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In Their Own Words:
Perspectives on HBCU Institutional Quality from HBCU Administrators

A Dissertation presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
Degree
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Chutney Nichole Walton
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who helped make it possible because I truly could not have done this without you.

To the 12 participants in the study, to Drs. Norma Mertz and Terrell Strayhorn, and the rest of my distinguished committee for their continued guidance and support of me and my work throughout this process.

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Abstract

College rankings such as *US News & World Report* (USNWR) are used as benchmarks for measuring quality in higher education (McManus-Howard, 2002). These ranking systems utilize traditional measures of academic excellence such as academic reputation, student selectivity, and financial resources, to assess institutional quality in higher education, which appear to disadvantage institutions with specialized missions such as historically Black colleges and universities. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe indicators of the institutional quality of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as identified by administrators at four different HBCUs.

Data were collected from 12 in-depth interviews with administrators at two HBCUs in Tier I and two in Tier II of the 2010 USNWR HBCU rankings. Data were analyzed using an on-going inductive approach to identify patterns across interviews and by tier. Overall, it was found that the participants in this study were largely accepting of the six USNWR indicators for assessing the quality of HBCUs. This finding was unanticipated given that the existing literature strongly suggests a misalignment between the USNWR indicators and the traditional mission of HBCUs. Only one administrator rejected every indicator, choosing to substitute a different set of indicators.

Participants sought to modify several of the indicators to make them more consistent with the fundamental characteristics of HBCUs. They also offered additional criteria they felt described the unique qualities of HBCUs, and were currently absent from USNWR. When comparing the responses of administrators in Tier I and Tier II, there were no clear differences in

their support for the USNWR indicators. However, administrators in Tier II offered more modifications and additions than administrators in Tier I, suggesting that Tier II administrators were less satisfied with the indicators as they are currently defined, than administrators in Tier I. At the very least, the aforementioned findings tend to raise questions about the ways in which the administrators in this study think about HBCU institutional quality. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are discussed at the end of the study.

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CHAPTER I

Background of the Study

The cost of attending college today is one of the largest investments made by American citizens (Pike, 2004). Additionally, consumers of American higher education have begun demanding clear and concise information about institutional quality (Dichev, 2001; Hossler, 2000; McManus-Howard, 2002; Pike). As a result, demands for credible information about institutional quality have led to the proliferation of collegiate ranking systems in many countries, including the United States (Dill & Soo, 2005). In fact, college rankings and guidebooks are so popular they tend to sell, on average, 6.7 million copies each year (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998). One such set of college rankings by *US News & World Report,* sells nearly 2.2 million copies annually, reaching nearly 11 million people (Dichev, 2001).

However, the importance of college rankings goes far beyond the sheer number of copies sold each year. These frequently used print sources imply quality to parents, students, and college and university administrators (Dahlin-Brown, 2003; Hossler, 2000). Indeed, people tend to accept the information provided by guidebooks and rankings at face value (Hossler & Foley, 1995; Hunter, 1995) and use this information to confirm their choices (Pike, 2004) or perceptions of an institution's reputation, value, and quality (Machung, 1998; Van Der Werf, 2007). Given the popularity of journalistic college rankings, two questions seem important to consider. First, what are college rankings, and second, how is institutional quality conceptualized in these systems?

Academic Rankings and Institutional Quality

The verb rank means to "determine the relative position of; to take precedence of; or to take or have a position in relation to others" (Ranking, 2009). Additionally, Scriven (1991) defines rankings as an act that involves "placing individuals in an order, usually of merit, on the basis of their relative performance on a test or measurement or observation" (p.299). Accordingly, "it could be determined that ranking is an evaluative measure used to compare two comparable entities" (McManus-Howard, 2002, p. 7).

Within the context of college rankings, it is essential to examine the definition of academic quality rankings. Webster (1986) states that an academic quality ranking:

> [M]ust be arranged according to some criterion or set of criteria which the complier(s) of the list believes measured or reflected academic quality. It must be a list of the best colleges, universities, or departments in a field of study, in numerical order according to their supposed quality, with each school or department having its own individual rank, not just lumped together with other schools into a handful of quality classes, groups or levels (p. 5).

This definition provides some insight into the concept of academic quality rankings, but the concept of institutional quality has been more elusive and difficult to clearly define.

Institutional quality is a subjective concept based in part on the opinions of those assessing it (McManus-Howard, 2002). According to Bogue and Saunders (1992), there are several assumptions being widely made concerning academic quality. These assumptions are that quality: (a) can only be found at institutions with abundant resources and large endowments;

(b) only exists at very expensive private colleges and universities; (c) is seldom found at state institutions and never at those schools with a regionally based mission or focus; (d) can only be found at highly selective and prestigious colleges; and (e) is available on a very limited number of college campuses.

Despite the focus on size, financial resources, and student selectivity in these assumptions, Bogue and Saunders (1992) place mission conformance at the center of their definition of institutional quality. They state that each college and university has the potential for excellence within its own mission. In fact, in their book, *The Evidence for Quality*, they propose that quality be defined as "the conformance to mission specification and goal achievement…within publicly accepted standards of accountability and integrity" (p. 20).

As stated earlier, one way of formally assessing quality in American colleges and universities is through college rankings, such as the *US News & World Report* (USNWR) rankings. USNWR ranks colleges and universities using six indicators of institutional quality (Morse & Flanigan, 2008), which are detailed in Chapter II. Some of the indicators are peer assessment, student retention, and faculty resources. Each indicator is weighted differently and comprises the sum of an institution's "quality" when measured in the rankings.

Despite its popularity, several questions and criticisms have been raised about USNWR and its proclamation of excellence and objectivity in assessing institutional quality, including the lack of information on how data are obtained and calculated (Hossler & Litten, 1993), accusations that schools alter their data to raise their ranking (Hossler, 2000; Pollock, 1992; Stecklow, 1995), and questions regarding the validity of these ratings and whether they measure

the quality of an institution or simply its prestige and reputation (Hossler & Pascarella, 2001; Carey, 2006). Another criticism of USNWR is that it appears to disadvantage institutions that do not typically fit into the categories of large, wealthy, highly selective, or prestigious (Bogue & Saunders, 1992; Carey), along with institutions that have specialized missions (Chang & Osborn, 2005). Historically Black[1] colleges and universities (HBCUs) are one such group of institutions.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the USNWR Rankings

The assessment and ranking of HBCUs necessitates a contextual understanding of these institutions primarily because of the centrality of race and racism to their development, existence, and struggles throughout history (Allen & Jewell; Anderson, 1988; 2002; Baez, Gasman, & Turner, 2008; Brown, 2003; Brown & Davis, 2001; Brown & Freeman, 2004; Kim, 2002; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Taylor, 1999). Gasman, Baez, Drezner, Sedgwick, & Schmid (2007) state that "the unique burden of historic discrimination HBCUs have faced and the distinct mission they have taken on as a result, have often put them at a disadvantage with respect to their white counterparts" (p. 5). In USNWR, HBCUs are disadvantaged because the indicators selected to determine institutional quality are inconsistent with their basic mission and characteristics (Chang & Osborn, 2005; Jaschik, 2007). Similarly, in this dissertation I argue that racism (and campus racial composition) is central to the disadvantages that HBCUs face in USNWR and American higher education. HBCUs must constantly navigate a racially charged

[1] In this dissertation, racial and ethnic groups are designated as proper nouns and will be capitalized at all times (i.e. Black and White). The only instances where racial and ethnic groups are not referred to as proper nouns and not capitalized are found in direct quotations.

higher education system which tends to denigrate them in much the same way that society has denigrated African Americans (Thompson, 1973).

Thus, it is critical that when assessing the value and quality of these institutions to consider the context in which they were established. Similar to Bogue and Saunders' (1992) earlier definition, it is also important to consider the unique mission of HBCUs, how and whether they successfully implement this mission, the qualities they possess rather than what they lack, and how these characteristics define the role of HBCUs in American higher education. Discounting these important factors may significantly reduce their odds of faring well in the existing USNWR ranking system, and more importantly, ignore their complex history as well as undermine their importance and relevance in society.

Since my position is that this issue stems primarily, if not completely, from a social history steeped in racism, oppression, and inequality, critical race theory will be used to help provide a theoretical foundation for this argument. Critical race theory will allow for fully exploring the concepts of race and racism inherent in the United States, historically and presently. Before I proceed, it is important to clearly state my perspectives and positioning as a researcher critical of American higher education.

Positioning Myself

Throughout my tenure as a doctoral student in a higher education administration program at a majority research university, I have continued to feel the need to speak out for several marginalized groups, unveiling to those in privileged positions the injustices and discrimination against "the other" in various situations and contexts. The intersection of my identities as

African American, woman, and two-time HBCU graduate has shaped my philosophical position as a social justice advocate, taking on an alternative worldview in hopes of bringing about change. With much success I have continued on my academic journey and I strongly believe that my "otherness" has helped me to do so. I also strongly believe that higher education is a site where race, gender, class, and sexuality come together to create one's experiences in academia. As I took on other students and even faculty members who were sometimes unknowingly oblivious to the experiences and lives of "others", I was calling for a change in existing ways of thinking and practice. Unbeknownst to anyone, including myself, I was simultaneously staking my claim in critical race theory.

Therefore, it was not surprising to me that prior to beginning work on my dissertation; I took issue with the application of USNWR's criteria to HBCUs for several reasons, even after the popular magazine created a separate set of rankings just for HBCUs. First, I believe HBCUs are disadvantaged by USNWR primarily because of their unique mission to serve African Americans and their racial identity as historically Black. For this reason, I believe that racism is not only normal within American society, but permanent as well.

In USNWR, lower student retention rates lead to a lower score for institutions on the student retention indicator. Based on this indicator, White institutions have no motivation to enroll low-income or minority (i.e., African American) students because they have higher attrition rates partly due to cultural factors and unwelcoming campus climates (Fleming, 1984; Chang & Osborn, 2005). This continues to widen racial gaps in America's educational system and perpetuate racism within society, making it normal and seemingly permanent (Ladson-

Billings, 1999). Meanwhile, historically White institutions[2] (HWIs) that seek to maintain their Whiteness by basing student admissions solely on factors that disadvantage many students of color (i.e., standardized test scores), and campus climates that marginalize minority students, are not disadvantaged in the rankings for this same reason (Taylor, 1999). They are actually rewarded with a higher score which can lead to a higher overall rank.

Second, the USNWR rankings have almost always consisted of mostly HWIs, leading one to believe that the attributes and outcomes of HWIs have become the rule by which all other institutions are and should be measured. In American society, Whiteness is normative. It sets the standard so much so that all other groups, such as Indians, Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans, are often described as *non-White* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For Black institutions, Ricard and Brown (2008) contend that they continue to face a stigma of inferiority despite their documented accomplishments, perhaps because the public perception is that traditional or mainstream colleges are the best pathways to success. As a critical race theorist, I reject the notion of Whiteness as a standard of excellence in education or any other aspect of life.

Third, it is my belief that USNWR, other journalistic rankings, and several traditional measures of institutional quality were not developed with HBCUs or their unique mission of serving African Americans in mind. This is because USNWR seems to privilege certain values in education (i.e., number of faculty members with PhDs, student selectivity, and financial resources) over others that are highly prized at HBCUs, such as the empowerment of Black

[2] For this dissertation the term historically White institution (HWI) will be used instead of predominantly White institution (PWI). The term PWI refers to the predominate number of White students enrolled in a university, whereas the term HWI refers to the historical context under which these institutions were developed---for Whites only.

leaders, faculty-student interaction, and the uplift of the African American race (Kannerstein, 1978; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). I feel it imperative to include the voices of those often not heard regarding the accomplishments and institutional quality of HBCUs, including those who work at HBCUs. For these reasons, critical race theory seemed an obvious choice for the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

The Use of Critical Race Theory as a Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged from a perceived failed attempt at racial reform through traditional civil rights litigation (Roithmayr, 1999). Created by legal scholars like Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw, CRT focuses attention on race and how racism is deeply embedded within the framework of American society (Creswell, 2007). Critical race theorists have a total distrust of Eurocentrism, and focus on the voices of people of color that are oftentimes framed by racism and at variance with the mainstream culture (Cole, 2009). There are several elements by which critical race theorists abide. A few were discussed earlier in my position statement and are some of the elements to which I am most closely aligned. Accordingly, they will serve as focal points of this dissertation.

First, CRT begins with the notion that racism is normal and permanent within American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Encouraging and practicing concepts of color-blindness or those that insist only on treatment that is equal or standard across the board only serves to remedy the most blatant forms of discrimination, while allowing more hidden forms of racism to remain deeply embedded within society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Second, critical race theorists reject the notion of Whiteness as standard, where Whites often view their understanding of reality as not just a specific perspective, but as the truth or normative (Taylor, 1999). In fact, when shaping the legal definition of Whiteness, judges, like many other citizens, defined the White race in opposition to Blackness or some other form of "otherness" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Third, CRT urges people of color to recount their experiences with racism and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess master narratives---a practice known as storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). A majority narrative uses a "standard formulae" (i.e., US News and World Report rankings criteria), purporting to be neutral and objective (Ikemoto, 1997). Majoritarian stories teach that darker skin and poverty correlate with "bad", while linking White with "good". Just based on the appearance of the USNWR rankings, Black institutions are seemingly bad or inferior, while White institutions appear to be just the opposite---good and superior.

The concept of storytelling in CRT, allows for the unearthing and replacement of underlying rhetorical structures of the current social order, especially when they are unfair to disenfranchised groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Counter-storytelling is proposed in this study, be it through the participants' voices or other HBCU constituencies, as a means of allowing for any stories that stand in opposition to the majoritarian perspectives and perceptions of institutional quality, particularly at HBCUs.

Using a CRT framework will allow me to advance the voices of those typically unheard in the construction of the rankings and insist that practitioners listen to those voices so as to

counter the dominant discourses surrounding academic excellence in higher education. This push for advocacy and hope for change was the impetus behind this study, and also influenced the research questions posed and the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Statement of the Problem

CRT maintains an overall goal of developing a research agenda that accounts for the roles of race and racism in higher education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in higher education (Soloranzo & Villalpando, 1998). These forms of subordination extend to the overall assessment of HBCUs in American higher education and their disadvantaged position in USNWR. This statement is not meant to imply that HBCUs are the only institutions that fare poorly in USNWR or to ignore the positions of other institutions. However, this study does allow for the examination of one group of institutions with a historically marred past of discrimination and struggle unique to only them (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

In terms of institutional quality, traditional assessment measures for the critical race theorist are a movement to legitimize the deficiency of Black institutions "under the guise of scientific rationalism" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 23). With the exception of a few private and elite HBCUs, few other Black institutions are included in USNWR (Kamara, 2007). When they are included in the *America's Best Colleges* issue or in the *US News & World Report Historically Black Colleges and Universities* issue they are evaluated based on indicators that were set on a broader cast of institutions, most of which are HWIs (Chang & Osborn, 2005). Current measures

do little in the way of revealing or highlighting what resources HBCUs actually possess and what they do for their students (Astin, 1985; Bogue & Saunders, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe indicators of the institutional quality of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as identified by HBCU administrators. To that end, this study addressed the following questions:

1) What characteristics do HBCU administrators identify as indicators of institutional quality at HBCUs?
2) To what extent are HBCU administrators' indicators of institutional quality similar and/or different by institutional rank as defined by *US News and World Report*?

This study focused on four HBCUs from across the United States. Institutions were selected purposefully from the 2010 issue of *US News and World Report's Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (US News & World Report, 2009), ensuring that there were two institutions from Tier I, which consists of schools ranked 1-35, and two institutions from Tier II, which consists of schools ranked 36-69 in the rankings.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for several campus constituencies. One group that might find this research beneficial is HBCU Presidents. The results of this study provide executive-level administrators with data about indicators of institutional quality at HBCUs that may account for their historic mission and purpose. Presidents might use this information to advocate for a new ranking system that highlights the contributions and qualities of historically Black institutions.

Freeman and Thomas (2002) state that one influential factor for students who choose HBCUs is the type of high school they attend, indicating that students who attend predominantly White high schools were more likely to choose to attend HBCUs. Academic advisors and counselors at predominantly White high schools may or may not be knowledgeable about HBCUs or the benefits they offer their students. Therefore, data from this study might provide them with important information they could use to help students accurately assess historically Black institutions and the benefits they could gain from attending.

Because HBCUs strive to serve traditionally underrepresented students, they are often stigmatized as "less than" in American society (Gasman, 2007; Gasman, 2008). Therefore, I hope to be an advocate for HBCUs. I also hope to positively influence national conversations surrounding Black institutions and the social constructions of worth that continue to guarantee their devalued status within American higher education. Similar to Baez et al. (2008), I also seek to advocate for change in the way practitioners within the field of higher education describe the positions of HBCUs within the hierarchy of education to one that "questions the mechanisms that ensure such a hierarchy in the first place", such as academic college rankings like USNWR (p. 6).

The present study also has significance for current and future research. This study explored the voices of HBCU administrators in order to describe indicators of institutional quality for HBCUs. Much of what is empirically known about HBCUs is presented through the results of studies conducted on or about their students, or from a historical perspective (Allen, 1992; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Allen & Jewell, 2002; Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini,

1995; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Fleming, 2001; Gasman, 2007; Gasman & Tudico, 2008; Gasman et al., 2007; Gurin & Epps, 1975; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Kim, 2002; Wenglinsky, 1996). Although this study adds to current literature on HBCUs, future studies might explore the voices of other constituencies (i.e., admissions officers, presidents, or students) within HBCUs regarding their institutional quality. These data might be used to expand the perception of the institutional quality of HBCUs, thereby broadening the conversations on the topic.

This study also has significance in terms of future policy. HBCUs are burdened by decreases in state higher education funding as well as federal financial aid to students. However, the perception that Black institutions are low in quality based on assessments by college rankings such as USNWR might sometimes lead to reduced confidence in these schools and thus lower funding. Also, several state funding patterns indicate states' tendencies to invest significant portions of funding into flagship institutions or those institutions which enroll the largest numbers of students, none of which are HBCUs (Minor, 2008). By providing a contextual framework from which to view HBCUs, as well as describing indicators of institutional quality at this institutions, federal and state governments will hopefully be inclined to devote more financial resources to these institutions.

Finally, this study is significant for policy because HBCUs continue to have to justify their existence in a post-segregated higher education environment (Wenglinsky, 1996). To some, HBCUs are seen as vestiges of segregation and are in conflict with judicial mandates for integration (Wenglinsky, 1996, p. 91). This study seeks to provide an understanding of what quality means to and for HBCUs in order to understand the existing need for them in today's

society as well as the need to invest funds into these institutions. This research also seeks to inform assessment policies utilized for institutions with diverse missions, populations, and historical contexts.

Operational Definitions

1) African American/Black - A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "Black, African Am., or Negro," or provide written entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).
2) Historically Black College and University (HBCUs)/Historically Black institutions– These two terms will be used interchangeably throughout this study. They both refer to institutions of higher learning that were founded prior to 1964 with the principle mission of educating African Americans (Mitchell-Cody, 2000).

Delimitations

As with all research, the present study had some initial delimitations. To investigate the characteristics of all HBCUs is beyond the scope of this study. This dissertation is limited to four institutions, two that are private and two that are public. These institutions do not reflect the diversity of HBCUs within the American system of higher education. Had other institutions been selected, the study's results might have differed in some unknown way(s).

Second, all four institutions were selected from the *US News & World Report* rankings. While there are other journalistic ranking systems that rank educational institutions, the results of this study were limited to institutions selected from the 2010 issue of *US News & World Report*

Historically Black Colleges and Universities Best Colleges. Other journalistic rankings may have ranked HBCUs differently using different criteria. Also, this study's results were limited to institutions included in only one selected year of the USNWR rankings. Using another issue from a different year might have resulted in the selection of different institutions depending on whether they were ranked and if so, the level at which they were ranked. These changes might have also provided different results.

Finally, only the opinions of HBCU administrators were collected in this study. HBCU faculty, students, recruiters, employers, and other employees might provide different, but equally valuable opinions. Despite these initial delimtitations, the study was worthwhile as it attempted to identify indicators of institutional quality that were germane to HBCUs using information provided by administrators who work at some of the nation's historically Black institutions. To guide discussion of this research, the organization of the entire study is presented next.

Organization of the Study

The present study is organized into five chapters. In Chapter I, the phenomenon of institutional quality and how it pertains to HBCUs, as well as the reasons for selecting critical race theory as a theoretical frame for this dissertation, were discussed. I also outlined my use of race as a central tenet in this study and vital to my assessment of American higher education. Chapter II presents a review of the literature relevant to the study. Literature on Black higher education; quality assessment in American higher education, specifically at HBCUs; and previous studies outlining HBCU administrator perceptions are highlighted. Chapter III details the research design and method used in the conduct of this study, including a rationale for

choosing case study as the methodology of research, the selection criteria and recruitment process for the chosen institutions and participants, and the data collection and analysis strategies employed in the study. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. Also presented are profiles of the selected institutions and the participants. Chapter V includes a summary of the study, and a discussion of the findings, as well as the implications of these results. Finally, directions for future research are presented.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

As stated earlier, the popularity of journalistic college rankings grew in the United States following widespread public demand for more transparent information about academic quality (Dill & Soo, 2005; Institute of Higher Education Policy, 2007). The boom of journalistic rankings began even before USNWR, which, contrary to popular belief, was not the first national magazine to have an issue dedicated to ranking colleges (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, Perez, 1998). *Rolling Stone* published its first issue dedicated to the ranking of American colleges and universities as early as 1982. *Time, Newsweek, and Money* magazines soon followed suit selling more than 6 million copies in 1997 (McDonough et al., 1998). *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines partnered with Kaplan Testing Service and Princeton Review, respectively, to create their own college guides in the 1990s (McDonough et al., 1998). Internationally, college rankings have also gained interest from consumers, particularly in countries with large higher education systems, such as Australia, China, Hong Kong, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Institute of Higher Education Policy, 2007).

Over the last 25 years, there has been increased research and debate not only about college rankings, but about the topic of college quality in terms of how it is defined, how it is measured, and more importantly, at which colleges and universities it is located. This last notion has been especially true for HBCUs, which are consistently asked to justify their purpose, mission, and quality (Ricard & Brown, 2008). In order to gain a greater perspective of these topics, it is important to review the extant literature and research on HBCUs, their impact, and

the assessment of quality in higher education. Also, since this study will employ the perceptions of HBCU administrators, it is important to review literature on these individuals and the nature and scope of their work and its relevance to institutional quality.

To that end, this review of literature is organized into five major sections. First, scholars have devoted a considerable amount of attention to the historical context and development of the nation's more than 100 HBCUs. In order to provide an understanding of this context, a brief history of HBCUs and their campus populations is given. There is also a great deal of literature dedicated to the assessment of quality at America's higher education institutions, some of which focuses on the assessment of institutional quality using ranking systems. This information is covered in the second section. One segment of the literature on institutional quality focuses almost exclusively on the quality of HBCUs. These studies are highlighted in the third section. Fourth, because this study will employ the perceptions of HBCU administrators, the nature and scope of their professional work is outlined. Finally, the fifth section reviews the small portion of studies that examine the perceptions of HBCU administrators. The review of existing literature on this topic and more specifically, the limited research on institutional quality at HBCUs provides the rationale for the study of this phenomenon.

Black Higher Education in the United States

Without question, HBCUs have achieved the accomplishment of educating a significant portion of students, particularly African American students, in spite of more than a century of inadequate funding by federal and state authorities (Green, 2004). Notwithstanding such restrictions, the historic mission of these institutions has not wavered, and HBCUs continue to

dedicate themselves to the successful matriculation of every student regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status (Green, 2004). Having fought for their right to exist, much like Blacks fought for their right to be educated, HBCUs have worked hard to accomplish great things for not only African Americans, but for all who could benefit from their existence (Anderson, 1988). The following sections help provide an understanding of the impact of these institutions with special emphasis on how effective they are in achieving their special mission.

The Development of HBCUs

Early American colleges and universities, such as Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary did not provide universal access to higher education. Such institutions were developed to produce a stable White upper class in order to maintain a stratified social order (Brown, Donahoo, Bertrand, 2001; Ricard & Brown, 2008). In fact, anyone who was not wealthy, White, male, and Protestant was denied access to higher education (Brown, et al., 2001). Not until the end of the Civil War, did the impact of these restrictions affect African Americans, who prior to 1865 were victims of institutional slavery (Anderson, 1988).

Prohibited from learning how to read and write during slavery, the newly freed slaves expressed a strong desire for education once the war ended (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Anderson, 1988). However, the idea of education for Blacks was strongly opposed by southern Whites, who thought Blacks were incapable of learning (Anderson, 1988). As a result, Blacks were denied access to public schools at all levels, creating the need for Black institutions of higher education (Brown, et al., 2001). There were some northern White missionary groups like the American Missionary Association (AMA) that recognized the need for such institutions. The

AMA, along with assistance from some Black churches and wealthy philanthropists like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and George Peabody, helped to fund and establish HBCUs (Allen & Jewell, 2001).

The first HBCUs, Cheyney State University and Lincoln University, were both founded in Pennsylvania prior to the end of the Civil War in 1837 and 1854, respectively (Brown & Davis, 2001). The remaining HBCUs are concentrated in the 19 southern and border states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) as well as Michigan and the District of Columbia for a current total of 103 institutions (Brown, Donahoo, Bertrand, 2001). HBCUs were created with the intention of providing their primarily Black student population with the kind of comprehensive higher education they would need to be able to return to their communities as effective, contributing teachers, leaders, scientists, and scholars (Bowles & DeCosta, 1971).

Collectively, HBCUs were developed to educate and prepare African Americans for their lives in an American society that typically regarded them as less than; a society that created and maintained barriers to their success as American citizens simply because of the color of their skin (Anderson, 1988). Unlike HBCUs, "HWIs were not concerned with issues of race, whereas HBCUs have always been expected to meet the same curriculum standards as other institutions while also providing African Americans with a culture-specific pedagogy" (Brown, et al., 2001, p. 559).

Student Populations at HBCUs

Although higher education began as a segregated entity, the 1960s brought accessibility to higher education for all races, genders, and classes. Given their ability to enroll in any institutional type, some scholars have questioned the factors impacting students' decisions to attend HBCUs.

McDonough, Antonio, & Trent (1997) examined factors that affected the college choice decision-making process for 220,757 African American students. The researchers sought to discover whether there were differences in the processes of students who chose HWIs and those who chose to attend HBCUs. They surveyed students and used data collected as a part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) 1993 freshman survey, which included questions about a student's background and demographics, high school experiences, reasons for going to college, reasons for choosing their particular college and expectations about college.

Findings revealed that students who attended Black colleges were influenced by the following: (a) religious affiliation of college; (b) good social reputation; (c) desire to become more cultured; (d) relative's wishes; (e) a friend's suggestion; (f) parents' wishes; and (g) ability of graduates to secure employment. Students who chose to attend White institutions cited the following as influences: (a) recruitment by athletic department; (b) desire to live near home; (c) good academic reputation; (d) availability of financial aid; (e) advice of high school counselor; and (f) particular educational programs. Analysis of the aforementioned differences indicated higher rates of bachelor's degree attainment for students who attended Black colleges than

students who attended White institutions. HBCU students also experienced greater gains in academic achievement, better social integration, and higher occupational aspirations.

Freeman (1998) conducted a longitudinal study of 21 students that focused on the characteristics of African American students and their college choice process. The sample included high achieving students who attended predominately Black high schools and were raised in predominately Black neighborhoods. It was found that students who chose to attend HBCUs were more likely to have been isolated from their culture and wanted a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage. Second, students attending HBCUs were more likely to have had an "HBCU connection" through a family member, friend, teacher or counselor, thus greatly influencing their decision. Third, students who attended HBCUs were greatly influenced by their mother's wishes more than any other family member. Finally, Freeman found that financial aid, or the lack thereof was a strong determinant in these students' college decision making process. Although HBCUs struggle to provide this financial support, Freeman's findings are significant in that they suggest the increasing ability of HBCUs to attract high achieving students.

There is also a great deal of research that reports on the matriculation of less academically prepared students at HBCUs. Allen (1992) asserts that HBCUs considerably and typically enroll Black students that might not have been able to attend college because of social, financial, or academic barriers. These students tend to have lower high school grade point averages (GPAs) and standardized test scores compared with Black students at HWIs (Allen, 1992; Gurin and Epps, 1975; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Nettles, 1988) and with all

students nationally (McDonough, et al., 1997). What is significant about these findings is that although these students come to college at an academic disadvantage, HBCUs are only concerned with what happens to them after they enter college, and thus work to improve on a student's potential during their matriculation (Kannerstein, 1978).

College Impact of HBCUs

In addition to the studies on why students decide to attend HBCUs, there is a large body of literature that has investigated *how* students experience these same institutions. Fleming's (1984) comparative study is one the most influential and cited studies on Black college students. Fleming studied 3,000 Black and White freshman and senior students enrolled in 15 colleges throughout Ohio, Georgia, Texas, and Mississippi. The sample of institutions was comprised of eight White institutions and seven Black institutions. Students participated in interviews, completed questionnaires, and submitted their transcripts for review. They were also tested for cognitive growth. While students were quite forthcoming about the poor quality of faculty members at their HBCUs, they also spoke of the positive relationships they established with their professors, as well as the value they placed on these relationships and the encouragement they received from them. Fleming's (1984) study concluded that although HBCUs lack adequate resources, they provide supportive and nurturing environments for students, which was later confirmed by other researchers (e.g., Allen, 1992; Kim, 2002).

Allen (1992) also conducted research on the campus climate at Black and White colleges as well as its effects on African American student success. He surveyed 2,531 African American students from both HBCUs and HWIs using the National Survey of Black College Students

(NSBCS). Data were collected in 1981, 1982, and 1983. Allen's findings suggested that the campus environment and climate at HBCUs might be attributable to increased student success on these campuses. He found that students attending HWIs reported substantially lower levels of social involvement than those at HBCUs. Black students at HBCUs emphasized feelings of engagement, acceptance, and extensive support and encouragement in comparison to their counterparts at White institutions.

Wenglinsky (1996) examined students at both HBCUs and HWIs in an effort to consider the educational justification for HBCUs. Specifically, he wanted to determine why students attended HBCUs and what types of educational experiences and outcomes were associated with these schools. Data were collected as a part of the National Postsecondary Aid Study of 1990 (NPSAS: 90). The survey recorded financial aid and demographic data. In order to determine why they attended Black institutions, 687 students who had attended HBCUs were studied. In order to determine their educational experiences and outcomes, the researcher sampled 742 students. The five variables used for measuring reasons for attendance were: (a) college type; (b) GPA; (c) leadership potential; (d) educational aspirations; (e) occupational aspirations; and (f) participation in community service.

Findings revealed that students at Black institutions had higher educational aspirations (i.e., to pursue postgraduate education and become professionals) than their peers at White institutions. No significant differences were found in any of the other variables. More specifically, according to Wenglinksy, HBCU students were no more likely than HWI students to experience high levels of social interactions with faculty and other students, nor were they

more likely to aspire to community activism. Similar to the findings of Freeman (1998), this study suggested that finances were a primary influence on students' decision to attend an HBCU because of their relatively low costs.

Watson and Kuh (1996) used the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) to test the responses of 502 Black students and 214 White students. The comparative study examined the responses of African American and White students at two HBCUs with those of African American and White students attending White institutions. They found that despite their invested efforts, African American students at HWIs still experienced fewer gains than Whites, whereas African American students at HBCUs received a greater return.

Finally, Kim & Conrad (2006) examined the impact of HBCUs on the academic success of African American students. The researchers also used data collected as a part of the CIRP. The final sample included 401 students in 10 HBCUs and 540 students in 34 HWIs. Data were analyzed using hierarchical linear and non-linear modeling. Results supported previous studies which suggested that students attending HBCUs were less academically prepared and came from households with considerably less income than students who attended HWIs. Similar to other scholars (i.e., Bohr Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Kim, 2002), this study found that attending an HBCU versus an HWI had no significant affect on African American students' college degree completion. What is significant about Kim & Conrad's findings is that although HBCUs seem to do no better producing African American graduates than HWIs, HBCUs do so with relatively fewer resources (e.g., physical facilities and faculty salaries) and with students

who have traditionally performed less well academically in high school. Yet, they continue to graduate at rates similar to their HWI counterparts.

Summary

Although somewhat inconclusive, the previous studies shape much of the way we view and discuss the impact of HBCUs on African American students. In addition to these studies several more speak to HBCUs being the leading producers of African American men and women who go on to earn doctoral degrees (Brazziel, 1983; Pearson, 1985; Solorzano, 1995) and the development of African American women at HBCUs more so than at White institutions (Wolf-Wendel, 1999). Despite their disadvantage, a great deal of empirical evidence exists suggesting that HBCUs are effective in achieving their collective mission of providing a quality educational experience for African Americans (Fleming, 1984; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Wenglinsky, 1996), which aligns with the definition proposed by Bogue and Saunders (1992) in Chapter I of this dissertation. Despite such accomplishments, many have and continue to criticize HBCUs for their academic standards, claiming that they in fact lack institutional quality, especially when compared to majority institutions (Baez, Gasman, & Turner, 2008; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). But who determines the standards by which institutions of today are measured? More importantly, what are these standards or indicators of quality and how do they relate to the unique historical context and special mission of HBCUs?

Assessing Quality in American Higher Education

Despite its elusive nature, several scholars have attempted to determine just what quality means within the field of higher education. After all, quality must be defined in order for it to be

measured. To that end, what evidence or indicators will be accepted as appropriate operational expressions of quality? To answer the first question, several indicators of academic quality are interpreted from two of higher education's most prominent scholars, Drs. George Kuh and Alexander Astin.

Kuh's Indices of Quality in the Undergraduate Experience

In his book, *Indices of Quality in the Undergraduate Experience,* Kuh (1981) helps to bring clarity to the undergraduate student experience by identifying and reviewing specific indices of quality. These four indices include context indices, input indices, involvement indices, and outcome indices.

Context indices. Context indices are often associated with an institution's environment and resources. They are fairly stable over time and include such measures as expenditures per student, size of student body, and proportion of faculty with doctorate degrees. Institutional size is often associated with positive indicators and manifestations of quality. For example, at smaller institutions there is reportedly a greater sense of community fostered by students, as well as opportunities to assume leadership positions in extracurricular activities and to have informal interactions with faculty.

Kuh also refers to the clarity of an institution's purpose as a benchmark of high quality. He asserts that large institutions tend to have multiple purposes and missions that seek to serve multiple constituencies and stakeholders. Therefore, a clear and distinct institutional purpose and mission become harder to achieve for these institutions. The literature on the relationship between resources and quality is not definitive, with some studies suggesting a positive

relationship between financial resources and institutional quality. Others argue that cost and quality are not perfectly related. The use of faculty salary as a proxy for quality has been linked to the assumption that more competent faculty members make more money. But this also assumes that a terminal degree makes faculty more competent. Expenditures per student were found to be inconclusive in determining institutional quality, while student living environments were found to be positively correlated to quality.

Input indices. According to Kuh, input indices are probably the most popular measures of institutional quality, but have yet to be powerfully linked to this concept. Selectivity usually includes a student's high school grade point average (GPA), their high school class rank, and standardized test scores (SAT or ACT). Kuh argues that these measures have little significance given the variations in grading standards and students' ability across different high schools. He also states that some critics believe that open enrollment lowers an institution's quality (Kuh, 1981). Biographical characteristics are also included in this category. For example, gender and cultural background are thought to be logical indicators of quality, but no empirical evidence has been produced to substantiate this logic. Some institutions argue that having more international students enhances the college experience on their campuses because of the cultural diversity.

Involvement indices. Although quality is more a function of what a student does with an institution's resources rather than the resources themselves, involvement indices have been used relatively less than other quality indices. The frequency of students' interactions with others peers, faculty members and staff has been used sparingly as an indication of institutional quality, despite its overwhelming linkage with such quality measures as student satisfaction,

achievement, and persistence. Faculty interaction with students outside of the classroom is also positively related to other indicators of quality, including morale. The degree to which faculty expend effort in instruction or are involved with students out of the classroom has been positively related quality as well.

Outcome indices. Outcomes are the second most frequently used indices after input measures. Output measures include persistence, achievement, intellectual and social emotional development, and alumni. Outcomes are often thought to be representative of an institution's value added to a student's undergraduate experience. Student retention has provided an easily produced indicator of whether an institution is meeting students' expectations. Student persistence in college has been linked to a number of indicators of quality such as satisfaction, achievement, and involvement in campus activities. The transfer or withdrawal of students has also been seen as having a negative impact on institutional quality. The earnings of students after graduation have even been linked to several quality indices as well.

Astin's Interpretation of Quality of Excellence in Higher Education

Astin (1985) conceptualizes an existing and ever-present academic hierarchy within American higher education in his book, *Achieving Academic Excellence*. The hierarchy is largely based on status and first lists a few well-known institutions, next is a larger group of institutions with modest reputations, and finally a very large group of institutions that are virtually unknown outside their geographic region. Astin also presents four traditional conceptions of academic excellence: (a) the reputational view, (b) the resources view, (c) the outcomes view, and (d) the content view.

Excellence defined by reputation. According to Astin, the reputation perspective of excellence is anything people define it to be. Furthermore, Astin asserts that a shared set of beliefs exists in the minds of educators and laypersons alike about which are the best or most excellent institutions. This belief system or folklore is the basis for the reputation view of excellence.

Excellence defined by resources. Determined to be a more objective measure, resources were embraced as another quality indicator. Essentially, more resources indicate higher institutional quality. The four basic types of resources in higher education are staff, physical facilities, students, and money. An institution's financial position within the hierarchy is also measured by the amount of money it spends on educational programming, but not the program's value or outcomes. According to Sussman & Wu (2002), simply offering a program does not imply that it is beneficial to students.

Institutions with selective admissions are also thought to be better in terms of academic quality. Through selective admissions, only applicants with outstanding test scores and high school records are admitted, creating a perception of exclusivity, thus enhancing an institution's reputation. Stringent admissions policies imply academic excellence and policies that stress or promote open admissions are seen as a "threat to academic excellence" (Astin, 1985, p.42).

Excellence as outcomes. For many proponents of the excellence as outcomes perspective, the true test of an institutions' quality lies in the quality of its products, or students. For example, the proportion of an institution's baccalaureate-recipients listed in *Who's Who* or the proportion of students who go on to get doctorate degrees. Other measures used have

included the persistence rates of undergraduate students, the lifetime earnings of its alumni, and alumni's ratings of the undergraduate experience. Many educators equate outcomes with institutional impact. However, Astin also states:

> If the emphasis on outcomes leads an institution to strengthen its educational programs, then the system's excellence is enhanced. On the other hand, if the institution tries to improve outcomes merely by acquiring more resources (e.g., brighter students, more productive faculty members), the excellence of the system as a whole remains unchanged (p. 55).

Excellence as content. The final conception of excellence in Astin's interpretation is the content view. This view is defined by what an institution teaches. The belief is that institutions that expose their undergraduates to the liberal arts and the sciences are the epitome of the American college. Contrarily, Astin argues that despite the supposed diversity of American higher education, the notion of what constitutes excellence in terms of what is being taught at higher education institutions is extremely homogeneous. Therefore, many institutions especially those that reside at the top of the higher education food chain have adopted a core curriculum that is comprised of a set of predetermined courses or distributional requirements covering the traditional disciplinary categories of the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The most selective institutions tend to award a high number of degrees to those fields that include engineering, physical sciences and mathematics, and the biological sciences. These institutions also tend to award a relatively high number of degrees in English, history, political

science, and other social sciences. However, these same institutions tend to offer slightly lower numbers of degrees in the latter fields than do institutions at the next selectivity level.

Excellence as human talent development. After presenting the above four concepts of educational excellence, Astin concludes that neither the reputation, resources, outcomes, nor content view offers a true definition of excellence in American higher education and thus he presents excellence from the viewpoint of talent development. He states:

> The talent development view of excellence emphasizes the educational impact of the institution on its students and faculty members. Its basic premise is that true excellence lies in the institution's ability to affect its students and faculty favorably, to enhance their intellectual and scholarly development, and to make a positive difference in their lives. The most excellent institutions are, in this view, those that have the greatest impact—'add the most value', as economists would say---on the student's knowledge and personal development and on the faculty member's scholarly and pedagogical ability and productivity (Astin, 1985, p.61).

Basically, this conception of human talent development focuses more on changes that occur in the student from the beginning to the end of an educational program.

The U.S. News and World Report Rankings

Contrary to the notion of developing standard quality indicators, Bogue and Saunders (1992) contend that "it may not be enough for quality to show through in whatever indicator or evidence we may select to demonstrate quality; it may be equally important to consider public perceptions of quality as well" (p. 66). Since the public seems to appreciate journalistic rankings

as strong measures of institutional quality, it is important to have a greater understanding of this method.

Arguably the most popular and influential set of rankings, the USNWR rankings have caused national college rankings to become more widely read and debated. The first issue of reputational college rankings by USNWR was published in 1983 (McDonough et al., 1998). In 1987, a separate guidebook was published using a combined method of both reputational and statistical data. By 1988, USNWR began publishing its rankings on an annual basis and incorporated other quality indicators in addition to reputation to determine an institution's rating. During this same year, reputational surveys were sent to deans and directors of admissions in addition to college presidents (McManus-Howard, 2002). Sales figures of the USNWR rankings are clear evidence of their popularity. The rankings have even been likened to the "swimsuit issue" of Sports Illustrated (Stuart, 1995). Increased popularity enabled USNWR to begin publishing its *America's Best Colleges* issue in 1990, which provided more detailed information on all included schools in this annual publication (Stuart, 1995). USNWR was also one of the first journalistic publications to begin assigning a numeric rank to institutions instead of simply grouping them categorically by institutional quality.

How the USNWR rankings are calculated. USNWR divides academic institutions into categories based on the 1994 Carnegie classification of colleges and universities (Carnegie, 1994). Next, the schools are divided into their appropriate categories with Carnegie Comprehensive I, Comprehensive II institutions and Carnegie Liberal Arts II institutions being

reported by quartile rankings. These quartile rankings list the schools by their location in one of the four regions of the country.

The USNWR methodology employs six broad categories of measures that relate to college quality. They are: (a) peer assessment, (b) student selectivity, (c) faculty resources, (d) student retention, (e) financial resources, and (f) alumni giving rate. The weights assigned to each of these broad categories varies across USNWR categories, as does the number of factors included in each category and the weight assigned to each factor.

The greatest weight is given to peer assessment which is 25 percent. This peer assessment survey measures how a school is regarded by presidents, provosts, and deans of admission at schools in each category on academic reputation. They are asked to rate each institution in their category on a scale of 1 (marginal) to 5 (distinguished), or to indicate that they are unfamiliar with the institution.

Retention is given a 20 percent weight and measures the proportion of freshmen who return to campus the following year as sophomores. To tabulate a school's score for retention, the difference is taken between a school's six year graduation rate for the class and USNWR's predicted rate for the class. If the actual graduation rate is higher than the predicted rate, the college is said to be enhancing achievement (Morse & Flanigan, 2007).

Faculty resources are also weighted 20 percent. The measure is comprised of six factors. They include: (1) the percentage of classes with fewer than 20 students, (2) the percentage of classes with more than 50 students, (3) faculty salaries (deflated by a regional cost-of-living index), (4) the percentage of professors with terminal degrees in their field, (5) the percentage of

full-time faculty, and (6) student-faculty ratio. For USNWR, a school benefits more from having a smaller number of large classes (more than 50 students).

Student selectivity is weighted 15 percent. This category includes: (1) the composite score of the reading and math portions on the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) or American College Test (ACT) for enrollees, (2) the proportion of enrolled freshmen who graduated in the top 10 percent and 25 percent of their high school class (depending on the type of institution), and (3) the school's acceptance rate, or the ratio of students admitted to applicants. The smaller the fraction of freshman applicants a school accepts, the more selective it is assumed to be.

Financial resources are weighted 10 percent. This category measures financial resources using the average spending per student on research, instruction, student services, and related educational expenditures in the prior fiscal year. Graduation rate is worth 5 percent and is used to show a school's "added value" or the effect the college's programs and policies had on the graduation rate for the entering class. Alumni giving rate is also worth 5 percent. It measures the average percentage of living alumni who gave back to their school during the previous two fiscal years and is used to indirectly measure students' satisfaction with their school.

To calculate the ranking for each school, the weighted sum of each of its scores is determined. The final scores are rescaled with the top school in each category being assigned a value of 100, and the other schools' rescaled as a proportion of that top score. Final scores for each ranked school are rounded to the nearest whole number and ranked in descending order (Morse & Flanigan, 2007).

Summary

The review of these various conceptions of quality is evidence of its ambiguous nature in higher education. However, there does seem to be some agreement, even if only by the studies examined here. In both aforementioned literature reviews, Kuh (1981) and Astin (1985) list resources (i.e., financial, staff, students) as strong indicators of institutional quality. They both mention the significance of what is being taught at an institution, an institution's student selectivity, and an institution's outcomes (i.e., persistence and graduation rates) as markers for quality.

The similarities seem to end there. Unlike Kuh, Astin presents the notion of reputation, which represents people's perceptions of excellence and quality in education. Astin also presents the concept of human talent development, which focuses on the overall impact of an institution on its students. Although USNWR is the only set of rankings examined in this study, many other college rankings are nearly identical applications of the indicators mentioned by both Kuh and Astin, with more of an emphasis placed on certain indicators than others. For example, the concept of reputation and financial standing as indicators of quality seem to be the essence of many journalistic rankings, particularly USNWR, while the notion of human talent development seems to elude them (Astin, 1985; Bogue & Saunders, 1992). Based on the aforementioned studies, it is clear that traditional measures of academic quality have influenced current trends and methods of assessment in higher education. However, given their unique place in American higher education and their special mission, it seems equally important to discuss studies that have specifically measured the institutional quality of the nation's HBCUs.

Measuring the Institutional Quality of HBCUs

Despite empirical evidence of the impact on their students, HBCUs are continuously criticized for perpetuating segregation, mistakenly perceived as homogeneous entities that serve only Black students (Brown, et al., 2001). For this and other reasons, HBCUs are consistently asked to justify their existence, more than any other special mission institutions (e.g., Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges, and community colleges). While several studies have investigated the impact of HBCUs, few have investigated the institutional quality of these institutions as of late. The following section highlights the history of the assessment studies and reports conducted on Black higher education, beginning in the early 1900s with the DuBois reports, the Phelps-Stokes reports, and other governmental surveys. Next, two of the most prominent studies assessing HBCUs conducted by McGrath (1965) and Jencks and Reisman (1967) will be discussed, followed by a look at the USNWR rankings of HBCUs.

Surveys and Assessments of Black Higher Education

During the early to mid-20th century Black and White educators and laypersons began seeking information about the kind of education being offered at HBCUs (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Large corporate foundations also sought to measure the quality of Black colleges in order to justify support of these institutions (Gasman, 2006). However, the debates over the direction of HBCUs were not grounded in any empirical evidence about them (Browning & Williams, 1978). As a result, surveys were conducted to determine the educational content and quality of the existing Black colleges (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

DuBois surveys and other governmental surveys. From 1890-1910, W.E.B. DuBois engaged in two surveys of Black higher education. The first survey was an investigation of the social and economic situations of a sample of Black colleges (DuBois, 1968). Institutions that had a course of study amounting to at least one year beyond the curriculum offered at an ordinary New England high school were considered colleges. Students who had completed the aforementioned curriculum, a more advanced curriculum, or those who had received a bachelor's degree were considered college graduates of their institution. Based on these criteria, 34 Black institutions were considered colleges, and were divided into five groups: three antebellum schools, 13 Freedman's Bureau schools, nine church schools, five schools of Black church bodies, and four state colleges.

In the second investigation, DuBois ranked a sample of Black colleges into three groups according to the quality of their curriculum (as measured by "Carnegie units" set by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) and the approximate number of students enrolled. DuBois also sent out a survey to a list of living Black college graduates with questions regarding their educational background, honorary degrees, occupation, publications, public offices held, amount of land, assessed value of real estate, land and houses. Other questions asked the participants' plans for educating their children, their perception of their chief hindrances, and their present practical philosophy in regard to the Black race in America.

For his rankings, DuBois grouped the institutions into three categories—First Grade Colored Schools, Second Grade Colored Schools, and Other Colored Schools. Those in the first category had 14 or more units of entrance requirements and more than 20 students of college

rank. Second Grade Colored Schools had 12 to 14 units of entrance requirements and more than 20 students. Other Colored Colleges had 14 or more units of entrance requirements, but enrolled 20 or fewer students. At the conclusion of his study, DuBois concluded that Black college graduates and Black colleges had been of "inestimable value" (DuBois, 1968, p. 99). He also pushed for changes at the colleges he investigated that were consistent with a liberal arts curriculum (Browning & Williams, 1978).

Several other assessments were conducted during the mid-20th century to assess Black higher education and the status of these campuses, including the Phelps-Stokes report, the Klein survey, and the report on agricultural and mechanical colleges (Browning & Williams, 1978; Gasman, 2006). Each of the aforementioned surveys offered several recommendations for Black higher education, such as immediate additional funding, revisions to the curricula, changes in student living conditions and personnel working conditions (Browning & Williams, 1978).

McGrath's assessment of Black colleges. Advised by prominent individuals within the United Negro College Fund, McGrath (1965) also strived to describe the state of Black colleges in America. The book examined all of the 123 HBCUs still in existence at the time, although not qualitatively. Instead, the book provided an overview of the characteristics, needs, and prospects of HBCUs. McGrath found that HBCUs were financially impoverished, needed curriculum reform, and in many instances paid their faculty members meagerly. The book called for the cooperative efforts of individuals, corporations, philanthropic organizations, foundations, and the state and Federal government in order to reach the goal of providing a better higher education for Black youth and their White counterparts who would go on to attend Black colleges. McGrath

stated that "anything less than such efforts would result in continuing restrictions nearly as demeaning as privational segregation itself" (p. vii). Finally, McGrath recommended the coordinated efforts of Black colleges, and long-term strategic planning, and faculty development.

Jencks and Riesman's assessment of Black colleges. In their highly publicized book chapter, Jencks and Riesman (1968) sought to describe the situation at HBCUs, their evolution, and the types of problems they faced. The authors knew that White higher education would soon be integrated, thereby creating a need for information about Black institutions (Gasman, 2006). Heavily criticized for their condescending language and vague methods, the researchers claimed to have:

> "…[V]isited a number of Negro colleges for relatively short periods, talked to or corresponded with many knowledgeable insiders and outsiders, read the better-known books and articles on the subject as well as some obscure ones, listened to critics who said we were wrong on particular points, and made numerous corrections to their objections" (Jencks & Riesman, 1968, p. 476).

Drs. Jencks and Riesman understood that their conclusions might and probably would be different from other scholars researching the same subject. Still they set forth their assessment, which painted a grim picture of private and public HBCUs, then and for the future. They coined all but a select few HBCUs "academic disaster areas" and characterized them as "ill-funded, ill-staffed, caricatures of White higher education" (Jencks & Riesman, 1968, p. 425). For private HBCUs, the scholars recommended the re-examination of their objectives, arguing that alternatively, these schools should become community colleges. The future of public HBCUs

was less hopeful. It was predicted that the compromise for them would be to become open-door commuter colleges.

Bowles and Decosta's comparison of Black and White institutions. Bowles & DeCosta (1971) describe the relative status of HBCUs offering at least four years of college on the basis of several numerical measures often employed as indices of educational availability or attainment. The measures included: (a) doctorates on faculty; (b) library volumes; (c) endowment; (d) value of buildings, grounds and equipment; and (e) doctorates earned by graduates. Relative status was determined by comparing the data for the HBCUs with similar data for comparable groups of White institutions. This study was undertaken in two ways.

First, the researchers studied all 88 HBCUs located in 19 states and the District of Columbia. The White institutions were also selected from the same 19 states and the District of Columbia. Each HBCU was matched with an HWI on the basis of enrollment, control (public or private), accreditation, levels of offerings, sex of students, and state location. The result was 24 pairs of matched public colleges and 39 pairs of matched private colleges. In other words, 63 HWIs were deemed similar to 63 HBCUs based on the criteria employed.

Second, the researchers chose all four-year White institutions based on control, location, and level of offerings that fell within the same enrollment range as the Black colleges, resulting in 96 public HWIs and 329 private HWIs, all of which were located in the 19 states and the District of Columbia. Essentially, the group of 88 HBCUs was compared with 425 White institutions. Some of the matched pairs included Spelman College and Agnes Scott College;

Fisk University and Southwestern at Memphis; Dillard University and Louisiana College; and Bennett College and Queens College.

Several generalizations were made from the resulting data. First, with the exception of mean endowment, HBCUs collectively had a relatively lower status than did HWIs on all the measures of educational availability or attainment. It is important to note that the mean endowment for the group of HBCUs was produced by the endowments of Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute, which accounted for more than 50 percent of the total endowment of HBCUs at the time. Second, the leading HBCUs had significantly higher status than did the majority of White colleges on all measures of educational availability or attainment. Third, the lowest HBCUs had about the same relative status as do the bottom HWIs on all the measures, except value of buildings, grounds, and equipment. Fourth, the differences between the group of private HBCUs and the group of private HWIs were not so great that they could not be resolved by added financial support for the HBCUs. The researchers' main argument was that many of the observed differences between HBCUs and HWIs were more a function of size than race.

Finally, this assessment yielded five conclusions, two of which were different from the generalizations made in the analysis of the data. First, the private HBCUs had a relatively lower status than the private HWIs on all the measures of educational availability or attainment. Second, the median endowment of the HWIs was significantly higher than that of the HBCUs.

The USNWR Rankings of HBCUs

Starting in 2008, USNWR began publishing their rankings of only HBCUs, similar to DuBois's rankings in 1910. These rankings include only institutions classified as historically

Black colleges and universities, created for the purpose of educating African Americans, and accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association. Included HBCUs must be undergraduate baccalaureate-granting institutions that enroll primarily first-year, first-time students and that were included in the same year's *US News and World Report America's Best Colleges* rankings. With the exception of the peer survey results (which measure academic reputation), the data are generally the same as what is published in the 2010 edition of the *America's Best Colleges* rankings.

As with the *America's Best Colleges* edition, the HBCUs included in this set of rankings are grouped into three categories: Tier I, Tier II, and Unranked. Tier I institutions include those ranked 1-35. Tier II include institutions ranked 36 -69. Unranked institutions are those institutions unable to report key educational characteristics or that possessed certain characteristics deemed unfair in comparison to the other schools listed in the rankings. Unranked HBCUs were schools that: (a) do not use SAT or ACT scores in admission decisions for first-time, first-year, degree-seeking applicants; (b) have total enrollments of fewer than 200 students; (c) enroll a vast proportion of nontraditional students; (d) do not accept first-year students, sometimes called upper-division schools; (e) private universities that are for-profit; (f) few specialized schools in arts, business, or engineering. A school's rank is determined using the same method employed in the *America's Best Colleges* rankings. As a result of the current methodology and criteria used in the USNWR rankings, nine of the top 10 ranked HBCUs were private and considered among the elite of HBCUs in terms of their perceived academic reputation, amount of financial resources, and relative student selectivity (US News, 2010).

Summary

The need to assess and evaluate Black higher education, as with all higher education institutions, is critical for their continued improvement and necessary to ensure that students are receiving a quality education. This review of literature on the assessment of Black higher education highlights a few points. First, the aforementioned studies all speak to the past and present similarities between the low status and bleak circumstances of Black colleges in America. Second, although initially compared to one another, HBCUs began to be compared to HWIs in the mid-1900s revealing some similarities across both groups and simultaneously revealing striking differences. Third, in each of the studies HBCUs had a consistently lower status than several HWIs, particularly in terms of size and financial resources, which leads to the fourth point. All of the earlier studies, with the exception of the Jencks and Reisman (1968) chapter, advocated for immediate and substantial financial support for Black colleges in order to assist with such problems as student living conditions, personnel working conditions and physical plant and building facilities. Finally, it is interesting to note that the indicators used in earlier studies to assess institutional quality and make comparisons across higher education institutions are similar or identical to those used today in other forms of assessment (i.e., number of doctorates on faculty, endowment, value of buildings, grounds, equipment, library volumes, number of graduates), particularly the USNWR rankings.

For various reasons, such as accountability and consumer demand, systems of assessment have been created that seek to standardize American higher education. However, in doing so these systems fail to consider the repugnant past of America that some would like to forget ever

happened. Today, affirmative action programs are constantly being questioned, as well as the need for institutions founded specifically for Blacks that have always practiced open admissions policies in order to allow access to education for all groups of people (Brown, et al., 2001). On the other hand, the existence of institutions founded only for Whites that seek to maintain their Whiteness is not questioned. Nor do these institutions face the same harsh sanctions as HBCUs for failing to attract and recruit diverse groups of students. America's higher education system is one that operates under practices and ideologies similar to those of legal segregation, yet it paradoxically seeks to assess and evaluate institutions as if they were indeed equal when HBCUs and HWIs clearly are not (Brown, 2003). Furthermore, even when HBCUs are currently assessed, they are done so with little regard for the context in which they were developed.

Employee Populations at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

When considering the information presented by USNWR and other rankings it is important to ask who is an effective judge of the institutional quality of HBCUs? The challenge is that few, if any, of the studies mentioned above sought the perspectives of HBCU employees, such as administrators, as raters. The perspectives of HBCU administrators are important to consider when seeking an understanding of the impact of these institutions on their student populations, the communities in which they operate and American higher education as a whole. This study is significant in that it will capture the perspectives of HBCU administrators who spend much of their professional and personal lives at these institutions. Unlike in previous

studies their perspectives will be used to provide a more personalized view of the unique characteristics of HBCUs as well as the nature of quality at these institutions.

Nature and Scope of Work for HBCU Administrators

There are several empirical studies that focus on the scope and nature of the work done by Black college administrators. In one of these studies Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, and Strayhorn (2008) surveyed a total of 70 administrators from 25 HBCUs, 89 percent of whom were African American. Participants were identified who had experience interacting with students in college settings. Several participants worked in functional areas traditionally associated with student affairs administration (i.e., residential life, student activities). However, some also worked in capacities that fell outside these traditional arenas, such as admissions, and academic advising. Data collection was conducted in two stages: (1) written exercises designed to collect demographic data about participants (i.e., age, sex, number of years of experience) as well as information about the nature of their relationships with students, and (2) an oral discussion where participants were allowed to elaborate on their written responses from the first stage regarding their relationships with students. Results from the study revealed how the use of "othermothering" pervades relationships at HBCUs.

The concept of "othermothering" is grounded in three components: (a) the ethic of care, (b) cultural advancement, and (c) institutional guardianship. Also examined was the importance of the relationships formed between students and student affairs administrators. According to the researchers, these relationships served as a primary means for facilitating student retention at HBCUs and distinguished these institutions from other institutional types. The researchers also

report that administrators at HBCUs must possess a sense of social and moral responsibility, enjoy close-knit working environments and genuinely engage in the "othermothering" of students, which includes mentoring students and treating them like family (Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008).

Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, and Bennett (2006) also conducted a study on the nature of student affairs work at HBCUs. In this study, student affairs professionals on Black college campuses reported that the nature of their work was challenging, time-consuming, stressful, and that change was slow to enact on these campuses. Administrators spent a large amount of their work days in several meetings and juggling multiple tasks at once with few support staff members. The "multi-task focus" was not unusual for HBCU student affairs professionals in that they are often unable to decline assignments out of a sense of devotion to satisfy the needs of their students. HBCU administrators also tended to work in teams and relied on one another for support. Aside from the team orientation, HBCU administrators described their work environments as practical, student-centered, and service-oriented. Similar to the previous study, student affairs administrators in this study also reported a sense of duty and devotion to their students, which is characteristic of HBCUs.

An unexpected, but interesting finding of the study was administrators' dedication to racial uplift on their campuses. This theme proved extremely significant to the nature of professional work for student affairs administrators at HBCUs. Participants in the study reported their desire to give back to the Black race and their alma maters, as many of the participants had attended HBCUs as undergraduates.

HBCU Administrator Perceptions

The majority of literature on HBCU presidents focuses on their role in improving the condition of their institutions. In many instances these studies also elicit the perceptions and perspectives of HBCU administrators in order to answer questions regarding the institutional mission of HBCUs. One such study was conducted by Willie and MacLeish (1978).

This study surveyed presidents on Black college campuses and asked about their priorities regarding the future direction of their institutions. Many responded that there were most concerned with educational matters (curriculum reform, faculty development, and implementation of new graduate programs) which they felt were critical to the survival and success of HBCUs. They ranked financial matters, including student financial aid, research, and faculty member salaries, a close second. Third, the presidents listed management issues as the next area of improvement, particularly in terms of the recruitment of more students, the improvement of class registration procedures, and public relations. When asked about the racial desegregation of HBCUs, the presidents emphasized the diversity that has always existed at HBCUs, including faculty, students, and administrators, but recognized the importance of making HBCUs even more diverse in the future. They also expressed the need to maintain the historic roots and traditions of HBCUs and the necessity of not losing sight of the founding mission of HBCUs---the education of Black students.

Ricard & Brown (2008) examined the missions of HBCUs via the perceptions of 15 HBCU presidents. Given their status, these campus leaders were asked to define the mission of their specific schools. Based on interview responses, the following common themes emerged:

access and opportunity, preparation for leadership and land-grant mission. The presidents were most consistent in their response that one of the missions of HBCUs is to provide access to students who were and are not able to attend many majority institutions for various reasons, including racial, financial, and academic barriers.

Finally, Strayhorn and Hirt (2008) examined the perceptions of faculty and administrators at HBCUs and Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), both of which are categorized as minority-serving institutions (MSIs). The study was conducted in order to understand the missions of these institutions and how they related to social justice. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions: (a) How is social justice reflected in the mission statements of these two types of institutions? (b) How is social justice reflected in the comments of administrators who work at such institutions? To answer the second question, the researchers interviewed more than 250 student affairs administrators. Administrator comments reflected four social justice concepts: power, empowerment, cultural maintenance and critique, and equality of opportunity.

For example, the first concept of power was reflected in their comments, for example, when they compared themselves to other more elite institutions and other MSIs. Empowerment refers to concepts such as liberation, overcoming the odds, and amplifying the voices of those not traditionally heard or those that have been silenced. The concept of cultural maintenance and critique was also demonstrated in the administrators' comments through their dedication to fulfilling the needs of minority students and minority communities as a means of giving back. Finally, equality of opportunity was reflected in their comments when administrators spoke of

their own opportunity to help underrepresented populations as well as the opportunities given to students who attended MSIs.

Summary

Based on the research, it is clear that students at HBCUs rely heavily on the relationships they establish with campus administrators who work no less than their faculty counterparts. Administrators at historically Black institutions characterize their work as challenging and stressful, but equally rewarding in that they are able to give back to Black students, the Black community, and for many, their alma maters. They spend much of their workdays multi-tasking between numerous projects, meetings, and service committees, all while making time to interact with their students on a professional and personal level. Black college presidents also serve a special role on their campuses. This unique cohort of individuals serves as the voice and many times the face of their institutions. They are fundraisers and strategic planners, rallying their campuses around a central mission and goal.

Each set of individuals is vital to the survival and success of HBCUs in that each plays an integral role in the mission implementation of these institutions. In this way, the perceptions of HBCU student affairs administrators and presidents are important in the dialogue on HBCU institutional quality. The challenge is that their voices are seldom, if ever, heard with regard to this topic.

CHAPTER III

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe indicators of the institutional quality of HBCUs as perceived by HBCU administrators. This qualitative research study was guided by two research questions:

1) What characteristics do HBCU administrators identify as indicators of institutional quality at HBCUs?
2) To what extent are HBCU administrators' indicators of institutional quality similar and/or different by institutional rank as defined by *US News and World Report*?

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methods and procedures used in conducting this study including the design, the research method, sites, population and sources of data, procedures for data collection, and the data analysis process. Trustworthiness of the data is also addressed in the final section of this chapter.

Research Design

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as:

> [M]ulti-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials---case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview,

> observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts---that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (p.2).

This definition was particularly appropriate for this study because the goal of the researcher was to interpret, or make sense of the meanings administrators applied to the concept of HBCU institutional quality. Also, in consonance with "critical" research in education (Creswell, 2007, p. 70; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), it was the intent of the researcher to use a qualitative research approach to empower individuals to tell their own stories and to have their voices heard (Creswell, 2007).

Second, the present study utilized an emic research approach (Brown, 2003), where the main concern is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's (Merriam, 1998). In the present study, this was accomplished through the implementation of in-depth interviews with chosen HBCU administrators. This is significant because "emic research explores constructed accounts, descriptions, and interpretations in relation to the beliefs and behaviors of members of a specific population under investigation" (Brown, 2003, p. 27).

Third, qualitative methods allow the researcher to study an issue in detail (Patton, 1990). Since it was the intent of the researcher to delve deeper into perceptions of the institutional quality of HBCUs, a qualitative approach seemed most appropriate. The questions that guided this research lent themselves to a qualitative method so as to uncover the meanings that HBCU administrators ascribe or attach to the concept of institutional quality at historically Black

institutions. Particularly of interest was the type of personal content and data that could possibly emerge from qualitative inquiry (Mertens, 1998).

The qualitative design chosen was case study. A case study approach is designed for the in-depth investigation of an issue or phenomenon affecting a case so as to better understand and illustrate the phenomenon and its meaning for those involved (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the cases investigated were HBCUs. The phenomenon being studied was the perceptions of HBCU administrators regarding HBCU institutional quality.

According to Merriam (1998), a case study approach can be used when detailed information is needed about a group or project through observation, interviews, or self-report. She further states that a case might be selected because of its "uniqueness for what it can reveal about a phenomenon" (p.35). This statement was particularly relevant because most often administrators are directly involved in carrying out the mission and purpose of an institution, thereby playing a special role in determining institutional quality (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991). The voices of HBCU administrators could provide an interesting point of view on this concept. Unfortunately, they have seldom been recorded or reported on in literature relating to this topic.

More specifically, a critical ethnographic case study approach was used for this study, given the history of racism and discrimination in this society, specifically towards Black colleges (Ricard & Brown, 2008; Thompson, 1973). Modern critical ethnographers (post-1960) tend to study ruling groups, ruling ideologies and/or the sentiments and struggles of oppressed people or groups with much of the concern being placed on the promotion of an egalitarian society (Foley

& Valenzuela, 2005). Similarly, critical ethnographies study the shared beliefs, practices, and behaviors of a marginalized group with the aim of advocacy (Creswell, 2007; Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2006). Since this study attempts to study the shared beliefs of a marginalized group (i.e., HBCUs) this approach seemed appropriate. With this understanding in mind, the present study is best characterized as a critical ethnographic case study focused on describing a specific group and the beliefs and perceptions this group has developed over time (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 445).

Selection of Research Sites and Participants

The population for this study was drawn from any institution designated as a historically Black college or university, or institutions of higher learning that were founded prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating African Americans (Mitchell-Cody, 2000). The target population, or sampling frame, was HBCUs included in Tiers I (schools ranked 1-35) and II (schools ranked 36-69) of the 2010 *US News & World Report Historically Black Colleges and Universities Rankings*. From the sampling frame, two institutions were chosen from Tier I and two were chosen from Tier II, for a total of four institutions.

By choosing institutions from different tiers, a maximum variation sampling approach (Creswell, 2007) was used. Perhaps grouping institutions by tier might highlight differences among the groups based on the USNWR criteria. Also, based on each institution's rank in USNWR, administrators from various institutions might render different responses about how they perceive the institutional quality of HBCUs.

A maximum variation sampling approach was also used to determine which institutions to investigate within each tier. Doing so, allowed for the maximization of differences in the chosen institutions, in which case these differences or different perspectives may likely be reflected in the study's findings---"an ideal in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2007, p.126). The institutions chosen differed in terms of their institutional control (i.e., public or private), student enrollment, year of establishment, institutional type (e.g., undergraduate, masters, research), and setting (e.g., rural, urban, etc.).

Institutions in the Unranked category of the *US News & World Report Historically Black Colleges and Universities Rankings* were not used. If one or more of the selected institutions was unable or unwilling to participate, the process continued until the total institutional sample consisted of four HBCUs, or two from each tier. Utilizing a maximum variation sampling approach allowed for different perspectives to be offered from each institution and institutional type. Additionally, institutions from which the researcher thought the most could be learned were sought for this study (Mertens, 1998). The two institutions selected from Tier I were identified as Sojourner College and Tubman State University. The two institutions selected from Tier II were Plessy College and Bethune State University. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of all four schools.

Research Methods and Sources of Data

Two sources of data were used to conduct this study. The primary source of data included in-depth interviews, although additional data was sometimes also captured from my reflective comments. According to Merriam (1998) "interviews are necessary when one cannot

observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them", which was the case with this research (p. 72). Therefore, in-depth interviews were used to gain insight into the participants' perceptions on the institutional quality of HBCUs.

The interview protocol (Appendix A) was designed by the researcher with the assistance of other more experienced qualitative researchers. Also, it was designed to allow the researcher to listen and respond to the emerging view of the participant and to discover new ideas or concerns about the topic (Merriam, 1998). Questions in the interview protocol were constructed in order to solicit in-depth responses from each participant regarding his or her perceptions. Sample questions included the following:

1) In your own words, describe the mission of your institution.
2) To what extent, if any do you think [the USNWR indicators] contain appropriate indicators of the institutional quality of HBCUs?
3) If given the opportunity, what indicators would you list as measures of the institutional quality of HBCUs?
4) Is there anything else you think I should know to better understand your perceptions and perspectives on the institutional quality of HBCUs?

Interviews were semi-structured in nature and ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The semi-structured interview allows for the researcher to respond to the situation at hand and to respond to the emerging worldview of the respondent or new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998).

In addition to the interviews, reflective comments from the researcher were also recorded during and immediately following each interview. Reflective commentary typically included

impressions created by the administrators, specific points of interest during the interviews, verbal clues given by the administrators' tone and pace of speech (e.g., pauses in speech or laughter), their morale and attitudes about working at an HBCU and their specific institution, and the administrators' comments related to the rankings.

Data Collection

Prior to beginning the study, approval was obtained from the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix B). IRB guidelines were followed to develop an Informed Consent Statement (Appendix C) which was then given to each of the participants before the interviews were conducted.

To ensure anonymity of the participants and their home institutions, any identifying information was masked in the study. Participants were informed on multiple occasions that participation was strictly voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Participants were also informed that transcripts of their responses would only be accessible to the researcher and kept in a secure location on the campus of the University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

Initial contact was made with the institutional participants in this study by the researcher's advisor, Dr. Terrell Strayhorn, because of his extensive network within the field of higher education. First, Dr. Strayhorn contacted upper level administrators at each of the four chosen institutions (Appendix D). He asked each administrator to refer two to four additional administrators, specifically Deans, Vice Presidents, and Directors from their institutions with which interviews could be conducted for the study. This letter informed contacts of the purpose

and aim of the study and ways in which potential respondents could respond if they wished to participate. After sending emails to one contact at each of the four chosen institutions, only the president of Plessy College responded.

A solicitation email was sent to the four references at Plessy College (Appendix E). This email stated that participation was voluntary and that any responses obtained from the interview would remain confidential. One reference responded almost immediately. A confirmation email was sent that included the Informed Consent Statement and a list of the indicators used in the 2010 USNWR HBCU rankings (Appendix F). Both documents were sent in advance for the participants to review. The list of indicators was sent to help participants answer two of the questions in the interview protocol.

A follow-up email was sent by the researcher to the Plessy College references who did not respond to the initial solicitation email within seven to 10 days, after which three of the four initial references responded. At this point, three participants (all from Plessy College) had agreed to participate. After approximately two weeks, and no response from Dr. Strayhorn's three remaining initial contacts, alternative methods were used to gain participation from the other participants in the study. These steps are outlined next.

Administrators from the remaining three participating institutions were contacted via email after obtaining their email addresses from their institutional websites. A master list of these administrators was compiled. Second, the same solicitation email that was sent to the Plessy College respondents was sent to each new contact. If unresponsive, a follow-up email was sent within seven to 10 days. Third, once an interview was scheduled, a confirmation email

was sent with the Informed Consent Statement and USNWR indicators. Fourth, follow-up telephone calls were made to each administrator who did not respond within seven to 10 days of the first solicitation email. Given their busy schedules, this step proved to be the most successful for contacting administrators for the study.

The last three steps were repeated with administrators from the master list until it became apparent that the original sample size of 16 administrators was not likely. Approval was obtained from the dissertation Chair, Dr. Norma Mertz, to proceed after it was decided that a good faith effort had been made to obtain participants. In total, a sample of 12 participants was recruited. Specifically, one participant was from Sojourner College, four were from Tubman State University, three were from Bethune State University, and four were from Plessy College. Every effort was made to recruit a representative and diverse sample of administrators from both academic affairs and student affairs, including various genders, roles, titles and positions, academic and professional backgrounds, and professional tenure within higher education and the specific institution.

Twelve interviews were conducted via telephone using appropriate telephone interview equipment. As stated earlier, a consent form was sent to participants to review prior to the interview. Prior to the beginning of each interview, the consent form was reviewed with participants, and he or she was given a chance to ask questions of the researcher regarding the study or the interview. Since interviews were conducted via phone, verbal consent to participate and consent to have the interview audio recorded was captured on tape. Interviews were conducted between April 2010 and July 2010.

Verbatim transcripts were produced after all interviews were completed to assist with data analysis. Tape recording allows the researcher to be more attentive to the participant and increases the accuracy of data collection (Patton, 1990). Transcripts of their individual interview were sent via electronic mail to each participant in order to have them affirm its accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an on-going inductive approach. This approach consists of reading and re-reading the transcripts and notes, identifying patterns and themes across and within interviews, coding data, and making comparisons with respect to themes (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Merriam (1998) stresses the importance of data analysis during the data collection phase so that both processes are "parsimonious and illuminating" (p. 124). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) also stress that data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research. They assert that throughout any and all methods of data collection in qualitative research, the researcher is keeping track of emerging themes, reading through his or her field notes or transcripts, and developing concepts and propositions in order to being to make sense of the data. For this study, the analytic process began with the first interview.

First, interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word. Second, data were coded from the transcripts marking similar text segments and statements from the participants' responses to the interview questions with the same code. Coding involves attaching one or more keywords to a portion of text in order to make the statement more easily identifiable for later use (Kvale, 2007). Whenever a meaningful segment of text was found within a transcript, a written code was assigned to that particular segment. This process was continued until all of the data were

segmented and initial coding was completed. During this process, a master list of all the codes was created by the researcher to use during the study and kept for reference throughout the analytic process. The codes were then reapplied to new segments of data each time an appropriate segment was encountered.

Next, the transcripts were read again to begin the categorization process. Developing categories, typologies, or themes involves looking for recurring regularities in the data and asking oneself which units fit together (Merriam, 1988). This process was also done using Microsoft Word where central patterns and themes were synthesized to help describe indicators/characteristics of the institutional quality of HBCUs in order to answer the research questions.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research calls for the researcher to drive the collection and analysis of the data, thereby subjecting the data to the researcher's bias (Merriam, 1998). For this reason, establishing the trustworthiness of the researcher and the data is important in qualitative research. Merriam (1988) suggests using one of the following six strategies: (a) triangulation –the use of multiple sources of data and methods to confirm findings; (b) member checks – participants review the data and the interpretations; (c) long term observation in the field; (d) peer examination– asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge; (e) participatory modes of research – involving participants in all phases of the research; and (f) stating the researcher's biases, assumptions, and worldview at the beginning of the study.

For this dissertation, three of the aforementioned strategies were used. First, member-checking was employed. Each participant received a transcript of his or her interview, and was asked to verify that what he or she said was accurately recorded. Member checking is necessary to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Second, peer examination was also an important step used in this research to assist with the development of the patterns and themes. Lincoln & Guba (1985) also state that peer debriefing is "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session, and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). This peer debriefing session was conducted with four peers, not connected with the study, and who were familiar with qualitative research. Each peer was asked to review the categorized data in order to develop their own themes and patterns associated with the data. The results of their analyses were then discussed with the researcher, allowing for an opportunity to determine whether the themes she had developed actually emerged from the data. Once the data were analyzed by both the researcher and peers outside the study, and the emergent themes in response to question one were affirmed, the administrators were grouped by and compared across tiers for similarities and/or differences in their responses in order to answer the second research question.

Third, the biases, assumptions, and worldview of the researcher were explicitly stated and outlined at the beginning of the study in Chapter I. This position statement provided insight into the theory guiding the study, the researcher's position regarding HBCUs, and the basis for selecting this group for study.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation of the Findings

As stated in earlier chapters, the purpose of this study was to describe indicators of the institutional quality of HBCUs as identified by HBCU administrators. Four HBCUs from the 2010 USNWR HBCU rankings served as the data collection sites for this research. Interviews were conducted with a total of 12 HBCU administrators---five from Tier I institutions and seven from Tier II institutions. Participants included six student affairs administrators, four academic affairs administrators, one financial aid administrator, and one sitting president. Data were collected from in-depth interviews with each administrator and analyzed using an on-going inductive approach to code, categorize, and compare themes across interviews and by tier (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). The results of the study are presented in this chapter. They are preceded by a discussion of the schools selected for the study, and the participants interviewed from these schools. Findings are presented in terms of the research questions:

1) What indicators or characteristics do HBCU administrators identify as measures of the institutional quality of HBCUs?
2) To what extent are HBCU administrators' indicators of institutional quality similar and/or different by institutional rank as defined by *US News and World Report*?

The Schools

This section of the chapter serves to paint a picture of the institutions included in this study. The four institutions chosen were located in the southern region of the United States.

This was not intentional, but more a function of the fact that most of the nation's HBCUs are located in this region of the country. As stated earlier, all four institutions were selected from the 2010 USNWR HBCU rankings, which included a total of 80 institutions broken into three categories: Tier I, Tier II, and Unranked. Institutions were purposefully chosen to ensure variation in terms of their institutional control (i.e., public or private); total student enrollment, year of establishment; setting (e.g., rural, urban, residential); and institutional type (e.g., undergraduate, masters, research). Using this approach allowed for the maximization of differences in the chosen institutions and as a possible consequence, differences in the perspectives of the chosen participants.

While providing the reader with a picture of the schools used was certainly important, it was also important to retain their anonymity. Thus, in this section, the schools are grouped by the tier of which they are a part: Tier I (ranked 1-35) and Tier II (ranked 36-69). Schools from the Unranked category in the rankings were not included in this study. To protect the identities of the institutions selected, pseudonyms are used and aggregated data are presented in place of real names or specific information. Rounded figures are used in place of specific figures or statistics. The following descriptions provide information regarding the size of the school, school enrollment, demographic information, and other pertinent data which might relate to a school's ranking in USNWR.

Tier I Institutions. In the 2010 USNWR HBCU rankings, 15 of the 35 Tier I institutions were private. Of those that were private, nine were in the top 10 alone. The Tier I schools selected for this study are identified as Tubman State University and Sojourner College.

Tubman State University is a public institution, while Sojourner College is private. Both were founded between the late 1800s and early 1900s, and are located in the southeastern United States, in or near metropolitan areas of more than one million.

Sojourner College has a relatively small population of fewer than 3,000 students. Tubman State University is considerably larger and has a student population closer to 10,000. The student body of each institution is primarily Black and comes from more than 40 states and over 15 countries. Both institutions offer between 30 and 40 undergraduate majors in such disciplines as business, nursing, engineering, psychology, political science, economics, drama, and philosophy. Tubman State University, a comprehensive institution, offers over 30 master's programs in disciplines like education and the health sciences. It also offers nearly 10 doctoral programs in such fields as public administration, and administration and supervision.

As a public institution, Tubman State University is able to offer its students lower tuition rates than Sojourner College, which is private. Full-time, in-state Tubman State students incur tuition costs between $2,000 and $3,000, while tuition costs for full-time, out-of-state students are between $7,000 and $8,000. Tuition costs for Sojourner College students are between $17,000 and $18,000. Prospective students at both institutions are required to have a high school GPA of at least 2.5. However, Tubman State students must score at least an 18 on the ACT and a 900 on the SAT. Sojourner College students are required to earn at least a 20 on the ACT and a 1000 on the SAT.

As with their student populations, the two schools in this category vary significantly by physical size and size of faculty. Tubman State is slightly more than 14 times larger than

Sojourner College in terms of acreage. Tubman State also has more than twice as many buildings as Sojourner College. Similarly, Tubman State has more than double Sojourner's less than 200 faculty members. At least 60 percent of faculty members at both schools hold PhDs. Also, both institutions have relatively small classes of approximately 20 students, and the student to faculty ratio is no more than 15:1 at either school. Descriptive information about the two institutions is summarized in Table 4.1 below.

Tier II Institutions. In Tier II, 18 of the 34 institutions were private. The two institutions included in the study from Tier II are identified as Bethune State University, which is public, and Plessy College, which is private. Both are located in the southeastern United States, and were founded during the mid- to late 1800s. Both schools are situated in either a residential or suburban setting in or near metropolitan areas with populations between 600,000 and two million.

Plessy College has a relatively small population of fewer than 700 students. Tubman State University is considerably larger and has a student population closer to 6,000. As with the schools selected from Tier I, the vast majority of the student population at both schools selected from Tier II are Black. Undergraduate majors are offered in at least 20 areas at both schools and include such programs as business, engineering, history, hospitality management, chemistry, and social work. The other comprehensive institution in the sample, Bethune State University, offers more than 15 master's programs, such as business administration, computer science, and public administration. It also offers two doctoral programs.

Despite the difference in institutional control between these two institutions, both offer similar tuition rates to their students. Bethune State University's tuition for full-time, in-state students is between $4,000 and $5,000, while full-time, out-of-state students incur tuition costs between $14,000 and $15,000. Full-time students at Plessy College also pay tuition costs between $4,000 and $5,000. Prospective students at both institutions must have a high school GPA of at least 2.5. However, Bethune State students are required to obtain at least a 19 on the ACT and a 900 on the SAT. Plessy College students must score at least a 17 on the ACT and an 800 on the SAT.

Similar to the institutions selected from Tier I, Bethune State and Plessy College also differ significantly with respect to their physical size and faculty. Based on the acreage of each school, Bethune State University is more than 10 times larger than Plessy College. Also, Bethune State's faculty consists of more than 200 members, which is more than 10 times larger than Plessy College. Class sizes are relatively small, and the student to faculty ratio is no more than 13:1. Descriptive information about the two institutions is summarized in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 – Demographic Profiles of the Institutions in the Study

Tier	School	Size	Control	Min. GPA	Min. ACT/SAT	Full-Time Faculty Range	Student to Faculty Ratio	In-State/On Campus Tuition	Out-of-State/Off Campus Tuition
1	Sojourner College	small	private	2.5	20/1000	150-200	12 to 1	$30k-$31k	$20k-$21k
1	Tubman State University	medium	public	2.5	18/900	450-500	15 to 1	$5k-$7k	$18k-$20k
2	Bethune State University	medium	public	2.5	19/900	200-300	17 to 1	$5k-$6k	$15k-$16k
2	Plessy College	very small	private	2.5	17/800	50-75	13 to 1	$7k-$8k	$5k-$6k

*Institutional size as determined by the Carnegie Classifications

The Administrators

This section serves to paint a picture of the administrators included in this study. Two of the first interview questions asked of the participants was to tell about their professional careers and why they decided to work at an HBCU. Although both were intended to be warm-up questions, they shed some light on who the participants were and their professional decisions, both of which might have impacted their perspectives on the focus of this study. The information in this section is presented in the aggregate so as to protect the anonymity of the participants. In that vein, pseudonyms are used in place of the participants' real names.

The participant sample included three females and nine males. Although a greater balance between genders was sought, male administrators were more accessible and responded more quickly and more often than their female counterparts. All 12 administrators were African American or Black.

The academic backgrounds of the administrators varied. Six administrators earned their bachelor's degrees from HBCUs in various disciplines including business, sociology, English, and Spanish. Three earned master's degrees as their highest degree, and nine earned doctoral degrees, including the EdD and the PhD. All 12 participants earned their graduate degrees from historically White institutions, except for one female. She obtained her MBA from an HBCU, and her PhD from a majority institution. Study participants obtained their terminal degrees in a variety of disciplines such as higher education, business, and English.

In terms of their professional backgrounds, six administrators worked in the student affairs arena in positions that included Vice President of Student Affairs, Associate Dean of Students, and Director of the Counseling Center. Four participants worked in academic affairs. Some of their positions included Dean of the College of Education, Interim Dean of the Graduate School, and Dean of the College of Business. One administrator was the Director of Financial Aid, and one was currently the president of his institution. In total, the study sample included three Deans, four Directors, three Vice Presidents, one Chair, and one sitting President. They each had a multitude of responsibilities, which entailed supervising a number of faculty and staff members and hundreds of students, overseeing several college offices and departments, and managing large budgets. They also explained that they served as mentors, counselors, and surrogate parents to the many students with whom they interacted on a daily basis.

A total of seven administrators worked at an HBCU before coming to their current institution. Ten had worked at their current institution for more than five years. Two had been working at their present institutions for more than 20 years. The average number of years

worked at their current institutions for the entire group was 11.25. Four administrators had even returned to work in their current positions at their alma maters.

Eight participants had spent their entire professional careers in some capacity within higher education. The other four began their careers in fields outside of higher education, including the healthcare industry, international organizations, and the business arena. Seven worked on an HBCU campus prior to landing their current administrative position.

Seven administrators made it a point to express their great pleasure about their decisions to work at an HBCU, and were anxious to share their experiences. For example, one administrator said he felt as though working at an HBCU was like "coming home" for him. Another believed it was his "destiny" to return to work at an HBCU. And another, who had returned to her alma mater, shared:

> I know the quality of the product that Sojourner College puts out and I love this institution literally with every fiber of my heart…so when the opportunity came for me to return it was almost a no-brainer for me to come back.

Descriptive data about the participants is summarized in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 – Demographic Profiles of the Administrators in the Study

Name	School	Campus Division	Undergraduate Institutional Type	Years at Current Institution
Dr. Thomas Allen	Bethune State University	Student Affairs	HWI	4 years
Dr. Stephen Anderson	Tubman State University	Academic Affairs	HWI	16 years
Dr. Nathan Askew	Bethune State University	Academic Affairs	HBCU	3 years
Mr. Peter Daniels	Plessy College	Financial Affairs	HWI	6 years
Dr. Kelly Dickson	Sojourner College	Student Affairs	HBCU	9 years
Dr. Janice Godfrey	Tubman State University	Academic Affairs	HBCU	38 years
Dr. Henry Jackson	Plessy College	Academic Affairs	HBCU	11 years
Dr. Frank Michaels	Tubman State University	Student Affairs	HWI	4 years
Ms. Laura Reynolds	Plessy College	Student Affairs	HBCU	13 years
Mr. Bill Robertson	Bethune State University	Student Affairs	HWI	5 years
Dr. Gregory Watson	Tubman State University	Student Affairs	HBCU	23 years
Dr. Keith Williams	Plessy College	President	HWI	6 years

Findings

With the preceding contexts of the institutions and the administrators in mind, the findings of the study are detailed below in relation to the research questions.

Responses used to answer the research questions were drawn primarily from two interview questions:

1) To what extent, if any, do you think this list [of USNWR indicators] contains appropriate indicators of the institutional quality of HBCUs?
2) If given the opportunity, what indicators would you list as measures of institutional quality for HBCUs?

Participants' responses were also taken from other points of the interview to answer the first research question. For example, at the conclusion of the interview, respondents were asked, "Is there anything else that you think I should know to better understand your perceptions on HBCUs, institutional quality at HBCUs, or anything that I didn't ask that you would like to tell me to add to what you have already said?" Some administrators chose not to add anything. For others, this question opened up the floodgates for them to talk more freely about their respective institutions and HBCUs as a whole.

Research Question I: What characteristics do HBCU administrators identify as indicators of institutional quality at HBCUs?

In brief, 11 of the 12 administrators in this study endorsed (to varying degrees) the USNWR indicators as acceptable for assessing the institutional quality of HBCUs. Of those, eight sought to modify some of the indicators to make them more consistent with the historic mission and purpose of HBCUs. Ten out of the 12 administrators also recommended the addition of other indicators/characteristics currently absent from the USNWR rankings, which they deemed relevant to assessing HBCU institutional quality. The findings with respect to research question I are detailed below in terms of three areas: (a) endorsement of USNWR indicators; (b) modifications to USNWR indicators suggested; and (c) additional indicators/characteristics recommended. Table 4.3 depicts the responses described above by respondent.

Table 4.3 - HBCU Administrators' Perceived Indicators/Characteristics of the Institutional Quality of HBCUs

Tier	Administrator	USNWR Indicators						Additional Indicators/Characteristics				
		Retention	Faculty Resources	Financial Resources	Peer Assessment	Student Selectivity	Alumni Giving	Added Value	The Student Experience	Nurturing HBCU Environment	Quality of Acad. Prgms & Curriculum	Community Engagement
1	Anderson	X	X	X		X*						
1	Dickson	X	X		X*	X	X					
1	Godfrey	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	
1	Michaels	X*						X				X
1	Watson	X	X	X	X			X		X		
2	Allen	X*	X*	X	X	X	X*			X		
2	Askew	X	X	X	X*	X*	X	X				
2	Daniels	X*	X	X	X*	X	X				X	
2	Jackson							X	X			
2	Reynolds	X	X*					X		X		
2	Robertson	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		
2	Williams	X*							X			

*Indicates a modification was made to this indicator

Endorsements. As stated above, the vast majority of the administrators (11 out of 12) endorsed the USNWR indicators to some degree. Specifically, eight participants endorsed between five and six indicators, while two participants endorsed only one or two. One participant did not endorse any of the USNWR indicators, and instead opted to substitute additional indicators not included in the rankings. The first section details the respondents' endorsement of each indicator, and is organized from the most endorsed indicator to the least endorsed.

Retention. The majority of participants (11) endorsed this indicator, which is composed of two components: freshman retention rate and six-year graduation rate. According to USNWR, higher retention rates indicate that an institution is offering the classes and services students need to succeed. Given the extent of endorsements, administrators appeared to think this indicator had considerable relevance for assessing the quality of HBCUs. In fact, seven accepted it without modification, and some were quite vocal in their support. One administrator even considered the retention indicator one of the three most important USNWR indicators for assessing HBCUs, next to financial resources and faculty resources. In his opinion, failure by an institution to retain its students constituted a disservice to them. Thus, he even thought the weight for the retention indicator was appropriate.

Faculty resources. The faculty resources indicator includes such components as class size, faculty salary, student-faculty ratio, and proportion of full-time faculty. It was the second most endorsed indicator (9 administrators), suggesting that the majority of respondents saw it as an appropriate measure of HBCU institutional quality. Seven of the nine even endorsed it unconditionally. Those who approved of it wholeheartedly often spoke about a particular aspect

of the indicator, rather than the indicator as a whole. For example, one administrator said faculty resources were "extremely important", and that faculty should have terminal degrees in the areas in which they taught in order to best serve students.

Financial resources. The financial resources indicator measures an institutions' per-student spending on educational expenditures. According to USNWR, greater per-student spending signifies that an institution is able to offer an array of programs and services for students. As an indicator of quality, the financial resources indicator earned seven unconditional endorsements from respondents.

Peer assessment. Peer assessment has the single heaviest weighting in the USNWR rankings. Institutional presidents, provosts, and admissions deans are asked to rate peer schools' academic programs. As with financial resources, this indicator also earned seven endorsements from respondents, four of whom accepted it without modification. One respondent who wholeheartedly approved of this indicator explained why he thought it was acceptable for assessing HBCUs:

> I would imagine that [peer assessment] is probably pretty accurate amongst the top level administrators at the HBCUs and for the most part they network and they all know each other and they all know what's going on. Many have worked at other institutions.

Student selectivity. The student selectivity indicator uses enrollees' standardized test scores, the proportion of enrolled freshman who graduated in the top 25 percent of their high school classes, and the institution's acceptance rate to determine a school's academic climate. Half of the participants endorsed this indicator, four without modifications.

Alumni giving rate. For the 2010 USNWR rankings, alumni giving rate measures the average percentage of living alumni with bachelor's degrees who contributed financially to their alma mater during 2007-08 and 2008-09. According to USNWR, this is an indirect measure of a student's satisfaction. Six respondents endorsed this indicator, the majority of whom (5) did so without modifications. Initially, one of the unconditional supporters appeared to find fault with the alumni giving rate indicator. It seemed as though she might call for its modification or even its removal from the rankings. However, she quickly decided to retain it in the rankings after remembering that she "happened to be at a school that enjoyed a high alumni giving rate."

The administrators' endorsement of the USNWR indicators is evident from the data, and suggests that they accept them (the indicators) overall for the assessment of HBCUs. Having acknowledged this, however, their endorsement of these indicators was not as equivocal as is suggested by the numbers alone. This was demonstrated in the participants' tone of voice, choice of words, and the multiple pauses captured in some of their responses. Most could even be "heard" shrugging their shoulders over the phone as they remarked that indicators were "okay", or that they didn't want to "discount their importance, but…", or even "I guess if one has to rank somebody on something these are just as good as anything".

Also, it was unclear whether every participant fully understood what the indicators were about as defined by USNWR. For example, when speaking about the financial resources indicator, one participant indicated that he thought it was important because many HBCU students are first generation students who come to college with limited resources and are dependent upon financial aid. Based on the USNWR definition for the financial resources

indicator, however, this is clearly not what the indicator is about. One is left wondering whether this administrator would have still endorsed the indicator if he had a better understanding of what it really meant. Another participant admitted, "I don't know very much about this kind of ranking, so I mean I guess it is okay." Interestingly, this administrator endorsed all six USNWR indicators.

Furthermore, three of the respondents were particularly vocal about their unhappiness with the rankings in general. One said, "I happen to not agree with the whole ranking thing." Later in her interview she also stated, "I just don't see why schools have to be ranked period." She endorsed five indicators. Another respondent called the rankings nothing more than a "marketing ploy" that failed to "take into account the inherent differences between HBCUs and majority institutions," and a third respondent stated:

> I have issues with the way US News and World Report measures quality at *all* institutions because I think the quality measures hinge too much on finances and if finances are going to be one of the major measures then HBCUs are always going to be somewhat at the bottom of the list".

Each endorsed one indicator.

These caveats are interesting and raise questions about the respondents' endorsement of the USNWR indicators. The modifications they suggested also speak to their level of support for the indicators, and are detailed below.

Modifications. In spite of the relatively widespread endorsement of the USNWR indicators, eight administrators sought to modify at least one or more of them. The only

indicator they did not seek to modify was the financial resources indicator. The primary reasons participants sought to modify indicators were to increase or decrease its weight, or to broaden its content matter to support the mission and student population characteristic of HBCUs. The modifications sought for each indicator are detailed below, organized from the most to the least modified indicator.

Retention. Four of the 11 participants that endorsed the retention indicator suggested modifications as well. One participant felt retention was so important that he wanted to increase its weight. The remaining three sought to include components in the indicator's current definition that would consider more than simply whether or not a student was retained. They felt it should consider students' background characteristics (e.g., academic background, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status) in relation to retention, as well as the institution's efforts to retain such students. For example, one respondent from Bethune State University stated:

> …the retention issue needs to look at the students that are coming in and how well they're prepared also, because if [Bethune State University] can get a student who is coming in from one of the inner city schools of [a surrounding metropolitan city], or one of the poor performing schools anywhere and [Bethune State University] can get them to graduate, [Bethune State University] needs to look at how we get them to graduate. And if we get them to graduate in 6 years that's fine, if we can get them to graduate in 7 years that's fine also.

Note that in his modification this respondent also dismisses the six-year cap on the student graduation rate. Similarly, another respondent mentioned student background characteristics and graduation rate in his modification, again based on the type of student oftentimes recruited by HBCUs.

> I think you still look at retention and graduation, but I think you have to start factoring in… the percentage of students from low socioeconomic [backgrounds], percentage of students who are first generation, and percentage of students of color. You gotta factor all those things in together. You just can't say take Harvard and take [Plessy College]…they're two fundamentally different institutions. Harvard has an [above 90 percent] graduation rate and there is research that suggests that if you have an institution where [there are] very few students with low socioeconomic backgrounds, those students are going to graduate at a higher level than students who come from high socioeconomic backgrounds or [those students at institutions] with higher percentages of poor students.

A third respondent also mentioned the social, academic, and personal background characteristics of HBCU students as the basis for his suggested modification. He felt that first generation students, especially, should be disaggregated from other students and given a different weighting "because it's harder to retain first generation students than it is to retain those who have their parents and their grandparents, and everybody [else who] went [to said institution]."

These findings suggest that in spite of their approval of the retention indicator, about a third of the endorsing participants' thought the definition of retention should have a revised meaning for HBCUs, given their distinct student population.

Peer assessment. Three of the seven participants that endorsed the peer assessment indicator sought to modify it because of its high propensity for engendering bias in the administrators surveyed. The indicator's subjective nature caused participants to be skeptical about its weighting, thus they called for it to be lowered. For example, one participant stated, "I would not put peer assessment at a percentage of 25...in my opinion...I don't think administrators at HBCUs will honestly rate other institutions." He referred to this as the "crabs in a barrel" mentality, often associated with African Americans who are envious of other African Americans they perceive as being successful. In this case, he worried that some top administrators might negatively rate other HBCUs, regardless of merit, in order to make their own institutions look better in the rankings. Similarly, a second participant stated:

> If 25 percent of your rank is going to be how your peers look at you—it's almost a farce in my mind because I will rank you high, if you rank me high and you rank me high if I rank you high. It just seems so stupid to me… If nobody knows about Sears University then you have lost out 25 percent of your points [and] then you're not gonna ever be ranked up at 1, 2, and 3.

A third participant was also apprehensive about the indicator's weight. He was quite skeptical of the way in which it was implemented in the rankings. While he understood that USNWR did choose to survey the same individuals at each institution, he lacked confidence in the assessment of those individuals because of how subjective their opinions might be. As an academic dean, he stated that even he would find it difficult to rate the majority of HBCUs on a variety of criteria. Ultimately, he thought the indicator was "okay", but that "it should be weighted much less."

Faculty resources. Only two respondents of the nine that endorsed it sought to modify the financial resources indicator. Their modifications focused solely on one component of the indicator---faculty salary, and of the negative implications of trying to compare HBCUs on the basis of faculty salary.

One participant, for example, argued that "a lot of stuff" in USNWR dealing with faculty salary is "skewed because all the schools are not on the same level as far as the paying and stuff", which referenced differences in financial resources amongst HBCUs. Although she acknowledged that USNWR attempts to account for regional differences in the cost of living for the faculty salary component, she remained unconvinced of the rankings' ability to equally measure faculty salary across all HBCUs. Particularly, she said [faculty resources] and a lot of other things in the rankings were like "comparing apples to oranges", meaning that like schools are not always compared in the rankings---including the HBCU rankings.

The second participant seeking a modification to this indicator reiterated this point, although he was somewhat more open to this indicator than his counterpart. The overarching message during his lengthy response about this indicator was the importance of equal resources between institutions, whether Black and White institutions or amongst HBCUs. He also used the "apples to apples" metaphor when arguing that institutions should be compared with those they are most like when measuring factors like faculty resources. Basically, he explained that HBCUs are not all alike. He also spoke of the difficulty HBCUs have, especially the less wealthy ones, with keeping good faculty because they are sometimes recruited to other schools by better pay.

Student selectivity. As with faculty resources, two of the six participants that endorsed it sought to modify the student selectivity indicator, citing its hefty weight and misalignment with the mission of HBCUs as the reason for their suggestions. One participant, bothered by the weight given to the indicator, thought it should be reduced because such a heavy weight could negatively impact HBCUs in the rankings. The other participant sought to expand the current definition of the student selectivity indicator by describing it as being about more than standardized test scores at HBCUs. He argued:

> There are other aspects to determine what kind of student may be successful when admitted in college and not necessarily what they get on the ACT or SAT. What I mean by this is looking at other factors such as student motivation or student background and also resources that are made available once students come on campus, [like] what kind of support they get.

This participant also defended the many HBCUs that do not receive federal research funding, "with the exception of perhaps Howard University." He argued that since these schools do not receive federal dollars they are less able to attract top students. In his opinion, this was not an indication that the mission of those HBCUs was diminished or that the students they recruit cannot be successful.

Alumni giving rate. The alumni giving rate indicator received only one hesitant modification from its endorsers. This respondent admitted that he would have completely endorsed the indicator had he still been employed at his previous institution---a private, selective

HWI, since there was a history of giving at that school. At his current institution, this was not the case. Therefore, he moved to modify the indicator.

He gave several reasons why he struggled to endorse this indicator. One reason was that that several HBCUs lack the same history of giving that many majority institutions have traditionally enjoyed. Another reason was that HBCUs most often do not possess the financial support necessary to sustain the "fundraising mechanisms" characteristic of HWIs. Also, he spoke of the disparate wage gap, not only between Blacks and Whites, but also between HBCU and HWI graduates. He proposed looking at the alumni giving rates of graduates ten years out, as opposed to those within the last one to two years.

Financial resources. No participants who had endorsed this indicator wished to modify it.

In sum, while the administrators in this study generally endorsed the USNWR indicators, suggesting they were appropriate for assessing the quality of HBCUs, some also these same indicators might be too narrow as currently defined. Thus, they suggested modifications to them. Of the administrators that sought modifications, some tended to find themselves in an interesting paradox. On one hand they endorsed an indicator, while simultaneously seeking to modify it in ways that would make it "more appropriate" for HBCUs, which basically changed the definition of the indicator they had just endorsed.

One example of this paradox occurred with the first participant to modify the student selectivity indicator. Although he endorsed the indicator, he simultaneously rejected its current definition for being in direct opposition to what HBCUs have traditionally stood for:

> …HBCUs have been noted in the past for providing access to a variety of students, not just being selective and saying we're only going to take the top 25 percent of the students who graduated from [their] high school classes. [HBCUs] traditionally haven't done that.

Essentially, his modification contradicts his endorsement of the student selectivity indicator since by virtue of its title the indicator challenges a fundamental HBCU characteristic---open enrollment.

Another instance like this seems to have occurred with the seven participants who unconditionally endorsed the financial resources indicator and suggested no modifications for it. Despite their unconditional endorsement, six participants spoke to the historic financial struggles of HBCUs, which almost directly contradicts the definition of this indicator. One talked about how several HWIs often have more resources than HBCUs, allowing them to attract more high achieving Black students. Another spoke about how "HBCUs do more with less" and another offered the judgment that "none of [the] HBCUs have enough faculty resources." Yet none of them connected these struggles to the financial resources indicator and how it might negatively impact HBCUs in the rankings given their modest financial circumstances.

When the number of modifications is considered in relation to the number of endorsements, it is clear that endorsements are more numerous and widespread. Such a finding would seem to suggest that, as a group, the administrators' support for the USNWR indicators is not eradicated by the modifications.

Additional indicators/characteristics. In addition to modifications, 10 of the 12 administrators identified five indicators/characteristics they perceived to also or alternatively (for

the one respondent who rejected all of the USNWR indicators), be used as indicators of HBCU institutional quality. The additional indicators/characteristics included: (a) added value; (b) the student experience; (c) the nurturing environment of HBCUs; (d) academic program offerings; and (e) community engagement. Participant responses are detailed below, organized in terms of the number of respondents who sought to add it. The additional characteristics sought are also shown by respondent in Table 4.3.

Added value. The largest number of participants (5) spoke to the need for an indicator of HBCU institutional quality that may most suitably be characterized as added value, particularly for HBCU students. The administrators who identified this indicator defined it in terms of an increase in the level of worth or value added to a student between the times he or she stepped on campus and graduated. As was indicated previously in a participant's response, graduation might not always occur within a set time frame, such as six years, but graduation was always the goal when participants described this indicator. For example, one said:

> Finishing obviously is your goal and is important, but you are a much better person if you went to an HBCU for three years, or two years, or one year as opposed to not going at all. There is something that happens to you, there is nothing else [better] than the peer interaction. You make friends for life and these people are the people who make up the 90th percentile of the Black earning power in the country. So yes, it is important to finish, but it is more important to ATTEND. The longer you attend the better off you are whether you finish or not.

His comment that "there is something that happens to you" suggests that this participant was adamant about not only graduation, but also attendance at an HBCU because of the unexplainable change in students once they attend.

Other participants described this added value indicator as being consistent with HBCUs' fundamental "come as you are" approach to dealing with their students. One female respondent characterized the approach at her institution with the statement, "Students are diamonds in the rough and by the time they graduate they are perfect." Similarly, one participant made this comment about HBCUs, "We make lemonade out of lemons…we take those folks that nobody else wants and we turn them into people that everybody wants." Yet another participant articulated what seems to be the essence of the value added indicator.

> I think [USNWR] ought to have a weight for those institutions that can provide access to students from just about any background and do something with them. So, if you take a student from point A to Z, I think you're doing a much better job than if you take a student from point X to Z, because X is only a few letters from Z. Many of your HBCUs have been able to take students from A to Z with very few resources, so I think that when you look at the product you are probably coming up with a better measure than if you just looked at who comes in, you know, the raw material. So if you can get raw material that isn't so good and produce a great product, I think that you deserve a higher ranking than someone who gets good raw material.

He also suggested testing students, perhaps through a comprehensive exam at or after graduation, or asking employers for information as a means of determining what and if a student had gained anything from attending an HBCU.

Nearly half the participants (5) agreed that some indication of the value an institution adds to its students should be employed to assess the institutional quality of HBCUs. At least for these HBCU administrators, the fact that HBCU students often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and circumstances makes this transformation all the more remarkable, and begs recognition in assessing the quality of HBCU institutions.

The nurturing HBCU environment. The second most talked about feature of HBCUs was their nurturing environments. Four of the participants perceived this characteristic as a necessary inclusion in any assessment of HBCU institutional quality. As one participant stated, "[HBCUs] are relevant…we do some things that other colleges do not do---the PWIs… Sometimes we may be a little overly nurturing...to a point where we're enabling…but we also empower." In describing the nurturing environment at HBCUs, administrators also depicted their roles as surrogate parents to students' once they arrive on campus. Another participant stated:

> [HBCUs] are smaller. We do provide a nurturing role for these students. When these parents come and they hand their children off to us, we become in effect the parent for the time that they're going to be in college, and we do have to nurture these students. We have to help sorta raise these students. Sometimes it is adjusting behavior that they bring with them.

An interesting finding was that of those participants who did not seek to add it as an indicator, three still spoke to the nurturing environment on HBCU campuses at least once during their interviews, especially if they had attended an HBCU as a student. One participant said, "I believe there are a lot of positives because of the nurturing environment at HBCUs, meaning there are some of us, including myself who have benefitted." Interestingly enough, this participant only attended an HBCU for two years before transferring and eventually graduating from an HWI. Another participant spoke at length about his experience as an HBCU graduate and how the unique environment helped his academic and personal development. According to him, "I found a very nurturing atmosphere at [undergraduate institution] with some of the professors….who had my best interest at heart and then they propelled me to graduate school as well as to a doctoral program." Although neither participant chose to add the nurturing environment of HBCUs as an indicator of their quality, both spoke to how it impacted, and even added value, to their lives.

The student experience. Beyond the characteristics about what students experienced on HBCU campuses (i.e., added value and the nurturing environment), four of the five participants offering additional indicators, sought to have an indicator added relating to *how* students experienced HBCU campuses. Participants' comments related to such elements as HBCU faculty and staff, class size, and student body. They attributed the nurturing and empowering nature of HBCU faculty and staff and the relatively small class sizes at HBCUs, coupled with a student body comprised of many other African American students with similar aspirations, to enhancing the student experience in ways that were uniquely characteristic of HBCUs.

For example, one administrator commented on how unique a role HBCU faculty play in the lives of their students. He stated that at HBCUs, "there are professors that know how to work to try to invite students into the learning process that haven't had the opportunity in the past." His opinion seemed to be that what makes HBCU faculty special is their ability to work with students who are not usually the cream of the crop in their classes, and to create an educational experience where they are able to realize their potential as learners. Similarly, another participant spoke to the accessibility of HBCU faculty and staff, which he perceived as instrumental to students' satisfaction with their collegiate experience.

In terms of the student body, one participant who graduated from an HBCU spoke about his experience as a student there. "I was able to see that African Americans were capable of organizing, initiating, and conducting business," he said. One other participant stated, "You make friends for life and these people are the people who make up the 90^{th} percentile of the Black earning power in the country." The ability to be around and see numerous other African American students aspire to and actually achieve success appeared to be an experience that these participants saw as unique and empowering, not only for them but for other students who attend an HBCU.

With respect to using the student experience as an indicator of HBCU quality, one participant suggested using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to arrive at students' perceptions of satisfaction with their experience. Similarly, another suggested using students' stories to measure their experiences, specifically alumni.

Academic program offerings. Two respondents sought to add an indicator related to the academic aspect of HBCUs. Their responses included multiple components. One component focused on looking at the types of programs the institution offered; another on the amount of funding put towards those programs; and a third on the strength of those programs. The first two components were encompassed in one participant's comment, "I think schools show a level of quality if they look at what programs are offered and the funding towards those programs." The other respondent commented more on the "strength" of an institution's academic programs. He was not exactly sure what this indicator would be called if added, but his interest in getting at the quality of an institution's academic programs was clear. He did not know how to arrive at the relative strength of an institution's academic programs, and was particularly apprehensive about adding it as an indicator since he was unsure how to control for subjectivity. He felt that what one might rate as a good program, another might not. Ultimately, he decided it was important enough to add such an indicator.

Although this response to an indicator might be considered a less than noteworthy finding, it did constitute the single instance in which any of the administrators referenced academic programs in their determination of what quality meant for HBCUs. In every other instance in this study, the broader and more social aspects of the HBCU experience were the focus of respondents' additions.

Community engagement. One participant sought to have community engagement added as an indicator for assessing the quality of HBCUs. He referenced the new Carnegie Classification where higher education institutions are judged on their engagement with the

surrounding communities. He described it as an obvious indicator for assessing HBCUs given that community engagement has been an integral part of their history. Indeed, he argued that HBCUs were "the standard for engagement in the community".

Research Question II: How are HBCU administrators' indicators/characteristics of institutional quality similar and/or different by institutional rank, as defined by *U.S. News and World Report*?

For research question II, the responses of the administrators were compared in terms of the tier to which their institutions belonged. This question was undertaken to explore differences that might occur among participant responses when examined based on differences in the types of institutions in each tier. The findings are organized in much the same way as the findings for research question 1. The similarities and/or differences in endorsement by tier are examined first. Next, the similarities and/or differences in the modifications sought are examined by tier, and finally, the similarities and/or differences in the additional indicators/characteristics offered by tier are examined.

Endorsement. In terms of endorsement for the USNWR indicators, there were no clear differences between tiers. As can be seen in Table 4.3, the number of participant responses is similar by tier, as well as the support for each specific indicator by respondents in both tiers, taking into account the difference in number of administrators in each tier (5 in Tier I; 7 in Tier II). This finding would seem to suggest that there is not much variation in the way Tier I and Tier II administrators view the USNWR indicators, regardless of their institutional affiliation; the rank of their institution in USNWR; or the tier to which their institution belongs in USNWR.

Also, the relatively widespread support expressed by the respondents overall is comparable to that expressed by respondents in each of the two tiers.

Modifications. In contrast to the pattern of endorsement of USNWR indicators by tier, there were differences between the tiers in terms of the number who sought to modify an indicator. Overall, eight participants sought to modify the indicators. When examined by tier, three of the five respondents in Tier I sought to modify the indicators, while five of the seven administrators in Tier II sought modifications, suggesting that Tier II administrators might be less satisfied with the USNWR indicators as they are currently defined than administrators in Tier I. Table 4.3 shows the breakdown of modifications for each individual and indicator by tier.

Retention. Three times as many Tier II administrators sought modifications to this indicator than the one respondent in Tier I. Three of the modifications sought to broaden this indicator's definitions by recommending that USNWR consider the distinct backgrounds of HBCU students; two of which were made by Tier II administrators, the other by a Tier I administrator. One Tier II administrator demonstrated his complete endorsement by seeking to even increase the weight of the indicator.

Faculty resources. No respondent in Tier I sought to modify this indicator. Both modifications suggested to this indicator came from respondents in Tier II. Both were concerned with the faculty salary component of the indicator. The complete acceptance of this indicator by Tier I suggests that this group was more satisfied with this indicator than were Tier II administrators. However, the remaining five administrators in Tier II also appeared to be satisfied with the indicator.

Financial resources. The financial resources indicator was the sole indicator to which no modifications were made by respondents in either tier. Thus, the strong support this indicator received across tiers as an indicator of quality for HBCUs was reflective of the strong support within tiers, taking into account the administrator in Tier II who rejected all of the indicators.

Peer assessment. Two modifications to this indicator were sought by Tier II administrators, compared to one by a Tier I administrator. All three thought its overwhelming ability to create bias on the part of top level administrators being surveyed by USNWR was problematic. The difference in response between tiers seems negligible, but what may be more notable is that the majority of respondents in each tier endorsed this indicator without modification.

Student selectivity. One administrator from each tier sought to modify the student selectivity indicator. The respondent from Tier II rejected its applicability because he perceived to be in contradiction with HBCUs' characteristic open enrollment practices. The respondent from Tier I expanded on its definition by seeking to account for determinants of student success other than standardized test scores such as student motivation or student background, which is also a perceived practice at HBCUs. This finding suggests a similarity by tier in terms of the response to the indicator and the desire to modify it by tier. This finding also reinforces the idea that the majority of administrators in each tier endorsed this indicator without modifications.

Alumni giving rate. Only one administrator from Tier II sought to modify the alumni giving rate indicator. His recommendations for modifying this indicator reflected the differences in wage earnings of Black and White students, as well as HBCU and HWI graduates. Given that

only one administrator sought to modify this indicator also suggests the similarities between tiers with regard to their support for the indicators.

Additional indicators/characteristics. There was a notable difference in the number of administrators who sought to add indicators by tier. Only three Tier I administrators offered additional indicators/characteristics they perceived to be indicative of HBCU institutional quality as opposed to seven administrators in Tier II. There were also differences in terms of the nature of additional indicators/characteristics offered by tier. Of the seven Tier II administrators who offered additional indicators/characteristics, six spoke to aspects that are arguably some of the most recognized characteristics of HBCUs, such as their added value, the student experience at HBCUs, and their distinctive campus environments. Both findings seem to suggest a greater focus on, if not commitment to, the traditional mission of HBCUs by Tier II administrators than administrators in Tier I when considering the quality of these institutions. At the same time, it suggests a greater comfort with the USNWR indicators among the administrators in Tier I than those in Tier II. The breakdown of these responses can be seen in Table 4.3.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Black colleges and universities have successfully educated African Americans for more than a century. In fact, they have helped to create what is now the Black middle class, contributing to society a vast majority of the nation's Black lawyers, doctors, businesspeople, and scientists, with fewer resources than historically White institutions (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Kim, 2006; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Such accomplishments are indeed noteworthy and arguably a testament to the institutional quality of these institutions. USNWR measures this quality by judging HBCUs based on the same criteria as HWIs, a group of institutions from which they are fundamentally different. This begs the question of whether such criteria are suitable for assessing the institutional quality of HBCUs, and if not, then what criteria are suitable for such a unique set of institutions? The present study sought to answer these questions.

The purpose of this study was to describe indicators of the institutional quality of HBCUs as identified by HBCU administrators. An on-going inductive approach was used to analyze data gathered from in-depth interviews with 12 HBCU administrators at four different HBCUs. Data were coded, categorized, and analyzed across administrators and between the tiers to which their institutions belonged. This qualitative study was guided by two questions:

1) What characteristics do HBCU administrators identify as indicators of institutional quality at HBCUs?

2) To what extent are HBCU administrators' perceived indicators of institutional quality similar and/or different by institutional rank, as defined by *US News and World Report*?

This chapter provides a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, and a consideration of the findings in relation to the literature presented in Chapter II as well as the conceptual framework influencing the study. In addition, implications for HBCUs, practice and policy, and recommendations for future research are presented.

Summary of the Findings

First, by and large, the HBCU administrators in this study appeared to endorse the current USNWR indicators as acceptable for the assessment of HBCU institutional quality. This was evidenced by the fact that more than half of the administrators (8) endorsed between five and six indicators, three endorsed one or two indicators, and only one administrator rejected them all.

Second, the majority of respondents (8 out of 12) recommended modifications to all of the USNWR indicators, except for the financial resources indicator. Respondents' modifications sought to expand upon current definitions of the USNWR indicators, and to add dimensions related to the unique mission of HBCUs.

Third, most of the administrators (10 out of 12) sought to add indicators that were presently absent from the USNWR rankings which they perceived to be characteristic of HBCUs. The five additional indicators focused on: (a) added value; (b) the student experience; (c) the nurturing environment of HBCUs; (d) academic program offerings; and (e) community engagement.

Fourth, there appeared to be no clear differences between tiers in terms of their overall support for the USNWR indicators. However, it was found that administrators in Tier II were more likely to seek modifications to the indicators, and to call for more additional criteria as well. Tier I administrators were more likely to endorse the indicators without modification.

Discussion

Contrary to what was anticipated, the USNWR indicators were generally endorsed by the participants as satisfactory measures of the institutional quality of HBCUs, with reservations. This was quite possibly the most unexpected finding of the study because it contradicts much of the literature on this topic, which suggests a misalignment between the USNWR indicators and the traditional mission of HBCUs.

Scholars and critics of USNWR have indicated that the rankings provide incentives for institutions that demonstrate greater wealth and are more selective in the students they enroll (Astin, 1981; Ehrenburg, 2002; Kamara, 2007; Jaschik, 2007). Others also assert that USNWR likely "punishes" institutions, such as Black colleges, that enroll high percentages of ethnic minorities and students from low-income backgrounds (Chang & Osborn, 2007, p. 354). An analysis of the USNWR rankings by Carey (2006) also revealed that university scores in the rankings are directly or indirectly, almost entirely attributed to fame, wealth, and exclusivity, whereas research on HBCUs has found that these schools are typically poorer, smaller, less selective, and less prestigious than HWIs (Bowles & DeCosta, 1971; Fleming, 1984; Jencks & Reisman, 1965; McGrath, 1965; Minor, 2008). Given this, one might assume that HBCU administrators, including the ones in this study, would have rejected most, if not all, of the

USNWR indicators. However, they did not, and instead chose to endorse all of them to varying degrees. Why might this group have been so accepting of the USNWR indicators?

One reason might be that quality in higher education has become so inextricably linked to institutions like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, that their standards and practices have become normative to those who work in higher education. Consonant with this possibility, Bogue and Saunders (1992) assert that quality is assumed by many to only be found at institutions that are expensive, large, highly selective, have national reputations, and impressive resources. Although race was not factored into Bogue and Saunders' characterization, their aforementioned image is typical of HWIs, possibly leading some to think that this description is tantamount to quality without questioning its inherent connection to Whiteness. Maybe the respondents in this study have become conditioned to think that quality in higher education does not have a race, when this may not actually be the case.

Another possible explanation for the administrators' approval of the indicators could be rooted in a perceived need by HBCUs to be seen as just as good as their White counterparts. HBCUs have long been considered the "bottom of the barrel" and stigmatized as "less than" in higher education, primarily because of their racial identity as historically Black (Ricard & Brown, 2008). In a time of fierce competition for high achieving Black students and federal and state mandates to diversity their campuses, HBCUs must demonstrate their attractiveness to both Black and White students. Participants' positive responses about the indicators might be an attempt to "put on their game faces" in order to be able to "play with the big dogs." In other

words, by refusing to allow themselves to be seen as separate (i.e., needing separate assessment criteria), perhaps HBCUs hope to be seen as equal.

Another unexpected finding was the extent to which the administrators endorsed the financial resources indicator. This was surprising because research on HBCUs consistently reports that these institutions have been plagued by financial woes since their inception (Anderson, 1988; Fleming, 1984; McGrath, 1965; Minor, 2008; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). It was also surprising because six of the seven respondents that endorsed this indicator spoke to the same financial woes indicated above at various points in their interviews. Despite this, more than half of the respondents endorsed this indicator, none of whom offered modifications to it. Why might this group be so accepting of this particular indicator when it is clearly contradictory to the literature and what these respondents spoke to in their interviews?

Although administrators were provided a detailed description of the indicators, it is conceivable that they did not fully understand what each indicator entailed. At least two participants made statements that might support this. One made statements about the financial resources indicator that were contrary to how USNWR defines the indicator, and the other indicated a complete lack of understanding of the rankings methodology as a whole.

Another rationale might be that participants based their decision of whether to accept the financial resources indicator on the financial circumstances of their specific institution even though they spoke to the bleak financial status of HBCUs as a whole. For example, one participant who spoke to the financial disadvantage of HBCUs also commented on the fact that her institution was currently benefitting from a great deal of alumni giving. This might have

boosted the financial standing of her institution, thus causing her to have a more positive outlook on the financial resources indicator because her institution was doing well financially. It is possible that other participants might have been thinking similarly.

Notwithstanding their overall support for the USNWR indicators, it was interesting to find that some of the participants seemed to have a different conceptualization of the institutional quality of HBCUs than did USNWR. Most of the suggested modifications were aimed at broadening the current definitions of the indicators and adding certain aspects the administrators felt were absent from the indicators as currently defined. At the very least, their modifications and additions raise questions about the way in which they think about HBCU institutional quality, possibly indicating a difference between their conceptualizations and the conceptualizations of USNWR.

Participants' modifications were in line with literature which notes that HBCUs are generally more concerned with what happens to a student after they get into college than what they bring with them to college (Kannerstein, 1978); that HBCUs are traditionally not selective (Brown et. al, 2004; Kannerstein, 1978); that their lack of alumni giving is more a factor of discriminatory wage disparities in this country (Strayhorn, 2008); and that they lack institutional resources, not quality (Gasman & Thompkins-Anderson, 2003). The participants' additional indicators were also consonant with some of the well-documented characteristics of HBCUs, such as their practice of taking students, regardless of their background, and helping them to become productive and successful citizens (Kannerstein, 1978); the nurturing environment of HBCU campuses (Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1992); and access to Black faculty members, staff, and

students which contributes to the overall student experience at HBCUs (Hirt et. al, 2006; Ricard & Brown, 2008). The modifications and additions suggest that these administrators are clearly aware of and committed to the unique mission and contributions of HBCUs, and apparently not ready to renounce those unique characteristics as indicators of quality.

It may be that the administrators interviewed are struggling to reconcile their commitment to the traditions of HBCUs with a perceived need for HBCUs to conform to the same standards as HWIs. Ricard and Brown (2008) found that their study participants, 15 HBCU presidents, struggled with the reality of their primarily Black student populations and African American campus culture, and the competing desire to not be seen as different [from HWIs] because this meant they would most likely have to continue to justify that difference. Today, Black students can attend most any institution they choose, especially high achieving Black students. Thus, the mission and purpose of HBCUs is constantly questioned and they are under intense pressure to recruit both high achieving Black students and White students, while still serving their traditional academically underprepared populations. This challenge of serving three different constituencies might create the perceived need HBCUs may have to accept indicators more aligned with HWIs, while simultaneously seeking to modify those same indicators in order to preserve their (HBCUs') historic commitment.

Surprisingly, there was no clear difference in support for the indicators between the tiers. Institutions in Tier I, as opposed to institutions in Tier II, usually have comparatively larger amounts of financial resources; are more selective; and are more well-known (Carey, 2006). Therefore, it was expected that this group would be more accepting of the indicators than

administrators in Tier II. Interestingly, the majority of schools in Tier I of the 2010 HBCU rankings, particularly the top 10 schools, also met the aforementioned criteria. Based on this information, one might anticipate a more striking difference in the level of support between Tier I and Tier II administrators. The fact that this was not the case was quite perplexing.

It was less surprising that Tier II administrators sought to make more modifications to the indicators than those in Tier I. This finding could have been a function of the fact that Tier I administrators saw these indicators as more in sync with the ways in which their institutions operate, and so they were more able to accept them wholeheartedly. This might also mean that the struggle to uphold HBCU traditional values and the aspiration to shift their institutional missions might be more acute for Tier II administrators.

Methodological Considerations

The decision to collect data using a qualitative approach seemed most appropriate in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of this topic. In-depth, semi-structured interviews also seemed to be the correct choice for data collection. However, it was necessary to address three methodological considerations.

The first consideration was associated with collecting data that some might consider sensitive. According to McCosker, Barnard, and Gerber (2001), sensitive topics depend on context and cultural norms and values; and are considered sensitive if they are private, stressful or sacred, might cause stigmatization or fear, or if the topic might cause a political threat. The authors also found that studying sensitive topics create methodological and technical issues, such

as “conceptualization of the topic; defining and accessing the sample; and mistrust, concealment, and dissimulation between the researcher and participants” (paragraph 4).

The subject of the quality of HBCUs constitutes a sensitive topic because their quality has consistently been questioned based on some correct observations, such as their focus on teaching and service rather than research; and on some incorrect assumptions and erroneous comparisons made by researchers, such as the notion that all HBCUs are alike, or that HBCUs are the institutional peers of HWIs (Brown, 2003; Brown & Freeman, 2002). Thus, it appears that HBCUs have become somewhat guarded in their disclosure of information regarding aspects of their perceived quality, particularly to those they deem as outsiders who are not directly affiliated with an HBCU. For this reason, not only was obtaining participants difficult at some of the sites, but obtaining permission to investigate some sites was initially challenging. The first institution solicited declined participation almost immediately with an unclear rationale. Another never responded. This resulted in the need for assistance from the researcher’s academic advisor to contact administrators (who would serve as gatekeepers) at each of the chosen institutions. Even his correspondence was written with painstaking sensitivity so as to not seem off-putting to HBCU personnel and to prevent concerns about the direction of the research.

Once access was granted at the institutions, obtaining participants was slightly more straightforward. Most were quite candid in their responses and seemed fairly comfortable sharing their views. Perhaps this was a function of the researcher’s racial identity as an African American and status as an HBCU graduate, both of which she open to disclosing to the participants, and often did.

A second consideration was associated with the framing and order of the interview questions from which the participants' responses were primarily drawn. Based on the interview protocol, participants were first asked for their perspectives on the appropriateness of the USNWR indicators for assessing HBCUs. Immediately following this question, participants were asked to provide a list of indicators which they felt were appropriate for the assessment of HBCUs. The latter question did not reference USNWR or its indicators. Asking about the USNWR indicators first may well have influenced the way in which they thought about and answered both questions. Indeed, it appeared as though the first question did influence their responses to the second. When asked to respond to the second interview question, participants would often begin by addressing the USNWR indicators they would keep or discard before considering the indicators/characteristics they would add on their own. Asking the questions in reverse order, or even asking only the second question, might have resulted in different findings.

A final consideration was associated with the relatively small number of schools selected for the study, as well as the selection of administrators chosen. Four schools were selected purposefully, but with some consideration given to convenience. The administrators selected for the study were also chosen purposefully, however, this research was limited by the willingness of the administrators at each school to participate. If other schools had been chosen, or if other administrators had been willing and/or able to participate, the results of this study might have been different.

Conclusion

In spite of what has been written in the literature, the findings of the study support the conclusion that HBCU administrators, at least in this study, generally accept the USNWR indicators as adequate measures of the institutional quality of HBCUs. Participants sought to modify some of the USNWR indicators and offered additional indicators in an attempt to contribute aspects they felt were characteristic of HBCUs, and currently absent from the rankings. However, their modifications and additions did not alter their support for the existing indicators. This support for the USNWR indicators did not differ by the tier to which the institution belonged, suggesting the support transcended tier position.

Implications

The discussion section of this chapter offered some speculations about why the participants in this study might have been so accepting of the USNWR indicators for assessing HBCU institutional quality. If true, these speculations could have profound implications for HBCUs when viewed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT).

Institutional

If the administrators in this study and others in society have become conditioned to think that quality in higher education is inextricably linked to historically White institutions, this could mean that quality does actually take up a race---the White race. In this way, it also takes up a majority narrative of quality where traits more characteristic of White institutions, and not Black ones, are represented as the norm or standard. A key tenet of CRT is the centrality of experiential knowledge, which legitimizes the stories and counterstories told by people of color

as critical to the understanding, analysis and teaching of racial subordination, and exposes methods that silence or distort their experiences (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). An exploration of USNWR might appear to include multiple stories pertaining to institutional quality, given the inclusion of Black institutions and even the creation of a separate ranking of only HBCUs. However, [White] American higher education's narrative disseminated through the rankings' indicators appears to be the dominant and only story, and is made to look ordinary and natural. By accepting the USNWR indicators, HBCU personnel are essentially relinquishing their ability to tell their narrative of quality through the rankings. Instead, they allow a White majority narrative (i.e., the policies and practices of HWIs) to be imposed upon their own.

In the same vein, CRT interrogates the unquestioned use of a White majority narrative or experience as criteria against which to measure the success of Black institutions. Accepting such standards only perpetuates a Eurocentric notion of what quality means in American higher education, and reinforces the perception that it can only be found at White institutions. HBCUs were developed with a specific mission, and many have tried to maintain this mission. According to Bogue and Saunders (1992), this type of mission conformance is evidence of quality. However, if HBCU personnel continue to accept USNWR's indicators and other traditional measures of quality, they are essentially shifting the traditional mission and characteristics of these institutions, and seeking to conform more to the mission and characteristics of HWIs.

It was also speculated that HBCU administrators may have had such a positive response to the USNWR indicators because of their perceived need to be seen as equal to majority

institutions, when in actuality they are not (Brown, 2003). CRT reveals the implications of this concept for HBCUs in that it explores the ways in which such attitudes do not actually challenge, let alone change, discriminatory behavior. Rather, they enforce it. By denying that race is indeed a major issue in their current struggles and distinct differences from HWIs, HBCU administrators allow for the possibility of all traces of their institutions' cultural identity to be ignored in place of White standards of excellence. As one of its central tenets, CRT exposes the normality and pervasiveness of racism. It is not an issue that has disappeared or one that has been overcome in society. By denying its existence, it is kept alive and made even more insidious. This study also has implications for practitioners and policy makers. Some recommendations are detailed in the following section.

Practitioners

The findings of this study raise questions about the present-day mission of HBCUs and what HBCU personnel want it to be. Although education at HBCUs has never been restricted to African Americans, most Black institutions primarily serve African American students. According to Ricard and Brown (2008), the focus on this special population influences the overall mission of the college or university, as the leaders of these institutions seek to provide the best services based on the needs of their student bodies. HBCUs maintain a distinct campus culture where the critical needs of African American students appear to be best understood (Freeman, 1998).

When the administrators in this study described the additional criteria they sought to add, they listed several aspects typically associated with HBCUs, including their nurturing

environments and their ability to take students from most any background and make them successful. However, these aspects could also be found at other institutions. Only one additional indicator, the student experience indicator, indirectly spoke to African American students, in that HBCUs are able to provide positive African American role models in various positions within the faculty and administration for Black students. If the focus on HBCU campuses moves away from Black students, is their mission really that much different from majority institutions who attempt to serve Black students, but with less proven success? For this reason, HBCU practitioners are encouraged to continue to examine the past and present-day mission of their institutions in order to assess their directions for the future.

Policy

State and federal policy makers should consider exploring the issues of race and racism in policies that leave HBCUs stuck between the proverbial "rock and a hard place" as they work to maintain their historic traditions and cultural identities in a post-segregation society. Policies targeting HBCUs that require them to further diversify their campuses by aggressively recruiting White students, adhere to standards characteristic of White institutions, and justify their existence in modern higher education, all put their identity as "cultural repositories for African American people" at risk (Ricard & Brown, 2008, p.111).

State and federal policymakers would be well advised to consider the use of critical race theory to highlight and deconstruct policies that essentially hold HBCUs responsible for segregation, while the stronger economic and political position of HWIs allows them to continue to delay and continuously resist change (Taylor, 1999). This study calls for the continued use of

CRT in analyzing American higher education. Though the results of this study do not directly align with all of CRT's main tenets, it proved quite relevant for certain aspects. Through the application of CRT as a theoretical lens, American higher education depicts the experiences of racial minority groups as subordinate to those of Whites. Using CRT also allows for practitioners and policy makers to better understand the ways in which racial inequality is produced and reproduced through such systems as the USNWR rankings and other systems that seek to assess the institutional quality of HBCUs without proper investigation into their cultural contexts, historical development, and narratives.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several subsequent studies are recommended. The first is a replication of this study with other HBCUs to see if the findings of this study are affirmed. In addition, a replication of the study minus the question about the USNWR indicators, or/and, asking them in the reverse order, is warranted to see if the same findings result.

Second, this study should be replicated examining other voices at HBCUs, such as past and present students, other groups of administrators (e.g., presidents, admissions officers, provosts), and faculty members. The perceptions of these groups might offer other opinions and perspectives not revealed in this study.

Third, assuming the additional criteria offered in this study are upheld in subsequent studies, an attempt should be undertaken to operationalize them to allow for their use in future

assessments and rankings of HBCUs. The application of these criteria might serve to redefine previous conceptualizations of the institutional quality of HBCUs.

Final Thoughts

As a graduate of two HBCUs, I like to think that I am testament to the quality these institutions exemplify and maintain. HBCUs have long been an important part of my personal, professional, and academic life. The nurturing and supportive environments, constant access to positive Black role models and other Black students with aspirations similar to mine, and an atmosphere of racial uplift and empowerment, all had a strong and positive influence on the person I am today. That influence was essentially the impetus behind this study.

I was admittedly surprised by the findings of this study, and I struggled with them because of the negative implications I perceived them to have for HBCUs. With each day that passes, HBCUs are under intense pressure to desegregate their campuses when in fact they have never been discriminatory in their admissions processes; and have long been diverse institutions, in terms of their faculty, staff, and student bodies (Brown & Davis, 2001). Interestingly, the main focus of this new diversity is White students. Indeed, some HBCUs already have predominantly White student populations, which Brown (2002) found to have drastic implications for one campus where the student and faculty populations are less than 10 percent Black; and the campus is practically devoid of any visible signs of African American culture. Research suggests that Black students' perceived lack of cultural awareness and the desire to seek their cultural roots are two reasons they choose to attend HBCUs (Freeman, 1998; Freeman & McDonald, 2004). These were also two of the primary reasons why I chose to attend an

HBCU as an undergraduate. Without HBCUs, where will these students gain what they feel they lack culturally? This responsibility certainly cannot be left in the hands of the nation's majority institutions.

It is my conviction that HBCU administrators must work to stay true to their founding mission, and take pride in their special niche within higher education. It is conceivable that the greater society may never be convinced of the mission and function of HBCUs. However, administrators and other supporters of these institutions must not take this as a sign to change, but rather embrace the opportunity to educate others about the contributions and accomplishments of these institutions. HBCUs must also be assertive in maintaining their identities as minority serving institutions and work to also recruit high achieving and academically underprepared Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other ethnic minority students.

If HBCU personnel and others continue to focus on USNWR indicators and other traditional standards of academic excellence, HBCUs could be travelling down a slippery slope where their traditional mission and populations are forgotten or lost, in an effort to morph into institutions that have been proven to not be able to carry out such a mission or effectively serve the same populations. It is because of my personal, professional, and academic experiences with these institutions that I perceive such a transition to be a terrible loss to not only African Americans, but society as a whole.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Getting-to-Know-You Questions

1. How long have you been working at your current institution?

2. Did you attend an HBCU as a student? If so, please tell me about your experiences there as a student?

3. Could you tell me about your professional career, including where you have worked and the type of work you have done?

4. How and why did you decide to pursue a career as a faculty member/administrator at an HBCU? Was it a conscious choice to work at a Black institution?

Institutional Context Questions

5. In your own words, describe the mission of your institution?

6. If you recall, I forwarded you a list of the indicators that US News and World Report uses to measure quality at higher education institutions, including HBCUs. To what extent, if any, do you think this list contains appropriate indicators of the quality of HBCUs? Please explain.

7. If given the opportunity, what indicators would you list as measures of institutional quality for HBCUs?
    a. Are there any other characteristics or factors that should be considered?

Wrap-up Questions

8. Is there anything else that you think I should know to better understand your perceptions and perspectives on the institutional quality of HBCUs?

APPENDIX B

IRB FORM B APPLICATION

All applicants are encouraged to read the Form B guidelines. If you have any questions as you develop your Form B, contact your Departmental Review Committee (DRC) or Research Compliance Services at the Office of Research.

FORM B

IRB # _____

Date Received in OR _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

1. **Principal Investigator:**
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   Faculty Advisor:
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Department: Education Leadership & Policy Studies

2. **Project Classification:** Dissertation Research

3. **Title of Project:** "In Their Own Words: Perspectives on HBCU Institutional Quality from HBCU Administrators"

4. **Starting Date:** April 1, 2010

5. **Estimated Completion Date:** November 30, 2010

6. **External Funding** *(if any):* N/A

Grant/Contract Submission Deadline: N/A

- **Funding Agency:** N/A
- **Sponsor ID Number *(if known)*:** N/A
- **UT Proposal Number *(if known):*** N/A

II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Specific Aims: The specific aim of this research is to describe indicators of institutional quality of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as identified by academic- and student affairs administrators at HBCUs.

Research Question: The primary questions driving this research are: (1) What characteristics do HBCU administrators identify as indicators of institutional quality at HBCUs? and (2) To what extent are HBCU administrators' perceived indicators of institutional quality at HBCUs similar and/or different across institutions by institutional rank as defined by *US News and World Report*?

Rationale: Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were founded and developed out of intense racial discrimination and legal segregation at a time when African Americans or Blacks were barred from attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Brown & Davis, 2001). Consequently, HBCUs adopted the special mission of providing quality education for

African Americans (Anderson, 1988; Brown & Freeman, 2004; Gasman, 2008). Other characteristics such as their open enrollment policies and their racial identity also resulted from these hostile circumstances (Browning & Williams, 1978). According to Ricard & Brown (2008), the identity of HBCUs as historically Black accounts for much of the unequal burden continually placed on these institutions to validate their specific purpose and institutional quality in higher education. Despite their many documented accomplishments, HBCUs have and continue to be viewed by many as "ineffective and dispensable institutions that do not meet the academic levels of White institutions" (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, p. 5).

College rankings such as the *US News & World Report* rankings (USNWR) are one of several assessment measures used to evaluate quality in higher education, including at HBCUs. Arguably the most popular of ranking systems, USNWR reaches nearly 11 million people a year, influences students' college choices and impacts academics' and laypersons' overall perceptions about what is quality in higher education (Astin, 1985; Dichev, 2001; Machung, 1998; McManus-Howard, 2002; Van Der Wef, 2007). For this reason, this dissertation focuses mostly on USNWR as an assessment measure of higher education. Although it maintains its nonpartisan view of what matters in education, USNWR does little to highlight what resources HBCUs possess, what they do for their students, and what constitutes quality specifically for these institutions (Bogue & Saunders, 1992; Hossler, 2000; Sussman & Wu, 2007).

Several rankings, including USNWR, consider financial resources, student selectivity, and institutional reputation as indicators of institutional quality (US News, 2009). However, in comparison to PWIs, HBCUs tend to have fewer resources (e.g. library holdings), have less selective admissions criteria, and fewer faculty members with terminal degrees, thereby making it difficult for them to fare well in the rankings (Allen, 2008; McGrath, 1965; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Moreover, by using indicators that are uncharacteristic of HBCUs, USNWR may inadvertently discount the quality of these institutions partly due to a mission, racial identity, and characteristics, all of which resulted from a legacy of slavery and racism in American society (Jencks & Reisman, 1967; Ricard & Brown, 2008; Taylor, 1999).

Because there are few empirical studies on HBCUs, and even fewer studies that focus on HBCU institutional quality this study seeks to add to the body of literature about HBCUs. Specifically, this research seeks to describe the indicators of institutional quality of HBCUs via the perceptions of HBCU administrators.

III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Sample and Recruitment: For this study, four institutions will be chosen from the 2010 issue of *US News & World Report Historically Black Colleges and Universities Rankings* report. Specifically, I will select two (2) institutions from Tier 1 and two (2) institutions from Tier 2 of the rankings. Using a maximum variation sampling method (Merriam, 1988), I will choose institutions ranging in institutional size, founding year, geographic location, institutional

selectivity (as measured by the average of entering freshman cohort's college entrance exam scores), institutional control (i.e. public or private), and institutional type (i.e., baccalaureate, master's, research).

I anticipate the participant sample will consist of a total of 16 individuals, or four from each institution. All participants will hold positions as either academic affairs administrators or student affairs administrators at an HBCU. Participants will be recruited in one of two ways. First, participants may be recruited via targeted emails, which will indicate that participation is voluntary (Appendix A). With this method, email addresses will be garnered from each institution's website. Alternatively, participants may be recruited via a snowball or chain sampling method, whereby participants are identified from people who know people who know what participants may be information-rich (Creswell, 2007).

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Data Collection: The primary method for data collection will be one-on-one interviews. In some instances, the researcher will make site visits to the campus. In other cases, interviews will be conducted by telephone. These interviews will be semi-structured, using open-ended questions from a single interview protocol (see Appendix B) and lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Face-to-face interviews will be held at a location comfortable for the participant, most likely their work offices. The participant and researcher will jointly agree on a time and place for each of the interviews. Most participants will be interviewed only once. Thus, their participation will span no longer than the summer of 2010. All interviews will be audio recorded by the PI with the participant's permission. All transcripts will also be transcribed by the PI.

Data Analysis: All interview transcripts will be saved in MS Word format and stored on an electronic flash drive owned by the PI to be stored on the PI's personal computer. The PI will search for patterns in the data illuminating the perceptions of HBCU administrators regarding the institutional quality of HBCUs. All transcripts will be stored for a period of three years in the faculty advisor's work office located at 316 Bailey Education Complex to be used in future research pertaining to HBCUs and institutional quality at HBUCs.

I will also employ modes of data analysis that focuses on meaning, including coding, categorization, and meaning condensation (Kvale, 2009). Second, I will make a detailed description of the cases and their settings as is standard in case study research (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, the researcher will use field notes to: (1) assist with verifying the accuracy of transcription, (2) contribute to a thicker, richer understanding of the participant's perceptions, and (3) reduce bias by revealing events that could influence the researcher's interpretation of meaning.

Finally, I will employ cross-case analysis (Yin, 2003). This method is used with the intention of studying processes and outcomes that occur across multiple sites and to understand how these processes/outcomes are influenced by specific local contextual variables (Yin, 2003).

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

Informed Consent: Each participant will be informed of the nature of the study upon initial contact from the PI. Prior to beginning the formal interview, informed consent will be obtained using an Informed Consent Statement (Appendix C), as well as consent to audio record the interview. Participants who decline will still be able to participate in interviews. However, in this case the interviewer will take detailed notes.

For in-person interviews, each interviewer will explain the confidentiality policy, the participant's right to withdraw from the study, risks, benefits, and safety measures to the participant before having them sign it. The language used in the Informed Consent Statement will be non-technical and understandable to the average individual. The participant will then be given the opportunity to ask any remaining questions.

For interviews conducted over the phone, verbal confirmation of informed consent will be obtained and recorded. The researcher will read the informed consent form to participants and have them give verbal consent, which will be recorded. The researcher will then note that consent has been given on an informed consent form.
If a participant decides to terminate his or her interview or participation before the study is complete, he or she will have the option of deciding what will become of the data collected from her up to that point. These options might include that the data be destroyed, returned to the participant, or used "as is".

All signed Informed Consent Statements will be stored in the faculty advisor's office on campus for a period of no less than three years.

Confidentiality: Though the researcher will know the identity of the participants and the institutions included in this study, this information will not be revealed in the study or to others not involved in the study. Transcripts will only be accessible to the researcher. Digital recordings, but not transcriptions, will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. Transcriptions will be retained by the PI as a digital file to be used in future research related to HBCUs and/or the institutional quality of HBCUs. Additionally, the identity of the participant this information will be kept under lock and key in the researcher's home. The participants will not be identified by any marks on the transcripts. Transcripts will only be accessible to the researcher. Digital recordings, but not transcriptions will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. Transcriptions will be retained for a period of three years, stored in a locked file in the researcher's home, to be used in future research related to HBCUs.

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to participants as methods of data collection are non-obtrusive. Some participants may experience mild anxiety or discomfort during interviews. If they become uncomfortable, they are free to stop the interview at any time. If a particular question makes them uncomfortable, they do not have to answer it.

VI. BENEFITS

Participants are not expected to directly benefit from the study. However, findings may be used to create new methods for the assessment and measure of the institutional quality of HBCUs.

VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS

As previously indicated, participants will be provided a copy of the consent form prior to beginning the interview. The researcher will ask the informant if he or she has any questions prior to the beginning of the interview. If the participant has no questions, the interview will begin. All signed informed consent forms will be stored for a period of three years under lock and key in the researcher's home.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The PI has experience as a qualitative researcher. She has served as the PI on three qualitative studies that have utilized interviews and document analysis as the primary methods for data collection. In addition, she has taken courses on qualitative methods including Qualitative Research Methods and Communication and Ethnography which included concepts and skills such as interviewing techniques, data collection and analysis, and proper fieldwork techniques. Finally, the PI has also passed her comprehensive examination, assumed PhD candidacy, and has been advanced to the point of dissertation. This research will serve as her dissertation project.

IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH

Interviews conducted at other campuses will take place at a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location by the researcher and the participants. Most, if not all, interviews will take place in the participant's work offices. The researcher will use a digital voice recorder and either a personal or work laptop and/or journal for note taking.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL/CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)

The following information must be entered verbatim into this section:

By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator(s) subscribe to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development,

and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee. The principal investigator(s) further agree that:

1. **Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.**

2. **Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to Research Compliance Services.**
3. **An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.**
4. **Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.**

XI. SIGNATURES

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE ORIGINAL. The Principal Investigator should keep the original copy of the Form B and submit a copy with original signatures for review. Type the name of each individual above the appropriate signature line. Add signature lines for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, faculty advisor(s), department head of the Principal Investigator, and the Chair of the Departmental Review Committee. The following information should be typed verbatim, with added categories where needed:

Principal Investigator: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Co-Principal Investigator _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Advisor (if any): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

[ ] Expedited Review -- Category(s): _____

OR
[ ] Full IRB Review

Chair, DRC: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Department Head: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services for final approval on (Date) : _____

Approved:
Research Compliance Services
Office of Research
1534 White Avenue

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For additional information on Form B, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer or by phone at (865) 974-3466.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

[In Their Own Words: Perspectives on HBCU Institutional Quality from HBCU Administrators]

INTRODUCTION

I. Purpose of this Research Project
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Chutney N. Walton, M.B.A. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an academic- or student affairs administrator at a historically Black college or university (HBCU).

Please read the information below carefully, and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the informed consent statement. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will be given a copy of this form.

The aim of this study is to explore perceptions of the well-documented value of HBCUs via HBCU academic- and student affairs administrators. Specifically, this research seeks to challenge the narrow scope of indicators employed by the US News and World Report ranking system used as a measure for institutional quality.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following:

1. Complete one interview about your experiences on campus. Interviews will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes and will be audio recorded. If you opt not to be recorded, you may still participate in the study.

All interviews will be audio recorded with digital technology. Recordings will be uploaded to the computer of the principal investigator. Recordings will also be transcribed.

In publications resulting from the study, your name will not be used. Instead, a pseudonym will be used. The name of the university will also be a pseudonym to further aid in privacy concerns.

_____ Participant's initials

RISKS
There is a small chance you may experience mild anxiety or discomfort during interviews. If you become uncomfortable, you are free to stop the interview at any time. If a particular question makes you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer it.

BENEFITS
There are no benefits to participants from this study. However, findings may be used to create new methods for the assessment and measure of the institutional quality of HBCUs.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Only the principal investigator will have access to the data associated with this study. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the principal investigator, unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity or the identity of your institution. All signed informed consent forms will be stored for a period of three years under lock and key in the researcher's home.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher, Chutney Walton, via phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email at cwalton8@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION
Participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT
I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I can still participate in this study, even if I do not wish to be recorded.

□ *I agree to be audio-taped*

□ *I do not want to be audio-taped*

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

INTITAL CONTACT EMIAL FROM ACADEMIC ADVISOR

Dear _____:

Hope this message finds you well and enjoying the end of term. I am writing with a personal appeal for your help in identifying staff members at your institution with whom one of my doctoral students, Chutney Walton, might speak via phone. Chutney is conducting a dissertation study on HBCU administrators' perceptions of the well-documented value of historically Black colleges and universities. She hopes to use this information to challenge the narrow indicators used in the US News and World Report ranking system.

Specifically, I am asking for your help in identifying four (4) student affairs administrators at Bowie State whom she might interview by phone using a short semi-structured protocol. It would be helpful if you would recommend or contact mid- and/or senior level administrators (i.e., at the Director/Dean level and above). And she would certainly welcome the opportunity to talk with YOU as one of her participants. Feel free to send their name and contact information (i.e., email and phone number) OR you can forward this note to them directly and have them contact Chutney Walton at cwalton8@utk.edu.

Artie, I sincerely appreciate your assistance, in advance. Let me know if you have questions or need additional information.

Warmly,
Terrell

PS--Her study is approved by the UT Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX E

INITIAL CONTACT EMAIL FROM PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Greetings Dr. _____:

My name is Chutney Walton. I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in Higher Education Administration under the direction of Dr. Terrell Strayhorn at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville (UT). I am presently conducting my dissertation study on HBCU administrators' perceptions of the well-documented value of historically Black colleges and universities. Specifically, I hope to use this information to challenge the narrow indicators used in the US News and World Report ranking system. I would like to ask for your voluntary participation in my research. Please allow me to share some background as to why I have chosen such a topic.

As a PROUD graduate of two HBCUs, Fort Valley State University and Tennessee State University, I am a testament to the quality that HBCUs exemplify and maintain. Both institutions allowed me to gain an understanding of my own culture as an African American, and provided spaces where I could comfortably associate and learn from and with people whom I perceived to be like me. Additionally, both Fort Valley State and Tennessee State armed me with the necessary personal, academic, and professional skills to succeed in a world, at an institution, and in a discipline (Higher Education) where I am outnumbered as not only an African American, but also as a woman. It is for these reasons that I possess an intense passion and affinity for HBCUs.

Over the next several weeks, I am seeking to interview HBCU academic- and/or student affairs professionals about their perceptions and experiences. Accordingly, I would enjoy the opportunity to talk with you. Participation takes the form of completing one telephone interview that will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes and can be scheduled at your convenience.

Despite what I are sure is a very hectic schedule, I hope that you will be able to take the time to share your insights with me. At your earliest convenience, please let me know if you would be interested in participating. Also, feel free to contact me should you have any questions about my research or the interview process. You can also reach Dr. Terrell Strayhorn, my dissertation committee chair, for support of my research either by email at strayhorn@utk.edu or by phone at (865) XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Respectfully,

Chutney Walton

APPENDIX F

DETAILED LIST OF US NEWS INDICATORS

Peer assessment (weighting: 25 percent). The *U.S. News* ranking formula gives greatest weight to the opinions of those in a position to judge a school's undergraduate academic excellence. The peer assessment survey allows the top academics we consult to account for intangibles such as faculty dedication to teaching. Each individual is asked to rate peer schools' academic programs on a scale from 1 (marginal) to 5 (distinguished). Those who don't know enough about a school to evaluate it fairly are asked to mark "don't know." In the spring and summer of 2009, *U.S. News* conducted a peer survey among only the president, provost, and admission dean at each HBCU. Each HBCU received three surveys. The recipients were asked to rate all HBCUs, considering each school's scholarship record, curriculum, and quality of faculty and graduates at schools they were familiar with. A total of 242 surveys were sent out, and 35.5 percent responded. Synovate, an opinion-research firm based near Chicago, collected the data.

Retention (25 percent). The higher the proportion of freshmen who return to campus the following year and eventually graduate, the more likely a school is offering the classes and services students need to succeed. This measure has two components: six-year graduation rate (80 percent of the retention score) and freshman retention rate (20 percent). The graduation rate indicates the average proportion of a graduating class who earn a degree in six years or less; we consider freshman classes that started from 1999 through 2002. Freshman retention indicates the average proportion of freshmen entering from 2004 through 2007 who returned the following fall.

Faculty resources (20 percent). Research shows that the more satisfied students are about their contact with professors, the more they will learn and the more likely it is that they will graduate. We use six factors from the 2008-09academic year to assess a school's commitment to instruction. Class size has two components: the proportion of classes with fewer than 20 students (30 percent of the faculty resources score) and the proportion with 50 or more students (10 percent of the score). In our model, a school benefits more for having a large proportion of classes with fewer than 20 students and a small proportion of large classes. Faculty salary (35 percent) is the average faculty pay, plus benefits, during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years, adjusted for regional differences in the cost of living (using indexes from the consulting firm Runzheimer International). We also weigh the proportion of professors with the highest degree in their fields (15 percent), the student-faculty ratio (5 percent), and the proportion of faculty who are full time (5 percent).

Student selectivity (15 percent). A school's academic atmosphere is determined in part by the abilities and ambitions of the student body. We therefore factor in test scores of enrollees on both the Critical Reading and Math portions of the SAT and the Composite ACT score (50 percent of

the selectivity score); the proportion of enrolled freshmen who graduated in the top 25 percent of their high school classes (40 percent); and the acceptance rate, or the ratio of students admitted to applicants (10 percent). The data are for the fall 2008 entering class. Using both SAT and ACT test scores that were submitted by enrolled students is a change from previous years, when either the SAT or ACT was used in the rankings depending on which score was submitted most often for admissions decisions. *U.S. News* believes that using scores for all students who submitted test scores improves the methodology since it's a much more comprehensive measure and better way to compare the entire entering class between schools.

Financial resources (10 percent). Generous per-student spending indicates that a college can offer a wide variety of programs and services. *U.S. News* measures financial resources by using the average spending per student on instruction, research, student services, and related educational expenditures in the 2007 and 2008 fiscal years. Spending on sports, dorms, and hospitals doesn't count, only the part of a school's budget that goes toward educating students.

Alumni giving rate (5 percent). The average percentage of living alumni with bachelor's degrees who gave to their school during 2006-07 and 2007-08 is an indirect measure of student satisfaction.

To arrive at a school's rank, we first calculated the weighted sum of its scores. The final scores were rescaled: The top school in each category was assigned a value of 100, and the other schools' weighted scores were calculated as a proportion of that top score. Final scores for each ranked school were rounded to the nearest whole number and ranked in descending order. Schools that receive the same rank are tied and are listed in alphabetical order.

VITA

Chutney N. Walton was born and raised in Perry, Georgia. She graduated from Perry High School in 2000, and Fort Valley State University with a Bachelors of Business Administration in Marketing in 2004. During the two years that followed, Chutney lived and worked in Las Vegas, Nevada at the MGM MIRAGE Corporation, and in Los Angeles, California at the Regent Beverly Wilshire Hotel. In 2006, Chutney returned to school at Tennessee State University where she obtained her Masters in Business Administration. While completing graduate school, Chutney worked with Tennessee State University's Office of International Business, and the University Honors Program as Coordinator of the Honors Program Mentoring Program. Immediately after graduating in 2007, she enrolled in the University of Tennessee's (UT) College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences. During her first year at UT, Chutney worked with the Black Cultural Center as advisor of the Black Cultural Programming Committee. Over the last two years, Chutney has worked with the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center to help improve teaching and student learning on UT's campus. She completed her dissertation in the Fall of 2010, and received her Doctor of Education degree, with a major in Higher Education Administration from the University of Tennessee in Spring 2011.