sense of pride in our students.

Theme: Peer Mentor Program

Administrators at three of the four institutions mentioned the role of peer mentors or a peer mentor program as having an impact on African American students' college experience. ADM.3 believed that involvement in the college's peer mentor program helped with student persistence, but more could be done to improve their program.

In our [name of peer mentor program], we touch on issues of prejudice and acceptance but we don't do enough. When I notice a problem like when students are not bonding, then that is where our [name of peer mentor program] comes in. I call their [peer mentor program] instructor, who is by the way their academic advisor for their first year.

ADM.4 described, in detail, the peer mentor program at her/his institution as it related to African American students:

In our peer mentor program, all the new African American students are assigned a mentor to make sure the academic side of things is taken care of for the new students. This peer mentor is experienced in the [name of college] life to lead and guide the new student. When it comes to the academic needs, we go through the

tutoring services that the whole campus uses. We don't just necessarily focus on freshman but transfers as well. If you're a new African American student we provide a mentor for you and we contact you about upcoming events. We make sure you get the help you need with whatever that may be. I make contact with the mentor and let them know what areas their mentee needs help in. One of the things I find about college is not just getting the student here but keeping them here. So, that is what I focus on when I work with those students. A mentor would have maybe five or six students that they are to meet with individually and to do things collectively. We'll all come together as a social outlet or do one big study session with everyone. A lot of our African American students are first generation college students and the thing is to have someone who has the college experience who is not a college professor or an administrator but is someone who they can closely relate to.

While the college where ADM.2 is employed did not have an active peer mentor program, he/she had a good idea for future consideration. Essentially, he/she would like to see leadership workshops and/or retreats that would train students, specifically Resident Assistants to serve as 'role models' or peer mentors to other students. These students could then provide programs that meet the needs of all students, but especially African American students. He/she said, "We need to give the student leaders the skills to send out the same message that we're sending out as a student affairs staff." Although having a peer mentor program and leadership workshops are important, participation can be a challenge. ADM.3's institution has a peer mentor program but he/she struggled to find African Americans to participate.

I would like to have African Americans in the [peer mentor program] program. When I brought a trainer in from [name of a large university] the first thing he said was how homogenized the peer mentor group was based on his observations. And, it is but it's a choice. It's their choice and I'm not sure how you involve them (African Americans). If you go to them it's like 'you picked me for your token'. I talk to coaches and different groups and ask whom they would suggest. We want all different kinds of students involved because they're working with all different kinds of students.

College Environment

The college environment at a small, predominantly white liberal arts college is a unique part of the experience for all students. This section examined the administrators' perceptions of the impact of college environmental factors on African American student experience and persistence.

Theme: Individual Approach

The small college environment, by its very nature, produces an individual approach to the student's needs in many cases. ADM.2 stressed the individual approach for her/his institution, not only for minorities but also for all students: "We do nothing to target a particular group. We approach all students on an individual basis." The individual approach was also emphasized by ADM.3 as he/she discussed the college environment at her/his institution.

I really think that what we try to do is benefit every student the same. I think all small colleges [I know we do] attempt to deal with students as individuals. When individual need or concerns come up then we try to deal with that on an individual basis. So to say that there are certain things we do for our African American students; I don't know if that is accurate. I think we try to deal with each student as the need arises. I think the open door policy we have is certainly beneficial to any student who wants to come in and talk. If they have concerns or questions and they are race based then we deal with those. They are paying for the individual approach. That's why they come to this type of school; they want to be a person. As they progress here at [name of college], I know something about them. That's one of the strengths of our school; of any small school. I think we're in a position to know what the needs are and to try to help them on an individual basis.

The term *fade into the woodwork*, when applied to college students, can often take on a negative meaning with a student directly or indirectly making himself/herself unavailable to needed assistance. ADM.2 gave an example of how difficult it was for students to *fade into the woodwork* at a small, liberal arts college. He/She made an

important point that a small environment “forces you to work out your differences.”

With a small student body, I think they (the students) do real well together. They're able to share frustrations together and to work together. We don't have a lot of problems with fighting in comparison with other places I've been employed. We don't really have a lot of problems with roommate conflicts. They just realize that when you have a small enrollment, you have to get along. It's not like a large school where if you make someone mad there is not much of an impact. But if you make someone mad here, it's more noticeable and you may impact a lot of people. You're sort of in a forced situation to get along with one another and work out your differences. I think our students learn how to feed off each other in a positive way.

Along with an individual emphasis and surroundings that make it difficult to ‘fade into the woodwork’, there were other characteristics mentioned of the small college environment. Small class size was a plus, according to ADM.3, both inside and outside the classroom, “Small class size (25-30 people) helps faculty get to know their students. Just the fact that the faculty get to know the students outside of class is helpful.” ADM.3 used the term “generational school” to describe her/his institution: “I have a student here whose father was a freshman when I first came to [name of college]. We get to know families. I think that has something to do with helping students persist.”

Theme: Community Among Minorities

The issue of community among college students is the next theme to be discussed. ADM.1 said there was a sense of community at her/his respective institution. According to ADM.1, community was fostered through two major avenues: the residence halls and two African American social organizations on campus, which appealed to African American students. Together, these avenues helped to build community among the African American students, according to ADM.1. Another area that was mentioned by ADM.1 was the cafeteria, where it was typical to see “tables with only black males”.

However, this was not a problem according to ADM.1, "There are times when you just want to be with people whom you have a common bond. It doesn't mean our students don't get along with each other."

ADM.2 attributed a sense of community to the small student body on campus: "I think they do real well together. They're able to share frustrations together and work together." ADM.2 also agreed that the residence halls provided a place for the students to build bonds with each other.

ADM.3 perceived African American students had a sense of community regarding the campus community but not necessarily with each other.

As a group, I'm not sure if there is a sense of community among our African American students here at [name of college]. I think they do have community. I think they feel a part of the community here. But as a group of African Americans, I'm not sure they feel a kinship with one another. I think their community comes through the activities they are involved in; whether campus activities, campus ministries, or athletics. There are certain athletic groups that tend to band together. I see it as them integrating into the greater community.

ADM.4 said many of the African American students at her/his institution were first generation and with that, came a sense of community. He/she felt by being first generation provided students a commonality to share with one another. He/she continued by describing his/her perception of the African American students on her/his campus with the males being a little more diverse than the females.

If there is a group of guys on campus, there is a couple of African Americans in the group. The African American females are always together, at least a couple of them. However, you don't see females being as diverse as the males.

ADM.5 thought the African American social organization on her/his respective campus had been a "catalyst for community by sponsoring activities to get African American students together."

At the end of each interview, administrators were asked the question of what they would like to see change on their campus in the future. ADM.1's comment was directed towards the issue of community and what community means. He/she thought that sometimes, administrators tend to view community in such a negative way; that something was wrong or that the community was not diverse when there may be nothing wrong at all.

I would love to change people's minds on the concept of what makes a community diverse. This goes across the spectrum of people whose concept of diversity is that everybody gets along. Here's a stupid example: the lunchroom. In my opinion, a liberal minded person thinks we have a diverse student body because we have everybody disbursed (Asians with whites, blacks with whites, etc.). Well, we have some of that. But, every lunch hour you will find a group of blacks together and a group of whites together. And with this, it appears there is something wrong. My question is: What is wrong with this? If I'm an American in another country, who do you think I am going to hang with the most; people who understand me best. It doesn't mean our students don't get along with the rest of the campus. Just because they eat lunch together, there's nothing wrong with that. I've never understood why that's such a big deal.

Similarly, ADM.2 described the cafeteria experiences on her/his campus, especially male athletes who are African American. However, he/she did not see this as a problem.

The biggest segregation I see is in the cafeteria. I think when you have an hour to eat with someone you usually eat with those you have the most in common with. I think it is more apparent with the African American males who separate themselves in the cafeteria. On a day-to-day basis, I don't know that the separation is so big. In the residence halls, there are less barriers like with guys playing Nintendo or shooting pool in the game room. I don't know if there are racial overtones on campus; if there are I haven't heard that concern being raised. But you can definitely see it in the cafeteria but not on the campus as a whole.

Theme: African American Student Enrollment

Administrators from each college mentioned the need to increase the number of African American students at their institution to some degree. More specifically, administrators suggested an increase in the number of African American students who are

female and African American students who are non-athletes. ADM.2 reported:

One of the things we're working on is to increase our enrollment, which will automatically provide more diversity. We're so heavy laden with athletes that sometimes it poses a problem. It's hard for student athletes to get involved in campus organizations due to time commitments with their respective sport. As we increase our enrollment maybe that will increase the number of non-athletic African Americans that will get involved in organizations and become role models. This would help improve our community.

ADM.3 shared a similar need for more non-athletes who were African American on her/his campus. However, the reality was athletic scholarships enabled some students the opportunity to attend that might not otherwise do so.

I would like to see more black students come here for the total educational experience and not to be so driven by athletic scholarship. This way they could get involved in other things. You know if you play basketball or football, along with being a decent student - that is your time. You don't have time for anything else. I would like to see our African American students be more involved in leadership positions. I don't know if they need the freedom to be involved or if they just don't have the time. But I have seen us progress. We're bringing more and more black women on campus but usually it is for a sport. But you know let's look at private schools. They are becoming so expensive that if you don't have some type of scholarship you can't go.

At least two of the administrators mentioned the need for more African American females on their respective campuses. ADM.1 said, in relation to dating, "black males have stated to me there aren't enough black females on campus." ADM.3 said he/she thought the college experience was more difficult for the African American women who don't play a sport and that, in comparison, there are more black men because of sports.

Theme: Local Community

The issue of student acceptance within the local community was also an important part of the college environment for African American students. All of the colleges that participated in the interview process are located in either small towns or rural areas that

have small African American populations. Although most basic services are provided on campus, the local community cannot be overlooked, as it did impact the overall college experience for many students.

ADM.1 said that African Americans at her/his institution were accepted on campus, but this was not always the situation off campus. ADM.1 also said that it would be helpful to have more local community involvement on campus.

Actually I think African American students are accepted rather well here on the campus. I can't say that would be true off campus because we are in a very mountainous, rural county. In fact, to my knowledge, the local high school hasn't had a black student in years and may have never had a black student. It would be nice if we had more community involvement. But that's a problem because there are not a lot of black people here in the community. There is a small black community about a mile from here and there is one small black church in town. There are not a lot of resources here in town for African Americans; [name of city] is the closest place. If there was some way to enhance that I think we would be better off.

ADM.2 had a suggestion about involving the local community to work with all students, but especially African American students.

Some workshops or leadership retreats for minority students and members of the community would help. We could get local leaders to serve as role models and perhaps talk to them about overcoming the barriers of being on a predominantly white campus.

Indeed, colleges that are located in a small, predominantly white community provide few African American role models. This can be difficult for African American students, even more so if they were not aware of the limitations of the local area prior to enrollment. However, ADM.3 thought the African American student could successfully adjust despite the limitations of the local area: "I think our area is limited, but if they come prepared for a positive experience and with a positive attitude then I think that is what they will have."

ADM.5 had a personal description of the local community in which her/his institution is located: "I have found that this community is a place you would find in the twilight zone, but in a good way. The people here are extremely friendly and helpful." Although friendly and helpful, it can be frustrating, even in trying to meet your basic needs. ADM.5 reported a brief retail experience.

I remember when I came here for the interview, my spouse and I went to K-Mart looking for black hair care products. The lady at the store said that they didn't carry black or ethnic hair care products. This was K-Mart in [name of nearby town]. A beauty supply store carried a small selection of black hair care products. When I went to the beauty supply place, the lady in charge asked me if I was a beautician. She was very careful because she didn't want to offend me. I appreciated her taking the time and putting forth the effort. If you're at the management aspect of the situation, there is not much a demand for the product.

One administrator had a different perspective. According to ADM.4, "the outside community plays little role in how African Americans students feel about the area." ADM.4 thought there was little need for students to go off campus, at least for the basic needs, because most needs could be met on campus.

College Experience

This section examined the administrators' perspective of African American students' college experience and its impact on their persistence.

Theme: Male/Female Relationships

On all four participating campuses, the number of African American males was substantially higher than the number of African American females. Therefore the issue of interracial dating was mentioned often among the students. Table 7 cites the total number of African American students at participating institutions along with the number of African American males and females (with corresponding percentages).

Table 7
African American Enrollment at Participating Colleges

Institution	Total Number of African Americans	Total Number of African American Females	Total Number of African American Males
Institution A	68	10 (15%)	58 (85%)
Institution B	120	14 (12%)	106 (88%)
Institution C	60	15 (25%)	45 (75%)
Institution D	41	12 (29%)	29 (71%)

Three administrators mentioned the issue of interracial dating on their campuses. According to ADM.2, interracial dating on her/his campus was not a problem: "Here at [name of college], due to our small student body interracial dating doesn't seem to be a problem. We have several interracial relationships." In terms of dating relationships within the African American community, it was interesting to note that at many participating institutions African American males and females did not necessarily date each other. ADM.4 shared his/her perception of dating on campus:

I've noticed that our African American women here don't really date the African American guys. The African American guys will date anybody. The African American women seem to look at the guys like they're still just boys and they don't want to date boys. The African American women are looking for a more dating type situation where they want to be wined and dined. The guys are looking at everything as just fun. I think the women perceive that as not being grown up. So, there is not a lot of interaction as far as dating each other. They get along like brothers and sisters. When we do some of the activities you would see that they really are close. Then in other settings you would think they hate each other. So, it's like brothers and sisters; that's how I see it.

ADM.5 had a similar perception of dating among African American students and interracial dating on her/his respective campus:

The dating situation can be very interesting between African American males and females. It's like they feel they can't date because it would be like dating their sister. There are a lot of African American males dating white females. Then the African American females get upset about that. There is some great jealousy.

Comments like: 'how could you' and 'am I not good enough'. But there are not a lot of African American females dating white males. I was talking to one of my Resident Directors who is African American and a male. He said that it would totally enrage African American males to just see an African American female date a white guy. He said that was just the mentality. It was not accepted for African American females but it was accepted for African American males to date someone from another race. I'm still trying to explore that.

Theme: Administrator Perception on Student Acceptance

This particular theme discussed the opinions of administrators concerning the perception, they felt, African American students had about their acceptance on campus. All of the administrators shared that they felt most African American students on their campuses felt accepted by the campus population. ADM.1 said that in general, "African Americans are accepted rather well here on campus." However, he/she cited a recent article in the student newspaper about students' perspective of the campus environment.

We had an incident that was discussed in our student newspaper last year dealing with the black perspective at [name of college]. There were some real frustrations presented in the article. An example was shared of a student who left because he thought it was too prejudiced. Before he left [an administrator] met with him and told him that yes there could be some prejudiced attitudes here but they're not going to go away just because you change locations, which I thought was a valid point. Anyway the article in the paper talked about the black perspective on campus. There are students who think there is prejudice here.

ADM.2 also thought African Americans were well accepted at her/his campus but the problem was that they did not know how to express their concerns or how to get involved. According to ADM.3, students on her/his campus also felt accepted and did not feel singled out. ADM.4 and ADM.5 both thought African American students were accepted on their respective campuses as well.

In terms of how administrators perceived the experiences African American students had on campus, two of the administrators felt the experiences were no different

than what a white student would experience. ADM.2 said, "African American students have mixed experiences." He/She continued by saying,

Some jump in and get involved with the minority group we have on campus. Others don't do anything, as with any other student, and then argue that there's nothing to do on campus.

ADM.1 did not think there was a difference between African American students and other students in terms of persisting at a small, predominantly white college.

Theme: Culture Shock

Administrators used several terms to describe the experience African American students have on small, predominantly white college campuses. ADM.1 used the term 'culture shock' not only for African Americans but students in general.

I think for some people, it's a real culture shock when you first get here in this county [where the college is located]; a real culture shock. It's very country, very rural and very slow. Being a [religious denomination] oriented school, the rules are pretty strict. But I don't think that is particular to black or white students. When you come from [names of large cities] up to [name of college] it's a different cup of tea. I just don't think some students can adapt to it. They just can't believe that you can't drink in the residence halls and that we have visitation hours. It's just different. They're moving into the Bible belt here where the standards are different.

Theme: Minority Among Minorities

Administrators also used the term 'outcast' to describe the experiences of some African American students. However, the term was used more in reference to African American students feeling like an outcast among other African American students or feeling like a minority among minorities, as was described in the student interview section. ADM.2 explained a situation on her/his campus.

We do have a couple of African American students who feel like an outcast and are even called traitors or *white wannabe*'s. They are called this because they are RAs, or have excelled in the classroom, or the group they run with is primarily

white students. One of our young ladies made the homecoming court and she was called the 'diversity piece' by the black students. She did not receive the homecoming queen award. All students had the opportunity to vote. I told some of the black students that if they had voted they could have had control. But the bottom line was that few minority students voted. She didn't get voted into the court because she was a minority but because of who she was on our campus. She came and talked to me because she felt she was an outcast among the minorities on campus. This was an interesting thing to see. They called her 'di piece' (or diversity piece). They were saying this was the token piece for the administration. The truth was she was a leading vote getter out of twelve people on our campus. It was because of who she was on campus not because of color.

ADM.2 also described how some African American students experienced 'peer pressure' from other African American students:

I think there is a lot of peer pressure (for our African American students). I would assume that by being on a predominantly white campus, if you did anything outside the norm or acceptable behavior of black students, there would be a fear of being an outcast. This can be damaging sometimes. Just like the young lady who branched out and found her niche by running for Homecoming Queen. She hoped that she would get support from her African American friends but instead she feels like an outcaste.

ADM.5 shared a similar experience with an African American male student who felt he was not accepted among other African American students and white students at his particular college: "The problem was that he was African American and he likes rock music as opposed to music and other things that are 'typical' for African American males. He was not fitting into the norm so to speak."

Theme: Token Black Person

ADM. 3 used the term 'token black person' during her/his interview. He/she discussed attempts to get African American students involved in the college's peer mentor program but sometimes got the reaction "you picked me for your token". Consequently, ADM.3 felt "self conscious about singling people out." ADM.3 described minority student involvement on her/his campus:

Sometimes when I ask minority students to do things, I'm afraid they're going to think I'm asking because I want them to be a 'token'. There are times when I'm afraid they will think 'she just wants me because I'm black or because I'm Malaysian.' That may be my fault and not their fault. For instance we do a freshman orientation brochure and I also work with the student handbook. I try to present all sides on the cover. I've had kids say 'sure [name of administrator], I'll be your token.' Well, you know sometimes they're teasing because I have a good relationship with them. Then I go back to my office and wonder if they really feel that way.

Theme: White System

ADM.1 shared his/her opinion of how African American students perceived the college administration as the 'white system'. He/She shared an example in reference to getting students involved in her/his particular department.

I feel personally that some of our black students are opposed to getting into the system. They consider it a 'white system'. Maybe that's why I have trouble recruiting black [student employee position]. They see it as the system that has been in place for years. They will come up against the side of the system but won't come inside. Then they might be called 'Uncle Toms'. They will be perceived as playing the white person's system. It's just a gut feeling I have sometimes. It could be that maybe there is no involvement because the involvement is set up from a white perspective. It would be wonderful if I could have a black assistant director (in my department) and if that would change the involvement of black students. Would it increase the flow of interested students? Maybe the perception would be that of a more fair system. The black student may feel the department can't understand their perspective because there are no black staff members in the department. I don't know if that's the perspective but sometimes I wonder.

Theme: Student Attitude

Attitude was discussed during the results of the student interviews. At least three administrators had comments regarding student attitude as it pertained to the overall college experience. ADM.1 described how he/she believed some African American students felt about their particular college:

I think there are some African American students who come on campus that have the attitude of 'I'll get screwed at every turn; I've been screwed all my life by the

white person.' I think there are plenty of black students who have a great experience and love it here, but some don't.

ADM.4 thought, overall, "the attitude of the African American students I work with is very positive." ADM.3 attributed the experiences students have at college to their individual frame of reference, which essentially meant if they came to college expecting a good experience, they would have a good experience. She continued, "If they come looking for discrimination then that can be found."

Theme: Negative Social Integration

The next theme focused on the issue of perceived prejudice against minorities. At least three of the five administrators mentioned the issue of prejudice against minorities in some way, either from students, parents or the local community. ADM.4 and ADM.5 did not have an experience to share concerning racial prejudice on their campus.

According to ADM.2, African Americans do not feel accepted in the local community where the college is located. An example of this non-acceptance was shared through an example at a local bank.

In the community, I know there have been problems. In [name of county], the minority population is small. There have been concerns that students have brought to my attention about experiences at banks or restaurants or other places in the community. I have made phone calls inquiring about various incidents. For example, two students from the football team (one black and one white) went to the bank to cash a student check in the same afternoon but not together. Neither of them had an account. The white student got his check cashed with no problem; just a valid ID was all that was required. The black student had to have an ID plus a thumbprint on the back of the check. They compared notes about the experience. It was the same bank, same teller and the same day. I called the bank and found out that all people who don't have an account there have to be finger printed. I told them that the picture that was painted was bad. It's those kind of things that our students face off campus but I haven't heard of any such injustices on campus whether in class or on the athletic field or in the residence hall.

ADM.3 talked about the issue of prejudice on her/his respective campus and how the location of the college did have an impact: "A lot of our students come from areas with few minorities and they don't have the experience with people who are different from them. However, it seems to me that the students are open for the most part."

ADM.3 also shared an experience concerning the issue of prejudice against minorities in terms of housing assignments for incoming freshmen.

Overall, I think the student atmosphere is pretty accepting. However, there is the issue of room assignments. I don't know what race a student is when I place them. When I make a room assignment, it's not the student who has a problem with an interracial or international roommate; it's the parent who has the problem. I can't tell you the number of parents I have had call me, not huge numbers, but it just surprises me that in 1998 and 1999 we're thinking like that. In many cases, it wasn't the student it was the parent who had the problem. It didn't matter to the student what the roommate situation was. Students are much more open than they were 10-15 years ago to living with someone of another culture or race.

ADM.1 had a similar experience concerning housing assignments for incoming freshmen at her/his institution: "I do room assignments and each year I have one or two request on cards that say 'I don't want a black roommate' or 'I don't want a white roommate'."

Involvement

Involvement in campus activities and leadership opportunities is an important part of the collegiate experience for all students. This particular aspect was evident with the administrators as they discussed their perception of African American student involvement on their respective campuses. ADM.1 said, "Most students who are successful in college find a connection." ADM.2 agreed that involvement needed to be encouraged but felt that there was some responsibility on the part of the student.

Our minority group provides a lot of opportunities for African American students. But overall, it's up to the students themselves to get involved with the various activities and organizations and what they make of that involvement.

The comments concerning student involvement ranged from a good amount of involvement to little involvement. ADM.5 reported that African American students on her/his campus were very involved in campus activities:

A lot of our African American students are very involved, whether it be athletics or extra curricular activities. They are very involved here on campus so they don't sit around and have a pity party and an 'Oh woe is me' attitude. They don't look at themselves as the only one in a fish bowl. They seem to take a leadership role and become very active from the start.

ADM.5 continued by describing how many of the African Americans on her/his campus were involved with their community service organization, African American social organization, and intramurals.

Theme: African American Social Organization

Three of the four institutions that participated in the study had an established African American social organization. These organizations were not national fraternities or sororities but local organizations set up for minority students. There were two organizations at ADM.1's institution. One organization was set up for African American males and one for African American females. Both organizations had other ethnic groups represented as well.

ADM.1 said that he/she "would like to see our African American organizations become more involved on campus, especially with student government." ADM.2 explained that the minority organization on her/his campus was not limited to African American students only. He/she said the intent of the group was "to raise awareness of various issues such as minority issues, black issues or women's issues." He/she further explained by giving some of the background of the organization:

[Name of African American social organization] provides a lot of opportunities. I think the organization has been around about four years or so. It was set up with the intent to have a focal group and a commonality; an established and organized group where minority students could come in and work together and exchange stories and experiences. From that it has grown to be one of our top programmers on campus. They do more than just provide a place to air their experiences but are an active and thriving group that really attempt to be involved and make a difference. Not only in the minority groups but to increase awareness campus wide.

ADM.4 discussed the organization on her/his campus that was in place "especially for African American students." He/she described the organization as follows:

It gives them an outlet to let them know there are people in the community like themselves. The skills this group teaches will help students develop characteristics that will make them strong, marketable people for the workforce.

One of the four institutions did not have an organization currently in place geared towards African American students. The administrator at this particular college, ADM.3, mentioned the idea of a black student union and the advantages and disadvantages that would bring.

I thought about a black student union. I see pro's and con's to having one. I think there are times when African American students need a focal point; we all need focal points. It concerns me that we don't have a black student union. But in the past when we had a black student union, it was steered by a militant attitude. It only takes one or two attitudes to move a program in the wrong direction.

Theme: Athletics

Another avenue of student involvement mentioned by each administrator was intercollegiate athletics. At ADM.1's institution he/she reported, "Most of the African American students are athletes". With the popularity of athletics, stereotypes towards African Americans sometimes come about. In discussing athletics ADM.1 shared, "I think there is a tendency in conversations to assume that a black student plays a sport. Whether it's a big deal or not I do think it happens." ADM.2 shared the following

concerning athletics at her/his college:

Our student population is heavily made up of athletes. Athletics really bring the male students together. At the same time, it also fosters cliques. Most black females at [name of college] are non-athletes. Overall, it's hard to get the athletes involved in other areas of campus due to their time commitments.

According to ADM.3, athletics added to the sense of community on her/his campus.

We don't have social organizations here. So, I think the energy that is put into those organizations at other campuses is put into things like campus ministries and sports. Sports - you talk about community now - it seems to me that sports really develop that sense of community and bonding.

ADM.5 said, "Many of our African American students are involved in athletics and stick together by their sport. The minority group brings them together as a larger group."

Theme: Lack of Leadership Desire

At the other end of the involvement spectrum, three administrators described how difficult it was to get African American students involved, especially as Resident Assistants, which was a key student leadership position on many participating campuses.

ADM.3 said, "We want our black students involved but it's hard to do so, they feel like a token at times." He/she continued by talking about how her/his college would like having more African American Resident Assistants:

Perhaps if we had more African Americans involved it would help incoming freshmen. I think it would give a comfort zone that they don't have now. Fortunately the one African American student I had involved in the [peer mentor] program this year is a terrific speaker and he was very much front and center in the new student orientation this summer. He spoke with students and parents. We need more than that. He is the only African American Resident Assistant (RA). We've done pretty well in getting internationals to be RAs because it's a source of money. But we're not successful in getting African American RAs. Out of 42 RAs I have one African American. I just don't what to do about it.

Similarly, ADM.1 and ADM. 5 described their frustrations with trying to recruit minorities as Resident Assistants.

We work hard to recruit African American students and other minorities for the residential living staff. It's almost impossible for us to recruit a black female. I don't know what it is but we just come up empty almost every year. This year we have six male black RAs on a staff of 14 male positions. So, that's a fair percentage, almost 50%. It drives me crazy that we can't hire black females. In year's past, the most I've had is two female African American RAs. You would think that the benefits of the job would be attractive. – ADM.1

ADM.1 also described her/his perspective on the lack of involvement at her/his institution, especially in the student government association.

I don't know that the black students are any different from any other students. It's like a church where 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. Everybody sits around and complains until you ask them to get involved and then they're too busy and don't have time. Sometimes I think that is true for African American students. They will complain that something is not good enough or diverse enough until you ask them to get involved. There may be a strong feeling that it is pointless to try to change this system. I think that feeling may exist. It is likely that it exist more for black students than white students. I know that we don't have hardly any involvement in SGA from black students. Even last year when the President was black we still didn't have a great drawing from the black population. It didn't make a lot of difference for black student involvement in how many showed up for the meetings. We didn't have a sudden influx of black students. You would think they would feel more power with a black student as President. But it didn't increase attendance. On the other hand, we have trouble getting anyone to attend. So, now we require every student group to send a representative to the SGA meetings.

Along with ADM.1, ADM.5 wanted to see more involvement by African American students in SGA at their institution.

We have students who are involved all over the place. We are trying to get African American students involved in student government because presently there is no African American representation on the senate except myself as an advisor. Our senior student president realizes that and he is trying to make an effort to have representation.

Although ADM.2 did not give detail about student involvement at her/his institution, he/she felt there were things that could be implemented to increase involvement. He/she said, "I need to work with our student leaders to let them know they have a voice."

Theme: Activities with Little Appeal

At a small, liberal arts college the statement 'there's nothing to do here' will inevitably be heard from students on occasion. At least two of the administrators referred to occasionally hearing this comment to some degree on their campus. ADM.4 said,

I think a lot of our kids hear about the big schools with all the partying and we don't have that here. They think they have to go somewhere else to do these things. I've only heard a few gripes about there not being a lot to do here.

ADM.1 shared a similar perception of the African American student on her/his campus.

One thing I've heard black students complain about is that there is nothing to do. It's a small town atmosphere. We have lots of students from larger cities, especially the athletes. It's just a whole different lifestyle here than the big city. So there are complaints about nothing to do.

Perceived Obstacles to Student Persistence

Each administrator was asked to comment on what he/she thought were obstacles to African American students' persistence. The administrators mentioned various areas: lack of African American females, lack of preparation prior to college, peer pressure from other African American students, lack of minority representation among faculty and staff, lack of academic success, isolation, college location and tuition cost. ADM.1 mentioned a conversation he/she had with the administrator who works with retention data. The colleague told ADM.1, "the black males have told her there are not enough black females on campus." ADM.1 thought this might be considered an obstacle for black males.

ADM.2 perceived there were several obstacles for African American students on her/his campus:

In terms of obstacles, I think for all our students, its just preparation to come to [name of college]. As for academic preparation, most of our African American

students are first generation and the expectation and the understanding are unclear for them. I think there is a lot of peer pressure. I would assume that by being on a predominantly white campus, if you did anything outside the norm or acceptable behavior of black students, there would be a fear of being an outcast. Another obstacle is the lack of minority representation of African Americans on our faculty and staff. It's hard to tell the students that we embrace diversity when we don't have a minority representation among our staff (with the exception of a couple of people). Visibly that perception is there.

ADM.3 discussed her/his perception of what obstacles African American students face at her/his respective college. However, as he/she stated, these items did not only pertain to African Americans but all students.

I think sometimes it's been a lack of academic success that has been an obstacle. Sometimes that is due to background. This can be said of a lot of our students who don't persist, not just African American. Sometimes it's money. Sometimes it's adjusting to [location of college] and not being in [a large city].

Similarly, ADM.5 said the college's location was an obstacle resulting in students feeling isolated.

We're in a very rural place and there is not a whole lot for them to do as far as outreach. There are not a whole lot of African Americans in [name of college town], so they have to go to [name of nearby town] to make those connections. They have to go to these places if they want a church that is African American.

Administrators from each of the four institutions mentioned finances as a potential obstacle for African American students. ADM.4 mentioned that funding for education could be an obstacle for African American students, but that applied to all students. ADM.1 and ADM.5 mentioned the cost of a private education as an obstacle for some African American students attending their respective college. ADM.2 shared a similar opinion pertaining to students at her/his institution:

I think another problem, that could be an obstacle, is that many of our African American students are low income. They are not able to go home for block breaks and probably can't afford to do side trips. They also may not have a car to even go off campus during the breaks. Basically, they are just hanging around.

Summary of Administrator Interview Results

The purpose of Section Two was to explore the major themes resulting from interviews with five college administrators. These administrators worked at the four small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the United States where the student interviewees attended. Administrators participated in interviews lasting about an hour. Each interview consisted of three broad questions. The primary goal of this section was to answer the second research question: "What do administrators at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia report that their institutions do to support African American students?" Analysis of administrator interviews resulted in several themes, which were noted in Table 6. Each theme discussed administrators' perceptions of the African American students' experiences at their institutions.

Section Four: Comparing Student and Administrator Interviews

Sections One, Two and Three of Chapter Four have reviewed in detail the results of both student and administrator interviews. Several themes were revealed from the interview process. This section will compare the major points from the student interviews with the major points from the administrator interviews. The comparisons of this section will in effect answer Research Question Three: "What is the relationship between what administrators report and what African American students say they experience as minorities at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?" The following sections from administrator and student interviews will be compared: Administration, Faculty, Academics, Perception, College Environment,

Community, Involvement, Obstacles, African American Student Enrollment, Interracial Dating, and Negative Social Integration.

Administration

A comparison of student and administrator comments about administrators at their respective colleges revealed various remarks and thoughtful suggestions for improvement. Both students and administrators seemed to believe their respective college took an individual approach with students. However, many administrators did not fully realize the struggles of African American students on a small, predominantly white college campus. Most administrators seemed to agree that administrators should 'practice what they preach' when it comes to diversity.

There were four areas where there was a slight difference between administrators and students in relation to college administrators. First, only two of the five administrators thought their institution could do more in reaching out to African American students on their campus. As noted throughout the student interviews, there were several suggestions on how the college could enhance the experience of African American students. Second, seven students (29%) mentioned their college President as having an impact on their college experience. These comments occurred freely and were not prompted by the researcher through interview questions. All student comments regarding the various college presidents were positive. Administrators did not mention their respective president during the interview. Third, administrators did not seem to be as aware of the need for more African American females and African American non-athletes as the students mentioned. Fourth, some of the students felt that African American students on their campus were only called on to lead programs that pertained to

Black History Month and/or Martin Luther King, Junior Day. This issue did not come up in the administrator interviews.

Faculty

A comparison of student and administrator comments about the faculty at their respective college revealed two similarities and one difference. First, both students and administrators were very positive in their descriptions of faculty members. Comments consisted of such phrases as 'faculty care about students' and 'faculty keep an open door policy.' Second, both students and administrators agreed that more African American faculty members were needed on their respective campuses as potential role models for African American students.

The one difference between administrators and students was the issue of what the students referred to as 'black spokesperson'. Some of the students commented on how they were often one of a few or the only African American student in many of their classes. This situation often placed them, in what they viewed, as a spokesperson for all African American students. The students who mentioned this experience were not comfortable serving in this role. Administrators did not mention this particular issue in their interviews.

Academics

A comparison of student and administrator comments about academics at their respective colleges revealed three differences. Before discussing these issues, it is important to note that the administrators, in most cases, were not as familiar with the curriculum at their institution as a faculty member would have been. The first difference centered on administrators not feeling there was a problem with the curriculum at their

institution in terms of its impact on African American students. In their best estimate, the administrators felt the curriculum, in general, was presented from a diverse perspective and not solely from a Euro-centric perspective. Conversely, some of the students felt that the curriculum, in general, did not use African American professionals as examples in classroom discussion and did not meet the needs of the African American students.

The second difference was in the area of courses relating to African American issues. An overview of the college catalogs from each of the four institutions revealed courses at three of the four institutions, which dealt with African American issues. However, 63% of students indicated that some type of course with an African American focus (e.g. African American Literature, African American History, etc.) should be added to the curriculum. With such a high number of students indicating an African American course should be added to the curriculum when three of the four institutions already had at least one course in place, the question arises of how well these courses were advertised. As already stated, administrators were not as familiar with the curriculum as it related to specific courses focusing on African American issues.

The third difference focused on academic preparation. Some of the students had the opinion that the college needed to do a better job at preparing students for the 'academic awakening' that would occur their freshman year. Several students commented they were not prepared for the academic challenges they faced their freshman year. Administrators did not mention academic preparation as a perceived problem.

A comparison of student and administrator comments about the peer mentor programs at their respective colleges revealed two differences. Administrators from three of the four institutions mentioned the importance of their peer mentor program and the

impact it had on students. Administrators from two of these three institutions gave detailed descriptions of their respective program; both programs appeared to be quality programs. However, only 13% (three students) mentioned the peer mentor program at their institution. These three students were either involved as a freshman or as a peer mentor or both. Administrators also mentioned how difficult it was to get African American students involved in their respective peer mentor program. However, none of the students, with the exception of the three students mentioned, indicated an interest in being involved in this type of activity.

Perception

A comparison of student and administrator comments about perception at their respective colleges revealed two differences and two similarities. At least two of the administrators had the perception that African American students had the same college experience as white students and that there was no difference in how they persisted in college. This was substantially different than some of the comments shared by African American students who had experiences that most white students would not have had. Some of the administrators perceived that the African American students on their respective campuses did not feel singled out. However, some of the students felt they had to put up with certain stereotypes such as: 'black spokesperson', all black students play sports, and all black students need academic assistance.

Despite the perception that African American students had similar college experiences as their white counterparts, *overall* the administrators appeared to have a good idea of how African American students felt on a predominantly white campus. The administrators used such descriptors as: culture shock, separation, outcast, token black

person, hesitant to approach the white system, and peer pressure from other African American students about not going outside the black norm. All of these descriptors were mentioned by at least one student.

The concept of 'mattering' (Cuyjet, 1998) as described in Chapter Two, was mentioned by at least three students. According to the students, 'mattering' was feeling appreciated and knowing that they had made an impact on other students and the college. However, administrators did not mention the concept of 'mattering' during the interviews.

Both administrators and students mentioned the importance of a positive attitude. 'Attitude' referred to students having a positive approach to the college experience meaning if the student thought he/she could persist then they would persist. Overall student attitude seemed to have had a substantial impact on overall college experience and persistence as perceived by the administrators as well as the students.

Campus Environment

A comparison of student and administrator comments about the college environment on their respective college revealed one similarity and three differences. The issue of the local community where the college is located was also briefly mentioned in this section. The overall general impression of the campus environment was similar for both student and administrator. The administrators described the college environment in the following manner: we take an individual approach, we treat each situation as unique, and it's difficult for students to fade into the woodwork here and have their problems go unnoticed. Similarly, the students described their college environment as friendly and that the small class size was a positive factor for their experience. Forty-two

percent of the students considered their campus environment a quiet place with few distractions, which they deemed a positive factor in their college persistence.

While administrators, in general, considered the small environment a good place for students to concentrate on their studies, some also thought that the small environment helped or pushed students to work out their differences. The students, on the other hand, indicated that the small environment, at times, made it difficult for African Americans to get along with each other. In some cases, especially with female African American students, the small environment created a difficult atmosphere to build bonds and work out differences. This was primarily due to the fact that there were very few African American females on their respective campuses.

The second difference between administrators and students centered on how the college environment fostered change in students' viewpoints. Some of the students had the perception that their respective college environment led to change in some of their African American friends' viewpoints. For example, some students considered it negative and conforming for their African American friends to join predominantly white social organizations on campus. Most of the administrators viewed this experience as a sign of diversity and evidence of growth, not a negative outcome.

The third difference was in the area of student athletics. Many of the students who were not athletes, thought their respective institutions placed too much emphasis on intercollegiate athletics. The administrators did not specifically mention this issue as being a particular concern on their campuses. Furthermore, several students mentioned the need for more African American non-athletes. It appeared that the students were more concerned about this issue than what administrators realized.

The local community in which the college is located was also discussed in both the student and administrator interviews. In general, the perception of the local community was the same. Both administrators and students mentioned the local community as a place where few African Americans live and therefore local citizens were not accustomed to interacting with African Americans on a regular basis. Consequently, students often felt they were not accepted in the local community. Both administrators and students agreed that more work was needed to connect the African American student with community members, especially African American citizens.

Sense of Community

A comparison of student and administrator comments about the sense of community at their respective colleges revealed one similarity and three differences. Both administrators and students agreed that involvement in African American social organizations, other forms of campus activities, and athletics fostered a sense of community among African American students.

Administrators mentioned the residence halls as building community among all students on campus. The students, however, said very little about the residence halls having an impact on their view of community or their college experience. Only one student shared that the residence halls had an impact on him in terms of building the community for which he was a part. Administrators also mentioned the bond of being a first generation college student and how this builds community among African American students. Being a first generation college student and sharing this bond with other first generation African American students was not mentioned by any of the students.

Several students indicated how difficult the college experience was for African American females and African American non-athletes to feel part of the community because there were so few of their particular group on campus. Administrators did not mention this element during the interviews. As a whole, administrators did not seem to realize the times when the conflict experienced by African American students was from within the community of other African Americans and not necessarily from those of another race. Students clarified that, on many occasions, the African American students did not always stick together and sometimes the community was dysfunctional. One administrator did, however, indicate there was little community between African Americans on her/his respective campus. This administrator represented the campus that did not have an African American social organization.

Involvement

A comparison of student and administrator comments about student involvement on their respective colleges revealed two similarities and two differences. Both students and administrators agreed on the importance of involvement; it fosters connection with the institution and made the student a well-rounded individual. Both administrators and students also agreed on the importance of an African American social organization on campus. Three of the four participating institutions had an active African American social organization on campus. Eighty-three percent (15 of 18 possible students) of the students at these three institutions participated in their respective African American social organization. Students and administrators on these three campuses agreed that the mission of the organization was not to separate but to unite and bring together all students, not only those in the minority. The one institution that did not have an active

African American social organization had three out of six students indicate the need for a group of this nature on their campus. The administrator from this institution also agreed on the need for an African American social organization.

Intercollegiate athletics played an important role for 46% of students who had participated at some point during their college experience. At the time of the interviews, 38% of the students were active participates in intercollegiate athletics. Several students mentioned athletics as being a persistence factor by helping them maintain balance in their life, serving as a motivator for studying, and providing a connection for meeting other people. Both administrators and students agreed that intercollegiate athletics helped to build community but could also cause cliques. One administrator's perception was that athletics might cause some separation among the students but the African American social organization united people together. Both administrators and students also agreed that participating in intercollegiate athletics could make it difficult to be involved in other campus activities due to the time required for sports.

Differences were also found pertaining to student involvement. Most of the administrators talked about how difficult it was to get African American students involved in campus activities. In particular, administrators indicated how difficult it was to get African American students involved in the Student Government Association (SGA). In fact, one administrator shared how even with an African American SGA President, it was difficult to get African American students involved. Administrators also mentioned the position of Resident Assistant. Specifically, administrators indicated that it was very difficult to attract females to the job of Resident Assistant. Students said very little about either of these areas of leadership.

Most students were positive about the activities in which they were involved on their respective campuses. At least one student felt it was the responsibility of the African American student for not being involved in SGA. According to the student, the opportunity was there but students did not take advantage of the situation. As for Resident Assistants, five of the 24 students were Resident Assistants, which was a good representation among those who interviewed.

Fifty-four percent of students were displeased in some way with campus activities. Most of these students indicated there were not enough campus activities for which African Americans could be involved. Some students thought that many of the campus activities at their respective institutions were not appealing to African American students. Most of the administrators, on the other hand, thought there were adequate activities for all students. A couple of administrators mentioned that African American students, as well as any other student, were willing to complain about there not being enough to do on campus but were unwilling to be involved in changing the situation.

Perceived Obstacles

Students were asked to comment on any obstacles or potential obstacles to their persistence in college. Administrators were also asked to comment on what they perceived as obstacles to African American students' persistence. There were two factors mentioned by both students and administrator during the interviews: peer pressure from other African American students and expensive college tuition. Both also mentioned academics as being a potential obstacle but in different ways. The students mentioned their current academic experience and the challenge of their college's curriculum. The administrators speculated that a lack of academic preparation in high school and being a

first generation college student were obstacles for some of the African American students.

Administrators also conjectured other potential obstacles for African American student persistence: (1) the lack of African American students on campus, specifically females, (2) lack of African American faculty members to serve as role models, and (3) the location of the college. While the students mentioned each of these issues during the interviews, they were not referred to as obstacles to their persistence. Instead the students listed other obstacles or potential obstacles to their college persistence: (1) few activities in which African American students could be involved, (2) the transition process during the freshman year, and (3) alienation within the college community.

African American Student Enrollment

A comparison of student and administrator comments about African American student enrollment at their respective colleges revealed two similarities. Both students and administrators agreed there should be more African American students on their respective campuses, especially non-athletes and females. Both administrators and students agreed that being involved in intercollegiate athletics made it difficult for African American athletes to get involved in other campus activities. Having more non-athletes who were African American would provide better representation in other campus organizations.

Both students and administrators also agreed that more African American females would actually help the overall relationship between African American males and females. In several cases, the existing situation between African American males and African American females was that of friction because many African American females

became frustrated with African American males dating white females. Forty-two percent of the students indicated that there should be more African American females on their respective campuses.

Interracial Dating

Both students and administrators indicated that interracial dating was not a problem on their respective campus in terms of racial prejudice. In other words, interracial dating did not seem to be an unacceptable practice in terms of respecting individual preference. However, one major point of contention on participating campuses was that African American males, in many cases, did not choose to date African American females. Instead, both administrators and students described the relationship between African American males and females as more of a brother/sister relationship. Often the African American females became frustrated at African American males for their dating practices. Conversely, in another example of interracial dating, one administrator mentioned an experience of talking with a student who explained how it is not acceptable [according to other African American students on that particular campus] for an African American female to date a white male. One student also mentioned this in the interview.

Although administrators were under the impression that interracial dating caused a problem between African American males and African American females, the students described the problem in detail. African American females attributed much of their conflict with African American males to the male's choice to date white females. African American females did not understand the reason for this preference and often thought there was something wrong with them (the females) that caused the males to not

want to date them. Some of the African American females described their relationship with African American males as having a lack of closeness and common ground. They attributed this lack of closeness and common ground to most females not playing intercollegiate sports. African American females also indicated that interracial dating often caused conflict between African American females and white females. According to the African American females, some white females did not have a problem dating African American males but did not want to build friendships with African American females.

Negative Social Integration

According to both administrators and students, prejudice and racial harassment were not a perceived problem 'on campus' but there had been problems 'off campus'. Administrators and students attributed these reactions mostly to the location of participating colleges. These small towns and rural areas had very few African Americans in the local community. Therefore, the local citizens were not accustomed to interacting with African Americans on a regular basis.

Overall, 50% of the students reported some problem with prejudice or racial harassment during their college years. The students described the incidents as blatant in some cases and subtle at other times. Most of these incidents occurred off campus. Twenty-nine percent indicated no problem with prejudice or racial harassment and 21% had no comment. Based on student comments, the perceived prejudice and racial harassment did not seem to be a problem or hindrance to the student's persistence.

Although administrators did not mention the term 'resilient', this characteristic often described some of the student remarks concerning their experience in a

predominantly white environment. Some of the students attributed the perceived prejudice and racial harassment to the small environment where the college was located. Other students simply disregarded comments because they believed some white people they encountered prejudice from were culturally illiterate of African American people and other minorities.

Summary of Comparisons between Administrators and Students

This section examined various portions of the student and administrator interviews and compared the results. Student interviews generally lasted longer than administrator interviews. Furthermore, there were only five administrator interviews as compared to twenty-four student interviews. Therefore, the volume of data was far greater for students than administrators. This particular section compared issues where both administrators and students commented. Some issues were not mentioned in this particular section because there were no comments from administrators for which to compare.

Section Five: Document Analysis

The document analysis consisted of a review of various documents from the four participating institutions. Those documents consisted of: college catalog, student handbook, institutional research data, and the college's Internet web page. An additional source was *American's Best Colleges by U.S. News and World Report* (2001). The following areas were mentioned as part of the document analysis: years of existence, college mission or purpose, tuition, faculty/student ratio, most popular majors, average ACT, average number of entering freshmen in the top 25% of their high school class,

freshman retention rate, graduation rate, and academic courses relating to African American issues. Most of the areas were mentioned in terms of comparison. The purpose of this comparison was twofold. First, the researcher considered it important to show how the institutions were similar so that generalizations could be made with other institutions that may consider the results of the study. Secondly, a comparison of the institutions provided further description of the college environment that the students were a part.

Each of the four institutions had a long history. The average age of the four participating colleges was 155 years. The institutions were also very unique in their respective mission or purpose. Based on analysis of the documents, each of the four institutions had several things in common. First, all institutions had some type of church affiliation and were committed to Christian values as was stated in their college catalog. Second, all four institutions were committed to the 'liberal arts' experience and had pride in their undergraduate education. Third, all institutions were primarily residential with the majority of students living on campus. Fourth, each institution was committed in some way to furthering educational opportunities for people in the Appalachian region of the U.S. Students from this particular region were highly represented at each institution. Finally, service-learning opportunities outside the classroom was also a noted feature among the four institutions.

Attending one of the participating institutions typically costs a student between \$13,500 and \$18,000 with an average yearly tuition and fees of \$15,973. One of the many things these institutions prided themselves on was the faculty/student ratio, which was 14:1 on average. Students who attended these colleges majored in a wide variety of

areas. A comparison shows four majors that were particularly popular at these institutions: Business, Education, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences.

Institutional data, both from the four participating colleges and U.S. News and World Report, revealed other variables that described the institution. The average ACT for these four institutions was 21. An average of 42% of the freshmen entering these four institutions were in the top 25% of their high school graduating class. The average freshman retention rate was 67%. The average graduation rate was 48%.

The college catalogs were examined for the number of academic courses related to African American issues. As stated in Section Two, several students noted the suggestion for more emphasis on African American issues in the curriculum. According to the college catalogs, the African American related courses that were offered were in the areas of Sociology, History or English. A few examples were "African American History" and "African American Literature" and "African American Religious and Social Movements". One institution had four courses relating to African American issues. One institution had two courses, another institution had one course, and one institution did not have any courses that were noticeable in terms of African American related issues.

It is interesting to note that the institution that did not have any noticeable academic courses relating to African American issues also did not have an African American social organization. It could be speculated that these six students would be more negative about their college experience and negative towards the administrators at their institution. However, the students were no more or no less negative than other groups of students who represented their college. Nevertheless, the researcher maintains

the notion that both academic courses relating to African American issues and an African American social organization should be considered in the future for this institution.

Final Synthesis

The final synthesis provides a summary and conclusion for Chapter Four. A brief description of how the researcher derived at the findings of the study is also given. The purpose of Section One was to provide a snapshot or profile for each of the student participants in the study. Section Two explored the major themes resulting from the interviews with 24 African American juniors and seniors. Analysis of those interviews resulted in various themes, which were presented within the framework of Astin's (1993) I-E-O Model. These themes were stated in Table 2, earlier in this chapter.

These themes were examined in detail by the researcher and discussed in Section Two. The primary goal of this section was to answer the first research question: "How do African Americans students describe their experiences of being African American at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?" The themes discussed the students' experiences with such areas as: faculty, administration, academic life, campus environment, and campus life. The themes also examined several factors students mentioned as helping them persist in college. Overall, the results led to some significant discussion and conclusions, which are noted in Chapter Five.

The purpose of Section Three was to explore the major themes resulting from the interviews with five college administrators. These administrators worked at the four colleges where the student participants attended. Analysis of those interviews resulted in various themes, which were noted in Table 6 presented earlier in this chapter. These

themes were examined in detail by the researcher and discussed in this chapter. The primary goal of this section was to answer the second research question: "What do administrators at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia report that their institutions do to support African American students?" The themes discussed administrator perception of the students' experience at their institution. Overall, the results led to some significant discussion and conclusions, which are noted in Chapter Five.

Section Four examined various portions of the student and administrator interviews and compared the results. The third research question was answered here: "What is the relationship between what administrators report and what African American students say they experience as minorities at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia?" Due to the number of participants and length of interview, the volume of data was far greater for students than administrators. This particular section compared only the issues on which both administrator and student remarked. Section Five discussed the information obtained from the document analysis.

Based on the analysis of student interviews, administrator interviews, and a comparison of administrator and student interviews, the researcher began to develop conclusions from the large amounts of data. The results of the three research questions that guided the study provided a framework in which to consider the experiences and persistence factors of the African American students who participated in the interview process. The discussion, conclusions, and recommendations are discussed in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

The student and administrator interviews yielded multiple findings. The researcher has chosen some of the more prevalent factors as an appropriate means to close this chapter. First, the impact of faculty influence on African American students' overall college experience and persistence was significant. According to students, small predominantly white colleges should consider increasing the number of African American faculty to enhance this already positive experience. Consideration should also be given for the addition of academic courses related to African American issues.

The small, predominantly white college environment had both positive and negative affects on African American college students. For instance, there were elements of adjustment that African American students face such as stereotypes (e.g. all African Americans play sports; all African Americans need additional assistance with their classes). Therefore, it is important for faculty and administrators to understand the ramifications of the small college environment, from the African American student's point of view, and its impact on their experience and persistence.

The lack of African American females and African American non-athletes tended to impact the college community. This impact sometimes produced friction within the African American student community. This was especially true, as non-athletes often felt left out. Also, African American females sometimes felt like an outcast because of not being asked out on dates by African American males. African American females also felt they had no common ground with African American males because they (i.e. females) were not athletes, in most situations. Most students noted the suggestion for an overall

increase in African American student enrollment on their campus, specifically among females and non-athletes.

Involvement in extra-curricular activities was a significant persistence factor for African American students. This was especially true for a number of students who participated in intercollegiate athletics. The issue of “sharing commonalities” or sharing similar interests was an important persistence factor for African American students. An African American social organization was reported to have positive impact on peer relationships on campuses where an organization was established.

Finally, many factors in this study were important to the overall experience and persistence of African American students at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges. However, sixteen specific persistence factors were mentioned during the student interviews (see Tables 4 and 5 presented earlier in this chapter). These factors have both internal (i.e. factors the students themselves can control) and external elements (i.e. outside factors such as the college environment and college personnel) that were important to the college experience.

The data resulting from this study were quite extensive. This chapter has provided an overview of the massive quantity of interview transcripts. The following chapter will provide discussion, conclusions, and recommendations to the study.

Chapter V

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter Five presents the discussion, conclusion and recommendations for this study with the results from Chapter Four as the primary focus. The intent of this research was to address the problem of describing the experiences of African American students who had persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the United States. The purpose of the study was threefold: (1) to describe the experiences of African American students who had persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia, (2) to describe what administrators, at these same institutions, said they did to contribute to the policies and procedures that impacted the persistence of African American students, and (3) to compare what administrators said they did to support African American students and what African American students said about their experience of being a minority at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges.

Twenty-four students and five administrators at four small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges were interviewed using a semi-structured, open-ended questioning method. Using qualitative methods, the responses were analyzed in Chapter Four. The amount of data collected from these interviews was extensive. It amounted to 400 pages of transcripts. The researcher attempted to condense these findings into a readable but concise fashion. It is suggested that Chapter Four be explored in detail for those who are interested in having further understanding about African American student persistence at

small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges. It should be noted that due to the size of the study and the data collected, more detailed data could have been shared. However, it would not have been practical for the reader to go into such detail in this particular work.

In this chapter, several findings are presented and discussed in relation to previous research and theory. Conclusions that can be reasonably drawn from these findings are then offered. Finally, suggestions for future policy and practice for student affairs professionals are stated along with recommendations for further research.

Discussion of Research Findings with Comparisons to the Literature

For purposes of organization, this section has the following sub-categories: Faculty and Administrators, Academics, College Environment, Community, Student Involvement, Student Adjustment, and Peer Influence. Each sub-category presents the major research findings of the study, along with brief comparisons with the literature. It is the intent here to describe what was learned from the study and how this compared to what was already known from the literature about African American student experience and persistence at predominantly white colleges and universities. While the findings were directly related to African American students at four institutions, it was assumed that these findings and their implications could be considered for other small colleges, especially those in the Appalachian region of the United States.

Faculty and Administrators

This first section discusses the importance of faculty and administrator influence on African American students as they persisted in college. The influence of faculty members and administrators on student persistence was significant. Seventy-one percent

of the students indicated faculty influence as a persistence factor. Therefore, it can be suggested that faculty at small colleges continue providing the individual attention that students mentioned. In this study, faculty influence was defined in several ways during the student interviews. According to the students, faculty have had a positive impact because they: cared enough to push students do to better (sometimes referred to as 'tough love'), took time for students, were willing to help and had an open door policy. Students also enjoyed getting to know their professors outside the classroom through various campus events. It was clear that students appreciated the individual attention they received from faculty members at their respective institutions.

Another significant factor mentioned by students was the Office of President. Due to the positive responses concerning college presidents, the researcher thought it was noteworthy to discuss this as a major finding. Without any specific questioning regarding the Office of President during the interviews, 29% of the students reported their college president as having a positive impact on their experience. The comments centered around the President's visibility on campus and willingness to talk to students. It could be assumed that if this type of leadership has had an impact on a small number of African American students, perhaps even more emphasis could be placed on all administrative offices providing attention to these students.

While faculty influence was a significant finding for this study, the existing literature was extensive on faculty influence on student experience and persistence. Several researchers have addressed the importance of faculty influence. Tinto's (1987) *Student Integration Model* suggested that the more integrated the student, the more likely

he/she would persist. According to Tinto (1987), interaction with faculty is part of this integration. Astin's (1984) *Theory of Student Involvement* discussed the importance of communication with faculty [both in and out of the classroom] as a means of involvement, which fosters persistence. Pace's (1980) *Quality of Student Effort Scales* also highlighted faculty influence. Academic experiences in the classroom and intellectual experiences with faculty members serve as one of the three major factors in Pace's (1980) model. Bean (1980) also mentioned the informal contact with faculty and administrators as an avenue for increasing retention. Nettles (1991) noted the ease of developing relationships with faculty as one of four items that led to academic integration for African American students. Other researchers have also addressed the importance of faculty and administrator influence on student persistence (Altbach and Lomotey, 1991; Gordon, 1994; Kobrak, 1992; Lang and Ford, 1992; Levin and Levin, 1991; and Noel, 1985).

Although students spoke very highly of the faculty, a majority indicated some room for improvement. The greatest need for improvement was in the area of diversity among faculty members. The need for African American faculty members on their respective campuses was reported by 58% of the students. Although most institutions participating in the study had a small number of African Americans on staff, there were very few African American faculty members. Students specifically mentioned the need of 'role models' for the African American student. Most students did not feel that they had an African American role model at their institution to which they could look for guidance.

Some students specifically mentioned that there should be African American faculty and administrators in positions other than coaching at their respective institutions. While coaches were a positive influence for the student athletes and some non-athletes in the study, there was a specified need to have a role model outside athletics. For the non-athlete, in particular, an African American faculty member or administrator would be an important asset for these students. Some student athletes even said this would be valuable to them to have someone who understood the African American culture and that could relate to them.

While several students mentioned the importance of having an African American role model, the number of African American faculty and administrators at participating institutions was relatively low. Nettles' (1998) model of the cyclical process of African American student attrition applies here. In this model, Nettles (1998) suggested that the lack of African American role models was part of the cyclical process that sometimes led to attrition for African American students. The notion was that without an African American role model, the African American student might not persist. If the student did persist, he/she might not have a college experience and that would lead to further education. According to Nettles (1998), the cyclical process occurs when the African American student decides not to choose a career where he/she can serve as a role model to other African American students. Thus the potential number of African American role models continues to be underrepresented. Altbach and Lomotey (1991) and Credle and Dean (1991) also suggested the importance of faculty members as mentors in African American student persistence.

Another area of improvement mentioned was in the area of classroom management. Three remarks deserve further exploration. First, according to the students, there were times in the classroom when African Americans felt like the 'black spokesperson' for the African American community. Students sometimes felt they were supposed to be able to present 'the' African American perspective on various issues in class. According to interviewees, most African American students did not want this responsibility, especially when he/she was the only African American in class.

Second, according to students, some faculty members were hesitant to discuss race issues in class due to unfamiliarity with the subject matter. However, students wanted discussions based on these types of issues, even with the unfamiliarity. The students felt that they, along with the faculty, could learn together during these times. Although similar in nature, the students viewed class discussion differently than being the 'black spokesperson.' The students believed class discussions were more voluntary and inclusive. Being the 'black spokesperson', however, was viewed as involuntary and often expected. Third, students sometimes felt that faculty were only able to relate to students from the Appalachian area and could not understand the 'black perspective' on various ideas or the African American culture. Perhaps these areas of concern could be addressed in faculty workshops or departmental meetings during the academic year. African American faculty members, administrators and students could assist in discussing these issues with non-minority faculty and staff.

In comparing these results with the literature, they are found to be similar. Brown (1996) stated that student belief of faculty not knowing how to discuss African American

issues in class was one reason African Americans found classroom experiences unsatisfactory. Also, Kobrak (1992) noted the importance of the faculty's willingness to learn about African American culture and to present minority perspectives in class as contributors to a positive college experience.

Academics

This section focuses on the curriculum and some of the suggestions students made for improvement in this area. Sixty-three percent of the students favored adding a course that dealt with African American issues (e.g. a history course or a literature course) to the curriculum for institutions that did not have one. The students indicated a course of this nature would enable them to learn more about their culture and would foster a sense of belonging on their college campus among African American students. The students also expressed a need for examples of successful African American professionals to be shared in the course content for a wide variety of subjects.

Administrators shared some insight that was useful in considering courses that focus on African American issues. First, one administrator shared from personal experience, how courses taught on African American culture could be taken for granted by African American students because they assume they know all there is to know about the subject as an African American. This particular administrator had a similar experience as an African American college student. Therefore, the administrator suggested that instructors take caution to adjust the course to meet the needs and challenges of all students. Second, another administrator thought that the "right person" must teach an academic course relating to African American issues. If the instructor

were not African American there would be a chance the African American students would not sign up for the course. This second administrator noted that African American students who did take the course might not give the instructor the same credibility as they would an African American professor. This point proved to be true in one of the student interviews. A student shared an experience of taking a course relating to African American issues taught by a white instructor. An African American friend dropped the course because he felt the instructor could not teach the subject matter because he/she was white. The student participant, however, remained in the course and had a meaningful experience.

The notion of offering African American related courses and the practice of referring to African American professionals as examples in classroom illustrations, are noteworthy issues. These issues could be explored and considered by the college's curriculum committee. Ideas could be implemented based on the individual needs of the institution. Also, it is important for faculty and administrators to consider how some African American students might view these academic courses and be prepared to address these issues.

Tinto (1997) argued that the classroom was the only place where faculty and students regularly meet. Therefore, he continued, if involvement and integration were to exist, they would do so in the classroom. The results of this study suggested the importance of classroom experience and the opportunity to learn about one's culture through various academic courses as significant. Cuyjet (1998) also reported the

importance of offering course materials that reflect different cultures as being important to African American students.

Students were generally positive about their classroom experience. This was congruent with Tinto's (1987) notion that academic integration played a key factor in student persistence. As juniors and seniors, these students had at least two years worth of classroom experience to make this assessment. However, students also shared how the college should do a better job at preparing students for, as one student labeled it, an 'academic awakening.' According to the students, incoming freshmen needed to be more aware of the academic expectations of the institution. Some students mentioned a lack of preparation for the academic challenge their freshman year. Noel (1985) discussed the reality of academic under-preparedness in students, in general, and the irrelevance of course requirements as leading to attrition. Noel (1985) found that those who enter college without the needed skills and a basic understanding of the relevancy of course requirements would have a greater likelihood of leaving college before completing their degree.

A final area the students mentioned as an important factor in their college experience was the office of support services on their respective campuses. Forty-two percent of students said they used support services, especially for writing papers and completing other class assignments. Ideally, administrators could help students utilize these services during the first few months of their freshman year. Then this practice would continue with the student throughout her/his college experience. A suggestion students offered was to employ upperclassmen in advertising support services.

According to the students, they were sometimes reluctant to ask for help. However, they thought peers could have an influence that administrators could not. The results of Norby-Loud's (1996) study revealed that the use of student services (i.e. academic tutoring facilities) had a significant influence on African American student persistence. Similarly, Cuyjet (1998) reported that academic advisors had a tremendous impact on African American retention, especially through the personal attention to student needs.

College Environment

This section discusses the importance of the college environment on student experience and persistence. According to the results of this study, the small, predominantly white college environment had both positive and negative effects on African American students. According to 42% of students, the perception that their college (i.e. physical environment) was a quiet place with few distractions was an important factor in their persistence. Many of the students admitted that, while they did not particularly like the small college environment, they felt it was the best place for them in terms of working towards their education. Some students speculated that it would have been more difficult for them to persist at a large university due to fewer restrictions [resulting in greater freedom] and the distractions of city life, where larger universities are often located.

Along with the small college environment being a place of few distractions, both students and administrators mentioned several other benefits. The small college environment offered an individual approach where each student could be treated according to her/his needs. The students liked the personal attention. The small

environment made it difficult for students to 'fade into the woodwork', which was particularly important for those students who may have struggled academically. In many cases, the faculty or administration would call the student if they saw signs of academic struggle through low grades, poor class assignments or excessive class absences. Therefore, it is suggested that the institution build on the benefits that already exist in a small environment. In other words, small colleges should focus on what they do well and continue to seek ways to augment their efforts.

Seventy-one percent of students felt they made the right choice in selecting a college. A predominantly white institution was exactly what some students wanted. Their reasoning was that a predominantly white institution prepared them for the workforce and provided opportunities for them to relate with Caucasians, which some of them did not previously have. Some students speculated the experience of attending a small, predominantly white college provided them with more of an 'eye opening' experience than a historically black college would have provided. Most students considered their experience a benefit as opposed to a drawback. These reasons for college choice could prove beneficial for both recruitment and retention efforts. Students themselves can be one of the institution's most valuable recruiting mechanisms.

A substantial amount of information in the literature focused on the impact of college environment. Tinto's (1987) model of student integration suggested the importance of integration into the college environment as leading to persistence. The congruence between the goals of the student and the long-term educational aim of the institution was also a factor in Tinto's (1987) model. Similarly, 42% of the students in

this study shared how the small college environment with few distractions was an important persistence factor for them. Thus the aim of the institution and the goals of the student were congruent, at least for some students.

Along the same lines, Bean (1980) noted that student retention increases when students believe their personal development was occurring and that their education would lead to desirable employment. Similarly, some of the students believed their experiences at a predominantly white college were good preparation for the work environment. Also, Rissmeyer (1996) discussed the importance of 'familiarity' with the college environment as an element of the adjustment process for African American students. Rissmeyer (1996) suggested as African American students become familiar with themselves in their new environment, the college becomes familiar with them. The result was a greater sense of belonging.

Although the college environment was generally positive for most students, there were some negative factors. At least 50% of students reported they had experienced some type of racial harassment or perceived prejudice either on or off campus. Most of the incidents occurred off campus. Approximately 29% of students said they had not experienced any racial harassment or prejudice and 21% had no comment on the matter. It was speculated that one possible explanation for the racial harassment or prejudice off campus was the location of the college. All of the participating institutions are located in small, rural areas or in small towns with few African American citizens.

Perhaps one approach to these issues is working with local community leaders. Both administrators and students suggested that more effort was needed to connect the

African American students with interested African Americans who lived in the local community. Perhaps this could even take the form of a community mentor program. Finding ways to help students become involved in the local community would be an enhancement to the college experience, as some students indicated. While this effort would provide possible role models for African American students, the issue of relationships with white citizens is not addressed. Therefore, perceived issues of racism and prejudice would not necessarily be addressed.

According to Eimers and Pike's (1997) study on minority adjustment to college, racial discrimination had a small impact on academic integration and intention to persist towards graduation. Similarly, in this study, students seemed to not allow these incidents to impact their academic integration and persistence. Rissmeyer's (1996) research on African American college students' transition process revealed one finding that was relevant to this study. According to Rissmeyer (1996), dealing with racism involved discernment of a situation and knowing how to give an appropriate response. In this present study, some of the students displayed recognition and ability to respond effectively, which concurred with Rissmeyer's (1996) findings. Some students discussed how they did not assume every event, which could be perceived as racial prejudice was directed at them personally. Instead they chose to consider the environmental factors of a small campus located in a rural area and the cultural illiteracy of some of its citizens. However, they were not hesitant to appropriately address an issue if it was indeed prejudicial and directed at them or one of their friends.

It was determined by the various remarks during the student interviews, that a positive attitude helped the student in her/his adjustment to being in the minority at a small, predominantly white college. Administrators mentioned this factor during the interviews as well. Students confirmed the concept of positive attitude by what the researcher referred to as a 'resilient' attitude. Some students attributed racial harassment or perceived prejudice to various factors such as: the small environment and ignorance of Caucasians in dealing with African Americans. Some students shared that they did not have the self-perception that most interactions with white people have racial overtones. In other words, students were not too quick to always blame Caucasians for everything that could be perceived as racial prejudice. In fact, some students indicated that they were closer to white students than black students. According to the students, some of the responsibility was on African Americans and the way they perceived daily events.

This resilient attitude does not only apply to perceived racial harassment. It is suggested that resilience was an overall persistence factor in their college success. The researcher observed resilience in many facets of the students' stories and overall college experience. Regardless of the circumstances, students refused to give up their pursuit of their long-term goal of earning their degree. They were determined to graduate.

The attitude or personal characteristic of 'resilience' was noticeable in several of the students who participated in the study. Although the term was not used by Cross (1978), there are similarities between 'resilience' and his theory of minority student development. Cross' (1978) four-stage theory included: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, and internalization. The stage 'internalization' shares some similarities with

the resilient attitude discovered in this study. According to Cross (1978), internalization occurs when the student developed a new identity with an inner security. This identity, according to Cross (1978), allowed the minority student to live within the majority (i.e. their campus environment) but yet be committed to her/his principles and participate in social change.

Sedlacek (1987) also discussed ways in which African American students dealt with racism. These were similar to the attitude of resilience in this present study. According to Sedlacek (1987), the most optimal way to cope with racism was to balance being informed about it and having a preoccupation with it. This means knowing when to take action and when to refrain. Based on the interviews, the researcher observed that some students practiced what Sedlacek (1987) argued and some did not. Similar to the resilient attitude are Rissmeyer's (1996) categories of transition. One category in particular, perseverance, refers to remaining connected to one's goals through periods of frustration. This definition was evident for some students in this study as they persisted amid frustration.

Cuyjet's (1998) research provided some helpful insight on how important it is for students to feel they 'matter'. They need to feel appreciated, cared for and a part of their campus environment. The antithesis of 'mattering' is 'marginality.' When a student feels insignificant and that they do not fit into their college environment, they experience 'marginality.' Cuyjet (1998) found that African American students were often more likely to feel 'marginal', especially on a predominantly white campus.

In this study, some students were directly asked if they felt they mattered to their campus community. Based on the overall experience of the 24 student participants, some had a reasonable degree of what Cuyjet (1998) referred to as 'mattering.' They felt they had made an impact on their peers and college personnel. However, all the students in this study were either juniors or seniors. The researcher speculates that as a freshman, more of the students may have described their situation as marginal due to being in a predominantly white environment. Some students confirmed this as they spoke of the difficulties of their freshman year. Even as a senior, at least three students were still experiencing a sense of marginality and were very much ready to graduate and leave their campuses because of their negative experiences.

Community

The issue of community among African Americans on their respective campuses is the focus of this section. The aspect of community will also be discussed as it relates to African American social organizations and other areas of campus life. However, one of the more significant findings in this study was the imbalance between African American male and female populations at participating institutions. The disproportion was evident, as the number of males far exceeded the number of females on each campus.

The lack of African American non-athletes was also reported as often having a significant impact on the existing college community. The impact of these factors, at times, produced friction within the African American student community. Most students suggested increased African American student enrollment at their respective colleges.

Specifically, 42% of students suggested their institution increase the number of African American females and African American non-athletes.

In this study, the number of African American males far exceeded the number of African American females at all four participating institutions. The number of African American students at each institution with gender representation in terms of percentages were as follows: Institution A – 68 (85% Male, 15% Female); Institution B – 120 (88% Male, 12% Female); Institution C – 60 (75% Male, 25% Female); and Institution D – 41 (71% Male, 29% Female). The average African American male/female representation at participating institutions was 80% male and 20% female. This disproportion causes several types of conflicts as already described in Chapter Four. Furthermore, according to Gose (1998), these figures are also significantly different than the national averages for male and female college students, especially African American male and female college students.

According to Gose (1998), “As has been the case for several years, black, Hispanic and American Indian women enrolled in greater numbers than men in the respective groups” (p. A32). Comparatively, the number of female college students was greater than the number of male students in at least five categories according to 1996 enrollment data as noted by Gose (1998) and the U.S. Department of Education (1998). The percentage of males compared to the percentage of females is listed for the following categories: Hispanic (56% females and 44% males), Asian (51% females and 49% males), White (55% females and 45% males), and all U.S. college students (56% females and 44% males). However the greatest difference is within the African American ethnic

group. As a whole, African American female college students represent 62% of the African American population on U.S. campuses. On the other hand, African American male college students account for 38% of the African American population on U.S. campuses. Cuyjet (1997) also reported that black women attend college in proportionally larger numbers than black males.

These comparisons are particularly noteworthy as administrators at small, predominantly white institutions explore their African American male/female ratio. As college administrators consider their respective campus environments and their African American student populations, attention should be given to the number of African American females, which was remarkably small in this study. The small college environment can be a difficult adjustment for some students but particularly difficult for African American females. Female participants represented between 12% and 29% of the total African American population at their respective institutions in this study. Whereas on a national level, African American females represent 62% of the African American population on college campuses.

Several students mentioned that having too few African American females on campus often created friction between: African American females and African American males, African American females and Caucasian females, and within the African American female population. In many cases, the relationship among African American males and African American females was often that of a 'brother and sister' relationship. In most cases, the African American males and African American females did not date each other. Instead, these students perceived each other, as siblings would view each

other. Furthermore, according to the students most African American females did not have an African American female role model. African American males, on the other hand, sometimes had an African American coach they could turn to for advice. These situations, coupled with the fact that most African American females were non-athletes, resulted in few opportunities to connect them to the college campus.

The reason for the disproportionate number of African American males compared to African American females at participating institutions is unknown. When comparing with national averages, the incongruence is quite evident. The researcher could only speculate that athletics perhaps had some impact on the relative number of African American males on each campus. Each participating institution had an extensive athletic program. In particular, football, which fields more athletes than any other team, was a major sport at each institution. The researcher is not suggesting that all African Americans play sports or that all football players are African American. Each institution is unique and would need to consider its individual status as appropriate when examining the issue of African American student enrollment.

African American non-athletes also encountered difficulties in gaining entrance into the campus community. Many times these students faced the stereotype that all African Americans were involved in intercollegiate athletics. In a sense, African American non-athletes were sometimes confronted with double jeopardy. They faced the issue of not playing a sport when many people they interacted with, assumed this as the case. Furthermore, the African American non-athlete sometimes felt they did not fit into

the African American male community, which was predominantly athletic, because they did not play a sport. Essentially, they had the potential to feel like an outcast.

Along the same lines, the issue of involvement and how it related to the African American community was an area on which to focus. Some of the students' viewpoints on involvement were different than what administrators thought. For example, some administrators would probably consider an African American student who became involved in a predominantly white social organization a sign of growth and a step towards diversity. They might also consider the same for a white student being involved with an African American social organization. However, some African American students viewed this type of involvement as conforming and treated the African American student who sought involvement in a predominantly white campus organization as an outcast. In some cases, the student received more negative treatment from her/his peers than from those outside her/his race. The theme 'minority among minorities' from Chapter Four considered this particular issue. By definition, the African American student felt he/she was part of the minority on a predominantly white campus. However, this experience was sometimes magnified as the student felt like a minority within her/his own ethnic group.

Haralson (1996) suggested that college administrators be aware of the social isolation and alienation that often comes with African American students on predominantly white campuses. Isolation and alienation existed, at some point during their college experience, among several of the students in this study. This was especially

true for African American females and African American non-athletes who often felt like a minority among minorities.

The residence halls are a very visible part of the small college environment. In this study, approximately 96% of all students lived in the residence halls on their respective campus, at some point in their college experience. However, the influence of residential living was only mentioned by two of the students as having a positive impact on their college experience. While these two students were positive about living in the residence halls, it was assumed that more information would be shared regarding on-campus living. Five of the students were, or had been, a Resident Assistant at their respective college. In comparison, involvement in the campus community (i.e. residence halls) was a significant factor in Sedlacek's (1987) study, which focused on critical factors for African American student success on predominantly white campuses.

Levin and Levin (1991) listed living environment as a persistence factor. Pascarella et. al. (1991) and Astin (1985) cited residential living as a significant persistence factor for college students. Both agreed that students living on campus were more likely to persist, be more involved and make higher grades. However, only 8% of the students in this study mentioned living environment as a persistence factor. The current study did not reveal any reason for this difference in perception toward residential living.

The manner in which the environment was presented to African American students as they first visited the college is also noted in this section. According to some students, their respective college needed to practice 'up front recruiting.' The students

suggested more straightforward information be given to African American students about what services were and were not available on campus (e.g. whether or not there is a minority affairs office). They also suggested the college be clear about the diversity on campus (e.g. how many African American students, faculty and administrators). Some students felt they were told a lot about diversity when they visited their respective college as a potential student, but they did not find that same diversity after enrollment. Perhaps more emphasis could be placed on how the college environment is presented to potential students in the recruitment process. While administrators want to be up front by discussing the realities of a small campus, they should also stress the individual attention and campus organizations the college provides to help all students become adjusted to college life.

Richardson and Skinner (1991) noted the importance of recruitment of African American students. They suggested that institutions be cautious about not recruiting African Americans to campus then expecting them to behave exactly as white students. Credle and Dean (1991) suggested that colleges consider their philosophy and mission of recruiting and retaining African American students because these students were now being more selective in their college choice.

For the most part, interviewees indicated that African American students on their respective campuses were like a family and provided support for each other. According to administrators and students, athletics and African American social organizations were often the linchpins that fostered community for many African Americans students on small college campuses. However, African American females and African American

non-athletes sometimes had a difficult time feeling a part of the community because there were often few members of these particular groups. As a result, conflict often took place among African American students. Understandably, administrators sometimes did not realize this conflict existed within the African American community.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggested that minority students often band together for support due to the perceived negative feedback they receive from non-minorities. Similarly, Person and Christensen's (1996) research on African American student experiences on predominantly white campuses revealed findings on this issue. Person, et.al. (1996) conducted a study at four institutions that revealed 83% of African American students spent all their free time on campus with other African American students. In this present study, students described community in several ways during the interviews. Most frequently students referred to the African American community as a family with the males and females often viewing each other as brothers and sisters. As a cohesive group, African American males tended to bond with each other, as did the African American females.

Student Involvement

Involvement in extra-curricular activities was a significant persistence factor for several African American students in this study. Fifty percent of students indicated involvement in extra-curricular activities as a persistence factor in college. However, the comments of administrators and students were somewhat incongruent. Administrators thought, for the most part, it was difficult to get African American students involved in campus activities, with the exception of athletics. Whereas 54% of students indicated

they were displeased with the amount of activities on their campus and the opportunity to get involved. Most student comments regarding this issue centered on the opinion that there were few activities offered in which African American students would be interested in participating. Administrators, on the other hand, felt the amount and type of activities were adequate for all students as their campus organizations and various campus activities provided ample opportunities for all students to be involved.

Two specific areas mentioned by administrators as being difficult to attract African American participants were in the Student Government Association (SGA) and in Resident Assistant (RA) positions in the residence halls. Of the twenty-four student participants, none were involved in SGA at the time of the interview nor had ever been involved in SGA during their college years. One administrator shared an experience at her/his particular institution of the difficulty of attracting African American students to SGA, even when the SGA President was African American. One student suggested that it was the African American students' fault, on his respective campus, that an African American perspective was not heard more often. He attributed this to a lack of involvement in SGA.

According to administrators, attracting African American students to the position of RA was also difficult. Of the twenty-four student interviewees, five were RAs on their respective campus, which was 21% of the 24 students who interviewed. Administrators indicated that it was especially difficult to attract African American females to the RA position. Little insight was shared on why it was difficult to attract African American students to this leadership position.

In terms of factors that lead to student persistence in college, Astin's (1984) research on student involvement, Tinto's (1987) research on social integration and involvement in student activities, and Pace's (1980) work on the quality of student effort all play a significant part in this study. Sedlacek (1987) also noted the importance of leadership positions in SGA and working as a RA in contributing to the persistence of African American students.

The lack of involvement in certain areas (e.g. RA, SGA, etc.) was noted in a study by Arminio, et. al. (2000). The focus of the study was students of color and leadership positions. In the Arminio et. al. (2000) study, some African American students resented the 'leader' label because it separated them from other students in their racial group. Being involved in a leadership position brought them into 'the system' that they believed oppressed their racial group and alienated them from their peers. This type of attitude towards leadership positions was also reflected in some of the interviews in this present study. However, at least half (50%) of the students said involvement in campus activities and organization had helped them persist.

While involvement in certain activities and organizations was difficult to foster for some African American students, other activities were well represented. Two of those activities were African American social organizations and athletics. Three of the four institutions that participated in the study had an active African American social organization. The number of students who participated in these organizations highlighted their importance. Of the eighteen student participants at these three institutions, fifteen (83%) were involved in the African American social organization on their respective

campus. This was a significant persistence element for these particular students. The organization provided a focal point and an opportunity to connect to other African American students and other minorities as well.

The popularity of African American social organizations leads to the suggestion that institutions which do not currently have such an organization, should consider establishing one on their campus. Perhaps this initiative would better meet the needs of all students, but especially African American females and African American non-athletes, who are often minorities among minorities.

Involvement in intercollegiate athletics was another significant avenue whereby African American students connected to their college campus. Forty-six percent of the students in this study participated in intercollegiate athletics at some point during their college years. According to students and administrators, some of the positive aspects of athletic participation were: providing balance and discipline to daily life, assisting the student in bonding with others; and motivating the student to keep her/his grades up to a certain standard. Some negative aspects of athletic participation were: cliques, which detracted from participation in the overall campus community; stereotypes; and time commitments that made it difficult to get involved in other activities. Given that the majority of African American males were athletes at participating colleges, perhaps administrators could work closely with coaches to create opportunities for involvement outside athletics.

The element of involvement as a persistence factor has both internal and external components. Essentially, students were responsible for taking advantage of various

opportunities to get involved on campus. However, administrators have a certain degree of responsibility to provide adequate activities and organizations for these students to be involved. The importance of involvement also needs to be stressed to these students through freshman orientation, freshman seminar, and various student activities and organizations, especially during the first semester.

Student Adjustment

This section focuses on various elements of the adjustment process for African American students at small, predominantly white colleges. Based on the findings in this study, these students experienced various stereotypes during their college years, which was part of their adjustment process. There were also descriptions administrators shared concerning the adjustment process they perceived for African American students.

Students described at least two stereotypes they experienced as an African American student at a small, predominantly white college. First, African American students sometimes felt they were called on in class as the “black spokesperson” for the African American perspective, which was discussed earlier. The second stereotype was the perception that if an African American was at a small, predominantly white college he/she participated in athletics. This stereotype was particularly difficult for those students who were not athletes. Inevitably some of these students [non-athletes] felt they were not part of the predominantly white campus community because they were African American. Furthermore, they might not feel part of the African American community because they were not student athletes.

Administrators shared several descriptions that related to the adjustment process for African American students on small, predominantly white campuses. These descriptions were based on administrator's conversations, interactions, and observations of African American students. First, it was likely that the African American students would experience 'culture shock' when they first came to a small college campus. One major adjustment was the college's rules and regulations. Of course this adjustment factor is true of most students, although for some more than others.

The second description is that of separation. This was most noticeable in the college cafeteria. Often at a small, predominantly white college, students will sit in the cafeteria with the people they know the best. This arrangement often takes the form of African Americans sitting together and Caucasians sitting together. The reaction to this observation was mixed among students with some not having a problem with the arrangement and others viewing the situation as negative due to the separation. Most administrators felt it was not a concern and did not interpret it to mean there was a racial problem. Instead, they felt it was a matter of personal preference and not a noticeable issue at other campus locations (e.g. residence halls) and campus events.

Peer pressure from within the African American community was the third description administrators perceived was part of the adjustment process. There were times when African American students received peer pressure from other African Americans concerning not doing things outside the norm of what was expected for African Americans. If an African American student went outside what was perceived to be the norm or what was acceptable for African Americans, peer pressure could take

place even to the point of the student feeling like an outcast. Sometimes this was described as 'not being black enough' or 'you're a white wannabe' by other African American students. One example could be, as an administrator shared, when an African American joined a predominantly white social organization on campus. Some African Americans ridiculed the student for her/his involvement.

The fourth description focuses on the term 'token black person.' One administrator discussed how some students believed if they were asked to serve on a campus committee or an office in an organization, they were the college's 'token black person.' In other words, the student felt he/she was only being asked to participate in order to represent the black population, which 'had' to be represented. It is understandable how African American students could feel this way on a predominantly white campus. However, based on the interviews it would seem that all efforts to have minority students involved were completely well intended. The attitude of being the 'token black person' not only made the student feel awkward, but the administrator as well. The administrator felt he/she was labeled as 'singling people out' when actually her/his efforts were sincere and conducted as an attempt to represent all segments of the community. Although similar to the 'black spokesperson' theme, the 'token black person' theme refers to representation in a campus group. The 'black spokesperson', however, referred to a classroom situation. The researcher perceived these two themes to be similar but also different and chose to represent them as separate factors.

The fifth and final description deals with what one administrator called the 'white system.' Some administrators felt that African American students were hesitant to get

involved in campus organizations and activities because the campus system was perceived as being set up for white students only. In addition to this perception, some students felt pressure from their African American peers that if they conformed to the white system, they would be going against the black system. As one administrator described, some African American students will go up to the system and get near it but will not come inside for fear of being labeled as conforming to the 'white system.'

In Noel's (1985) research, various factors were mentioned concerning the adjustment to college life. One issue that was particularly relevant to this study was how students adjusted to a new environment. Noel (1985) found that students who enter a new environment with a lack of support and little understanding of the demands for college life are more likely to not complete their college education.

Rissmeyer's (1996) research led to the construction of eleven categories of experiences African American students have in the transition process on predominantly white campuses. Perseverance was one of those categories. Perseverance simply referred to remaining connected to your goals through periods of frustration (Rissmeyer, 1996). African American students in this study mentioned several frustrations with the transition process at their respective institutions. All of which have been discussed earlier. Various stereotypes such as 'all African Americans play sports' were major adjustments for some students, especially non-athletes. Other students had to adjust to being looked at as the 'black spokesperson' in classroom settings when certain issues were discussed. Finally, some students had to adjust to members of their own culture ridiculing them for 'going outside the black norm' and conforming to the 'white system'.

Regardless of the adjustment factors, each student found a way to persevere towards completing their college education.

Sedlacek (1987) suggested that involvement in the local community was a major factor in the adjustment process for African American students. In this study, all four of the participating institutions were in small and/or rural towns with few African Americans. Student involvement in the local community was limited, at best. Some students indicated experiences of racial harassment off campus, which made involvement even less likely to occur.

Peer Influence

The impact of friends or peer relationships was mentioned by 38% of students as a persistence factor. The issue of 'sharing commonalities' is a term coined by the researcher to describe what several of the students discussed during the interviews. Students mentioned sharing commonness with other minorities and non-minorities in several areas such as: sports, academic major, or career goals. The students shared disappointments and helped each other through the tough periods of college life. They also shared 'tough love' and accountability. Similar to how some students described faculty and administrators, students motivated each other through accountability and encouragement. Some of the students described the friends [both African American and those from other ethnic groups] they had made through their academic major as a positive aspect of their college experience. A few of the students described how they had been with some of the same students for most of their classes within their academic major. This arrangement created a 'family' type atmosphere of support and encouragement.

These and other commonalities helped to create a sense of solidarity, which was a needed factor in some students having a positive college experience. Several students shared how there were times when the 'family' or community of African American students was all they had for support. These findings were supported through the work of Tinto's (1987) theory, which cited external forces (e.g. peers) as a significant part of student integration into the college community. Furthermore, Bean (1980) suggested that the degree to which students develop relationships with peers and become close friends was an indicator of persistence towards graduation.

Summary

The *Discussion and Implications Section* has attempted to feature some of the themes and findings from the vast amounts of data resulting from this study. The researcher has attempted to compare these findings with existing literature. It was the intention of the study to add to the literature findings on the experiences of African American students at small, predominantly white colleges in the Appalachian region of the United States and the factors that enabled them to persist towards graduation. Although there remains much to be learned, this study has contributed to the knowledge base on student persistence. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to conclusions, suggestions for student affairs professionals, and recommendations for further research.

Conclusions

This section will address conclusions that can be reasonably drawn from this study. The purpose here is to briefly mention what the research findings mean for African American students at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges. Other

questions also guided the researcher in this section: What did the researcher learn from the study? What was discovered that was not already known in the literature? What do the findings mean? The researcher suggests the following as conclusions with the understanding that there are others that could be drawn. Furthermore, the conclusions that follow and the recommendations for student affairs professionals in the next section are offered with the premise that each campus is unique and must therefore address various issues as appropriate for their respective campus.

The issue of 'minorities among minorities' was one of the primary factors discovered in this research. African American students at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges are, by definition, in the minority. However, among African American females and African American non-athletes, the issue of being a minority is magnified. African American females are especially a 'minority among minorities.' The numbers of African American females were remarkably low on participating campuses representing only 12% to 29% of the total African American population. The average number of African American females (approximately 20%) was clearly disproportionate to the number of African American males (approximately 80%). These figures were significantly different from national comparisons where African American females typically outnumber African American males on college campuses.

The question of why this disparity exists is not quite clear. It can be assumed that small, predominantly white campuses in the Appalachian region of the U.S. have a somewhat different environment than other regions of the U.S., especially as it affects African American students. In most of the colleges in this study, the majority of African

American males were athletes. However, most of the African American females were non-athletes. These institutions have various issues to consider for African American students, but especially female African American students who are far outnumbered by their male counterparts.

The question of what can be done in terms of working with African American students who are a 'minority within a minority' must also be considered. African American freshmen [especially females and non-athletes] need to talk about the realities of being a minority at a predominantly white institution but also the not so obvious 'minority among minority' factor they might encounter. They might need to discuss the experience of being an outcast among their own racial group, not fitting into the athletic community, or the frustrations that might come through dating relationships or the lack thereof. Administrators should pay particular attention to these issues as they work with African American students.

The idea of 'resilience' as a persistence factor was suggested through the observations made by the researcher and the data collected from the 24 student interviews. The idea of resilience was simply defined as sheer determination and the ability to press forward amid difficult circumstances. Taking into consideration the various positive and negative experiences described by student participants, it was evident that resilience was a characteristic of student persistence for some students. The idea of resilience as a predictor of persistence could be explored with further research.

The importance and need for an African American role model for students was also significant. The idea of an older adult with whom to share cultural understanding

seemed to be important to African American students. The term 'mother figure' or 'father figure' was sometimes used in reference to such a role model. The researcher suggests that perhaps the need for an African American role model is particularly important for females. The issue of family was the third most reported persistence factor among all students. However, when examined by gender, females were twice as likely to cite 'family' as a persistence factor. The majority of African American males in this study were athletes and in some cases had an African American coach to look to as a potential role model. The females on the other hand, did not feel they had this option. Perhaps faculty and administrators at small, predominantly white colleges need to consider these issues when working with African American students, especially females.

Involvement in intercollegiate athletics played a key role for several of the student participants with 46% participating at some point during their college experience [38% at the time of the interview]. With the exception of time constraints and stereotypes, the remarks regarding athletics were positive among student athletes. The question of whether or not African American athletes adjust to college better than African American non-athletes is relevant. The researcher has no basis to make a claim in either direction. However, impact of athletics on African American student adjustment could be considered with the transition for African American non-athletes at small, predominantly white colleges. Both proved to be significant and interesting factors in this study.

The importance of an African American social organization as a focal point for students in this study was very significant. Three of the four participating institutions had an active African American social organization. Therefore, 18 of the 24 student

interviewees could speak to their experience with one of these organizations. Of these 18 students, 83% indicated they participated in their respective campus' organization. While, these organizations were not national fraternities and sororities, as may be the case on large university campuses, they did provide a major connection to campus for African American students. This element should be significant in terms of suggesting to small colleges the importance of this type of campus organization.

While there was involvement in African American social organizations and athletics among African American students, there was a lack of involvement in other areas of campus life. For instance, none of the 24 students were members of Student Government Association (SGA), which often provides key leadership positions on campus. The exact reason for this lack of involvement was not revealed in the study but speculation would suggest that certain factors might play a role.

As a possible explanation for this lack of involvement, the researcher suggests a link between the 'white system' perception described by one of the administrators and some of the peer pressure that sometimes existed within the African American community. The perception existed for some students that campus activities and organizations were set up only from a white perspective and did not account for other ethnic groups. Arminio et. al. (2000) suggested that African American students resent the 'leader label' because it brings them into the system that would alienate them from their peers. The researcher suggests that the process, described by Arminio et. al. (2000), goes one step further in that this attitude of resenting the 'leader label' fosters peer pressure. Students and administrators used such terms as: 'white wannabe's', 'outcast', 'diversity

piece' and 'not black enough' to describe how some African American students are viewed if they attempt involvement in certain leadership positions. Students who resent the avenues provided for leadership may actually discourage their peers from becoming involved. This peer pressure might be subtle and noticeable only to a few people. However, the result is that African American student involvement is often impacted. Perhaps further examination is required based on individual campus needs.

In terms of campus environment, a quiet atmosphere of few distractions might be taken for granted. It was interesting to note that 42% of the student interviewees mentioned a quiet environment with few distractions as an important part of their college experience. Some students further explained that it would have been more difficult for them had they attended a larger university, which they perceived would have been more distracting. While this might not be a profound concept, it does merit some attention. Administrators could examine the level of importance students place on a quiet environment and determine if their campus is meeting that specific need.

The notion of African Americans as 'sojourners' was another interesting factor discovered in this study. Some African American students spoke of their experience at a small, predominantly white college in terms of a 'temporary resident' or as one student noted "going into someone else's territory." One student used the term 'Oreo' to note how African American friends at home viewed her as sometimes being black on the outside and white on the inside. These thoughts suggest the ability to adapt to two cultures simultaneously. African American students on small, predominantly white campuses often go back and forth between their own culture and the temporary college

climate in which they are a part. Perhaps this ability to be flexible was the result of their 'resilience' as mentioned earlier or vice versa.

The term 'sojourner' also pertains to the issue of similarities between African American students and international students. The comparison was made that sometimes it is easy for both groups to feel left out a predominantly white institution. Perhaps this area needs further exploration in terms of how the two groups adjust on small, predominantly white campuses. It is possible that information gained from one group would be of assistance to the other group and their adjustment process.

The term 'black spokesperson' and 'token black person' were mentioned in the student interviews. African American students mentioned how frustrating it was to not only be [in many cases] the only African American in class but to also being called on for the 'black perspective'. Furthermore, when asked to participate on a committee or join an organization, the student sometimes felt like a 'token black person'. The perplexing question is: How do administrators negate the 'black spokesperson' and 'token black person' perceptions but still give representation and opportunity to African American students? Perhaps the suggestion is for administrators to approach everything from a voluntary basis. Whatever the case, these issues were very real experiences for African American students on small, predominantly white campuses.

Another notion to consider in this section is dominant cultural influence or the student's background prior to attending a small, predominantly white college. A few questions are appropriate here for administrators to consider: Did the student attend a predominantly white or predominantly black high school? Has the student been in a

situation where he/she was in the minority? If so, can he/she easily adapt to a predominantly white institution? If the student attended a predominantly white high school, the adjustment process could be a smoother transition. If the student attended a predominantly black high school and lived in a predominantly black neighborhood, the transition could be more difficult because he/she was used to being in the majority. These are important factors to consider as part of the adjustment process.

However, some students who grew up in a predominantly black environment considered it a welcomed challenge to have the experience of being in the minority. Perhaps these students should be considered as candidates for a peer mentor program and/or other types of leadership positions. They could assist their peers who have more difficulty in the adjustment process.

The importance of how the campus is presented to prospective African American students was also important in this study. Some students raised the issue of their college's literature not presenting an accurate reflection of the campus community. Campus presentation can also be noticed based on whether or not the college has a minority affairs office. Perhaps these factors mean that African American students are being more selective in their college choice and therefore pay more attention to the environment they would be entering. The examination of college literature and the possibility of a minority affairs office may need consideration on some campuses.

The importance of the college curriculum containing course(s) relating to African American issues was also important to some students. However, according to the college catalogs at least one course existed at three of the four participating institutions. This

poses the question: How well are the courses advertised and promoted to African American students? It also raises the question of whether the courses are being taught with any regularity. Many students thought courses pertaining to African American issues were important but some did not seem to be familiar with what their institution offered. Perhaps this merits further examination to determine how students can be more informed of this option.

Suggestions for Student Affairs Professionals

The researcher provides the following suggestions for student affairs professionals as they work with African American students on their respective campuses, as individual need can be determined.

1. Consider the importance of faculty influence on student experience and persistence; continue to foster and encourage this effort. Encourage peer mentor relationships between African American students and existing African American faculty and African American administrators. This would promote the importance of positive role models.
2. Explore ways to increase the number of African American faculty and administrators.
3. Work with the curriculum committee to explore ways or ideas for implementing classes that deal with African American issues. Also, professors should be encouraged to consider ways of including African American professionals as examples in classroom discussions where appropriate. This effort is essentially the notion of 'diversity across the curriculum.'
4. Capitalize on the small college environment and the benefits of this arrangement. The small college environment offers many attractive features such as: small classes, individual attention, and fewer distractions. It is suggested that small colleges continue to focus on what they do well, which is provide this type of environment.
5. Seek a collaborative relationship with the Office of Admissions, if one does not already exist. Both offices should explore avenues to increase the number of African American females and African American non-athletes. This suggestion is

based on an area of need according to African American students who participated in this study. With the disproportionate enrollment in relation to African American males, African American females are often a minority within a minority.

6. Consider how the college might reach out to African American females. Given the small numbers of African American females on small, predominantly white campuses, the need for an African American role model is greater for these students.
7. Institutions that do not currently have an active African American social organization should consider establishing one on campus. For those institutions that do have an organization, administrators should consider ways to enhance their support for the organization. For instance, support could be given to help students understand the importance of sharing commonalities, accepting differences and working together as a family.
8. Investigate how the concept of "mattering", as outlined by Cujet (1998) relates to all students, especially African American students. The concept of mattering examines how students feel they are appreciated on their respective campus; also it is the feeling they have made an impact on somebody or some aspect of their institution. Administrators should consider how they could foster students' sense of 'mattering' within the realm of the campus environment. It is speculated that the more students feel they matter, the more likely they are to persist.
9. Capitalize on the existing influence of the Office of President. The Office of President has the capacity for positive influence on all students. College presidents had a positive impact on some of the African American students in this study. Furthermore, leadership from the top down can have a positive impact on administrators and faculty.
10. Encourage African Americans to participate as leaders in a peer mentor program. If a peer mentor program does not exist, strong consideration should be given to the establishment of one on campus.
11. Explore ways to give African Americans an avenue to express their concerns and share their voice on campus. Town meetings, forums, and meetings with African American organizations are potential avenues for this action to take place. The question could be asked specific to each campus' environment: How do we make African Americans a genuine part of what goes on here?
12. Consider ways to enhance support services, which several students said they use. Support services were especially helpful in assisting students in writing papers. Administrators should consider employing upperclassmen to advertise to students

the services available on campus, especially during the freshmen year. This may lead to increased attraction to the office and its services.

13. Use freshman seminar sessions to discuss various stereotypes African American students sometimes face in college. Stereotypes such as being the 'black spokesperson' and 'all African Americans play sports' are issues that need to be discussed with students during their freshman year.
14. Examine ways to use the residence hall as a place to build community for African Americans. Also, consider how to increase the number of Resident Assistants who are African American. This would provide African American students a voice in the residence halls by having African Americans in leadership positions.
15. Explore ways to work with the local African American community leaders to serve as mentors for African American students. Although most of the institutions in this study are located in areas where there are few African American citizens, there are some opportunities for this relationship to take place at some institutions.
16. Seek ways to assist African American students to work through their conflicts within their community. Conflicts that may come through interracial dating, conflicts between males and females, and the difficulties African American females face by being a 'minority within a minority' are all important aspects African Americans deal with on small, predominantly white campuses.
17. Encourage African Americans to get involved in Student Government Association and other activities so they can have a voice on campus activities. This involvement could help them represent other African Americans for ideas on potential campus activities.
18. Collaborate with coaches to enhance the potential for student involvement in other areas along side athletics. Many African Americans participate in athletics but often do not have the time or the desire for other areas of involvement. Coaches, who already have the rapport with student athletes, could encourage other forms of campus involvement. Perhaps athletes could serve as peer mentors to other athletes.
19. Examine admissions related advertisements (i.e. brochures) that are given to prospective students. The materials should be reviewed to determine if the minority representation is accurate for the campus. Perhaps African American students could be asked for their insight on how the brochure would be perceived by prospective African American students. Pictures and/or statements found to be misleading should be addressed as appropriate for the institution.

20. Institutions that currently do not have a minority affairs office should consider the possibility of creating such an office. If an office were not feasible, perhaps a part-time minority affairs staff position could be created.

Recommendations for Future Study

The following ideas are recommended for continued research in the area of African American student persistence.

1. Develop a quantitative instrument based on the findings from this study. This would allow for greater amounts of data from multiple participants at numerous institutions. Perhaps the study could compare students at different size institutions, both private and public.
2. Conduct a more narrowed study involving only African American females and African American non-athletes. These students are often the minority within the minority at small, predominantly white institutions. Perhaps a study focusing only on this population would bring more attention to a group of students who are sometimes at a greater disadvantage.
3. Apply Cuyjet's (1998) concept of 'mattering' to African American students at small, predominantly white colleges for further knowledge on what makes these students feel appreciated and/or not appreciated on their campus.
4. Conduct a study at small, predominantly white colleges that explore ways to increase the number of African American faculty and administrators. For instance are there ways that recent African American doctoral students might be attracted to apply for teaching positions at these institutions? Perhaps a survey of African American doctoral students in conjunction with administrators at small predominantly white colleges could be compared concerning this need.
5. Survey or interview African American students at small, predominantly white colleges to explore the reasons for lack of interest in leadership opportunities in the Student Government Association and Resident Assistants positions.
6. Administrators at small, predominantly white institutions may want to consider a questionnaire to administrators at historically black institutions concerning African American student adjustment. Although the environments are different, perhaps some meaningful information can be obtained that would be helpful to small, predominantly white colleges.
7. Conduct a qualitative study that would explore the attitudes of resilience and sheer determination of African American students at small, predominantly white

colleges. Or, perhaps a quantitative instrument could be developed that would use 'resilience' as a possible predictor of minority student persistence.

Concluding Statement

This study has attempted to thoroughly examine what the experience is like for an African American student on a small, predominantly white campus in the Appalachia region of the United States. The researcher concluded that meaningful information on African American student persistence has been assembled and reported along with additional questions to consider for the future. African American students at small, predominantly white colleges make up a small, but very significant, part of the college environment for the campuses that participated in this study. Among many things, this research has demonstrated the sheer determination and persistence of students who are in the minority, and in some cases a minority within a minority. Through their persistence, great lessons of character can be explored such as: motivation, resilience, adaptability, openness, faith and many more. The study also showed how caring faculty and administrators at these colleges can and do make a significant difference in the daily lives of students on their respective campuses. Their love, dedication and passion for their work were evident to the researcher and as reported by students.

It is fitting to close this study with a final comment from one of the very thoughtful and bright 24 students who took part in this research project. This comment is from Robert 15 months after his interview: "Overall, I think this is an excellent study. I believe that it sheds light on the significant struggles of coexistence on our nation's college campuses. I truly hope that those who can benefit from this study will use it effectively. I am honored to have been part of this study."

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX	PAGE
A Ten Steps to Implementing A Campus Wide Retention Effort	325
B Suggested Items to Cover in a Retention Study	326
C Appalachian College Association (ACA) Enrollment Data	327
D Appalachian College Association (ACA) Institutional Description	328-329
E Student Interview Guide	330-331
F Administrator Interview Guide	332
G Letter to Participating Institutions	333-334
H Research Synopsis	335
I Letter to Student Participants	336-337
J Basic Elements of Informed Consent	338-340
K Interview Transcript Letter to Student Participants	341
L Dissertation Codes (by interview question) – Student	342-343
M Dissertation Codes (by interview question) – Administrator	344
N Contact Summary Sheet	345
O Letter to Student Asking for Assistance in Reviewing Results	346-347
P Update Letter to Students Who Agreed to Review Results	348
Q Member Checks Procedure Letter	349-351
R Student Interviewees' Extra-curricular Activities Involvement	352

Appendix A

Ten Steps to Implementing A Campus-wide Retention Effort

<i>Step One: Decide to Act</i> * Create an awareness of the benefits of retention to both students and faculty.
<i>Step Two: Create Need</i> * Create an awareness of a need for action by pulling together committed supporters. * Examine institutional data and compare it with national data.
<i>Step Three: Identify Supporters</i> * Identify a committee based on key campus constituents and units. * Don't be afraid to expand; examine who should be on the committee that is not present.
<i>Step Four: Assemble Start-up Committee</i> * Share campus retention data. * Examine who drops out and why. * Examine the satisfaction level of students. * Review the literature to see what other institutions are doing.
<i>Step Five: Formalize Effort</i> * Create a campus committee for retention with support and commitment from the president. * Identify a retention coordinator. * Create a task force to facilitate data collection.
<i>Step Six: Convene Committee and Display Data</i> * Review new data. * Devise strategies to expand greater awareness of retention needs. * Keep a steady flow of communication with the campus community.
<i>Step Seven: Begin Implementation</i> * Consider using an external retention consultant to initiate campus efforts. * Continue collaboration efforts by getting others in the campus community involved in the process.
<i>Step Eight: Establish Priorities for Action</i> * Determine priorities and establish action subcommittees. * Priorities for action might include increasing frequency and quality of out-of-class contact between faculty and students, expanding the scope and effectiveness of academic advising programs, and identifying and implementing strategies to meet the needs of academically under-prepared students.
<i>Step Nine: Gain Top Level Support</i> * Involve top-level administrators and the president. * Identify outcomes/benefits of the proposed ideas and their impact on retention.
<i>Step Ten: Assess Impact</i> * Continuously review and determine the impact of efforts made. * Share results with the campus community.

(Noel, et. al, 1985)

Appendix B
Suggested Items to Cover in a Retention Study

Entering Ability- the predicted freshman G.P.A. based on high school G.P.A. and ACT/SAT scores.

External Encouragement - support received from parents and friends to continue the college education.

Perceptions of Discrimination - perceived prejudice and discrimination from faculty and other students.

Affinity of Values - the students' perceptions of the congruence of their values with the values of the institution.

Faculty-Student Interaction - informal interactions with faculty.

Academic Integration - combining students' academic involvement & success.

Social Integration - social integration into university life.

Academic Achievement - cumulative G.P.A.

Perceived Quality/Satisfaction - overall satisfaction with the college.

Perceptions of Learning and Development - extent to which college experiences influence their learning and development.

Institutional Commitment - extent to which the student believes that it is important to obtain a degree from the institution.

Goal Commitment - goal to graduate from a specific institution.

Intent to Persist - how likely is it that the student will return.

(Eimers and Pike, 1997)

Appendix C
Appalachian College Association (ACA) Institutions Enrollment Data, 1996

Institution	Total Enrollment	% African Am.	# African Am.
<u>Kentucky:</u>			
Alice Lloyd	511	.6	3
Berea	1,515	8.5	129
Campbellsville	1,521	2.9	44
Cumberland	1,614	2.5	40
Kentucky Christian	573	1.0	6
Lindsey Wilson	1,363	8.7	118
Pikeville	814	0.0	0
Union	980	5.0	49
<u>North Carolina:</u>			
Lees McRae	453	4.6	21
Mars Hill	1,299	9.2	120
Montreat	1,018	11.7	119
Warren Wilson	687	1.9	13
<u>Tennessee:</u>			
Bryan	455	.9	4
Carson-Newman	2,265	4.3	97
King	519	1.2	6
Lee	2,652	1.5	40
Lincoln Memorial	2,003	1.7	34
Maryville	928	4.5	42
Milligan	836	1.2	10
TN Wesleyan	738	4.6	34
Tusculum	1,516	5.8	88
University of the South	1,346	1.9	26
<u>Virginia:</u>			
Bluefield	756	5.3	40
Emory & Henry	916	5.6	51
Ferrum	1,075	13.4	144
Virginia Intermont	449	4.0	18
<u>West Virginia:</u>			
Alderson-Broadus	738	4.1	30
Bethany	712	3.5	25
Davis & Elkins	750	2.8	21
Ohio Valley	315	10.8	34
University of Charleston	1,424	3.8	54
Wesleyan	1,592	4.5	72
Wheeling Jesuit	1,527	1.7	26
Total	35,860	4.35	1,588

(U.S. Department of Education, June 5, 1998)

Appendix D
Appalachian College Association Institutional Description (ACA)

Institution	Affiliation	Location	Year Founded	Athletic Status	Degrees Offered	Carnegie Class
Kentucky						
Alice Boyd	Independent	Rural	1923	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Berea	Independent; Christian	Small Town	1855	NAIA	Bachelors	BA I
Campbellsville	Independent; Southern Baptist	Small Town	1906	NAIA	Bachelors Masters	BA II
Cumberland	Independent; Southern Baptist	Rural	1889	NAIA	Bachelors Masters	MA II
Kentucky Christian	Independent; Church of Christ	Rural	1919	None	Bachelors	BA II
Lindsey Wilson	Independent; Methodist	Rural	1903	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Pikeville	Independent; Presbyterian	Small Town	1889	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Union	Independent; Methodist	Small Town	1879	NAIA	Bachelors Masters	MA II
North Carolina						
Lees McRae	Independent; Presbyterian	Small Town	1900	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Mars Hill	Independent; Baptist	Small Town	1856	NCAA II	Bachelors	BA II
Montreat	Independent; Presbyterian	Small Town	1916	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Warren Wilson	Independent; Presbyterian Affiliated	Small Town	1894	NAIA	Bachelors Masters	BA II
Tennessee						
Bryan	Independent; Interdenom.	Small Town	1930	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Carson-Newman	Independent; Southern Baptist	Small Town	1851	NCAA II	Bachelors Masters	MA II
King	Presbyterian	Suburban	1867	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Lee	Church of God	Small	1918	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II

Institution	Affiliation	Location	Year Founded	Athletic Status	Degrees Offered	Carnegie Class
Lincoln Memorial	Independent	Rural	1897	NCAA II	Bachelors Masters	MA I
Maryville	Independent; Presbyterian	Small Town	1819	NCAA III	Bachelors	BA II
Milligan	Christian	Small Town	1866	NAIA	Bachelors Masters	BA II
Tennessee Weslyan	Independent; Methodist	Small Town	1857	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Tusculum	Independent; Presbyterian	Small Town	1794	NAIA	Bachelors Masters	MA II
University of The South	Independent; Episcopal	Small Town	1857	NCAA III	Bachelors Masters	BA I
Virginia						
Bluefield	Independent; Southern Baptist	Small Town	1922	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
Emory & Henry	Independent; Methodist	Rural	1836	NCAA III	Bachelors	BA II
Ferrum	Independent; Methodist	Rural	1913	NCAA III	Bachelors	BA II
Virginia Intermont	Independent; Baptist affiliated	Small Town	1884	NAIA	Bachelors	BA II
West Virginia						
Alderson	Independent; Baptist affiliated	Rural	1871	NCAA II	Bachelors Masters	BA II
Bethany	Christian	Rural	1840	NCAA III	Bachelors	BA I
Davis & Elkins	Presbyterian	Sm. Town	1904	NCAA II	Bachelors	BA II
Ohio Valley	Independent; Church of Christ	Small Town	1960	None	Bachelors	AA
University of Charleston	Independent	Urban	1888	NCAA II	Bachelors Masters	MA II
Wesleyan	Independent; Methodist Affiliated	Small Town	1890	NCAA II	Bachelors Masters	MA II
Wheeling Jesuit	Independent; Roman Catholic	Suburban	1954	NCAA II	Bachelors Masters	MA II

(Peterson's Four-Year College Guide, 1996 and Chronicle of Higher Education, 1997)

Appendix E

Student Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The results of this study will be of assistance to students and administrators at other small liberal arts colleges. What you have to say is very important to me.

The questions I will be asking will help facilitate a conversation between you and I. There may be times when I ask for clarification on some of your comments. Throughout the interview, it will be important to remember that there are no right or wrong answers. You should feel comfortable to decline to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. Most importantly, your interview will be kept confidential and your identity will be protected.

The questions I am going to ask you are based on your experience while at _____ College/University and focus on your persistence to the junior or senior year. Persistence simply means that you have met the academic requirements at _____ College/University to be classified in 'good standing'. You are one of twenty-four juniors and seniors who will be participating in this study.

Do you mind if I tape record this interview? The fact of having a recording device will enable me to give a more accurate description of your interview. If you decline to have the interview recorded, you may still participate in the interview if you choose.

I will also be transcribing the interview after it is over. If you would like, I will be happy to mail you a copy of the tape and also the text of the interview. If at the end of the interview, you decide that you do not want your interview to become part of the study, I will gladly give you the original tape. No other person will have access to these tapes other than myself. If at some point during the interview, you would like to make a comment 'off the record' please let me know and I will turn the tape recorder off.

In order to maintain confidentiality, I will refer to you as a subject number. However, for the purposes of identification in the dissertation, I would like for you to pick a first name that is not your own. As I have already stated, I will be the only person knows exactly who you are. Before we begin, may I get your signature of informed consent indicating your agreement to participate and that you understand the purpose of this study. Your signature also authorizes me to use the information collected in the interview, with your identity remaining completely anonymous.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix E (Continued)
Student Interview Guide

Question #1:

How would you describe your college experience at _____ College?

Question #2

Currently, you are classified as a (junior/senior). What factors have enabled you to succeed in the past (two/three) years of college?

Question #3

How would you describe your experiences with the faculty and administrators at _____ College?

Question #4

How would you describe your experiences with other students at _____ College?

Question #5

If I were an entering African American freshman at _____ College, what would I experience the first month on campus?

Question #6

What would you like to see happen in the future for African American students at _____ College?

FACTUAL DATA.....

Now, I would like to ask you some general questions about yourself.

- a. Your age and place of birth.
- b. Your geographic region that you spent most of your life in.
- c. Was this primarily a rural or urban area?
- d. Are you the first from your family to attend college?
- e. What is your classification?
- f. What extracurricular activities are you involved in?
- g. Do you live on or off campus?
- h. If you currently live off campus, have you ever lived in the residence hall and how long did you live on campus?
- i. What is your major?
- j. Are you employed on or off campus? Part or full-time?
- k. What are you planning to do after you graduate?

Appendix F
Administrator Interview Guide

Question #1

As an administrator, how would you describe the experiences of African American students at _____ College?

Question #2

In your opinion, what do administrators and faculty at _____ College do to support African American students?

Question #3

What would you like to see happen in the future for African American students at _____ College?

Appendix G
Letter to Participating Institutions

To: Gatekeeper
From: Robby Littleton
Re: Dissertation Research: African American Student Persistence at Small Colleges
in Appalachia
Date: September 28, 1999

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to ask for your assistance with a very important study. As a fellow administrator, I know that retention of your students is a top priority just as it is at Carson-Newman. I am particularly interested in not only retaining students but finding out what experiences help facilitate their *persistence* in college. And, how we (as administrators) can enhance those experiences in the most effective way possible to help the student succeed and graduate. By persistence, I simply mean a student who continues to be enrolled full-time in college and is in 'good standing' as defined by the college. In fact, I feel persistence is so important that I have chosen to pursue this area of study in my dissertation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

As I review the literature in higher education, I find a great deal of information on retention and persistence of students at large public universities. However, I notice a lack of information on helping African American students persist at small, predominantly white colleges. I think this type of information would be valuable to institutions like yours and other similar colleges. As you will note in the attached letter, the Appalachian College Association (ACA) is supportive of my endeavors. If you and your institution would be willing to participate in this study, I would greatly appreciate it.

Attached is a one-page statement describing my qualitative study. As you will note, I am seeking to interview 24 African American students who are successfully persisting in college. The interviews will be held on the campus on which the student is enrolled. The interviews will be informal and focus specifically on the experience of students as they persist in college. It is the student's perspective that is most important for me to understand.

I hope that you will be willing to work with me on this study. Specifically, I would need your help with the *random* selection of junior or senior students whom you would characterize as successfully persisting in college (i.e. in 'good standing' with the institution). Ideally these students would come from a variety of hometowns and high schools. I am interested in as much diversity as possible within the African American participant group.

Appendix G (Continued)

Obviously before I can conduct any research, I must have the approval of your campus' institutional review board that would approve such a research project as the one I am proposing. I would appreciate it if you could provide the name, address and phone number of that person so I may contact her/him. Should your institution agree to participate in this study and you agree to assist me, I would ask you to do the following:

1. Randomly identify 6 African American students whom you would characterize as successful with regard to their college experience. Random selection is important to the study to ensure representativeness among the population. Ideally, gender would also be equally represented (3 males & 3 females).
2. Invite each student to participate in this study. Provide them a letter from me explaining the purpose of the study and the procedure involved in being a participant.
3. Secure a commitment from six student participants and notify me of their names, addresses and phone numbers using an information sheet, which I will provide along with the letter. A stamped, self-address envelope will be provided for this purpose.
4. Assist me in securing a room on your campus that would be suitable for a 90- minute interview.
5. Serve as a liaison (if necessary) between the student and myself.
6. Assist me in locating at least one administrator who would be willing to be interviewed concerning their perspective of the experiences of African American students at _____ College.
7. Assist me in locating any written policies and procedures your institution has for working with African Americans students. These documents may include: reports on retention or graduation rates, policy statements, committee or task force reports, memoranda, and minutes of meetings.

Should you decide to work with me, your support of the research will be acknowledged in my dissertation. However, I respect the fact that your institution (if agreed to participate) will not want to be mentioned in the study and will keep the college's name out of the dissertation and maintain confidentiality. Again, thank you for your consideration. If you have questions, please feel free to call me at _____ or e-mail me at _____. I will be in touch soon.

Appendix H

Research Synopsis

Subject: African American Student Persistence at Small Colleges in Appalachia

Researcher: Robert A. Littleton (Robby), Doctoral Candidate, Leadership Studies in Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Robby is also the Director of Residence Life and Summer Conferences at Carson-Newman College with nine years experience in student affairs administration.

Study Sample: The sample will include 24 African American students and at least four administrators at small, predominantly white, liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the U.S. The students will be of junior or senior classification and 'in good standing' as defined by their institution. The administrator may be one who directly or indirectly works with African American students but can comment on the institutional policies and procedures that impact the experiences of these students. The institutions involved in the study are all part of the Appalachian College Association (ACA) and have an average African American enrollment of approximately four percent.

Data Collection Method: Semi-structured, open-ended individual interviews conducted on the campus on which the student is enrolled. The same format will also be used with administrators. Document analysis will also be used as a secondary form of data collection. Documents may include such items as: reports on retention or graduation rates, policy statements, committee or task force reports, memoranda, and minutes of meetings.

Methodology: Qualitative approach (i.e. interview method). The qualitative method will provide rich, detailed information on what it means to be a minority at a small, predominantly white, liberal arts college.

Anticipated Outcome: A description of the experiences of African American students who have persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white liberal arts colleges in Appalachia. The study will also compare the student's perspective with what administrators say they do to support African American students at these same institutions. The end result is to make practical recommendations for campus policy and practice that would enhance the quality of experience for African American students and in turn strengthen African American student persistence at small, predominantly white, liberal arts colleges in Appalachia. This study would also fill a gap in the literature on African American student persistence, which primarily includes large public universities.

Time Frame: Interviews are expected to begin in early fall semester 1999 and continue through January 2000. The study is expected to be completed by July 2000.

Appendix I
Letter to Student

Dear Student,

My name is Robby Littleton. I am a doctoral student at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville conducting research study on the experiences of African American juniors and seniors at small, liberal arts colleges located in the Appalachian region of the U.S. You have been identified by an administrator on your campus as a student who is moving toward graduation. I am interested in learning about your college experience through an interview that will take approximately 90 minutes of your time.

I hope that you will consider participating in this important study. Limited research has been done on the experiences of students at small colleges in the Appalachian region, particularly from the African American student perspective. Given this lack of research, college professors and administrators have a limited understanding of the college persistence process *from the student's point of view*. Persistence simply means that you are meeting the requirements at your institution to be classified in 'good standing'. Your perspective has the potential to educate and influence college leaders responsible for student programs and services. Furthermore, your experience and the strategies you have utilized for successful persistence in college can likely assist future generations of African Americans students.

Should you agree to participate, you will be one of about 24 student participants enrolled in colleges and universities in the Appalachian region of the United States. A private interview will be scheduled at your convenience, on your campus. The interview will be informal and will last approximately 90 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded based on permission of the participant. If you agree to participate, you will receive \$25 for your time and for making a good faith effort to take part in the interview process. This monetary inducement is a fair compensation and not meant to be a bribe or patronizing gift. After the interview begins, if for some reason you choose not to finish the process you will still receive the \$25.

I want to ensure you of confidentiality. I am obligated by research standards, ethical codes and the law to protect your privacy. *The information from the interview will not be used to identify you in any way*. Participation is voluntary; there is no penalty to withdraw or not participate. Your return of the attached sheet indicates your interest in participating in the interview. After I receive the information sheet, I will contact you to confirm an interview time.

If you wish to discuss this study with me prior to or after agreeing to participate, I will be happy to speak with you by phone _____ or by e-mail _____. Also, you may call the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (423-974-3466) if you have questions. I appreciate your consideration. Thank you.

Appendix I (Continued)
Agreement to Participate Information Sheet
(Included with letter to student)

Please return this sheet (in the self-addressed, stamped envelope)
with the following information completed:

I understand the basic purpose of your study and am interested
in participating. _____ Yes

Name _____

College/University _____

Best days of the week and time of day for an interview:

1. _____ Day; _____ Time

2. _____ Day; _____ Time

3. _____ Day; _____ Time

Local Address:

Phone: () _____

Signature:

Appendix J
Basic Elements of Informed Consent
Student Persistence Research Study
Researcher: Robby Littleton

This study involves human research. The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of African American students who have persisted to their junior or senior year at small, predominantly white, liberal arts colleges in the Appalachian region of the U.S. Persistence is simply defined as a student who continues to be enrolled full-time in college and is in 'good standing' as defined by their institution. Should you choose to participate in the study, the time requirement would be approximately 90 minutes. A follow-up session may follow the present interview for those willing to participate. The purpose for this session is to have the participant give feedback on the data that was collected in the initial interview.

The procedure that will be used in the study is a one-on-one interview. The researcher will ask approximately six open-ended questions. After these questions are completed, a series of background questions will be asked (i.e. hometown, classification, campus activity participation, etc.). The interview will be tape recorded if the participant agrees to do so. If the participant would prefer not to be tape recorded, the researcher will unplug the machine and rely on note taking.

Based on the content of the questions and the purpose of the study, the researcher does not foresee any risk or potential discomfort to the participant. The study is intended to be positive and is based on what factors have led to the participant's progression in college. Furthermore, the questions that will be asked and the consent form have been tested with African American students in a pilot study at a similar size institution in the Appalachian region.

The benefits of this study are an increased knowledge in the area of student persistence at small, liberal arts colleges, specifically from an African American student's point of view. This knowledge could be of benefit to college administrators and future African American students.

The data identifying participants in the study, along with the tapes, will be accessible only to the researcher. This information will be stored at the University of Tennessee's Office of Leadership Studies in Claxton Education Building in a locked cabinet. All information identifying each participant will remain confidential. All information used in the dissertation will be referenced by a pseudonym chosen by the participant. The actual name of the college will also remain confidential. For questions regarding the research or rights of the participants, Robby Littleton may be contacted at _____ (office) or by e-mail _____.

_____ Participant's Initials

Appendix J (Continued)

The \$25 compensation will be given to those participants who make a good faith effort to participate in the interview process. This information was stated in the initial letter to each participant. The \$25 is meant only to be a compensation for the participant's time and is not meant to patronize or bribe in any way. *After the interview begins, if for some reason the participant chooses not to complete the interview they will still receive the \$25.*

A sample of participants will be asked to take part in a follow-up session to review the context of the initial interview. If the participant decides to take part in an additional follow-up session, there will not be an additional compensation.

Participation in this research is totally voluntary. Those who decide not to participate will not incur any penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled. The participant may withdraw from the research project at any time and will still receive the \$25 compensation. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed if you so choose.

Each participant will be provided with a copy of the transcription from the interview tape. A letter from the researcher will accompany the document that requests the participant to review the transcript for accuracy and clarity.

I, _____ consent to participate in the research conducted by Robby Littleton. Participation involves being interviewed about my personal experience of persisting in college.

I give Mr. Littleton permission to audiotape the interview and to use excerpts from it in future presentations of this project. I understand that Mr. Littleton will protect my anonymity by not using my name or any other identifying characteristics when quoting me. I understand that, during the interview, I may ask for the tape recorder to be stopped so that I may comment 'off the record'. Mr. Littleton agrees not to directly quote any information given by me when the tape recorder is off.

I am aware that I may decline to participate in this study at any point during the study, even if I have already started to participate. I recognize that I have the right to examine the overall results of the research and any conclusions drawn from these results. I understand that the \$25 compensation is available for making a good faith effort to participate in the interview process.

_____ Participant's Initials

Appendix J (Continued)

By my signature below I am indicating my understanding of the above explanations of informed consent for this particular project. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix K
Interview Transcript Letter to Student Participants

February 4, 2000

Dear _____ :

Let me say again how much I appreciate your assistance and time with my research. I was very pleased with the information I gathered at _____. More than anything, it was a pleasure meeting you. As you continue your education, I wish you the best.

I have included the transcript from the interview we had together in January, 2000. As you will note the major questions are in bold print with your comments following. In the transcript you will notice "R>" which is a note for the sub questions I asked you.

Please read over the transcript carefully. If there is something that you feel needs correction, please mark accordingly. The main thing I'm looking for is whether I accurately captured what you stated in the interview. I am interested in what you have to say. By your review of the document, the validity of my study will be stronger. Please know I appreciate your help with this portion of the study. When you finish, please put your initials in the upper left hand corner of the first page and use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to mail the transcript back to me. I would appreciate it if you could return this no later than February 23, 2000.

Should you have questions you may reach me at _____ or e-mail me at _____. Again, thank you so much for your insightful assistance.

Sincerely,

Robby Littleton

Appendix L
Dissertation Codes (by interview question) - Student

Question #1	Question #2	Question #3
How would you describe your college experience at _____ College?	Currently, you are classified at a (junior/senior). What factors have enabled you to succeed in the past (two/three) years of college?	How would you describe your experiences with the faculty and administrators at _____ College?
Academics	Academic Major	Academic Advisor
Administration	Administration	Administrators
Attraction to College	Attitude	Black Faculty
Black Family Influence	College Degree	Classroom
College Environment	Direction	Chapel
College Experience	Faith	Curriculum
Community	Family	Curriculum (as an African American)
Descriptors (general)	Freshman Program	Curriculum (general education)
Disappointments	Friends	Faculty
High School Preparation	Goals	Involvement
Larger School Experience	Learning	Student Involvement
Involvement	Involvement	Student Responsibilities
Local Community	Mattering	Tutors
Minority at a Small School	Motivation	
Small Class Size	Obstacles	
Most Enjoyable	Preparation	
Parents/Family	Professors	
Personality	Residence Hall	
Professors	Responsibilities Given	
Racial Harassment or Discrimination	Small Environment/Class Size	
Responsibilities Given	Support Services	
Right Choice	Work Study	
Student Activities		
Students (or peers)		
Transfer Students		
Transition		

Appendix L (Continued)
Dissertation Codes (by interview question) - Student

Question #4	Question #5	Question #6
How would you describe your experiences with other students at _____ College?	If I were an entering African American freshman at _____ College, what would I experience the first month on campus?	What would you like to see happen in the future for African Americans students at _____ College?
Accepting	Academics	Adjustment
African American Male/Female Relationships	Accepting	Administration
Approachable	Activities	African American Course
Athletics	Adjustment	Alumni
Black Female Experience	Advice to Freshmen	Athletics
Black/White Relationships	African American Curriculum	Attitude
Classroom	African American Organization	Background
Cliques	Athletics	Black History Month
Family Figure	Background	Black/White
Incongruent	Black Faculty	Campus Activities
Internationals and Blacks	Black Male/Female Relationships	Community (more)
Interracial Dating	Black/White Mix	Diverse Student Body
Introvert	Cliques	Ending Remarks
Involvement	Complainers	Faculty
Mattering	Culture Shock	False Assumptions
New Experience	Determination	Food
No/Few White Friends	Discouraged	Fraternity/Sorority
Not Black Enough	Diversity	General Curriculum
Not Real	Environment	Involvement
Perception	Family	Local Community
Poor Communication	Females	Mattering
Residence Hall	First Month (Personal Exp.)	Minority Affairs Office
Separation	Fresh Start	Minority Scholarships
Sharing Commonalties	Immersion	More African American Faculty
Small Campus	Interracial Dating	More African Americans
White Relationships	Involvement	More African Americans (females)
	Lonely	More Black Non-Athletes
	Males	Nothing for African Americans
	No Connection	Peer Influence
	Other's Perception	Perceptions (black)
	Peer Mentor	Persistence
	Roommate	Residence Hall
	Sense of Belonging	Resilient
	Transfer Experience	Role Model
		Student Organization
		Up Front Recruiting

Appendix M
Dissertation Codes (by interview question) - Administrator

Question #Adm. 1	Question #Adm. 2	Question #Adm. 3
As an Administrator, how would you describe the experiences of African American students at ____ College?	In your opinion, what do administrators and faculty at ____ College do to support African American Students?	What would you like to see happen in the future for African American students at ____ College?
Acceptance	Administration	Activities
Athletics	Black Faculty	Administrators
Attention	Black Student Leaders	African American Course
Attitude (frame of reference)	Campus Activities	African American Group
Awareness	Class Size	Attitude
Black Faculty	Coaches	Black Faculty
Black Females	College History	Black Faculty Mentor
Campus Activities	Curriculum	Black Females (recruit more)
Community	Faculty	Black Non-Athletes
Culture Shock	Finances	Black Student Union
Finances	Generational School	Community Involvement
First Generation	Individual Approach	Connection
Increase # of African Am.	Lack of Involvement	Forums
Interracial Dating	Minority Leadership Program	Involvement (more)
Involvement	Peer Mentor Group	Leadership
Leadership Opportunities	Personal Experience	[Don't] Lower the Standards
Local Community	Stereotypes (Personal)	Misconception
Male/Female Relationships	Student Perception	Peer Role Models
Minority Group		Personal Experience
No Difference between Black and White Persistence		Priority
Non-Athletes (recruit more)		Reality
Nothing To Do		Research
Obstacles		White System
Outcast (among their own)		
Parents		
Peer Mentor Program		
Prejudice (we have it)		
Proactive		
Residence Hall		
Separation		
Small College		
Student Leaders		
Student Perception		
Token Black Person		
Understanding (by Adm.)		
Varied Experience		
White Students		

Appendix N
Contact Summary Sheet (Condensed)

Descriptive (Contextual)

Subject Number _____ Pseudonym _____ Institution _____
 Location _____ Time _____ - _____
 Interviewee Appearance _____

Observations

Frequently used words or key words	
Surroundings	
Non-verbal cues	
Silence	
Informal/unplanned activities	
Attitude	
What has not happened?	
Themes	
Gestures	

Analytic

Overall reaction	
Reflective feelings	
Researcher Bias	
Possible researcher mistakes	
Problems to be worked out	
<u>Beginning analysis</u> - Insights gleaned - Emerging patterns/Ideas	

Memos to self

Other

Appendix O
Letter to Student Asking for Assistance in Reviewing Results

April 25, 2000
[Name/Address for Merge file]

Dear [First Name]:

Hello. I hope this letter finds you doing well. In order to refresh your memory let me briefly re-introduce myself. My name is Robby Littleton and I interviewed you in the Fall semester as part of my research project. I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and an administrator at Carson-Newman College. My research is entitled *African American Student Persistence at Small Colleges in Appalachia*.

Again, I want to thank you for your willingness to be a part of my research. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and hearing your perspective during the interview. Please know that your interview has been very insightful. The purpose of this letter is to bring you up to date on the research project and to ask for your input on the results of the study.

As I discussed with you during the interview last fall, my plans were to visit four colleges and interview twenty-four students and four administrators. Earlier this year, I completed this process and transcribed the interview tapes. Since that time I have been working on other aspects of the research project. Presently, I am at the data analysis stage. As you can imagine, this stage will take a good amount of time to complete. After the analysis is complete, I will compile the results of the study and conclude the project. This is where I need your input.

During the interview, some students indicated they would be interested in reviewing the results of the study. I would like to ask if you would be willing to take part in this process. Although I am not at this stage, I determined that now is the best time to contact you concerning your interest since this process will *likely* take place this summer. Furthermore, I am not sure how to reach you this summer or thereafter. If you would be willing to participate in reviewing the results of the study, I would greatly appreciate you filling out the attached form and returning it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope as soon as possible.

At this point, I do not know how large a document I will be mailing. If possible, I will only send a synopsis of the results. I don't want to be a burden on your time but it would greatly enhance the validity of my study to have your input on the results. Basically, I would mail you the results of the study and ask you to read the document and make any comments or suggestions. Although I cannot compensate you for this work, please know that I would greatly appreciate your cooperation.

I hope to hear from you by May 12, 2000 if you would be interested. If you have questions, please feel free to call _____ or e-mail me at _____. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robby Littleton

Appendix O
Letter to Student Asking for Assistance in Reviewing Results (Continued)

African American Student Persistence at
Small Colleges in Appalachia

A Dissertation in Progress
Robby Littleton, Doctoral Student, UTK

Initial Yes, I would be willing to participate in reviewing the results of the
research project describe to me by Robby Littleton.

Initial I understand that this process will involve me reading the research results,
making comments or suggestions, and returning the document to Robby
Littleton in a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Initial I understand that I will not be compensated for this work.

Initial I understand that even though I agree to review the results, I may change
my decision at any time.

Summer Address (May – August, 2000)

Address after August, 2000 (if known)

E-mail Address (optional): _____

Name (Print)

Signature

Date

*******PLEASE RETURN BY MAY 12, 2000. THANK YOU.**

Appendix P
Update Letter to Students Who Agreed to View Results

September 10, 2000

Dear :

I hope your summer was everything you had planned and that your semester is off to a good start. Things are going well here at Carson-Newman. My summer was quite busy which is the main reason why I'm writing you.

I wanted to give you a quick update on my dissertation. First, it would help to read the attached copy of the letter dated April 25, 2000 and the information sheet I asked you to fill out. This will help refresh your memory since it's been awhile.

As you can see, I don't have the results from my study for you to review at this point. The size of the project, the steps it will take to produce significant results, and the time constraints of my summer are the main reasons for this time lag. In other words, I still have a ways to go before the project is complete but I'm making progress.

I am still very interested in your input as I noted in the April 25, 2000 letter. My intentions are to contact you with the results when that *great day* comes. I plan to use the above address to contact you. If your address changes this semester or if I have mailed this letter to the wrong address and you happened to receive it anyway, I would appreciate it if you would contact me. I am only contacting the students who showed interest from the April 25, 2000 mail out.

Just for your information, I am in a different position now at Carson-Newman. On September 1, 2000, I became the Director of Adult Education. You may reach me one of several ways noted at the bottom of this letter. I would really appreciate if you would drop me a quick e-mail to let me know you received this letter. Thank you. I will be in touch in the near future.

Sincerely,

Robby Littleton

Appendix Q
Member Check Letter

February 3, 2001

Hello. I hope this letter finds you doing well. As you can see, I have included some long awaited information. Last year (April 25 and September 10) you received letters from me asking for your assistance in reviewing the results of my study "*African American Student Persistence at Small Colleges in Appalachia*". I appreciate your agreement to assist me in this very important matter.

The process I am asking you to participate in is called "member checks" and is simply the process of obtaining feedback about data I have collected from the people I have interviewed. As you may recall, along with your interview, twenty-three other students and five administrators participated in the process. These interviews took place at four small liberal arts colleges between October 1999 and January 2000.

The interview transcripts from all 29 interviews totaled approximately 400 pages. These transcripts were analyzed and condensed into a readable fashion as appropriate for most dissertations of this nature. The chapters of my dissertation include the following: an introduction and discussion of the overall aim of the study, a review of the literature relating to the subject matter, a description of the methodology used in the study, the results, and the conclusion.

What I have included in this mail out is various segments of the dissertation that focus on the results and conclusions of the study. I have noted in *italics* the content of pages I have left out of the attached document.

- Pages 103-105 are an introduction to the results of the study.
- Pages 138-166 are examples of how I attempted to discuss the various themes discovered in the student interviews.
- *The pages not included cover such thematic and categorical areas as: academics, perception, college environment, sense of community, college experience, transfer student experience, peer relationships, what its like to be a minority at a small predominantly white college, and involvement in extra-curricular activities.*
- Pages 261-284 discuss the perceived obstacles and persistence factors as indicated by the student interviewees.

Appendix Q
Member Check Letter (Continued)

- *The pages not included consist of the results from the administrator interviews.*
- Pages 334-355 focuses on the comparison of what administrators reported in their interviews and what students reported in their respective interviews.
- Pages 356-384 include the discussion and implication of the research findings with suggestions for Student Affairs Personnel.

As you can see, it was not feasible for me to send all of chapters four and five, much less the entire dissertation. I also did not think it reasonable to ask you to read the entire document. Therefore, I have attempted to provide you with various segments so that you may adequately review my work. If you feel that you don't have the time to read the entire document, pages 356-384 would be the best place to focus your attention.

Basically, I need you to do three things. First, please read and examine the attached document critically (with the understanding that it is a 1st Rough Draft). Second, please answer the questions on the following pages and feel free to remark anywhere within the document. Third, PLEASE mail the complete document in the postage paid envelope no later than **Tuesday, February 20, 2001**. Since this document is a rough draft and the dissertation is in progress, I would ask that you not make photocopies. If, for some reason, you no longer wish to participate in this process, please return the complete document to me immediately.

Please know that I am extremely grateful for your participation in the interview process and this very important aspect as well. If all goes as planned, I will defend my dissertation in March or April then graduate in May. Later in the year, your undergraduate institution will have a complete copy of the dissertation. Again **THANK YOU** and I look forward to hearing from you soon. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Robby Littleton

Appendix Q
Member Check Letter (Continued)

African American Student Persistence at Small Colleges in Appalachia
Dissertation in Progress: Robby Littleton
Member Check Response Sheet

Please answer the following questions based on what you have read. Feel free to use the attached blank sheets to comment. Also, please feel free to refer to examples in the text.

1. Describe your overall reaction to the results of this study?
2. Describe how you feel the results of the study did or did not depict your own personal college experience? In other words, was this a reasonably accurate description?
3. What one or two elements stood out to you the most?
4. What elements or conclusions did you disagree with?
5. What comments or suggestions do you have pertaining to the findings on page 357?
6. What additional suggestions do you have for Student Affairs Administrators that are not listed on pages 383-384?
7. What other reactions do you have concerning this study?

Appendix R
Student Interviewee's Extra-curricular Activities Involvement

Student	Athletics	Social Org.	Music/ Choral	Intra-mural	Res. Asst.	Campus Activity Board	Comm. Service	Ministry	Honor Society	Academic Club	Orient. Leader/ Peer Mentor	Other	Total
Charles	1	1	1	1									4
Chris		1			1								3
Cindy		1	1										2
David	1	1	1			1						1	5
Debra		1				1	1						3
Grace		1			1			1				1	4
Jamar	1	1			1				1				4
James	1									1			2
Jean	1									1			2
John	1	1	1							1			4
Kris	1			1									2
Lauren		1	1							1			3
Liz			1							1		1	3
Marlene	1	1	1			1						1	5
Nichelle	1									1			2
Olivia		1								1	2	2	6
Patrick			2										2
Robert			2		1			1			1	1	6
Shequita		1	1			1				1		2	7
Simmons		1	1			1				1		1	5
Vanessa		1				1				1	1	1	5
Voline			1					1	1	1			4
Warren	1	1	1				1			1			5
William	1				1						1		2
TOTALS	11	15	15	2	5	6	3	4	2	12	5	11	91

VITA

Robert A. Littleton was born in Church Hill, Tennessee on November 20, 1964. He attended schools in the Hawkins County Public School System where he graduated from Volunteer High School in May 1983. He entered East Tennessee State University during August 1983 where in December of 1987, he received the Bachelor of Science in Speech Communication. After working for eight months, he entered the Master's program in College Student Personnel at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August of 1988, officially receiving the Master's degree in August 1990.

In August 1990, he went to work for Carson-Newman College as an Area Coordinator in the Residence Life program. In 1993, he became the Director of Residence Life at Carson-Newman College. Also in 1993, he returned to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to pursue the Doctorate of Education in Educational Administration and Policy Studies and continued to work at Carson-Newman as the Director of Residence Life. In 1997, he became the Director of Residence Life and Summer Programs at Carson-Newman College. In 2000, he began work as the Director of Adult Education at Carson-Newman College. The doctoral degree was received in May 2001. He is presently living with his wife, Cheryl, in Jefferson City, Tennessee.